

Second Session - Thirty-Ninth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLAN, Nancy, Hon.	St. Vital	N.D.P.
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	N.D.P.
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GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
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IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
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JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
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TAILLIEU, Mavis	Morris	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, April 18, 2008

The House met at 10 a.m.

PRAYER

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 23—The International Labour Cooperation Agreements Implementation Act

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Labour and Immigration): I move, seconded by the Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade (Mr. Swan), that Bill 23, The International Labour Cooperation Agreements Implementation Act; Loi sur la mise en œuvre des accords internationaux de coopération dans le domaine du travail, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Allan: This bill will enable Manitoba to approve and implement labour co-operation agreements Canada has signed with other countries to help ensure that minimum labour standards are maintained in the context of international trade agreements.

Mr. Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? [*Agreed*]

Bill 24—The Public Schools Amendment Act (Cyber-Bullying and Use of Electronic Devices)

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): I move, seconded by the Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross), that Bill 24, The Public Schools Amendment Act (Cyber-Bullying and Use of Electronic Devices); Loi modifiant la Loi sur les écoles publiques (cyberintimidation et utilisation de dispositifs électroniques), now be read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Bjornson: Mr. Speaker, Bill 24 will enable schools to develop policies to their existing Safe Schools Charter to address issues of cyber-bullying and the appropriate use of electronic devices, such as digital cameras, cellphones with cameras, text messaging and the Internet.

Mr. Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? [*Agreed*]

PETITIONS

Dividing of Trans-Canada Highway

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

The seven-kilometre stretch of the Trans-Canada Highway passing through Headingley is an extremely busy stretch of road, averaging 18,000 vehicles daily.

This section of the Trans-Canada Highway is one of the few remaining stretches of undivided highway in Manitoba, and it has seen more than 100 accidents in the last two years, some of them fatal.

Manitoba's Assistant Deputy Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation told a Winnipeg radio station on October 16, 2007, that when it comes to highways projects the provincial government has a flexible response program, and we have a couple of opportunities to advance these projects into our five-year plan.

In the interests of protecting motorist safety, it is critical that the dividing of the Trans-Canada Highway in Headingley is completed as soon as possible.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) to consider making the completion of the dividing of the Trans-Canada Highway in Headingley in 2008 an urgent provincial government priority.

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to consider evaluating whether any other steps can be taken to improve motorist safety while the dividing of the Trans-Canada Highway in Headingley is being completed.

This is signed by Grant Engel, J.P. Wiens, Mike Nelson and many, many other Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: In accordance with our rule 132(6), when petitions are read they are deemed to be received by the House.

Personal Care Homes–Virден

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virден): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Manitoba's provincial government has a responsibility to provide quality long-term care for qualifying Manitobans.

Personal care homes in the town of Virден currently have a significant number of empty beds that cannot be filled because of a critical nursing shortage in these facilities.

In 2006, a municipally formed retention committee was promised that the Virден nursing shortage would be resolved by the fall of 2006.

Virtually all personal care homes in southwestern Manitoba are full, yet as of early October 2007, the nursing shortage in Virден is so severe that more than one-quarter of the beds in the Westman Nursing Home are sitting empty.

Seniors, many of whom are war veterans, are therefore being transported to other communities for care. These communities are often a long distance from Virден and family members are forced to travel for more than two hours round trip to visit their loved ones, creating significant financial and emotional hardship for these families.

Those seniors that have been moved out of Virден have not received assurance that they will be moved back to Virден when those beds become available.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) to consider taking serious action to fill the nursing vacancies at personal care homes in the town of Virден and to consider reopening the beds that have been closed as the result of this nursing shortage.

To urge the Minister of Health to consider prioritizing the needs of those seniors that have been moved out of their community by committing to move those individuals back into Virден as soon as the beds become available.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by Sherald Joynt, William Jago, Jean Dunfield and many, many others.

* (10:10)

Power Line Development

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The reasons for this petition are:

Manitoba Hydro has been forced by the NDP government to construct a third high voltage transmission line, Bipole III, down the west side of Lake Winnipegosis instead of the east side of Lake Winnipeg, as recommended by Manitoba Hydro.

The NDP detour is more than 400 kilometres longer than the eastern route recommended by Manitoba Hydro experts.

The line losses created by the NDP detour will result in a lost opportunity to displace dirty coal-generated electricity, which will create added and unnecessary greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to an additional 57,000 vehicles on our roads.

The former chair of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee has stated that an east-side bipole and a UNESCO World Heritage Site can co-exist contrary to NDP claims.

The NDP detour will cut through more forest than the eastern route, and will cut through threatened aspen parkland areas, unlike the eastern route.

Former member of the Legislative Assembly Elijah Harper has stated that the east-side communities are devastated by the government's decision to abandon the east-side route, stating that this decision will resign them to poverty in perpetuity.

Manitoba MKO, an organization that represents northern Manitoba First Nations chiefs, has stated that the government has acted unilaterally to abandon the eastern route without consultation with northern First Nations despite repeated requests by MKO for consultations.

The NDP detour will lead to an additional debt of at least \$400 million related to the capital cost of line construction alone, to be left to future generations of Manitobans.

The NDP detour will result in increased line losses due to friction leading to lost energy sales of between \$250 million and \$1 billion over the life of the project.

The added debt and lost sales created by the NDP detour will make every Manitoba family at least \$4,000 poorer.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to abandon the NDP detour on the basis that it will result in massive environmental, social and economic damage to Manitoba.

To urge the provincial government to consider proceeding with the route originally recommended by Manitoba Hydro, subject to necessary regulatory approvals.

This petition is signed by Marg Kummen, Kelly de Groot, Jim Huggard and many, many other Manitobans.

Long-Term Care Facility—Morden

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background for this petition is as follows:

Tabor Home Incorporated is a time-expired personal care home in Morden with safety, environmental and space deficiencies.

The seniors of Manitoba are valuable members of the community with increasing health-care needs requiring long-term care.

The community of Morden and the surrounding area are experiencing substantial population growth.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) to strongly consider giving priority for funding to develop and staff a new 100-bed long-term care facility so that clients are not exposed to unsafe conditions and so that Boundary Trails Health Centre beds remain available for acute-care patients instead of waiting placement clients.

This is signed by Larry Unrau, Susan Reimer, Emily Hiebert, and many, many others.

Provincial Nominee Program—Applications

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

Immigration is critically important to the future of the province, and the 1998 federal Provincial Nominee Program is the best immigration program that Manitoba has ever had.

Lengthy processing times for PNP applications causes additional stress and anxiety for would-be immigrants and their families here in Manitoba.

The government needs to recognize the unfairness in its current policy on who qualifies to be an applicant.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to consider establishing a 90-day guarantee for processing an application for a minimum of 80 percent of applicants that have family living in Manitoba.

To urge the provincial government to consider removing the use of the restrictive job list when dealing with the family sponsor stream.

This is signed by J. Carnecer, S. Artuz, E. Alberto and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Lake Dauphin Fishery

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Fishing is an important industry on Lake Dauphin.

To help ensure the sustainability of Lake Dauphin fishery, it is essential that spawning fish in the lake and its tributaries are not disturbed during the critical reproductive cycle.

A seasonal moratorium on harvesting fish in Lake Dauphin and its tributaries may help create an environment that will produce a natural cycle of fish for Lake Dauphin, therefore ensuring a balanced stock of fish for all groups who harvest fish on the lake.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick) to consider placing a moratorium on harvesting of any species of fish on Lake Dauphin and its tributaries for the period of April 1 to May 15 annually.

To request the Minister of Water Stewardship to consider doing regular studies of fish stocks on Lake Dauphin to help gauge the health of the fishery and to consider determining any steps needed to protect or enhance those stocks.

This petition is signed by Emile Carriere, Barry Khimciuk, Randy Zastre and many, many others.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Power Line Development Location

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): My question is to the minister responsible for Crocus and Manitoba Hydro.

Mr. Speaker, it's the minister who said that the \$280-million Hydro tower would only cost \$75 million, the minister who said the \$1.6-billion and climbing Wuskwatim project would only cost \$800 million, the minister who said that Crocus was a good deal even when he knew it was tanking.

I want to ask that minister today why he's foolishly pursuing a detour on the next transmission line that will put us two years behind schedule and put the reliability of our power sales to the United States in jeopardy.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, yesterday's announcement with Wisconsin power is for 500 megawatts, \$2.2 billion of sales, starting in 2018. It builds on the Minnesota Power sale of 250 megawatts, \$1.5 billion, which builds on the Xcel sale of 375 to 500 megawatts for \$2.2 billion.

Mr. Speaker, today there is no doubt that the converter stations are needed to build the new hydro projects in northern Manitoba. The member has been proven wrong that the converter stations are not needed. His numbers are wrong by at least \$1.1 billion.

Will he stand up in the Legislature today and admit that he's at least \$1.1 billion in the wrong on his calculations?

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, the minister who said that the Hydro tower was only going to cost \$75 million, which is now at \$280 million and climbing, four times greater than his earlier estimate; the \$1.6 billion and climbing Wuskwatim project, he said it was only going to cost \$800 million, more than double—under any scenario, it's going to be

between a billion and two billion dollars in losses to Manitobans, going on the west side versus the east.

I want to ask the minister: the CEO of Manitoba Hydro, in committee, said that, if they'd gone down the east route, they would have completed Bipole III by 2015. Instead, it's not going to be complete till 2017. Can the minister confirm that the Wisconsin power sale deal has been delayed by two years with all of the loss in revenue because of their decision to go west instead of down the shorter, safer, faster, better eastern route?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, one of the great value-added of Manitoba Hydro for our customers is that it's considered clean, renewable energy. The member opposite would like to toss all of that advantage out the window by putting at risk the entire future development of Manitoba Hydro and the Manitoba economy by rolling the dice and putting the hydro line down the east side and jeopardizing the reputation of Manitoba Hydro's product to our customers in the United States.

The member opposite may want to roll the dice in opposition, but I can tell you that would be one of the most foolish decisions we've ever made. Mr. Speaker, he has never put a value on the preservation of the east-side boreal forest. Never has he put a value on it.

Mr. McFadyen: As Vic Grant said on CJOB this morning, it's time for this government to stand up in the way that Duff Roblin did. I know they're afraid of standing up to the small, unelected group of noisy activists at Poplar River who have dictated this decision to the NDP government. I know they won't stand up to that small, unelected group at Poplar River, Mr. Speaker, but if they're afraid of a challenge from that group, what about the challenges that are going to come from the northern chiefs who are opposed to the western route, from all of the other groups and people, Manitobans, not just international environmentalists, not just billionaires in Birkenstocks on Cape Cod, but those many, many Manitobans who are standing up and saying that west is wrong, east is the right way to go?

Why won't he side with the Manitobans, stand up to the small group of unelected activists at Poplar River, do the right thing, build it on the shorter, cheaper, safer, faster, better east side of Manitoba?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, when former Premier Duff Roblin built the floodway, he was criticized for building an expensive floodway. All his critics said

that he should just build a dam which would flood southern Manitoba. It would be much cheaper, much more cost-effective.

We are doing the right thing by taking the transmission line down a route which maximizes the potential for protecting southern boreal forest, a forest which has been considered of universal outstanding value by UNESCO.

The members opposite want to be penny-wise and—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Selinger: —jeopardize the future of Manitoba's reputation, of Hydro's reputation. They want to be penny-wise and dollar-foolish, and they want to put at risk the potential to have it both ways: pristine boreal forest; export sales that will generate thousands of jobs.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before recognizing the honourable member, I'd just like to remind members there is still a lot of time in question period for other members to ask questions or other ministers to answer them, so let's just be patient and let's have some decorum in here.

* (10:20)

Power Line Development Benefits of East-Side Location

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister's own report refers to the fact that forest watches indicated that the western boreal forest is at greater risk than that on the east, that very forest that he's going to plough, the western longer, less safe, more expensive, more environmentally damaging route that they've chosen, Mr. Speaker, through forest on the west side that's been identified of being in greater need of protection than the eastern forest.

Now, Mr. Speaker, he talks about pristine boreal forest down the east side at the same time as his Minister of Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) is announcing their desire to plough through, get out the bulldozers, plough down the forest to build a road. I don't know why they don't—he should talk to his Minister of Transportation, Chainsaw Lemieux, and get their story straight.

Mr. Speaker: Order. All members in this House are honourable members and they—*[interjection]* Order.

Members should be addressed by their constituencies and ministers by the portfolio they hold.

I ask the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition to withdraw that comment.

Mr. McFadyen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I withdraw that comment, and I would simply make the point that he should speak to the Minister of Transportation about the road that's going through that side.

We had the opportunity, some weeks ago, to look at the vast tracts of forest that are being chopped down right now. The rock is being blasted. They're putting dynamite into the rock. They're blasting the rock in order to create the grade to go into the road, vast areas of forest being mowed down on the east side to make way for the road construction.

So I want to ask the minister: They announced with great fanfare a couple of months ago their nine-minister, extensive east-side tour. I just wonder if he could provide us with an update on how their east-side tour is going.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, what we have here is the Member for Fort Whyte (Mr. McFadyen)—he's actually doing the equivalent of a Margaret Thatcher. She one time said that there is no society, only individuals.

The member opposite is taking the same position with the pristine boreal forest. There are only trees. There is no pristine boreal forest. He just doesn't get it, Mr. Speaker.

The southern boreal forest on the east side has outstanding universal value according to the UNESCO committee that is studying this matter. The opportunity to protect that while at the same time developing our hydro-electric resource in a way that gives us the potential for billions of dollars of export sales, tens of thousands of job opportunities in northern Manitoba where we can actually have a win-win of green economic growth is what he wants to—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. McFadyen: The self-appointed expert on the eastern boreal forest didn't answer the question, Mr. Speaker.

We had a chance to visit with the people who are living in the boreal forest, Mr. Speaker. We heard the story in Berens River of a young man who had been

unemployed for several years, on two different occasions had attempted to take his own life by hanging himself from the bridge at Berens River because of the lack of employment opportunities. He was rescued by members of the community. He was put to work on a road-clearing crew on the eastern side of the province, through that opportunity for work regained a sense of purpose in his life and self-respect, and today is walking around the community with his head held high and a sense of pride.

I want to ask the minister: If he proclaims to be so concerned about the people on the eastern side, why not give us an update on their eastern tour and why not show some concern for those people who are living in situations, in many cases 70 percent to 80 percent rates of unemployment, high rates of diabetes and a sense of hopelessness because this government has abandoned them? So why not give us an update on their east-side tour and let us know how they're doing in instilling some sense of hope and pride in eastern communities?

Mr. Selinger: The member completely overlooks the fact that the members on this side of the House, before they made any decision, went out and consulted through 82 meetings with the people of the east side. They talked to the elders; they talked to the youth; they talked to the grass-roots people in those communities.

Based on what they heard from those people, they made a decision to proceed with an alternative route. They did that with full respect for the people on the east side. They listened to them carefully. They didn't, before an election, hold out the promise of ownership of a transmission line and then after the election say, no, you will not own the transmission line. They never tried to have it both ways as the member opposite did in the election window.

Where does he really stand on what he's prepared to offer the people on the east side, and how much will it cost?

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on question No. 3.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, this is the second supplemental on the second question.

Mr. Speaker: Oh, is it the second supp?

An Honourable Member: Yes, it is.

Mr. Speaker: Sorry.

Mr. McFadyen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Apparently the east-side tour isn't going very well. I don't know why the minister won't respond to the question.

If they actually had gone on an east-side tour, I think what they would have heard from residents is that the government went through a process that they abandoned years ago. They didn't put a proposal on the table explicitly with respect to the transmission line. They heard a couple of people say, we don't want the transmission line unless there are going to be some benefits flowing to our communities, which seems to me to be a very reasonable position for people on the east side of the province to adopt. Based on that, they said, oh, there's opposition; we'll run it down the more expensive side of the province and deny the people on the east the opportunity.

So, Mr. Speaker, we know what the cost is to those communities on the east side of the province. Can the minister now indicate what will the cost be to all Manitobans when they have to apply a discount to the price because of the reliability problems with the west side? How much will the two-year delay cost Manitobans when we could have been selling to Wisconsin in 2015; because of them, it's been delayed to 2017?

Mr. Selinger: It's really amusing, Mr. Speaker, how the members opposite who have never sold a megawatt of power to anybody outside of Manitoba, now would like to argue that a sale worth \$2.2 billion is a bad thing. The sale of \$2.2 billion is an excellent piece of good news for Manitoba, which builds on the sale to Minnesota Power, which builds on the sale to Xcel power, which confirms that for the next 10 years there will be dramatic development of hydro resources in this province.

It will be done with sole regard to the consultation process that was done with the peoples of the east side, and there will be additional consultation on the west side. The job training programs are already under way with northern people so that they will have the opportunities to be the tradespeople, the contractors and the construction people.

Manufacturing Industry Tax Relief

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Brandon West, on question No. 3:

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): As predicted, Mr. Speaker, the U.S. economy is taking its toll on

Manitoba manufacturing. The distant storm clouds are turning into a thunderhead, perhaps a tornado. We know how this government handles tornado damage. Loewen Windows announced recently 100 jobs lost. Motor Coach Industries has laid off 230 people to date and are having a one-week unscheduled shutdown beginning next week. Manufacturing in Manitoba is reeling. What does this Finance Minister do? He raises taxes; he increases spending by 6.2 percent.

We know there's difficulty in the manufacturing sector, Mr. Speaker. I ask the Minister of Finance and the minister of Crocus: What is his position and how is he going to help the manufacturing sector in this province?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, if the member would have taken the time to read the budget, he would have noticed that the capital tax for manufacturers will be eliminated by July 1, 2008. He will have noticed that the Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit is fully refundable now to 70 percent, as of January 1 past. It's already been put in place and confirmed in the budget. He will have noticed that the corporate tax rate for all businesses in Manitoba is going down again by another percent, and he will have noticed that the small business tax rate, in addition, is going down as well, to have the lowest small-business tax rate in the country with no capital tax for manufacturing.

That's what we've done. That's what you're going to vote against when the vote comes up for the budget.

*(10:30)

Mr. Borotsik: Mr. Speaker, he didn't talk about the 100 layoffs that were announced today by Loewen. He didn't announce and didn't deal with the 230 layoffs that are already there in Motor Coach Industries.

The Business Council, their No. 1 recommendation in the pre-budget deliberations was to phase out the payroll tax. I didn't hear anything about the phaseout of the payroll tax, Mr. Speaker. The NDP government did nothing in this budget to help manufacturers. The chair of the Premier's (Mr. Doer) Economic Council, he's actually moved his business to China.

Is it this minister's and his government's strategy to force manufacturers to lay off more and more employees so that they no longer have to pay the

payroll tax? Is he turning large businesses into small businesses and that's how they're going to take advantage of all these wonderful tax breaks?

Mr. Selinger: The manufacturing sector in Manitoba has been among the most resilient of the entrepreneurial members of this community in the last several years. We have worked with them both on the advanced manufacturing side in terms of new technologies; we have worked with them in terms of new training opportunities to skill up the workers; and we have reduced and eliminated the capital tax July 1 this year.

When members opposite were in government, they never touched the capital tax. They did nothing about it. When members opposite were in government, they had the highest small-business tax rate in the country, and the corporate tax rate was left untouched since the Second World War.

We have reduced the corporate tax rate by a third; we have eliminated the capital taxes as of July 1; and we have the smallest small-business tax rate in the country. The manufacturing sector is—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Borotsik: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance and the minister for Crocus, he can sit and he can put as much spin on this as he wants. What he didn't tell this House is that—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Ministers are addressed by the titles they hold, okay, and that's always been the policy of this House. So, when addressing a minister, please use the title that they hold.

Mr. Borotsik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Finance didn't tell this House that we're the only jurisdiction that has a capital tax. So to remove it certainly doesn't help our competitiveness. It just makes us even with what's there right now.

What he also didn't tell you is that our corporate tax is one of the highest, Mr. Speaker. He can keep his head firmly planted in the sand, but the reality is, the fact is manufacturing may well have been resilient, but right now we're dealing with a whole different set of circumstances with the U.S. economy downturn.

What he said he did in the past is not good enough to take us into the future. If he wants to keep his head in the sand, he's more than welcome to, but we'll continue to lose more jobs in this province and they'll continue to go to Alberta and Saskatchewan, and he is responsible for it.

Mr. Selinger: One of the best indicators of the resiliency of the business community and the manufacturing sector, as well as other sectors, is private investment intentions. Private investment in Manitoba is projected to increase by 22.4 percent this year. That's the highest increase in the country and seven times more than the forecast for Canada as a whole at 3.7 percent.

Mr. Speaker, 22.4 percent capital-investment improvements, aided by the elimination of the capital tax on manufacturing, will allow the manufacturing sector to forge a prosperous future in Manitoba and supported, in addition, by the lowest hydro rates in northern Manitoba, supported by export sales which are reaching a record high.

Farm and Rural Stress Line Increased Usage

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, economic challenges continue to cause heartbreak and pain for Manitoba farm families. The high level of stress is being borne by the visits to the Farm and Rural Stress Line Web site. I table for this House some FIPPA information that has recently been obtained. Visits to the Farm and Rural Stress Line Web site have jumped from just over 100,000 in 2004 to more than half a million visits in 2007. That's a 400 percent increase.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Agriculture now admit that this government's farm policies are an abject failure? They are failing farm families, and I find it extremely offensive that they are laughing on that side of the House. It's an extremely serious issue. Farm families are struggling. We're—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I need to be able to hear the questions and the answers, please. Let's have some decorum in here, okay?

The honourable Member for Minnedosa has the floor.

Mrs. Rowat: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm asking the Minister of Agriculture to show some leadership, address the issues. Farm families are in crisis. This is the only resource that they have, in many rural communities, for help because most of the services are available in urban centres.

So what are they doing to address this increase?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Healthy Living): Mr. Speaker, yes, there is ultimate stress in

the agriculture industry right now. We're aware of that. That's why we have worked diligently with all producers to develop strategies to alleviate that stress.

One of our options is the farm stress line which is made available. Now we have it through telephone or on-line services to provide it to people. It's manned by professionals that provide the support.

This is only one aspect of the support that we provide Manitoba families when they're facing stress. The regional health authorities across this province also provide many mental health services to help them overcome these barriers that they're feeling.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, if this government's farm policies were working, we would not be seeing a 400 percent increase in visits to the Farm and Rural Stress Line Web site over a short period of time.

So will the minister now admit that her government's farm policies are hurting, not helping farm families?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that they're asking questions about the farm stress line which they cancelled.

In 1999, we reinstated the farm stress line. We knew that those services needed to continue to provide that support for people. The farm stress line provides accessible professional support to people on the telephone or through the Web site. This stress line provides them with information about where they can get resources in their own communities.

This is only the first step. The RHAs provide quality service as well.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting, this is the same government that pushed Crocus as the best investment in Manitoba. This is a government that has their facts wrong and they're not credible.

Manitoba farm families are trying to cope with a very serious economic and social challenge. I personally know of families who have lost loved ones to suicide because of the extraordinary challenges that they've been facing. The producers are looking for some support and help. Surely this government can't be proud that the visits to the Farm and Rural Stress Line Web site have exceeded half a million in just a few short years.

Mr. Speaker, how many more suicides will happen before this minister realizes her policies are

failing farm families? Come to the funerals and see what's happening to my communities.

* (10:40)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Mr. Speaker, rural stress is an issue that we are so aware of in our community. We all feel it. We travel throughout the rural communities. We have members that represent the rural area and we know about it. That's why we have provided this service through the farm stress line.

Yes, the calls have gone up, but that means that people are aware that services are available to them. We are here to provide those services to them. As I said, this is the front line. The stress line provides them with information about where to go in their communities to get this essential support that they need through their RHAs.

Workers Compensation Board Coverage for Low-Risk Employees

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, the NDP are currently forcing expansion of the Workers Compensation Board coverage to low-risk businesses in Manitoba. Some sectors, in their submitted briefs to WCB, say they already have better insurance policies in place for employees and do not need the coverage under Workers Compensation.

Will the Minister of Labour and Immigration force employees to accept less coverage through Workers Compensation than they presently have with their employers?

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Labour and Immigration): I don't know if the MLA for Morris has had an opportunity to read the Workers Compensation Review Committee report that was presented to me as minister in 2005. On pages 16 and 17, Mr. Speaker, there is a unanimous recommendation from the Workers Comp Review Committee. It's recommendation No. 6 in the report, and it says: WCB coverage of workplaces should be extended gradually over a three-to-five-year period, beginning with the inclusion of higher-risk workplaces that are not already covered.

We have done that, Mr. Speaker, and we are continuing to consult with employers and stakeholders in regard to the expansion of coverage.

Mrs. Taillieu: Mr. Speaker, she didn't consult with the people that are going to pay the premiums. We know that, under the NDP government, Manitoba normally has the highest workplace rate injury in Canada. Even though their press release claimed it

was reduced by 25 percent, it was really only 6 percent, and as the *Winnipeg Sun* said, and I quote: But that didn't stop the province from fudging its number for the sake of good spin.

Mr. Speaker, including a lot of low-risk employers will bring down the averages of workplace injuries. I ask the minister: Is this her strategy to reduce the workplace injury rate by forcing more low-risk businesses into WCB coverage?

Ms. Allan: Mr. Speaker, recommendation No. 7 in the report says that the WCB should consult, and that consultation should be initiated by the WCB.

That is what they've done. Over 40,000 consultation notices have been sent to stakeholders. Ads have been placed in newspapers across the province, and a consultation paper has been made available on the WCB Web site.

I invite her to look on the WCB Web site. I invite her to talk to any of the stakeholders that represent the board at the WCB. I'm not the only person that can talk to employers in this community.

Mrs. Taillieu: Sure, employers are talking to us and they're saying, we don't want this coverage and we don't need it. To expand coverage to those who neither need nor want it is just so that she can say that she reduced the workplace injury rate, and that's just self-serving.

I ask the minister: Will she force businesses that already have better insurance for their employees to reduce that coverage just so that she can get the stats on workplace injury down and grab some headlines? Is this the start of her leadership campaign?

Ms. Allan: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate a question from the MLA for Morris on my leadership aspirations.

The one thing I can guarantee the MLA for Morris is, regardless of who takes us into the next election campaign as leader, all the people, whether it's the present leader or anyone else on this bench, I can guarantee you, we will have respect for the process and respect for our leader and no one will knife that person in the back.

Crocus Investment Fund Independent Investigation

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I know the Member for St. Vital (Ms. Allan) is anxious to get away to sell memberships, so I'll make this quick.

Mr. Speaker, my question is to the minister responsible for Crocus. The position of the Manitoba Securities Commission, when the civil lawsuit was under way in respect of Crocus, was to stand back and cease their investigation into charges under The Securities Act.

Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the minister: Now that the lawsuit has been settled, what is the position of the Securities Commission, and will they do what we have asked and refer the matter to an outside Securities Commission to ensure the integrity of the investigation into potential breaches of The Securities Act in connection with the Crocus scandal?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, as the member might know, the Securities Commission is a quasi-judicial body. It operates autonomous from government. The only one that has ever attempted to question their integrity and their autonomy has been the members opposite.

I'm sure the Securities Commission will follow the proper procedures of due process and proceed in a way that continues to operate as an independent, quasi-judicial tribunal responsible for securities regulation in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, the minister clearly doesn't understand what his job is.

There are ministers in government, including the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers), who is looked to as the person who is appealed to with respect to environmental licences. The Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak) has various responsibilities that are independent of their political role to ensure that processes are followed to guarantee the integrity of investigations. The Minister of Justice does it all the time, will involve him- or herself in decisions to refer matters out of province for investigation.

The Minister of Conservation who has weighed in, incidentally, quite inappropriately on the issue of the environmental licence with respect to Bipole, Mr. Speaker, when he is the appeal body, to take political positions is a complete breach of his responsibilities as a minister. But that's another matter altogether.

This minister similarly doesn't understand his responsibility, which is to ensure that steps are taken not to get into the substance of the investigation but to set up a procedure to ensure matters are investigated properly.

So I want to ask the minister today: Will he take responsibility for doing what's right? Will he ensure that the matter is referred out of province, and will he also ensure that potential issues of insider trading, those who sat around the Cabinet table in November of 2000 who were privy to inside information were not engaged in insider trading based on the information they had that was not available to Manitobans in November of 2000?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the member is in full mud-painting mode today. There's nobody that he doesn't want to smear on his way to his weekend. I just wonder where he's going on the weekend. I hope it's not another convention.

Mr. Speaker, the Securities Commission is a quasi-judicial tribunal. Members opposite have asked many times for us to interfere in it. We've always declined interfering in an independent body like that. We will continue to let that body operate independently and do their job as they're mandated to do under the legislation of Manitoba.

And no matter what the member opposite says, the Securities Commission will operate without fear of favour to do its job of enforcing the legislation for which it is responsible. The member opposite, no matter how many times he attempts to interfere in that, we will protect them from the interference of the members opposite and let them do their job.

*(10:50)

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, I was, in my comments, paying—and I hope it wasn't lost on members opposite—a compliment to the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak), who will routinely meet with his officials to ensure that matters are properly investigated. He did it with respect to the Taman inquiry and other areas, and we're looking for similar responsibility from the minister responsible for the Securities Commission.

The reality is that, when we asked questions back at the time that the document, the Cabinet document from November of 2000, first emerged, when we asked questions, he was all too keen to stand up in this House and say that he was going to ensure that the Securities Commission was going to move forward and do its job and take positions in the court hearings that were then taking place with respect to whether or not the Securities Commission would carry on in light of the civil lawsuit.

So he seems to be taking a different position today, his rise to questions about why he's hiding

from his responsibilities, what it is that they don't want Manitobans to know, and I want to ask him: Will he take the most basic and fundamental step required of a minister responsible for the Securities Commission?

He appoints the members of the Securities Commission. They report to him and it's his job as minister to ensure they do their job. Will he ensure that it's referred outside, and will he ensure that the investigation looks into whether or not there was insider trading based on the knowledge of those at the Cabinet table in November 2000 that was not available to the innocent Manitobans who continued to invest in Crocus, even when they knew it was going into the tank?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Fort Whyte's revision just doesn't stand up to scrutiny. He was the one that accused this side of the House of not making documents available to the Auditor General. He was proved wrong; he's never apologized. He just likes to carry on, taking his paint brush, smearing mud over everybody every single day. He attacks the Auditor. He attacks the independence of the Securities Commission. He attacks Cabinet members. He attacks MLAs. He even attacks members of his own party when it suits his purpose.

The reality is the job of the minister is to let the quasi-judicial body do its job without political interference.

I will assure you we will continue to protect the independence of the Securities Commission as members opposite—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Police Services Resources

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, we all know that the New Democratic government has clearly demonstrated over the years that they know how to spend money: \$4 billion-plus.

The question that one could pose to the government is their ability to spend smart. That is something which they have failed to do, Mr. Speaker.

I have asked now over the last couple of days for the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak) to deal with the issues of thousands of police officer hours that are lost in our hospital institutions, our courts, Mr. Speaker, and the government's only response is, well, we're hiring more police officers.

Mr. Speaker, Manitobans have a higher expectation that their tax dollars are being spent smart.

My question for the Minister of Justice is: Will he recognize that there is a need for a departmental review on how the Province is wasting police officer time?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Just waiting for the light to go on. Oh, there we are.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question, and, certainly, we are in discussions with our law enforcement and with our health-care facilities.

We know that the safety of individual patients, sometimes with very complex needs, is paramount, and we know within the context of legislation and with protocol that we have officers that are assisting to maintain the safety of those individuals. Of course, that needs to continue until we can work together with our facilities and our law enforcement to continue to build a system.

That's one of the reasons why we've promised to build—the first of its kind in Canada—a mental health ER so we can work with our partners to ensure that our people are as safe as they can be and that our resources are used as efficiently as possible.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to finish.

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member have leave for his two supplementary questions? *[Agreed]*

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

I look to the Minister of Health and ask for the Minister of Health to recognize that having police officers be glorified babysitters in our hospitals is a very expensive way to be spending the tax dollar.

Will the Minister of Health recognize that we need to have, at the very least, as she does her investigating, some sort of an interim measure such as having individuals there so that police can release individuals or the people that they're bringing into our institutions that are less expensive and still provide that sense of security for the hospital institution?

Ms. Oswald: Again, I'd say to the member opposite we recognize that there is a challenge with some of the very complex needs that we have in supporting

citizens of our province who struggle with mental illness. We know that oftentimes these are the individuals that our officers are working to support with our health-care professionals. They're partners. I would respectfully request that the member opposite doesn't belittle them with nicknames about what they're doing and not doing. They're supporting our health-care professionals in our health-care facilities with very, very complex cases.

We're working together with our stakeholders to improve this situation. We acknowledge it needs to be improved. That's why we're going to build a mental health ER, and that's why we are working on an interim plan. Again, I thank the member opposite to respect all professionals involved in these complex cases.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, in fact, the reason why I raise the issue is because I respect what it is our police officers are doing. I want them to be doing what it is that they've been trained to do, and that is to provide peace and harmony within our communities. I don't believe that they're medical professionals that should be standing guard 12, 14 hours a day for one patient. There's a better way of doing it.

Surely to goodness, the Minister of Health and this government need to recognize that Manitobans have an expectation that their money is going to be spent wiser, better, which would enable more police officers on the street.

My question for the Minister of Justice: Will he agree that there is a need for us to have a departmental review dealing with how the Province of Manitoba is wasting police officers' time?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, I believe the member was in the committee when The Mental Health Act dealing with this specific portion was amended. It was of such a profound issue that there were actually, literally, members of the Legislative Assembly in committee in tears dealing with this fundamental issue. It is of a fundamental nature and it is a very difficult issue.

We have protocols in place. We have revised protocols that we're working on. Most importantly, we're taking an initiative that has never been done in this country, and that is to put in place a mental health ER that will provide the dignity, the care and the protection of those people and those individuals who require that kind of treatment and will help ease the burden on our much utilized and very brave men

and women of the police force who put themselves in harm's way, not just in mental health cases, but in domestic violence and a variety of cases—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

House Business

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, on House business.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): On House business, Mr. Speaker, lest something change, I'd like to table the Estimates order in this Chamber to commence—*[interjection]*

I want to do it sooner rather than later, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, the honourable Government House Leader has tabled the Estimates order, and oral questions had expired.

We'll go on to members' statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Glenboro Water Tower

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, today I stand to lament the loss of a local cultural gem. It's the Glenboro water tower. The century-old wooden structure reached its end early in the morning of April 4, setting the night sky alight in a burst of flames. The water tower, along with dozens of others across Manitoba, was built in the dawn of the 20th century by the Canadian Pacific Railway. The purpose of the tower was to provide water to the many steam engines whose cargo served as a lifeblood to the emerging western economy and whose lines crossed the southern Manitoba prairie.

The octagonal design was created by the CPR following an improvement upon an earlier 1882 design that would become a fixture of the rural Manitoba landscape.

* (11:00)

The Glenboro water tower until its demise was one of only three remaining water towers in the province and was considered to be in the best condition. The disappearance of this treasured architectural artifact returns the prairie landscape once again to the time before elevators, rail lines and water towers dotted the landscape. Without such reminders of our proud agriculture heritage and without this tangible connection to our past, a hole is forged in our community's sense of collective history. It becomes more difficult to recall the sound

of locomotives as they steamed into town. It becomes more difficult to imagine a time that is now lost.

This heritage site, Mr. Speaker, is truly irreplaceable. The water tower, instead, will live on through our photographs, portraits and, most of all, our memories as we seek to retain our grasp of a time in our history that has given way.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to express my sense of loss to the people of Glenboro and encourage them to hold on to their cultural heritage and preserve the memories that only weeks ago were contained in this hundred-year-old structure.

Mr. Speaker, if, in fact, this incident does turn out to be arson, it is hoped that the individuals responsible will be dealt with to the full extent of the law. Thank you.

River East Collegiate Jazz Band

Ms. Erna Braun (Rossmere): Mr. Speaker, music education is as much part of a student's development as math and reading. One of the hotbeds for music education can be found at River East Collegiate. Their jazz band was the only Canadian finalist at this year's Essentially Ellington jazz competition in New York. This highly prestigious competition allows young up-and-coming musicians to play with some of the best musicians in the world.

Music Director Jeff Kula rehearsed with students four times per week in the lead-up to the New York trip. The River East jazz band was one of 82 bands that were accepted to the competition this year. They sent two recorded Ellington pieces to the adjudicators, "Blue Ramble" and "Mood Indigo."

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be part of a government that sees the values of all forms of learning from music to art, from mathematics to English. All are essential to becoming a well-rounded individual and valued member of society. Consider for a moment what it would be like to have a society devoid of any musicians, artists or athletes. Many of the great musicians of our time had a high school band leader or music teacher who dared them to dream and expand their horizons. Education is a cornerstone of this government's plan to move Manitoba forward, and I am committed to ensuring that young people have the opportunity to become well rounded and to dream.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate Jeff Kula and the entire River East band for their fantastic achievement. Being a finalist in the Essentially

Ellington competition is one of the highest honours that can be bestowed upon a group of musicians and their director. They have a great deal to be proud of, and I wish them much success into the future. Thank you.

Pharmacare Deductibles

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, Pharmacare deductibles have gone up six times in the last seven years to the tune of 34 percent. Let's recap: 2002, 5 percent; 2003, 5 percent; 2004, 5 percent; 2005, 5 percent; 2006, 5 percent; 2007, oh wait, that was an election year, they didn't go up then; 2008, 5 percent.

Leave it to this government to not only increase Pharmacare deductibles every year, except for an election year, but to implement the increase before even telling Manitobans about it. That's right, Mr. Speaker, the NDP government has been charging Manitobans more in Pharmacare deductibles since April 1, 2008, more than three weeks before this government's budget was put to a vote. That is the height of arrogance.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP Health Minister (Ms. Oswald) loves to crow that her Pharmacare plan is the most comprehensive drug plan in Canada. Well, let's set the record straight. That's not what the Canadian Medical Association Journal found. The Medical Association Journal found, and I quote, "New Brunswick and P.E.I. stand out as offering the most comprehensive public prescription drug plans for seniors."

Indeed, in two case studies, seniors in Manitoba paid more for their prescriptions than they would anywhere else in Canada. For example, the journal found that the annual drug costs paid by a 65-year-old woman whose annual income is below the national average, suffering from diabetes, hypertension and insomnia and is married to a senior receiving Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement, pays \$503 in Manitoba for her meds compared to just \$8 in Ontario. That's certainly not the comprehensive system that the Minister of Health boasts about.

Mr. Speaker, if this minister would listen to the Auditor General, who found that she has not sufficiently explored all avenues available to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Pharmacare and to contain the cost, growth of the program and improve the efficiency, then perhaps she shouldn't have had to increase Pharmacare deductibles by 34 percent.

Mr. Speaker, seniors, many of whom are on fixed income, are wondering how many more Pharmacare increases they should budget for from this heartless government. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

Mr. Drew Caldwell (Brandon East): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to pay tribute to one of the world's most important documents for the protection of minority rights. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms celebrated its anniversary on April 17. This document has changed the way Canadians from coast to coast to coast think about minority rights and has made Canada one of the most progressive nations in the world. Nations from around the globe look to Canada as a leader on minority rights, and we all should be very proud about the global precedent we are setting.

Protecting minorities is part of the job description of this government. We must continue to ensure that all voices are defended and heard. I am proud to be part of a government that listens and acts to make Manitoba one of the most welcoming places in Canada. From Aboriginal people to persons with disabilities, to ethnic minorities, to women, children and the burgeoning population of Canadians who are calling Manitoba home, our government is listening to their concerns.

In Brandon East, we know first-hand that the face of Manitoba is changing. Brandon is becoming more diverse each and every day with people coming from around the world to live and work in the Wheat City.

I would call on all my honourable Conservative colleagues who sit in opposition to take this opportunity to learn more about how we can ensure that the voices of minority groups are heard and respected. We are a diverse country, a diverse province, and I am proud to be a member of the most diverse government in Manitoba history. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Municipal Excellence Award

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Mr. Speaker, the town of Carman and the rural municipality of Dufferin are wonderful places to live, filled with hardworking people. There are many fine examples of how people work together in a co-operative manner from volunteer organizations, the business community and local governments.

Today, I am pleased to stand to recognize the Town of Carman and the R.M. of Dufferin for

receiving the fourth annual Municipal Excellence Award. Ron Bell, the president of the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, presented this award to them yesterday at the Municipal Officials Seminar, which was held at Brandon on April 16 and 17.

The concept that brought the Town of Carman and the R.M. of Dufferin this recognition was their creation of a residential development agreement that would not result in a disadvantage to either municipality. When this agreement first arose, there was potential tax loss for the R.M. as some of its land was going to be annexed to the Town of Carman. However, to address this matter, the town agreed to put an amount of money equal to the R.M. tax loss into a joint fund. This fund was then used for community projects, such as library, fire department, recreation groups and other areas that benefit both municipalities.

To receive this award, a panel judged seven submissions, and in each project, they looked for aspects of creativity, cost-effectiveness, sustainability and overall benefit to the municipality.

Two finalists were picked, and in the end the Carman-Dufferin agreement was selected over the City of Brandon's submission for paperless council meetings. President Bell praised Carman and Dufferin for their ability to find a positive solution benefiting both parties in the process of land annexation, which is often a difficult matter to address.

I would like to congratulate Carman mayor, Bob Mitchell, Dufferin reeve, Shawn McCutcheon and the councils of both municipalities for receiving the Municipal Excellence Award. They certainly deserve recognition for their resourcefulness and co-operation in this project. Together they worked to build a stronger community that benefits all residents. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

BUDGET DEBATE (Seventh Day of Debate)

Mr. Speaker: Resume debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), that this House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government, the proposed motion of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) in amendment thereto, and the proposed motion of the honourable Member

for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) in subamendment thereto, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Inkster, who has 25 minutes remaining.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I wanted to spend some time talking about ideas. I concluded my remarks yesterday by talking about Manitoba Hydro and how impressed I was by Professor John Ryan and the presentation that he made at our party's annual general meeting. He's written and published in the *Free Press* an article detailing his proposal that the hydro line, in fact, go down under Lake Winnipeg.

* (11:10)

In fact, Mr. Speaker, I want to quote directly, a little bit, from his report. I want to emphasize this because I truly believe that, if the government and, particularly, the Premier (Mr. Doer) were to swallow some pride and put the taxpayer and Manitobans first, we would see a number of changes in attitude and government policy. Ultimately, the biggest benefactor would be the province of Manitoba and the people that live within.

So, Mr. Speaker, here are some specific quotes in terms of advantages of a transmission line that would go under Lake Winnipeg, and I quote again: "Being geographically separated from the two existing lines, it would increase the reliability and security of the entire system.

"Being 40 percent shorter than the West route, it would significantly reduce line losses, with savings of a reported \$250 million over the lifetime of the line.

"In terms of construction, the 350 kilometre lake section would require a far smaller labour force, and because of its shorter distance, the overall project would be less costly than the west route and competitive with the east route.

"It would take far less time to complete the project.

"It would cross only the northern part of the east route and it would not disrupt the overall integrity of the relatively undisturbed boreal forest."

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

The arguments for going down the centre of Lake Winnipeg are, indeed, very strong. I take it seriously because of, Madam Deputy Speaker, the amount of dollars and the future of Manitoba Hydro

and the impact it has on our province. I would hope and trust that all MLAs inside this Chamber and, particularly, the government MLAs in caucus will do the right thing. We need to have a truly independent look at which is the most viable side to be developing this line. The costs are phenomenal. The future impact is phenomenal. We owe it to future generations to make a good decision on this. I believe that, if the Premier was to approach this with an open mind, this project, going down under the lake, could be the most practical solution. Sometimes we make mistakes. I believe that the government and, possibly, the bureaucracy have made a mistake by quickly overlooking this.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it was interesting in one comment that was made that I take quite seriously—and again, I don't know if it's a true allegation or to what degree it's correct. I do understand that the Department of Finance is now investigating this whole idea and concept. Hopefully, it's with an open mind. But what I found interesting in the presentation is that he makes reference to what Mr. Brennan had indicated to a public group, and that was Mr. Brennan's assertion, "It is an oil-filled cable, so there's environmental concerns."

Well, Mr. Ryan comments on that comment by Mr. Brennan, and he says: "This is so far removed from reality, it verges on nonsense. ABB cable has no free oil inside (in contrast to standard oil-filled cables) and it has been installed in some of the most sensitive marine environments."

Madam Deputy Speaker, I think, given the credibility and stature of someone like the retired professor, John Ryan, that we need to make sure that we're doing the right thing in terms of the environment. The Liberal Party has bought into what Mr. Ryan has said, and pending on the impact of environment, and based in terms of what we hear, this is the position that we should be taking. That's why I say, no one owns a good idea. If this is the one that's going to make this project fly and be most cost efficient, be the most friendly to the environment, then this is the one that we should be looking at, even if it means having to suffer a little bit of embarrassment in terms of, yeah, we might have made a mistake, we might have moved in a direction prematurely. It's not too late to do the right thing.

I wanted to talk now about some more specific Liberal ideas. The Liberal Party has brought forward some legislation that really could make a difference. One of the pieces of legislation that I thought would

have received wide support from all members of this Chamber—and I challenge the government to allow votes to occur on private members' bills. I would love to see how members of this Chamber would vote on Bill 223, which is The Non-Smokers Health Protection Amendment Act. Madam Deputy Speaker, this is the one that deals with second-hand smoke in motor vehicles. Other jurisdictions are now looking at it. Some have already adopted it. I would have thought that it would be a no-brainer. When interviewed outside the Chamber, whether it was the Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross) or the Premier (Mr. Doer), they talked about, well, it's about education; we need to have more education as opposed to legislation.

Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, if we applied that same logic, why did we bring in the smoking ban in the province of Manitoba? There is no requirement for education on this bill. It's a question of whether or not the government wants to protect our children by banning people from being able to smoke in a vehicle while they're travelling with a 12-year-old or younger inside that said vehicle.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am so impressed with the number of people that have taken the time to e-mail me, write me, telephone me on this issue and say that this is what we need. In fact, I understand there are even poster campaigns that are being generated.

I had an offer by one individual that would produce a brochure and drop it wherever I would like. I suggested, well, maybe it could be like a riding like Kirkfield Park. You know, there are a number of constituencies that I think the government needs to be more sensitive to in terms of what it is that the MLAs, the backbenchers would have to say on good legislation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the support for this bill, I believe, is there, that the government needs to do the right thing in terms of acknowledging that the bill is a good idea. It's not my idea. This is an idea that has come from outside of the province of Manitoba, but we can act on it.

There is the private member's bill dealing with the banning of plastic bags. Well, again, you know this isn't something that has to be earth-shattering legislation. It's legislation that can be very positive for our environment.

You know, the other day, I had a presentation on the plastic bag from—*[interjection]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade): Madam Deputy Speaker, this is a budget debate. If the member has nothing further to say about the budget, perhaps he could sit down and let somebody else speak.

Madam Deputy Speaker: On the same point of order?

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am disappointed in the Member for Minto trying to imply talking about our children, talking about our environment are not relative to what's happening inside our budget.

You will find, Madam Deputy Speaker, if you look into the history of Throne Speech debates and budget debates that there is phenomenal discrepancy even if I wasn't relevant, but I would suggest to you that the comments are totally and absolutely relevant to this government and its budget and the way it establishes its priorities and that the Member for Minto is eating up valuable time of this Chamber by interrupting on a point of order when the point of order, he knows full well, is not a point of order.

Madam Deputy Speaker: This is clearly not a point of order, but I would remind the Member for Inkster that you are speaking to this bill, and perhaps a little relevancy.

I'm sorry. There is traditionally a wide scope of issues allowed in the budget debate, so there is no point of order.

* * *

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Deputy Speaker, I don't want to reflect on the Chair. Suffice to say that this speech that they're hearing, and they might not like what it is that they're hearing, but the reality is, it is absolutely relevant. If this government, in particular, the Member for Minto had any sense of an open mind, he would be listening and supporting the type of ideas that we're talking about within the Liberal Party. But it's because of his closed mind and the closed mind of members of this government that's enforced by the Premier (Mr. Doer) of our province that prevents good legislation from being able to pass. Legislation of this nature has an impact on the budget.

* (11:20)

Madam Deputy Speaker, the environment and the number of initiatives that this government is taking in this budget dealing with the environment pales in comparison to some of the initiatives that have been brought forward by the Leader of the Liberal Party dealing with the environment. We can talk about the phosphorus-free dishwasher bill, which had more substance and would have had more of an impact on the environment than the soft bill that they brought in, which didn't even come close to doing what our bill would have done with phosphorus-free dishwasher soap. Much like the environment in terms of the plastic bags.

What this government wants is, it wants the positive headlines. It tells the media what it believes is going to garner those headlines that's going to make it look as if it's doing a good job. Why don't they listen to children that are going to Cecil Rhodes School? Why don't they listen to what Manitobans are saying in terms of bringing in positive legislation that will make a difference? I'll tell you why this government doesn't do it. Because they are scared to do anything that could cause any sort of opposition.

This is a government that has been inundated with funds whether it's coming from Ottawa, whether it's coming from personal income tax, whether it's come from provincial sales tax. They've been inundated with revenue. Anyone with a brain can spend money. The challenge is, can you spend it wisely? Can you spend it smarter? Can you bring in initiatives that are going to make a real difference in the province of Manitoba? Time and time again this government, this Premier has failed. They have failed in being able to deliver for Manitobans a vision that would capture the imaginations and provide hope for our province. That's the reality of this government. So, when we get members like the Member for Minto (Mr. Swan) standing up on a point of order, talking about relevance on budget, he needs to start looking at the bigger picture. He needs to step out of the box and start thinking about the future of our province and the children of our province and start looking with an open mind as to what's going to make a real difference in the province of Manitoba. It's going to be legislation like what the Liberal Party of Manitoba is bringing forward that's going to make the difference.

I somewhat digress. There are other bills. We talk about fetal alcohol syndrome. Madam Deputy Speaker, this is a bill that could have a positive impact on future generations of children that are being born. Even Judy Wasylicia-Leis has

recommended that government, that Ottawa—she wants Ottawa to take action on this. She wants to see labels on liquor bottles. There is no reason whatsoever, no justification, economically, nothing that prevents this government from being able to take action to support the fetal alcohol syndrome bill that I'm putting forward that would ensure that there are labels being put on alcoholic beverages. It's progressive legislation.

I had a New Democrat, he might even be a former New Democrat by now, who has said that today's NDP is not NDP. If you take a look at the way in which they disregard good, positive, progressive ideas, you have to conclude that he is right, that this individual is right, that today's NDP is not NDP. They're more preoccupied about staying in power than they are in terms of doing the right thing. That causes a great deal of concern for individuals like myself, and many others that want to see a government that's going to take progressive actions and do the right thing on a wide variety of issues. That's not more concerned about, well, if we can't take the credit for the idea, we don't want to see it pass into law.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there is other legislation that's before us that the government should be looking at. I encourage the government to take a look at where it can really make a difference by accepting some of the ideas that are being brought forward from all sides of this Legislature.

I've talked about immigration to the province of Manitoba. If we want to expand, there are things we can do to improve our Provincial Nominee Program. This is a program that was created under Gary Filmon and Jean Chrétien back in 1998. The government, if it really knew what it was doing, could even make it that much healthier of a program. The worker-restricted list prevents individuals from being able to come to our province. We should be opening our borders and allowing for a higher priority for family reunification. I ask for the Minister of Labour and Immigration (Ms. Allan) to ease on the whole issue of the restriction list.

I have now raised the issue in terms of crime and what it is that we could be doing, Madam Deputy Speaker, to fight crime on our streets. You know, the former Minister of Justice would issue out so many press releases, we're doing this, this and this. I don't think there was a Minister of Justice that ever had as many press releases as the previous one. When it came right down to it, crime on the streets is no

better today than it was yesterday. We still get the types of crimes that are there that are scaring individuals and we still get a government that says, well, all we need to do is hire more police officers.

This is where it gets into this whole spending smarter concept. Why do we allow for thousands of hours of police time being wasted? It exists in many different ways. Even the City of Winnipeg has recognized that, and they're starting to review how those police hours are being spent.

You know, the government came up and they got their headlines. They're bringing in the GPS, and we'll remember. I believe that in the last budget speech you will see that I talked about GPS ankle bracelets, Madam Deputy Speaker. Well, members should know, the GPS ankle bracelets are the most expensive ankle bracelets that are on the market. They are very expensive. If we were to go to the ankle transmitters with a radio frequency home beacon, we could virtually have five times the number at virtually the same cost. People don't realize, or the government doesn't seem to realize an ankle bracelet does not prevent a crime. Where ankle bracelets provide most value is in terms of ensuring that house arrests and curfews are being respected and where they're not. That's where an ankle bracelet can very, very effective.

This government has not been effective in terms of automobile theft. You know, we get minister after minister that'll stand up, remember, and they'll say, well, we've cut auto theft down by 25 percent or by 30 percent, Madam Deputy Speaker. What they don't realize is that we still lead the country. They're the ones that brought us up to that rate. There is still no province that has as many automobiles being stolen on a per capita basis as the province of Manitoba. If we were to lock up or put under curfew and make that—and ensure that those curfews are being respected by the 200 youth that are causing the problems, you could virtually cut automobile theft in half.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, on that positive note, it's about good ideas. We want the government to spend money smarter. We thank you for the opportunity to be able to speak.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): It's a great pleasure for me to rise this morning in support of the budget 2008, which has already inspired us unanimously to

pass because it has everything that one would need to pass a budget.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is our straight ninth balanced budget. Yes, a straight ninth balanced budget with one set of books, and our Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) and we have done the corrections which were at one time not possible. Now our balance sheets are of international standards and one of the most transparent and very clear. So we have a lot of programs here which are going to enhance the economic benefit of already-growing economy of the province.

It delivers the most needed social programs and benefits to all Manitobans. Yet it also provides strategic tax cuts, investments in people by skills training, recruitment of specialists in medicine and health care, and preventing our environment from destruction and pollution.

* (11:30)

Madam Deputy Speaker, let's look at Manitoba today and compare to the dark years of the '90s. I recall members, including the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen), telling us that we are giving them history lessons. Yes, we need to give the history lessons, particularly when you compare. You have to have a yardstick to see what we are doing compared to what we did. That is called a history lesson, and every progressive society looks at the history to learn from the history so that we don't do that.

Laying off a thousand nurses, we learned from the history. We are now recruiting nurses. We are training more doctors. We have given more seats in our medical schools, because we learned from the history. So the dark years of the '90s are really for us to refresh, time to time, to say we will not do that. I think, Madam Deputy Speaker, that is what Manitobans heard when our slogan was: move forward, not go backward. Particularly, I must say, in the constituency of Radisson where I fought the election, people were asking, some of them would ask, well, let us have a change. Change for what? To go back? To go back in the '90s, or move forward? So this is what we talk about when we talk about the dark years of the '90s.

I have mentioned this several times perhaps during my five years of legislative experience, why I entered politics primarily was for one reason. That was that I was thinking of health care, which could be perhaps dismantled if the Tories come in power. I

think people in Canada don't want it. Definitely people in Manitoba don't want it. I think this is what is happening today, to see that we have now installed something that is working for the future. We have started, but it takes nine years for a specialist to graduate. We are almost nine years in office. So our medical graduates now are graduating from schools, and very soon you will see that they will be working, and our system will perhaps come to the desirable heights and goals that we have set for ourselves.

Building takes courage, determination and vision, Madam Deputy Speaker, be it health care, be it environment, be it education. We all talk about different ideologies. We have mentioned this several times in the past, but, yes, we do have differences in ideology. Capitalism is a tool to build, but I see capitalism as an institution to exploit. I see social democracy as a means to build sustainable societies, equitable societies and society for all.

I would like to say that we will look at the business. I would really congratulate the Minister of Labour and Immigration (Ms. Allan). When the minimum wages were going up, there was a fear, my God, if the minimum wage goes up, businesses will close. Guess what, businesses have prospered because employees, once they get good wages, are productive. I must tell you that is the respect we need to give in a society where we want to build business. We have done a remarkable job in cutting the small-business taxes, but the employees who work there, they are not to be exploited by the capitalism, which is the tool that I rejected since I was a little boy and I will reject until I leave the world.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this budget reflects our ideals and our thinking process. We are a government for all people. People first is our ideal. Our worthy opponents lack the basic understanding of social changes and dynamics of social policies. One can simply compare societies and see what happens there.

I'm not sure, maybe I have repeated this before, but it may be good for some of the new members, the backbenchers who have come in this election. It was the '99 election, and the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) will enjoy this because this is something extremely honest and real, but factual. I ran in '99 in Fort Whyte. While I was there, I would say it was slowly changing. I was told by a gentleman when I was putting my sign up. He says, how dare you put an NDP sign here? But, now, fortunately, I think that the colour is changing

slowly. It might be orange next time. I recall knocking on doors, and I would like my friends and everyone to enjoy this. I knocked on one door and I was in a suit. Usually I am. I used to be in business. So I went and knocked on the door and the gentleman opened and he let me in. He said, are you a candidate? I said, yes. Which party? I said, NDP. He almost threw me out, and then he said to me that you will take power and you will bankrupt it for four years and then Manitoba will be history. We would not like you to ever think.

So I took back and I gave a reference to offer a common-business friend and I said, do you know such-and-such? He said, yes. So I said, phone him and he will tell you who am I. He said, come in, and then we had some good conversations. Then he said to me, that—I discussed—I said, why do you think this? He said, well, you guys are not business-orientated. You will do this, you will do that.

So I said, let's talk private school versus public school. He said, private schools, private hospitals versus public hospitals; private hospitals. I said, private roads versus public roads, private roads. I said, then you and I are definitely thinking; you are thinking of the world that one time there were kings, capitalists and there were slaves. We are not believing in that society. We are believing in a society that we are all equal, and we are all equal. Mighty power is not our ideals, and guess what? That gentleman listened to me intelligently, and, in a Gandhian way, very polite way, I told him to keep looking at these ideals and see what happens.

Guess what happened? I met him several times in occasions I would not like to name, but then he started telling me that, yes, I think you are right, you are right. John Loewen was running, I know was opponent and he won. And guess what, Madam Deputy Speaker? That candidate has now joined the Liberal Party, and now I'm suggesting some of these from Tory to Liberal, now maybe from Liberal to NDP. So they're shifting in the right direction.

Now what I'm suggesting here, Madam Deputy Speaker, some of the people there, who are wonderful people, that they will look at the ideology and perhaps shift, shift and come back to the right side, which is social-democratic ideals called NDP, which has given us now 36 members because people understand. They do not want to go back. They want to go look for future; they want to build a future for their children, for grandchildren.

We do not want to have—now here is what I would like Madam Deputy Speaker to see: health-care education or heavy tax cuts; universal health care or private, public-funded clinics; two-tiered society where elites are making rich and so poverty is increasing, both; clean hydro power: green energy or fuel-fired old thermal stations; a school for rich only or universal education.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as I mentioned before, there is absolutely an unwritten propaganda that they like to say NDP is anti-business. That literally hurts me because we are not anti-business. We are pro-fair teams to employees and employers both. We work with building together. It is not that you versus us. We are just trying to work together to make a society that we all enjoy.

It's maybe idealism, but we have just heard today's debate when the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) said that our corporation capital tax will be zero. We are the lowest in the country on the small business tax. So what else do you need? Our minimum wages are going up; still businesses are prospering here. The economy of Manitoba is healthy today. It is not, fortunately, following the trend that is elsewhere. The manufacturing sector is doing okay, if not the best in the world, but it is doing far, far better than one would expect by the propaganda and the fear that has been initiated through publicity by the people opposite now.

* (11:40)

Let me just say that capitalism—I was just reading. I got a quote here, and I was just trying to do some research on trying to see how capitalism is seen by some people, and here is Martin Luther King, and I quote: "We have deluded ourselves into believing the myth that capitalism grew and prospered out of the Protestant ethic of hard work and sacrifices. Capitalism was built on the exploitation of black slaves and continues to thrive on the exploitation of the poor." That goes not only in America; it goes all over the world. Exploit the poor, make money and call yourself free enterprise. That, I think, in my own definition, it's sinful.

Anyway, I was just about to say that, when I look at the budget today which we have to pass, I think I would request all of you to really do your soul searching and then be conscious and then vote for the budget. It offers economic strength of future. It offers tax savings for all Manitobans: \$182 in personal, property and business tax relief; farmland and school tax rebates to 17 percent in 2008;

\$120-million tax cuts for Manitoba businesses; \$16.6 million more in housing through HOMEWorks!; \$23 million to continue making changes to better protect Manitoba children; exporting clean, renewable hydro power expected to produce \$5.5 billion over next 10 years to Manitobans. Today, we had the announcement yesterday and I think that people are very, very positive about what's happening.

So I am suggesting, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we look at what we have been doing and then we will understand that our philosophy, our thinking is in line with the reality of the world. I would like to share something here rather than repeat which has already been stated in writing in the budget. One has to just carefully read every line and then one will understand, but I would say to some of my friends on that side, let us look at the world. The world is unfolding. It's changing. I'm asking, to say, wake up. Wake up and look beyond. Look ahead. Look around, and you'll see the new waves of hope to make a better world as dreamt by visionary leaders of the world. It has become reality today. The word of socialism is not dirty, whereas the black should not be classified as slaves. Blacks were classified as slaves. They were brought as slaves.

I think that I would like to give a quote here from the speech of his Holiness Dalai Lama in December 1989. It says, "Peace, in the sense of absence of war, is of little value to someone who is dying of hunger or cold. It will not remove the pain of torture inflicted on a prisoner of conscience. It does not comfort those who have lost their loved ones in floods caused by senseless deforestation in a neighbouring country. Peace can only last where human rights are respected, where people are fed and where individuals and nations are free. True peace with oneself and with the world around us can only be achieved through the development of mental peace. The other phenomenon mentioned above are similar, interrelated. Thus, for example, we see that a clean environment"—this is something to be noted—"a clean environment, wealth or democracy mean little in the face of war, especially nuclear war, and that the material development is not sufficient to ensure human happiness."

We have to think it is not only material development, material gain that we need. We need to really feel our conscience, our value, our own spirit, and look at the faces of the children that are born. What kind of world are we leaving for them?

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I'd like to say that His Holiness the Dalai Lama is not a radical leftist, but has been, you know, kind of painted by some of the people that he is. But he is an intellectual leader who talks about spirituality, talks about the world which is emerging.

Now, today, I'm proud to say that the United States of America is going to elect either a woman or a black as the country's president. This is amazing. The nation could not allow women to even vote, but that nation will have either, as president, a woman or a black president very soon.

So I'd like to ask some of my friends here, honourable members, if you recall, in the '70s, there was a serial called *Roots*, and Alex Haley, who was the author, wrote—he went to Africa, did his search, and so that serial was made. There was a slave. I don't know if any of you remember. There was a slave brought in, and his name was Kunta Kinte. He was beaten. They said, your name is Toby. He said, no, my name is Kunta Kinte. He was punished, physically abused. Then, finally, when he could not take it, he was asked, what's your name. Then he said, Toby.

Now, the same America, the same America is today going to, perhaps, elect Barack Hussein Obama. That name sounds very, very dangerous, but that is the reality that that person could be the president of the United States of America. So the world is changing. People are realizing the truth that we are all the same. We are all the same is the doctrine that I believe in. So I like to say that we all came for the welfare of our people, for the welfare of all people, and then adopted the policy of the social democratic system that is doing everything, including fixing health care, giving taxes, raising hopes for the children, installing health care, and doing all that we need to do.

Now you may laugh, but people don't. Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I'm going to end with only the request: Let us be unanimous, vote on this budget. Thank you.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Madam Deputy Speaker, it's certainly a pleasure to be able to rise in the House today to speak to this particular budget. The Member for Radisson (Mr. Jha) certainly put a lot of interesting thoughts on the record this morning. I hope to have an opportunity to speak to some of those thoughts.

It was nice to see the Member for Radisson last night. We attended the same event over at Club Regent. It was a send-off for our Olympians to Beijing. It was a great event. The Member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat) and myself attended, and the Member for Radisson was there representing the Province of Manitoba. It was a great event, and we certainly enjoyed his company last night and the hospitality there. It was a great event and good to see our young athletes continuing on in some of their endeavours, and we want to wish them all the best as they travel over to China.

Not just the Olympians but the para-Olympians were there as well. So it's certainly good and encouraging to see those people there and some of the things that they've been able to accomplish over the years. We wish them all the best as they travel to China, as well.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I notice the government this year picked "Opportunity and Stability" as the theme for their budget. Quite frankly, I do believe there is tremendous opportunity in Manitoba, and the government should be there to make sure that opportunity exists and to help foster and facilitate development in Manitoba. I think that's where this particular government has not stepped up to the plate. There are all types of opportunity there, and we have tremendous resources throughout Manitoba. You know, in the mining field, I look at some of the energy sector, Manitoba Hydro. All those things are a tremendous opportunity, but they have to be managed correctly, and that's really the role of government. I don't see the government stepping up and taking that on very seriously.

* (11:50)

Madam Deputy Speaker, when we talk about the budget, we all think about numbers. Quite frankly, that's on the thoughts of a lot of Manitobans. Where is the province headed in big-picture terms? Where are we headed? We know where we're headed; we're headed down the path of more debt. The provincial debt now is close to \$20 billion. Of course, that includes the debt of the Crown corporations, and a large part of that, in fact, is Manitoba Hydro. I'll talk a little bit about Manitoba Hydro later on.

But certainly the increase in the debt that we're seeing within Manitoba is certainly a cause for concern because we do, Madam Deputy Speaker, have to service that debt, and we service that debt through interest costs. The debt-servicing cost for this fiscal year coming up is \$860 million,

\$860 million. That's what it costs you and me as Manitobans every year just to service, just to pay for the debt we have in the province now. Eight hundred and sixty million dollars, that particular amount is higher than the entire budget for the city of Winnipeg. Could you imagine what we could do with \$860 million? What an investment we could make in Manitoba for \$860 million. Instead, we as Manitobans are taxed every day just to pay for the debt that we have incurred in Manitoba.

Quite frankly, Madam Deputy Speaker, the debt is going to increase. I'm going to quote from the *Brandon Sun*. The *Brandon Sun* had quoted here, just after the release of the budget: "The government conveniently ignores the fact that the province's net debt is actually forecast to rise back up by \$490 million from 2007 to 2008."

To find that out, you have to look past the press release and delve deep into the Province's budget papers. That's one thing that we do find disturbing about this particular government. They're a government's that's out there and bringing out news releases and glossy ads telling us about how good they perceive things to be, but in reality, when you dig down deep, things just aren't as rosy as the perception this particular government likes to leave with you.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it's certainly important that we, as all Manitobans, recognize that we're headed down the path of more debt with this provincial government and there's no sign in terms of the government stopping that increase in our debt.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we were on a course in the 1990s to eliminate that debt. There was a plan in place to eliminate the provincial debt, and, if this particular government would have stayed true to that particular plan, within the next 20 years we could have paid off our debt. You look at the province of Alberta, for instance, which, obviously, has some tremendous opportunities out there. They had some tremendous governments there, too, that recognized the fact that, if you pay off your debt, good things will happen to you, and all the people in the province of Alberta are being rewarded for that.

It's not too late to turn this thing around, and especially given the relatively good economic times we've had over the last few years, it should have been an opportunity for the government to actually pay down some of that debt and try and turn that around, but, no, they haven't. They've increased spending in just about all areas. We don't mind

spending, but it has to be in a positive way so that we as Manitobans will gain value from that spending. It's all about value for dollars, and that's how we look at things.

Having announcements that we're spending more and more money here and there just doesn't address the real issues. It's really about getting results for the money that you're investing in Manitoba, and that's really the crux of where the government should be heading in terms of their budget document.

Madam Deputy Speaker, just for interest's sake, I had a look at the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the report. It's a pre-budget submission that they've provided to the Province of Manitoba. Some of the recommendations in there, I think they've done a pretty extensive survey of their membership, so they've got a pretty good sense of what the people of Manitoba are thinking about the economy and how things are going in Manitoba.

Just to have a look at the survey results, and they talk about small-business priorities. It was very interesting to see what the community is thinking about what the priorities should be. Almost 90 percent of those surveyed recognize that the total tax burden is the biggest issue before them. We know that Manitoba is one of the highest-taxed provinces across the country, and we don't see any sign of this turning around with this particular government because it's a tax-and-spend mentality of this government.

The second most important issue, where 70 percent of the respondents came in, was the government debt and deficit. So that's a very significant issue that Manitobans have on their radar as well. Manitobans are starting to understand that this government is spending themselves deeper into debt.

The other interesting statistic I noticed here in this report talks about the optimism in Manitoba and just how do people view the economic future of Manitoba. What we found there is an index they use there and in fact the last two years the index has fallen in Manitoba. That's a bad sign that there's a lack of opportunities, there's a lack of optimism in our business community, and that sort of thing translates across the province. In fact, we're finding that even that index shows we're falling behind Saskatchewan as well. So not a very good foresight for the future of Manitoba.

Another issue that they raised in their report was the shortage of qualified labour. That's very dramatic here in Manitoba. In fact, they're talking about one-third of the small businesses having issues with labour. That's a very important place where the Manitoba government can be involved in terms of getting our youth educated, getting some of our people that aren't working, get them educated, get them trained in those certain areas that there is potential for labour development, because the economy for the most part has been rolling along pretty well. There certainly should be opportunities, and we should make sure that all of our people that are able to work are actually going to be out there and working.

A couple of the other interesting things that they noticed in terms of things that impact the business community, first of all, was the increase in labour costs that we've gone through. We've seen this government raise the minimum wage, and that certainly impacts small businesses and a lot of times in a very negative way. So that's obviously something that's impacting the business community as well.

Another area here, which I just touched on briefly, but one of the priorities that they see is actually a reduction in the personal income tax. That's something this particular government seems to have failed to have a serious look at. They did add \$100 to the basic exemption where we start paying income tax, but reality is when you look at inflation, we're actually losing ground there. We're certainly way behind other provinces in terms of our basic exemption where we start paying taxes. Just to give you a quick comparison: Alberta, you don't start paying taxes till you make \$16,000. Even in Saskatchewan, you're almost \$9,000 before you start paying taxes. In Manitoba, we're just over \$8,000. So the reality is it's about leaving money in people's pockets, Madam Deputy Speaker. It's not about taxing them to death. That's something we think is a missed opportunity in this particular budget.

The other thing, too, that was interesting was the payroll tax. Actually, this year marks the 25th anniversary of the introduction of—as it was called to begin with—the health and post-secondary education tax levy, and we now know it as the payroll tax.

An Honourable Member: You don't like post-secondary education?

* (12:00)

Mr. Cullen: Well, we certainly like post-secondary education. What we're doing is we're burdening the business community to pay for those sorts of things. There're other ways that we can—we generate a lot of tax revenue now from various sources, and we think that the Province should be investing in post-secondary education. It's a very, very important part of what the government's role is, educating our youth and our people in Manitoba. They should be investing in post-secondary education. They should be having a dialogue with the universities and the colleges around Manitoba, how we can improve that.

We're just wondering, Madam Deputy Speaker, if the current freeze on tuition fees is actually the proper way to go. Is it really serving Manitobans and Manitoba universities and colleges? Is that the best use of revenue that's coming into the province and for the colleges? So that's something that certainly should be addressed. There has to be a long-term plan for education in the province of Manitoba.

We are, Madam Deputy Speaker, getting record money from the federal government in terms of transfer payments and in terms of equalization payments. We're close to 40 percent now of our provincial budget coming from Ottawa. Quite frankly, there's no sign that this particular government wants to turn that around. We're the only province in western Canada that relies on government equalization payments, certainly to that extent. Even Saskatchewan—even Saskatchewan—has turned things around there, and they do not receive equalization payments anymore.

Here's a very interesting—this is part of the conclusion in this particular report here. This is actually a quote. They quoted Premier Doer: As noted by Premier Doer in May 2007, having as much profit as you can is really important for the sustainability of small business.

If we want to ensure we have the revenues to fund the priorities of health care, highways and higher education, we must ensure every effort is undertaken to fulfil the Premier's comments, both in May and last February, where he advised: "We don't want to be behind Saskatchewan."

Well, quite frankly, Madam Deputy Speaker, we are behind Saskatchewan, and we've got a little ways to go to catch up to Saskatchewan. Quite frankly, there are opportunities in Saskatchewan. There are opportunities here in Manitoba and it's up to this government to allow Manitobans to move ahead and seek those opportunities and really get the job done.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in terms of our comparing ourselves with Saskatchewan, it's interesting to look at some of the statistics on population. I think that's a pretty good way to kind of gauge how things are going within the various provinces.

I just had a document here from Canada West Foundation, and they've been plotting the census over the last number of years. So, basically, as we know it, B.C. and Alberta have been fairly robust, and they are growing communities, growing provinces. Saskatchewan and Manitoba, basically we're the same size as we were 30 years ago, but the other side of the coin is when we look at the future and the potential growth, what the potential is to have.

Well, these graphs that they have in this document clearly show Manitoba very stagnant in terms of people coming to the province, in terms of our potential growth, whereas we look at Saskatchewan and over the next few years it looks like an exponential growth in terms of people moving to Saskatchewan. It just looks like a tremendous opportunity for Saskatchewan.

So, you know, according to this document, of course, and according to what the Canada West Foundation is looking at, it doesn't see Manitoba moving ahead. It sees the province of Saskatchewan moving ahead, and, of course, we know it looks like Alberta is going to be continuing to move forward as well. We really look at the history here in Manitoba, and we're having a hard time keeping up with Saskatchewan in terms of our population.

You know, the government as they do, from time to time, they come out and they bring forward their documents saying that people are moving into Manitoba; but, when you look at the real numbers here, without cherry-picking some of those numbers, we know that the fact is that very few people are actually moving into Manitoba. We're still having an out-migration of Manitobans to places like Alberta and into Saskatchewan now.

In fact, Saskatchewan, the province of Saskatchewan, last year had a net increase of 16,500 people where the province of Manitoba only had a net increase of 13,500. Most of those people, Madam Deputy Speaker, are immigrants to the province of Manitoba and actually as a direct result of the Provincial Nominee Program, which was initiated under the Gary Filmon government back in the 1990s.

So those types of programs that were initiated by the Conservatives are starting to pay off, and things are certainly starting to work in that regard.

I did want to talk a little bit about some issues that are relevant to Turtle Mountain and to rural Manitoba. We've seen this government come in with the heavy-handed political maneuver to shut down the hog industry in Manitoba. It's something that certainly affects that industry. It certainly affects a lot of Manitobans, and it affects the economy of the entire province. I know the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) recognizes the importance that agriculture plays to a community such as Brandon. It is very dependent on how the rural economy works, and any shutdown in agriculture and the hog industry is certainly going to impact the province as a whole. So we know, quite honestly, that the Premier (Mr. Doer), in cohorts with the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers), has basically tried to shut down that particular industry and, really, has done so. Again, it's clearly a case of politics over sound science.

In the Clean Environment Commission itself, it said we need to do some more work to make sure we have the science down pat before we start making any rash decisions. Well, the Province and the Minister of Conservation said, we don't think we need to worry about the science. It's all about the politics and, if we can make the people in the city of Winnipeg happy, this is the route we're going to go down. They didn't care what happened to agriculture.

Oh, Madam Deputy Speaker, I see my time's running out. I had so many more issues to talk about, but—one other. Obviously, it's fairly important that the hog industry and the beef industry get looked at. You know, we have this country-of-origin labelling, which is a very, very important issue. It's going to impact our livestock industry here in Manitoba very substantially, so it's something that this particular government should take a role in here, a lead role in talking to the federal government and talking to our American counterparts and talking to our producers to make sure that the impact of whatever rules that are going to come down, that those sorts of impacts to our producers are mitigated. So, again, it's certainly an important role that the Province should be taking.

The other very important issue that I wanted to just briefly talk about was the whole east side, west side debate in terms of Manitoba Hydro. Quite frankly, this is a place where the government of Manitoba should be getting out of the way, letting

the people of Manitoba Hydro do the right thing, do the thing they've wanted to do for the last 20 years, build a line on the east side of Manitoba. It's shorter, it's safer, it's more reliable and it's going to save Manitobans at least \$1.5 billion, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Again, it's a matter of this government sticking its nose in the places where it doesn't belong and bringing forward bad, bad public policy. It's all about leadership. It's all about doing the right thing, getting the job done. It's positive to see sales into the United States, east of Manitoba, Wisconsin, Minnesota becoming involved. It just makes common sense. If you look at the map, Manitobans agree across this province that the right thing to do is build the hydro line on the east side of Manitoba. Let's get the job done. Let's sell our hydro. Let's develop. There are tremendous opportunities here in Manitoba. Let's get this government out of the road and let Manitobans get on and seize those opportunities, instead of having this government get in the road and stop development in Manitoba, Madam Deputy Speaker.

There are more, many more things to say, but I'm going to end my speech this morning. Certainly, there are opportunities that have been missed here by this government, and that's the bottom line. This is a budget of missed opportunities, Madam Deputy Speaker. Thank you.

Ms. Marilyn Brick (St. Norbert): I rise to speak in opposition to the two amendments that have been put forward to budget 2008.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is two months short of the five-year anniversary for me as being elected as an MLA. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation to the people of St. Norbert, who have provided me with the greatest honour possible to serve as their representative in the Manitoba Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

* (12:10)

It is, indeed, an honour that they have bestowed on me, and I am very appreciative of the support I receive from my constituents. Of course, Mr. Speaker, this could only mean that it's spring here in Manitoba. All throughout this province, people are feeling good about their future. There's an optimistic mood everywhere in this province. I must say that I've been attending lots of events over the last few weeks, and everyone is feeling good about the prospects for the next year. I'm proud to stand up

today and express my thoughts in support of budget 2008. This budget builds on our record of good government by focussing on Manitoba's growing economy, by providing more opportunities for young people, by continuing our commitment to health care, and by ensuring we have safe communities and lower taxes for Manitoba families while protecting our water and the environment.

I was really pleased yesterday to hear about the agreement to sell 500 megawatts of clean, renewable Manitoba hydro power over 15 years to Wisconsin Public Service starting in 2018. This deal is worth over \$2 billion. This new agreement is in addition to the recent proposal from Manitoba Hydro to sell 250 megawatts of hydro power over 15 years starting in 2020 to the Minnesota Power company. Our Premier spoke of the great benefits this will be for our province when he said this power sale will significantly increase our exports, allow us to maintain our low energy rates for domestic users, and reduce the production of greenhouse gases by reducing the need for thermal generation in the United States.

Manitoba electricity generated \$592 million in revenue last year, and it is expected to produce \$5.5 billion in revenue over the next 10 years. This new deal means that we will be moving forward with the construction of new dams like Wuskwatim and Conawapa, and the development of secure transmission lines to bring power from northern Manitoba to the consumers of our clean electrical power in the south.

Mr. Speaker, university and college students who continue to live and work in Manitoba after they graduate will be beneficiaries of the tuition income tax rebate this year. This goes a long way to provide support for students. The new tuition fee income tax rebate will provide students with reimbursement of up to 60 percent of the tuition fees they paid for their education. Our government is committed to ensuring affordable, accessible, quality education for our post-secondary students. That's why we will be increasing the student bursary program by \$8 million and reducing the student interest rates by 1 percent on student loans.

Mr. Speaker, in the constituency of St. Norbert, the University of Manitoba is one of the main employers, and it's very important to my constituents. Two years ago our government committed to the largest-ever increase in post-secondary education funding with a three-year

commitment of \$60 million. This year's budget goes beyond previous commitments and increases operating funding amounts over three years by more than \$79 million. This is the largest-ever increase in post-secondary education funding. We will also be investing more than \$100 million in capital projects at our universities and colleges. Over the last four years we have made major investments in post-secondary education capital programs. Our previous \$50-million investment helped to kick-start a successful \$237-million University of Manitoba capital campaign.

I'm so pleased to see that our government will be assisting the University of Manitoba in their plan to revitalize the university campus. Our government will be investing \$47 million over the next three years in the historic redevelopment of the University of Manitoba's Fort Garry campus. The redevelopment plan, titled Project Domino, is a huge undertaking that involves at least 13 faculties and departments. As a result of the project, the university will see a 350-bed residence go up on the south side of the university. Tache Hall will be converted into a new home for the Faculty of Music and the School for Art.

The redevelopment of a 400-seat auditorium to allow for musical performances will be part of the project. On April 9, I had the opportunity to hear many of the music students from the University of Manitoba's School of Music perform in a concert at Smartpark. The opera, piano recitals and jazz groups were great, but the front hall at 135 Innovation Drive in Smartpark was not large enough to accommodate all the people who attended the concert. A new music hall that would allow for much larger crowds to attend music recitals is a great idea. The Faculty of Music where the students currently attend school was built in the 1960s, and it was intended to host 60 students. There are now 250 students enrolled in the School of Music, and they are housed in numerous buildings around campus.

The School of Art will also be moving into the redesigned Tache Hall, which will be outfitted with all the latest technology to allow for new media and digital arts that the students are studying. Several other buildings will be redeveloped, such as the Fitzgerald Building that will host the faculty of graduate students and studies.

I want to commend the University of Manitoba administration on their bold thinking for this project and on their keen interest in maintaining the historic

component of the campus, while allowing for the development of new facilities that meet the demands of the students. I'm looking forward to the development of new buildings that will fit right in with the Engineering and Information Technology Complex that was opened on September 23, 2006.

I had the opportunity to visit many of the university's science faculties and, I must admit, the equipment is often outdated and badly in need of upgrading. Our government has committed to investing \$4.2 million to modernize laboratories and upgrade equipment at Brandon University, the University of Winnipeg and the University of Manitoba. This will go a long way to address the needs of students that they have to gain experience and relevant opportunities to work with current equipment as they prepare for future education and for employment in science-related fields.

In addition to funding capital projects and increasing our support of the operating budget for universities and colleges, our government is also supporting apprenticeship training through an infusion of \$3.8 million to support the creation of 1,100 new apprentice-training seats, as well as a new apprentice tax credit for businesses, as part of budget 2008. The 1,100 new apprenticeship spots are fulfilling the first part of our commitment to add 4,000 new training spots over the next four years.

It is great to see that we are offering a new incentive for businesses to encourage increased employer participation in the system, as it was recommended by the Apprenticeship Futures Commission. Businesses are telling us that their greatest challenge is finding enough qualified staff to fill the jobs that would allow them to prosper. This announcement goes a long way to help them find qualified staff.

Manitobans have been asking us for a strong commitment to the environment, and our government is doing just that. On April 11, we introduced new legislation that requires Manitoba to meet its Kyoto commitments by 2012. It also sets long-term goals for future greenhouse gas reductions by 2020 and 2025. To be in compliance with this legislation, Manitoba must reduce its annual emissions to 17 megatonnes from approximately 20 megatonnes. This legislation brings with it \$145 million in investments over four years and commitments to look at a wide variety of initiatives that will move us towards our goal of reducing greenhouse gases.

Some of the actions we will be taking include a new coal-reduction strategy, including a tax on coal emissions, and incentives for coal-reliant industries to change to cleaner energy. We will be supporting public transportation, and this we will be doing by enacting legislation that puts into law a 50-50 funding partnership to ensure the Province continues to pay half of transit's net operating costs. This also, Mr. Speaker, includes rapid transit.

We will be taking action on large emitters, closing down Manitoba's coal-fired electricity plant in Brandon, except where we have to support emergency operations. We will be working on projects that capture methane gas from large landfills. We will be supporting the use of greener cars and trucks, including the use of low-carbon fuels, and developing a clean-vehicle standard for Manitoba vehicles.

We will also be reviewing the ways we can encourage alternate transportation choices for Manitobans, things like modernizing highway traffic laws and looking at low and no emission vehicles that would be able to operate here in Manitoba. We will be continuing to rebate people for the purchase of hybrid and electrical vehicles.

The Manitoba government will be continuing our work for the expansion of clean-energy projects, like the development of hydro, wind and geothermal. We will be planting and assisting to plant five million trees over the next five years, and developing new programs to help municipalities track their emissions.

*(12:20)

Manitobans understand the value of clean water in our province, and they want to know that we are doing our best to ensure that this resource is protected for the future. We are doing just that, Mr. Speaker. Some of the initiatives we are undertaking include: implementing a new phosphorus restriction for lawn fertilizers; instituting new standards for nitrogen and phosphorus for large waste-water treatment facilities. Our government has committed to providing one-third of the funding to the major upgrading for the projects that are planned for Winnipeg waste-water treatment plants. We will also be setting new limits for smaller systems and lagoons.

Some of the larger municipalities have expressed concerns to us about the septic services that exist in rural Manitoba, and we will be addressing this

challenge by introducing new rules for the use of septic systems and providing more funding for inspections and monitoring of these systems.

We will be introducing programs to encourage the use of water-saving devices and to make water conservation relative for people.

We are the first government to legislate the amount of phosphorus that can be present in automatic dishwasher detergent.

We know the importance of wetlands as well, so we will be working along with Ducks Unlimited, the Conservation districts, the Natural Conservancy of Canada and the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation to protect this natural, valuable filtration system.

Our government will be increasing funding to conservation districts by more than \$5.3 million to encourage the good work they have been doing.

In addition to protecting the environment, Manitobans want to know their communities are safe, good places to live. Our government is paying attention to this challenge by ensuring we have preventative programs that offer safe, healthy alternatives to crime, and by ensuring that there are police available to respond to criminal activities.

By providing a well-trained strong police force we are able to deter and respond to crime. Since being elected in 1999 our government has increased the number of police officers in Manitoba by 155 positions. We are committed to adding another 100 positions during the next four years.

Budget 2008 provides funding for hiring of another 20 police officers; 10 for Winnipeg and two for Brandon.

Since taking on the position as Legislative Assistant to the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak), I have had the opportunity to learn more about the wide variety of prevention programs that our government has undertaken.

The Lighthouses program is proving to be very successful. Last year 130,000 children participated in the program. In my community of St. Norbert, the program has the second-highest attendance of the 50 sites that are currently running in the province. These programs offer physical activity, mentoring opportunities, fun and a safe haven as their name, Lighthouses, references. They are a great community initiative that has proven to be very successful in helping young people make positive choices and

encouraging great life skills. This budget provides for funding for five additional Lighthouses sites to offer in services to the community.

Our government has introduced a very successful program, Mr. Speaker, that targets neighbourhood-driven projects to reduce crime and to revitalize the area.

The Neighbourhoods Alive! program has worked very well as it's community-driven and funds projects that encourage both economic and community improvement initiatives. Budget 2008 provides funding to expand this great program and extend the activities that are available for people to participate in.

I am pleased that we will be providing funding of \$500,000 for recreation directors to work in the inner-city and other neighbourhoods.

We are also introducing a new First Sports initiative that will allow young people to purchase equipment they need to participate in sport.

This budget also provides for a new Mediation Services pilot program, two additional Crown prosecutors, additional staff for the Milner Ridge Correctional facility, and there is a new facility being built for the replacement of the women's jail.

Mr. Speaker, I am so happy to say that crime reduction strategies are proving to be effective. The work of the Auto Theft Task Force has helped to reduce auto thefts. Thanks to the MPI immobilizer program and other aspects of the program auto thefts are down 46 percent in the first three months of 2008.

Manitobans consistently tell us that health-care services are their No. 1 priority. This is why our government has made health care our No. 1 priority. In my community the redevelopment of the Victoria General Hospital to include a new emergency department and oncology department is a much-needed and much-anticipated project.

I've had the pleasure of hosting a consultation session with community residents along with the MLA for Southdale (Ms. Selby) in regard to the services and programs that should be offered as we start the process of designing the new women's hospital. People spoke passionately about the need to keep moms and new babies in close proximity to each other so care can be provided that matches the needs of both individuals while encouraging the bonding process to take place.

Many of the people present at the consultation spoke about the positive experiences they had with the staff when they visited Manitoba hospitals. Manitobans are very happy to see the \$40-million redevelopment of the Women's Hospital go forward as they are with the fact that we are providing additional money to educate and train more health-care professionals.

Our government has made health care a priority, resulting in 235 more doctors working in Manitoba now than there was in 1999. There are 86 more doctors working in rural Manitoba and 103 more specialists providing service to Manitobans than there were in 1999. Our 2008 budget provides \$7.2 million that will be used to expand the medical school to 110 training spots, increase specialty training with a focus on emergency medicine, increase support for the International Medical Graduate program.

In the consultation session we hosted on the Women's Hospital, particular compliments were paid to the nursing professionals. Since 1999 we have increased the number of nurses working in Manitoba by 1,789. Budget 2008 provides funding to increase the number of training spots by 40. It also commits to invest \$1.2 million to provide additional nurse-practitioner positions for emergency rooms and for primary- and acute-care setting training.

Mr. Speaker, our government has worked very hard to ensure Manitobans can receive care in a timely fashion. Our province leads the way in wait-time reductions. I want to say that we have worked very hard and we continue to address the priorities that Manitobans have. That's why we've been voted back in for a third term.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, Oh.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): We're taking up too much time. Before getting into the number of issues that I have with this budget that has been presented in this House, I wanted to take this opportunity to thank the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) for saying what were some wonderful words about my father, who recently passed away. I wanted to thank all of the members of the House, including yourself, Mr. Speaker, for your kind wishes to my family and to the many condolences. I think it's wonderful that we can at times like this set aside our partisan politics, and show the fact that we are all human beings in this

House. I just wanted to extend, on behalf of my family, my gratitude for all of you who did give us cards and well wishes to our family. So thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, I know I just have probably one or two minutes left today to get into discussing this budget. I did want to start off by just saying that I think one of the things about this budget, and if we go back, I've now been an elected member in this Chamber for about seven and a half years now. I think, going back to the first budget that I ever saw that was delivered in this House, certainly, prior to that in 1999, I think we were looking at just under a \$6-billion budget at the time or it was in and around

\$6 billion. Now we're approaching the \$10-billion budget. I find that that is in and of itself scary. The fact that this government and the way that they want to run our province, it's all about spend more, spend more, bigger government; we know how to manage the affairs of our province better than you, and so we're going to take your money and do that. I think it's—

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter's again before the House, the honourable Member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson) will have 28 minutes remaining.

The time being 12:30, this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, April 18, 2008

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