

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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

Vol. LXI No. 23 - 1:30 p.m., Thursday, April 9, 2009

ISSN 0542-5492

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
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WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 9, 2009

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYER

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 15—The Victims' Bill of Rights Amendment Act

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), that Bill 15, The Victims' Bill of Rights Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Déclaration des droits des victimes, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, this bill contains two amendments to the victims' bill of rights that will implement the recommendations of Commissioner Salhany in his report of the Taman Inquiry.

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

PETITIONS

Long-Term Care Facility—Morden

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following 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 Dena Gillis, Anne Berg, Henry Fehr and many, many others.

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

Ring Dike Road—Ste. Rose du Lac

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:

The Ring Dike Road is a well-used gravel municipal road that is used as a secondary road in and out of the community of Ste. Rose du Lac.

Given the heavy pattern of use, there is strong interest in the community in seeing the Ring Dike Road upgraded to a paved provincial road.

It would be most cost-effective to upgrade the Ring Dike Road to a provincial road at the same time that upgrades are being undertaken at the junction of Highway 68 and Highway 5.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) to consider upgrading the Ring Dike Road at Ste. Rose du Lac into a provincial road; and

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to consider upgrading the Ring Dike Road at the same time that work is being done at the junction of Highway 68 and Highway 5.

This petition is signed by Dora Ogg, Henry Ogg, Michelle Morin and many, many others.

Traffic Signal Installation— PTH 15 and Highway 206

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

In August 2008, the Minister of Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) stated that traffic volumes at the intersection of PTH 15 and Highway 206 in Dugald exceed those needed to warrant the installation of traffic signals.

Every school day, up to a thousand students travel through this intersection in Dugald where the lack of traffic signals puts their safety at risk.

Thousands of vehicles travel daily through this intersection in Dugald where the lack of traffic signals puts at risk the safety of these citizens.

In 2008, there was a 300 percent increase in accidents at this intersection.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Transportation consider the immediate installation of traffic signals at the intersection of PTH 15 and Highway 206 in Dugald.

To request that the Minister of Transportation recognize the value of the lives and well-being of the students and citizens of Manitoba.

Signed by Lorraine Boitson, Lora Chapman, Debra Alexander and many, many other Manitobans.

Personal Care Homes—Viriden

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

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 Viriden 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 Viriden 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 Viriden is so severe that more than one-quarter of the beds at 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 Viriden 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 Viriden have not received assurance that they will be moved back to Viriden when these 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 Viriden 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 Viriden as soon as the beds become available.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by Craig Whyte, Blair Fordyce, R. Mark Routledge and many, many others.

* (13:40)

Seven Oaks Hospital—Emergency Services

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:

The current Premier (Mr. Doer) and the NDP government are reducing emergency services at the Seven Oaks Hospital.

On October 6, 1995, the NDP introduced a matter of urgent public importance that stated that "the ordinary business of the House to be set aside to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely the threat to the health-care system posed by this government's plans to limit emergency services in the city of Winnipeg community hospitals."

On December 6, 1995, when the then-PC government suggested it was going to reduce emergency services at the Seven Oaks Hospital, the NDP leader then asked Premier Gary Filmon to "reverse the horrible decisions of his government and his Minister of Health and reopen our community-based emergency wards."

The NDP gave Manitobans the impression that they supported Seven Oaks Hospital having full emergency services seven days a week, 24 hours a day

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Premier of Manitoba consider how important it is to have the Seven Oaks Hospital provide full emergency services seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by N. Fernando, D. Soles, R. Jaramel and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister charged with the administration of The Workers Compensation Act): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the 2008 Annual Report of the Workers Compensation Board; the 2009-2013 Workers Compensation Board of Manitoba Five-Year Plan; the 2008 Appeal Commission and Medical Review Panel Annual Report and the Report of the Fair Practices Advocate for the year 2008.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Provincial Ice Jams and Flooding

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): The Red River is cresting in Emerson today. Reports indicate that the community remains safe and dry. The water is roughly two metres below the top of the community dikes. The crest moving north towards the city of Winnipeg is expected to be here on either April 15 or 16.

Yesterday, the Red River Floodway control structure went into operation at approximately 1 p.m. in an attempt to hold river levels at 18.5 at James Avenue.

This morning, engineering staff further raised the floodway gates with the objective of stabilizing river levels in Winnipeg at 20 feet at James Avenue. The operation is necessary to address the reduced effectiveness of the floodway operations because of the ice at the inlet structure and in the floodway channel.

The extremely unusual combination of high flows with persistent ice cover and ice jams is raising river levels within Winnipeg higher than previously

forecast, especially in the southern portion of the city. The Province has undertaken the unusual action of operating the floodway with ice still in place in order to prevent imminent flooding in the city of Winnipeg.

This operation is in accordance with the floodway operating rules and is not expected to raise river levels upstream of the floodway inlet above their natural level.

Mr. Speaker, there remains a significant risk of serious ice jams in the city that could increase river levels by up to three feet in three to four hours. If emergency conditions arise, consideration will be given to a variation of the floodway operating rules in accordance with the floodway's Environment Act licence to authorize additional rises of the floodway gates to avoid imminent flooding in Winnipeg.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): I am pleased to respond to the minister's statement and to thank him for the information provided to the House today.

I had the opportunity yesterday, along with the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), at the invitation of the Premier (Mr. Doer), to visit community leaders in Emerson, Morris and in municipalities north of Winnipeg, Selkirk, St. Clements, St. Andrews, and the R.M.s of East and West St. Paul, that we were impressed by the efforts undertaken in all of those communities to prepare for the high water levels and to deal with the issues of ice jamming. I appreciate and I want to indicate my appreciation for the opportunity to have those discussions and get an overhead view of what's happening.

Mr. Speaker, we saw, this morning, the efforts under way within the first kilometre of the floodway channel to break up the ice which is jamming in that area as a result of the low bridge at St. Mary's Road, which has now been closed. We congratulate all those involved and thank them for their efforts to deal with the damage and with the challenges being created upstream from the St. Mary's bridge. We have concerns that this was an avoidable situation and needs to be mitigated in terms of work going forward.

But we do want to congratulate those involved in dealing with this crisis and certainly indicate our support for the government, the City of Winnipeg and community leaders around the province of

Manitoba to deal with the challenges of the coming days.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I ask for leave to speak to the minister's statement.

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member have leave? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for the statement, and I thank the Premier (Mr. Doer) for organizing the visit both south and north of Winnipeg, and the opportunity to overview the operation of the floodway and to see the areas where there was a lot of ice, a very unusual amount of ice in the Red River this year, some areas which were starting to clear out. But it is clearly a year when the ice has had a huge impact, and the planning around that ice has been a major factor in terms of what's happening.

It was good to see in Emerson that the dike is doing well and they have not even had to use a single sandbag.

It was clear when we were north of Winnipeg in St. Andrews that the people are still pretty stressed and pretty tired from all the efforts that have been put in. So I extend, on behalf of myself and all members here, a big thank you to the efforts that people have put in to try and make sure that the damage as a result of the flooding is kept to an absolute minimum.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us from Southern Manitoba Home Schools 46 grades K to 12 students under the direction of Mrs. Margaret Unrau. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Red River Floodway Expansion Completion

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): We've been, with all Manitobans, carefully watching the developments in connection with the rising waters of the Red River and the ice-jamming situation which has created some risk to homeowners at various points along the way on the Red River over the past number of days.

This morning, Mr. Speaker, we were seeing reports of tube dikes being breached in south Winnipeg, residents of south Winnipeg being put on evacuation notice. We see concerns about water backup in the area immediately south of Winnipeg in a situation where we have far less water than what we saw in 1997.

So with less water than 1997 and \$660 million spent to date, I want to ask the minister of highways why it is that these things are happening when just two weeks ago his government announced that the floodway expansion was complete.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I think in the budget it states that we will be completed by the end of 2009, the one-in-700-year protection. I think it's in writing in the budget.

Secondly, on the issue of vulnerability south of the floodway vis-à-vis 1997, we have put some \$6.5 million into the Grand Pointe area that was devastated in 1997. We're hopeful that that investment will protect the people and residences of that area in the Grande Point region.

We're obviously concerned about ice, but we think and we know that the investments we've made provide greater protection.

St. Mary's Road Bridge Ice Jams

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Five years ago in 2004, engineers identified the risk of ice and debris coming up against bridges along the floodway as a major risk that would be posed to the city of Winnipeg and was part of the rationale for the recommendation made by engineers to raise the height of all the bridges over the floodway and that the failure to do so would, in effect, undo all of the other good work that was being done in other places along the floodway.

I want to ask the minister of highways, why, only one kilometre into the channel we have the St. Mary's bridge which today is blocking ice, which is closed and which has created the risk that is being referred to in terms of the operation of the floodway, why he's put the people of Winnipeg at risk by not dealing with the St. Mary's Road bridge which is only one kilometre into the channel.

Why spend \$665 million widening a channel that the water is having difficulty getting to?

* (13:50)

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Also part of the engineering solutions to those challenges were the notches that were not in place in 1997 at the inlet of the floodway to protect the bridge that he indicated. So there was a considerable amount of work provided by engineers, the advice to the federal and provincial governments on notches, both of which—and the forebay—both been expanded to provide greater protection.

Ice Jam Concerns

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, we have residents of Winnipeg on evacuation notice. We see ice lodged up against bridges in St. Vital and throughout south Winnipeg and rising water levels with water levels that aren't even comparable to those that we faced in 1997. This is after a \$660-million taxpayer spending spree on the part of the government which didn't deal with the first kilometre of the floodway channel. It didn't raise the very first bridge that the ice in the water would meet at St. Mary's Road. They didn't widen the channel within the first kilometre of the floodway. As a result of that, they have created the risk that they were referring to yesterday about the operation of the floodway.

I want to ask the minister of highways, whose constituents are going to be impacted and who has put at risk residents within the city of Winnipeg, why it is that they would undertake all of this other expenditure and work but leave the first kilometre of the floodway as it is with a narrower channel, with a low bridge at St. Mary's that as of 11:30 this morning had ice jamming against it, Mr. Speaker, and backing up the flow of water.

Will the minister of highways admit that they've duffed the ditch?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I would point out there's a massive amount of ice right abutting on the floodway gates as we speak, ice that's in front of the floodway, ice that's behind the floodway, ice that's in the floodway. I think it's very, very important to point that out. Are we concerned about ice and the management of ice? We have two Amphibexes that we didn't have before. We have four ice cutters. We have 10 excavators.

Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is looking at the issue of Grande Pointe. I'm hopeful that all the work we've done in Grande Pointe will not result in what happened in 1997. I will await to see the risk and damages of the ice before I make any political

comments. We have invested a lot of money in the Grande Pointe area and we'll see whether with ice and with water that is a better protection for the people of Grande Pointe that we see today than we saw in 1997.

Red River Floodway Communication to Public

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, as we know, the floodway was very quickly pressed into action yesterday. Public notification of the floodway's operation is required to allow residents who may be negatively affected south of the intake structure to take steps to mitigate their risks. The floodway rules of operation say there is supposed to be a 1-800 line for ongoing information about the gate operations, as well as information on the Water Stewardship Web site.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick) outline what steps were taken to notify Manitobans about the floodway's operation?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): Mr. Speaker, I think it's important, as we deal with a critical 24-to-48-hour period in the current flood situation, whether it be in terms of questions raised by the Leader of the Opposition or the questions raised now, to focus in on the immediate emergency situation and the fact that yesterday we did—in fact, the Minister of Water Stewardship made an immediate call to operate the floodway partially. That was done, and with the protocols that were in place the warning sound was given.

I want to note, by the way, that we had indicated in the media a number of days earlier that there was a possibility, a strong possibility of the operation of the floodway with ice conditions. We have followed those procedures, and I want to stress again we're dealing with an emergency situation—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Operation Authority

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, operation of the floodway control structure will create some unknowns over the next few days for residents south of the gates, through the city, and north of the city. Government officials have acknowledged that activating the floodway gates when there is still ice present does create some risks. My constituents have expressed some concerns that

they were caught off guard by how quickly the floodway went into service.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick) indicate to this House who has the authority to activate the floodway gates? Is it her or is it someone else?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): Mr. Speaker, I would hope that members opposite would have taken the time to look at the situation that we were faced with yesterday. I say we, because the Minister of Water Stewardship, the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux), every member of our government, and I hope every member of the Legislature, have been focussing on the needs of Manitobans. We have been following the best technical advice that is available to us.

I want to stress, by the way, that the operation yesterday was a partial operation. It is not the first time that we've operated the floodway with ice conditions. It was operated in both 1997 and 1978 with ice conditions. As of this morning, even with the additional raising of the gates, we are not yet above natural levels. I want to put that in perspective, by the way. With the coming crest south of the floodway, we're expecting a rise in the level of the river by upwards of seven feet over the next couple of weeks—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Taillieu: Mr. Speaker, we just want some clarification about the decision-making process that went into putting the floodway into service yesterday, so the public has a better understanding of it.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister responsible identify who has the legal authority to put the floodway into operation? Is it the minister or is that authority delegated to someone else, and, if so, who is it?

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that if the member opposite wants a briefing and wants to read the act or follow processes—but let me tell you what we did yesterday, and I want to stress, working collectively. We took the advice of the professionals who said there was an imminent risk of flooding in the city of Winnipeg.

They may be more concerned about technical legal questions. They can go read the act if they want. We were concerned about acting to protect

Manitobans. We did so and nothing that happened yesterday will come anywhere close south of the floodway of the kinds of levels we're going to see from the natural rise of the Red River because of flood conditions. It's going to go up another seven feet.

So I hope members opposite, by the way, will not exacerbate the legitimate concerns of Manitobans. We acted to protect Manitobans yesterday, and we will continue to do so, Mr. Speaker, over the next critical 48 hours.

Maylynn Sanderson Death Investigation

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): And no answer as to who has responsibility, Mr. Speaker.

Maylynn Sanderson expressed fear that she would die in the remand centre if she didn't get the medical attention she needed for a heart condition that she was well known to have had. Her family publicly pleaded with Manitoba Justice officials to ensure that Maylynn would receive the medication that she needed for her heart condition. On Monday, Maylynn died in custody.

Can the Minister of Justice tell Manitobans the intake procedure Manitoba Justice currently has in assessing the medical and the physical needs of individuals who are entering custody and whether or not those procedures were followed in the case of Maylynn?

* (14:00)

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Obviously, this situation is very tragic, and I know that everyone involved, the justice system, the family, the First Nations organizations that are involved, all of the officials feel and everyone in this Legislature feels the pain when a young individual tragically dies, Mr. Speaker.

As I indicated, I believe, two days ago, the Chief Medical Examiner is looking at the circumstances, and I believe the Chief Medical Examiner said publicly that he still hadn't had a chance to review it completely, but I'll welcome the examination of the Chief Medical Examiner, as well as, as I indicated publicly, the review being undertaken by the deputy minister—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Goertzen: During Maylynn's incarceration, she and her family had repeatedly contacted Manitoba

Justice officials about her medical condition and their concern that she was not receiving the medication that she needed. Maylynn's family have said that their concerns and those of their daughter were ignored by Justice officials.

I know the minister has indicated that he has asked his deputy minister to undertake a review. Can he tell this House what the procedures are for assessing an individual who's been taken into custody, on their medical condition, and, also, whether or not he is comfortable having somebody within his department review the actions taken by the department itself?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, I think, unlike what I hear in this Chamber on a daily basis, I think it's a little bit premature just for the members to start pointing fingers, as they often do.

I think this is a very serious matter. Let me put it this way, Mr. Speaker. When someone comes into custody, health concerns are of a significant importance. There not only is a protocol, but there's a screening procedure. There is staff on duty 24 hours a day with respect to medical screening, medical care and medical treatment, and let us wait until all the facts are out before the member starts pointing fingers and blaming people. Let us wait until all the facts are out.

Mr. Goertzen: I know that this member takes any question as being a partisan question, Mr. Speaker, but this is a very serious incident that's happened.

We also know that under The Manitoba Fatality Inquiries Act, where there's been a death in custody that an inquest is essentially mandatory. So we expect that the inquest is going to take place under these circumstances. However, there still needs to be answers before that. An inquest can take an awful long time in Manitoba.

I want to ask the Minister of Justice whether or not he will ensure that the review that he's instructed his department to take about his department's actions, whether or not he's going to make that public along with the recommendations to ensure that there is confidence both for the family and for the general public at large.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, since I've been Minister of Justice, I think virtually every single action and review we've taken has been made public.

I also know that since I've been Minister of Justice, Mr. Speaker, that the member opposite has

been against our provision of our program to stop auto theft, but now he doesn't say anything about auto theft because it's down. He was against our provision to put immobilizers into vehicles. Now, he doesn't say anything about immobilizers in vehicles. He was against our safe communities program. Now that it's been exported across Canada, he doesn't say anything about it. He blamed everybody in the Taman Inquiry until the Taman Inquiry came out.

So there's a record from the member—there's a record of blame from the member before all the information is in. We'll wait till all the facts are in and then publicly the information will be provided and any steps that could or should be taken will be taken.

Lake Dauphin Fishery Tabling of Co-Management Plan

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, the government spent \$500,000 over nine years to develop a co-management plan to protect the Lake Dauphin walleye fishery.

Last year, on several occasions, I asked the Minister of Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick) to table her co-management plan. The minister has now had another full year to develop a plan to protect this important fishery.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister again: Will she today table a plan for the Lake Dauphin fishery, or has she simply wasted another year in trying to protect this valuable resource?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Conservation): We've been working very hard with the West Region Tribal Council to put that management plan in place. It deals with more than just the Lake Dauphin fishery; it deals with other issues. We have been committed very much so to working with chiefs to make sure that we make good decisions based on conservation on that lake and in our area, which is our backyards.

Government Strategy

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, last year the minister put in place a trap net program that was totally useless. The minister said she was trying to find creative ways to ensure a sustainable fishery. Well, her creative solution was a costly failure.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: Is she planning another Band-Aid solution this year that won't work,

or is she actually going to do something that will protect the Lake Dauphin fishery in the future?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Water Stewardship): Well, that was a very warm reception, Mr. Speaker. They must approve of the good work we're doing on this side of the House.

An Honourable Member: We just thought you were new.

Ms. Melnick: No.

Part of that work is working with the communities, as we had stated last year, rather than as was the flavour of the questions coming across the House from last year about not consulting, about not respecting treaty rights, the whole gamut that came across the floor last year.

We've continued to work with West Region Tribal Council. We have been consulting. We have been listening. We have been talking with the fishers in the enhancement group. We are working on a plan for sustainability of the fishery.

Mr. Briese: Mr. Speaker, it has been nine years. The department's own data indicates serious shortfalls in the populations of walleye under five years of age. These are the very fish that are needed to repopulate the lake of the future. If the minister does not take action now, and it doesn't sound like she's going to, the fish stocks will continue to decline, placing the fishery in jeopardy.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister commit today to a full conservation closure on Lake Dauphin and its tributaries during the critical walleye spawning season?

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Speaker, the consultation that we have been leading for several months now has been discussions around the science that has been developed around the health of the lake, the class year fish that we know will be part of the spawn for this year and in future years.

We are looking at the science. We are working with the communities. We are very focussed on the health of the lake, not only through the spawning season but through the entire fishing seasons and through the years to come.

So we are looking at science. We are working with the community. We are consulting with First Nations groups, and we are working together to make sure that there is a long-term sustainable plan

for Dauphin Lake, as we are doing on many waterways throughout the province of Manitoba.

Unemployment Statistics Provincial Comparisons

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Mr. Speaker, Statistics Canada has released the latest unemployment numbers for Manitoba. There have been some 4,200 job losses in Manitoba in the past month. Regionally, northern Manitoba has a 26.9 percent unemployment rate, while next door in northern Saskatchewan they have an unemployment rate of 15.5 percent.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade: Why is it Saskatchewan's strategies are working so much better than here in Manitoba?

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade): Mr. Speaker, certainly as we've said on this side of the House, even though Manitoba is well placed to deal with these difficult times, we're not immune. There's no question we're seeing that now.

But to give the Member for Carman and the members of the opposition some perspective, if my friend would have read the rest of the report, he would see that in the past month StatsCan tells us the number of full-time workers in Manitoba has actually gone up by 1,200.

As well, if my friend would also have looked at the reports over the last five months as the recession has truly impacted in the United States and in the rest of Canada, while Canada has lost 387,000 full-time jobs, Manitoba has actually gained 1,700 full-time jobs over that same period.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, I have read the report, and I also read that the unemployment rate in Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut are all lower than northern Manitoba; 10 years of increasing revenues, millions of dollars in training programs, and now an economic downturn.

Mr. Speaker, I ask, through you to the minister: When this government couldn't be competitive in good times, how do Manitobans expect anything but a further decline now in unemployment for residents of northern Manitoba?

* (14:10)

Mr. Swan: You know, I understand the member doesn't know much about northern Manitoba, and I

know that none of his members in his caucus know the slightest thing about northern Manitoba—

An Honourable Member: Except how to stop northerners from voting.

Mr. Swan: Well, that's it.

The member should know—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. A little decorum; let's have some decorum here. The honourable minister has the floor.

Mr. Swan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's no question that the north has been affected by worldwide commodity prices in the forestry sector, in the mining sector, but certainly our government is very active in working with northern people to make sure that those opportunities will be there when things turn around.

Budget 2009 announced a reduction in the mining tax to 10 percent, 15 percent and 17 percent from 18 percent to support our mining industry. Through the Forestry and Mining Training and Workforce Retention Initiative, we've invested \$1 million on new special training approaches to make sure that northern people have those opportunities.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, 10 years of poor results, millions of dollars spent on training, only to have the highest regional unemployment in Canada. Steady and balanced has taken on a whole new meaning now.

How can the minister justify having the poorest regional record in the country? How high does the high unemployment rate in northern Manitoba have to become before this minister and this government will finally take meaningful action for Manitoba to be competitive, at least in Canada?

Mr. Swan: Well, Mr. Speaker, for the past several years, every single member on this side of the House has been calling on the federal government which has a responsibility—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. One person at a time to answer a question, please. We have a lot of volunteers here.

The honourable minister has the floor.

Mr. Swan: Thank you. As I was attempting to say, Mr. Speaker, of course our federal government,

whichever stripe the federal government may happen to be, there's been Conservative and Liberal governments that have done nothing to address the low levels of spending in our schools in the north, which has resulted—[interjection] Well, I hear the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) laughing. I don't consider it very funny that the federal government does not consider a young Aboriginal person to have the same right as a person in a Manitoba-funded school to get an education.

This is shameful, Mr. Speaker. This is an embarrassment, this opposition.

Civil Service Employees E-mail Use for Political Purposes

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, the only embarrassment is a minister that gets up and says that 40 percent of the budget that they're getting already from the federal government isn't enough. Yes, we need more and more and more. That's pathetic.

Can the government indicate whether or not it is their policy to allow provincial government employees to use their government e-mail addresses for political purposes?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister responsible for the Civil Service): No.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick) indicate if she feels it's appropriate for employees in her department to use their government e-mail addresses as a main contact for political purposes?

Mr. Selinger: Our policy applies, generally, across the government. We do not believe that it is appropriate to use government e-mail for political purposes.

Mrs. Stefanson: I'd like to table a copy of a printout from the NDP MP for Elmwood-Transcona, his association Web site, where the president of his association uses her government e-mail address as her main contact. Also included in the printout, from the government directory, it shows this e-mail address is tied directly to an employee in her department.

So I'm asking the Minister of Water Stewardship: Does the minister, herself, believe—is it the policy for her department, and I hope she will stand today and answer this question, whether or not it's an appropriate use of a government e-mail address.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, if the member has a specific concern, I'd be happy to receive that and have it investigated by the Civil Service Commission. The Civil Service Commissioner will take a look at that under our ethical guidelines, and if there is anything inappropriate, we will report back to the Legislature on that. *[interjection]*

Mr. Speaker, I thought the member had a serious complaint here. She seems to be giggling in her seat. We will take it seriously. We will follow up on it and we will let her know what the status of this complaint is.

Mrs. Stefanson: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Point of Order

Mrs. Stefanson: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Tuxedo, on a point of order.

Mrs. Stefanson: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I take the comments from the Minister of Finance. I think it's inappropriate, what he just said. There were members on his side of the House, including the Premier (Mr. Doer) and so on, that were laughing as well at another comment. So I ask the minister if he will withdraw his comment.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, the member doesn't have a point of order. It's pretty obvious that members opposite were making political lightness of this matter. In her defence, she's trying to cover that up, and I just think that she ought to accept the fact that it's not a point of order whether she was laughing or not.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on the same point of order?

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, on the same point of order, Mr. Speaker. It was pretty obvious when the Minister of Finance was answering that question that he was making light of the matter.

We have a very serious issue here. It's important that we ensure that government e-mail addresses are not being used for political purposes. It just so happens that the political purpose happens to be for members opposite, for a member of the NDP party, and it's a very serious matter, Mr. Speaker. I believe that it is a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: Order. On the point of order raised, I think this would be a good opportunity for members to reflect why decorum in the House is very, very important. When it's time for questions and answers, everyone needs to be able to hear the questions and the answers.

The honourable member does not have a point of order. It's a dispute over the facts.

Provincial Ice Jams and Flooding Use of Hovercraft Ice Breakers

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, this year the ice conditions, with a lot of thick blue ice, have been much worse than usual, and they have contributed significantly to ice jams and to the flooding problems. There are many who are aware of the effectiveness of hovercraft icebreakers in dealing with such ice conditions on rivers who ask, why don't we have a hovercraft icebreaker in use on the Red River this year to improve our icebreaking capacity so that the risk of ice jams and the risk of flooding to Manitobans would be decreased?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): I would point out, with the former Liberal government, we had an agreement to buy Amphibexes, one north of Winnipeg, and after they agreed to provide one-third funding, they left us high and dry without any equipment. We picked up the tab, two thirds of it, so we should be a little careful about these questions.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, we have asked our people to evaluate the capacity to either get a hovercraft or what its capacity will be. There is a trial program on the St. Lawrence River. We will evaluate whether that device is better than the four ice cutters and the Amphibexes we have. We also are using excavation machines to some positive impact to take the ice back, so we will evaluate what they find on the St. Lawrence River versus what we're dealing with here. If anything is better than what we're using, we'll obviously look at it.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, hovercraft were shown to be effective in icebreaking on rivers in the 1980s, more than 20 years ago. They are widely used not only in Québec, the St. Lawrence tributaries, on the Illinois River, various other places around the world.

Why has the government been slow to make sure that we had assessed this use of hovercraft icebreakers, and we were well positioned here to be able to mitigate the problems with the ice which we've had in a major way this year and the problems

with ice jamming which have contributed so much to the flooding.

* (14:20)

Mr. Doer: Well, we certainly, as I said, are evaluating any device. We're unique in terms of the Amphibexes and the ice cutters, a unique jurisdiction. In fact, some jurisdictions the member opposite is talking about are actually evaluating what we're doing here.

What we're concerned about now is that all the equipment that we do have and all the expertise that we do have is effective in mitigating as much as possible the impact of unprecedented ice. In fact, at one point last week there was a 200-mile stretch of ice, blue ice, from Lake Winnipeg all the way down to Drayton.

We are certainly using equipment. At the end of the fight on flooding, we will evaluate what worked well, what didn't work well, and we will ask questions about what else could be utilized to improve our mitigation conditions.

I would point out every year we've increased our capacity to manage ice, but we are dealing with an unprecedented amount this year.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, yes, it's clearly a major problem with the ice jamming and the flooding. I understand, though, that the federal government has just replaced one hovercraft icebreaker with another which could possibly be available. Can the Premier indicate whether he's been in touch with the federal government with respect to the availability of any federal icebreaker to Manitoba?

I understand that Mark Holland, in fact, asked two weeks ago in the House of Commons about the readiness of the federal government to help Manitoba by making such an icebreaking hovercraft available. *[interjection]* An icebreaking hovercraft.

Can the Premier tell us what is happening and whether there is any help from the federal government in this area?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, the member asked whether there were any inquiries to the federal government. The answer was yes.

Healthy Buddies Government Initiative

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): In stark contrast to the rants, past, present and no doubt future, from the opposition on the need for cuts in difficult financial

times, our government actually believes in investing in the future, Mr. Speaker.

One particular area is, of course, investing in the young people of our province, and I wonder if the Minister of Healthy Living could inform the House if any new initiatives are underway to improve the health of Manitoba's young people.

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Healthy Living): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to stand up in the House and talk about an announcement that I made alongside the Minister of Family Services and Housing (Mr. Mackintosh) at Victory School with staff and students present.

We have announced that we are committing funds to a new program called Healthy Buddies where peer-to-peer support will be provided to 20 schools across the province including two First Nation schools. The students will discuss issues such as physical activity and nutrition as well as emotional well-being.

We find that this is going to be a huge asset. It will continue to develop leadership skills as well as support all the other initiatives that we've put into the schools such as mandatory phys ed, the school nutrition policy and programs that we will continue too.

Highway 83 Bridge Upgrade

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Mr. Speaker, truck haulers who are hauling Canola product to Bunge just at Harrowby and are coming from the Swan River area, the Dauphin area and anywhere north of Russell are restricted from loading their trucks to capacity because of a small restriction on a bridge just half a mile north of Russell.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the minister of highways, who is very familiar with this issue, whether or not he can share with the House and perhaps with many people who are concerned about this issue his plan for either replacing the bridge or indeed doing something about it so that trucks can load to capacity to haul their product to Harrowby.

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): It also gives me the opportunity to say that we've spent millions and many millions of dollars near Russell on Highway 16 and improving Highway 16 access to western Canada as well as into Manitoba.

But with regard to the point that the MLA for Russell is making, indeed agriculture is an important industry for us and important to all Manitobans. Transportation is an economic enabler and we'll do everything we can, certainly, to work with the agricultural community.

I met with a number of the different producers as well as elected officials from the area consulting with them and receiving their advice as to the recommendations of what we should be looking at to improve Highway 83 overall, not just north of Roblin but, Mr. Speaker, indeed, south of Roblin as well.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, the question I asked the minister was with respect to a small bridge just north of Russell which is restricting the ability of truckers to fill their trucks to capacity in order to be able to access the markets at Harrowby.

Mr. Speaker, there are two giant Canola-crushing plants about to open in eastern Saskatchewan in the Yorkton area, and if this product cannot get to the plant at Harrowby, it's going to be diverted to Saskatchewan.

I want to ask the minister whether he has a plan to improve that structure this summer so that indeed the Bunge plant at Harrowby can continue to operate at capacity.

Mr. Lemieux: Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker, that anything we can do to help the agricultural community, indeed, we'll do not only this year—*[interjection]* Well, there's a lot of chuckles next door, or across the way, but the fact of the matter is, you know, in this time of flooding we've been flexible with regard to restrictions on our roads and highways to enable agricultural producers to ship their goods. We will help the agricultural community, indeed, if that is the only situation that is prohibiting people from hauling their product.

I depend on the engineers and the professionals with regard to making an assessment of that bridge or those culverts that the member opposite refers to. He's not an engineer, nor am I, so we depend on the professionals to give us advice as to the best way to proceed. We certainly don't want to be a roadblock or an impediment to making sure that agricultural producers get their product to market.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, I'm not suggesting that he use a particular solution. I'm asking him for his plan in order to be able to open up that highway. Now, when he says that his government is ready to help the agricultural community in any way, I

shudder because the only thing we hear from them are moratoriums.

Mr. Speaker, I want to ask this minister whether he's prepared to ensure that that bridge is either replaced or fixed up to the point where full loads can be hauled to Bunge so that they're not diverted to another province in this country but, indeed, can be processed right here in Manitoba.

Mr. Lemieux: Well, Mr. Speaker, whether it's a culvert or a bridge or whatever needs to be put across that particular creek, we're looking at it and we, indeed, will address it.

I just wanted to make sure I mentioned to the member opposite that he's very much aware that we've consulted and worked with the industry that is located near Russell. We want their advice and we've received their advice with regard to the solutions. We're certainly not going to be a speed bump or an impediment to agriculture, the agriculture community, from bringing their product to market. The member opposite knows we've been working very closely with the industry to ensure this happens, and, Mr. Speaker, he knows very well that we've committed to work to make sure that Highway 83 is certainly passable, to make sure that that product gets to market.

Just to conclude, he also is aware that the department is looking at many different options and not just one, as he refers to a bridge. There are many different options that we might be able to put in place.

Long-Term Care Facility (Virden) Nurse Recruitment

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): For over a year and a half, the Westman Nursing Home in Virden has had a waiting list of seniors for admission even though nearly a third of the beds are empty. This is the only personal care home in the Assiniboine Regional Health Authority that has this level of empty beds, which the minister knows because I've been telling her about this problem for nearly two years and she hasn't fixed it yet.

Well, make it three, Mr. Speaker. I read this very statement in this House a year ago today, and today there's still a 20 percent vacancy in the Westman Nursing Home in Virden.

So will the minister today assure the town of Virden and the region whether any of the incoming nurses that are going to be arriving this summer—

that's she's promised at least—will alleviate this problem?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): We have spoken with the member opposite concerning recruitment of nurses and, indeed, physicians to the community of Virden. We're going to continue to work with the regional health authority. We know that this regional health authority was part of an overseas recruitment initiative that is proving to be very successful. We are going to continue to work to recruit along with members of the community who have been partners in this initiative. We're going to continue to improve the staffing ratios as committed. Those ratios hadn't been looked at since 1973. We're committed to continue to work on that process as well.

We're going to invest in health human resources, Mr. Speaker, and not fire them like the people opposite did during the last recession.

Mr. Maguire: Mr. Speaker, that's no solace to those who have waited over three years since we first raised this, and the petition that I read in the House today. I mean, there are still many, many petitions to read on this issue. The local citizens are appalled at the fact that there's a 20 percent vacancy for over three years in the Westman Nursing Home. It's the only one empty in western Manitoba. They are told that there's nurses coming in. We held a retention committee meeting with the retention-recruitment group and a private recruiter that we brought in last spring, and 10 days later the regional health authority in the *Brandon Sun* announced that they were going to the Philippines to import more nurses to the region.

Can the minister today guarantee us that the Westman personal care home will have enough nurses to reopen this summer?

*(14:30)

Ms. Oswald: We continue to work to recruit nurses to the Assiniboine Regional Health Authority and, indeed, all regional health authorities across Manitoba. In November of 2007, we announced a \$40-million project, a four-year plan to add 400 more nurses, health-care aides and other health professionals to Manitoba personal care homes. That applies to personal care homes across the region. We continue to invest in capital programs.

The Philippine recruitment initiative is proving to be very successful. We have got candidates that are arriving this month and last month. We're going

to work with the region to staff that personal care home and ensure as quickly as possible that we can get rid of that vacancy rate. We know that the best way that we can do that is with a multi-pronged approach, training our own nurses, recruiting our own nurses. I can guarantee the member opposite that in this recession, we're not going to fire a thousand of them.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

National Day of Remembrance of the Battle of Vimy Ridge

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski (St. James): Mr. Speaker, I rise before the House today to commemorate the National Day of Remembrance of Vimy Ridge. The battle for Vimy Ridge began 92 years ago today and continued for seven days. The losses that occurred during the battle were steep, but by April 14, Vimy Ridge was captured by the Canadian Corps, who gained more ground in that battle than any previous Allied offensive. It is for that reason that Vimy Ridge remains such a poignant example of Canadian bravery in times of war, and many say that it was a defining moment for Canada as it took its place in the community of nations.

Mr. Speaker, the Canadian National Vimy Memorial stands at the highest point of Vimy Ridge in France, as a tribute to all Canadians who served their country in World War I. Here in Manitoba, our Vimy Ridge Memorial Park stands to commemorate soldiers who fought for Canada and to ensure we never forget that the freedom we enjoy here and throughout our country came at a great cost.

Last Sunday, it was an honour, as Manitoba's special envoy, to join my colleague the MLA for Wolseley (Mr. Altemeyer) in laying a wreath on behalf of our province in tribute to these heroes. Veterans from several organizations also paid their tribute at this touching ceremony.

Today, our flags fly at half-mast here at the Legislature and throughout Manitoba in commemoration.

I would also like to acknowledge my colleague from Selkirk, who visited Vimy Ridge in 2007 to honour his uncle, whose name is etched into the granite of the Vimy Cenotaph.

On this 92nd anniversary of the battle of Vimy Ridge, I ask all members of this Legislature to join me in honouring the bravery and sacrifice of the

soldiers who served our country in the past as well as those who continue to do so today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the Member for St. James (Ms. Korzeniowski) for that very appropriate statement and just add a few words to the record of appreciation for those who served our country and the things that it stands for at Vimy Ridge. Some of those who served and who lost their lives, as the member had indicated, are uncles, aunts, parents, grandparents and great-grandparents of current members of this Chamber, and to them we owe a great debt of gratitude today, which is the 92nd anniversary of that battle, and the effort of Canadian soldiers in the capture of Vimy Ridge.

In commemoration of this important day in our history, the flags here at the Legislature are at half-mast, and we're reminded of the service and sacrifice of the thousands of brave soldiers in this battle.

There's a remembrance ceremony being held today at the Vimy Ridge National Historic Site of Canada in France where Canada's impressive memorial stands to recognize those Canadians who fought and gave their lives in the First World War.

The Canadian National Vimy Ridge Memorial overlooks the Douai Plain and marks the site of battle that Canadians were to remember with more pride than any other operation in the First World War.

It was at Vimy Ridge where the Canadian Corps demonstrated that it was one of the most effective and brave military operations of the Great War and the greatest allied victory up to that time. Aside from being an important turning point in that conflict, the victory at Vimy united the effort on the home front and helped earn Canada its own signature on the Versailles Peace Treaty at the end of the First World War. It is for that reason that many say that Canada won its nationhood at Vimy Ridge and it came at a great cost; over 7,000 Canadians injured and 3,598 who died.

So let us take this moment to commemorate the dedication and sacrifice that so many gave so that we might be able to enjoy the freedoms and liberties that we have today. Let us also remember and respect the ongoing efforts by our Canadian Forces personnel who continue to defend our nation's interests and the freedom of its citizens and the freedom of citizens in

places around the world. As Manitobans and Canadians, we thank them for their courage, their bravery and their great service to our province and to our country. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Vincent Massey Collegiate Varsity Girls Basketball Team

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Healthy Living): Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased today to extend my sincere congratulations to the members and coaching staff of the Vincent Massey Collegiate varsity girls' basketball team on their recent accomplishment of winning the AAAA High School Basketball Championship in March 2009.

Hard work, commitment and dedication to the team are all required to have a team successful. The members of this team are a highly motivated, enthusiastic group who display a positive work ethic and have consistently demonstrated their ability to focus on a goal. These attributes have led to their success in the provincial championships and, indeed, throughout their season.

Behind a successful team are many, many hours of hard work by a dedicated coaching staff. Vincent Massey's team was lead by head coach, Stacy Hawash, and her capable assistants.

Participating in high school sports provides students with the opportunity to learn life lessons, such as control, self-discipline, leadership and achievement through self motivation. These are all skills that students will take with them through their lives. As the coach of this team, Stacy Hawash has ensured that these girls will have learned these skills as well as physical skills required to play a high level basketball game. Participating in high school sports encourages students to become involved in an active way of living and hopefully lays a foundation for them to continue along a path of healthy lifestyles.

Again, congratulations to Vincent Massey Collegiate varsity girls' basketball team on an incredible achievement.

University of Manitoba Bisons Women's Hockey Team

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba that the University of Manitoba Bison women's hockey team is the 2009 Canada West conference champions. The Bisons were able to defeat the University of Alberta Pandas in game three of their best of three series.

This put an end to the Pandas 25-game win streak at home, and Manitoba was able to beat the Pandas for the first time in eight playoff games. The head coach for the Bisons, Jon Rempel, along with the Bison's captain, Leanne Kisil, were certainly instrumental in leading their team to their championship win.

Nellie Minshull, of Pierson, Manitoba, was also a key player in the Bison's success. Minshull, who is a rookie to the team, scored the winning goal at 5:29 of triple overtime to promote the team to the Canadian championships in Halifax. Ms. Minshull was named to the conference all-rookie team after she recorded six goals and 13 assists in 24 regular season games. She was also second in playoff scoring in the conference with four goals and seven points in five games. As the MLA for Arthur-Virden, I want to add my personal congratulations to Nellie for her great rookie season.

Their western conference championship win took the Bisons to the Canadian Interuniversity Sports National Championship, which was hosted by St. Francis Xavier University. The ladies hockey team lost to the University of Moncton in a shootout in the bronze medal game. However, they should still be very proud of their fourth-place finish at the Canadian championship.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the University of Manitoba Bison women's hockey team for winning the 2009 western Canada conference championship. Their success is shared with the province, and as a Manitoban I am very proud of their accomplishments. Thank you.

*(14:40)

Long Term Care Association of Manitoba

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge and congratulate an important organization in Manitoba. The Long Term Care Association of Manitoba is a non-profit organization whose purpose is to advance and elevate the status of long-term care by promoting awareness to government, regional health authorities, allied health agencies and the community. They are celebrating their 50th anniversary this year.

The association advocates on behalf of its membership to the Manitoba government and the regional health authorities for support of continuous quality improvement initiatives and quality care standards for residents in long-term care. It represents 4,000 of the 9,600 long-term and continuing-care beds and suites in Manitoba. Fred

Douglas Lodge, of which I am the past chairperson of the board of directors, which is part of the Fred Douglas Society, is a member of the association. Congratulations to the Long Term Care Association who celebrate their 50th anniversary in 2009.

In order to begin the year, the association launched, in 2009, the Four Seasons of Life: Celebrating the Spirit of Seniors calendar. It's a full-size calendar that tells the compelling stories of local seniors and offers a daily reinforcement of the values and strengths that our friends, neighbours and relatives bring to our lives everyday.

The association will also be launching its new corporate identity at its 2009 annual Provincial Conference and Exhibition on May 26, 2009, where our Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross) will be presenting the keynote address.

The association does advocacy work in the province and strives to make the lives of our seniors better. Seniors are a vital part of our society and contribute to our community immensely. I want to congratulate the Long Term Care Association of Manitoba for 50 years of great work and wish them all the best for the next 50 years.

House Business

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, for the information of the House, I just want to indicate that, following passage of the budget next Thursday, the Friday, which would be April 17, will not be utilized for Estimates, for the information of the members of the House. So Friday, April 17 will not be a House sitting day.

Mr. Speaker: For the information of the House, after the budget process on Thursday, the following Friday, that's next Friday, April 17, will not be utilized for Estimates and the House will not be sitting that Friday. That would be Friday, April 17.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

BUDGET DEBATE

(Fifth Day of Debate)

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

Member for Turtle Mountain, who has 15 minutes remaining.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): I welcome the opportunity to resume my debate on the 2009 unbalanced budget.

I do want to, first of all, make note of two members' statements that were made today in recognition of Vimy Ridge. I think it's important that we do recognize the soldiers who made sacrifices so that we do have the opportunity to debate, not only this budget, but other pieces of legislation in this House in a democratic fashion. I think it's also important that we do recognize the work that Canadian Forces are doing around the world in terms of providing democracy or trying to provide democracy through to other countries as well. So we certainly want to recognize the good work that they do on our behalf throughout the world.

Mr. Speaker, it was quite interesting today when we hear from Stats Canada in terms of the job loss in Manitoba. We hear that we've lost another 4,200 jobs within the province of Manitoba over the last month. Obviously, it's incumbent upon the provincial government to recognize that, you know, there is some tremendous uncertainty throughout Canada, and, obviously, Manitoba has been impacted as well. So it's certainly important that they do take notice of this, and it's important that the budget should recognize the fact that there are some issues within Manitoba as well.

I think that's why Manitobans were looking for some kind of a vision in this particular budget. I look at last year's budget, and that was a signal for a couple of years down the road, that Manitobans would see some tax relief from personal income taxes. But we look at the new budget, released here just in the last week, and we find that those future tax relief statements were not showing in the budget.

Ms. Marilyn Brick, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

So, clearly, this government has taken the short-term approach to budgeting, and they're not willing to bring forward a kind of a long-term vision for Manitobans. That's something that all Manitobans were looking for in this particular budget.

Madam Acting Speaker, in question period every day we ask some fairly straightforward questions and, unfortunately, we're not getting straightforward answers. We find that the provincial government is always looking to blame somebody else. They seem to be unwilling to take responsibility for their actions

and for their spending. They're always looking to the federal government, it seems, for help. That's kind of their last-ditch effort. If they can't blame the governments back in the 1990s, well, then, they look to the federal government and blame them.

Well, they can't look too hard at the federal government because almost 40 percent of their entire budget comes from the federal government. As I made the comment yesterday, that's probably not going to be sustainable into the future. So it's something that, you know, there should be some long-term planning in terms of the provincial budget going forward.

Madam Acting Speaker, obviously, the provincial budget will impact all Manitobans. I think when we're in these tough economic times, we have to recognize that we should be spending every dollar we have at our hands in a very, very responsible manner. I know the government uses the term investment. When we say investment, we're usually looking for some kind of a return on that investment. So it's important that we do invest this money wisely.

One issue that really, really hangs out, and for all Manitobans, in terms of not being very prudent in terms of money use, is the idea that the provincial government wants to run the next bipole line on the west side of the province of Manitoba. Now we know the construction alone for that particular line will be over \$600 million. We're not sure that Manitobans, really, especially at this point in time, will want to spend an extra \$600 million in building a line down the west side of the province, when it can be built on the east side of the province.

Again, it was nice to see that the government did mention an east-side highway, or at least an all-weather road, the possibility of it being built or continued to be built on the east side of the province. It's something that's been announced for many years now. But I think it would stand to reason, Madam Acting Speaker, that if we do construct a road on the east side of the province, that a hydro line could be run adjacent to that particular piece of road.

We know, Madam Acting Speaker, that there already is a hydro line running up to Poplar River. So there's certainly right-of-way access there—the hydro line is there now—and we think it would just be, certainly, prudent use of taxpayers' money, ratepayers' money, to invest that money in a hydro line being built on the east side of the province.

Madam Acting Speaker, we know there has been, at least, reportedly, there's going to be an increase in the infrastructure spending within the province of Manitoba. We do know there's a tremendous deficit in terms of infrastructure capacity in Manitoba, and not just in terms of highways, but also sewer and water. In fact, when the Building Canada fund came out and the applications came forward over the last couple of months, we find that there's been an over-application of that particular fund at a rate of eight to one. So there are very substantial needs out there in terms of infrastructure within the province of Manitoba. So I think the government of the day should certainly make sure that there's money being allocated for infrastructure within the province of Manitoba in all areas, including highways, sewer and water.

*(14:50)

Madam Acting Speaker, we know there are tremendous issues in the livestock industry in Manitoba. There's a lot of hurt in the agriculture industry, particularly in the hog and the cattle sectors at this point in time. It's important that the provincial government recognize that some of the programs that are in place these days are not working for agriculture producers, so there should be an awareness that some things will have to change in the very near future or else we'll be forcing many more producers out of the business.

We know we've lost a tremendous amount of the livestock industry, both in the hog and in the cattle sector. A lot of producers are going out of business. We also know by some of the policies and the regulations that have been brought forward by the particular government that they're actually driving some of the industry outside of the province.

It goes back to my original comment about getting results. When they bring forward some of the regulations in terms of the environment, you know, we want to make sure that those regulations are actually obtaining and achieving the results they're actually intended to. We're not sure that the results are there. Unfortunately, sometimes politics trumps good sound science, good sound public policy and common sense. That's something the government should recognize.

Madam Acting Speaker, certainly, the health-care field is a very important part, and we recognize that about \$4.4 billion of the \$10.2-billion budget has been allocated to health care in the province of Manitoba. So we think it's time for a

good serious look at how we deliver health care in the province of Manitoba. You know, it's something that hasn't been done for a number of years, even going back to the time when regional health authorities were introduced to the province quite a number of years ago by a previous government.

The intent at that time was the RHAs would be reviewed, and the structure of how we deliver health care would be reviewed, but the government of the day has refused to take a real hard look at how we're investing over 40 percent of the entire provincial budget. So it's time we had a hard look at probably reforming health care and how we deliver health care in the province of Manitoba.

Again, it goes back, Madam Acting Speaker, to having a vision for Manitoba and how we can better allocate and how we can better use and utilize the limited funds that we have here in the province of Manitoba. We believe it's incumbent upon the provincial government to do that on behalf of the people of Manitoba.

Madam Acting Speaker, we think there have been lost opportunities here in Manitoba. The provincial government has refused to look at some opportunities. We know our counterparts to the west in the province of Saskatchewan have been very adamant in terms of trying to attract business. They've been trying to attract industry from across Canada. They've been out. They've been going to other countries to try to attract business, and they've been very, very successful in terms of attracting business.

My colleague from Carman today just pointed out some very interesting statistics when it comes to unemployment rates in northern Manitoba versus unemployment rates in northern Saskatchewan, Madam Acting Speaker. It was startling to find, the unemployment figures for northern Manitoba, that 26 percent, almost 26 percent of northern Manitobans are currently unemployed. If you go across the provincial borders into Saskatchewan, only 15 percent of northern Saskatchewan people are unemployed.

I guess this is one place that we're now first in, and that's in terms of northern Manitoba. We're first in unemployment rates. We're the highest in Canada in terms of unemployment rates for that particular region. So, clearly, the policies that the provincial government have had in place for the nine years are not working for northern Manitoba.

Now we know the mining industry in particular is facing some pretty tough times, not only here in Manitoba, but across this country and in other countries, but we have potential here. We have tremendous potential for the mining industry here in Manitoba, but the potential can only be fully utilized if the provincial government is willing to have a look at the policies that it currently has in place. There certainly is a lack of positive public policies as it relates to the mining industry in Manitoba.

We think it's incumbent upon the government to look at the policies and future development in Manitoba and how those policies can be very proactive in terms of development here in Manitoba. It's the government role to make sure that there is a proper consultation process for the industry and for the communities that may want to get involved in mining and resource management here in the province of Manitoba. That's a very important role that the province of Manitoba should be undertaking, and to this point in time, has done a very, very poor job of.

So, when the economy does turn around and we, in Manitoba, want to get the limited resources that will be, could be available for the mining industry, we want to be sure that we have the policies in place so that we will attract those limited resources that will be available.

Madam Acting Speaker, we had quite a discussion over MPI, Manitoba Public Insurance, and some of the rates that are being charged. Obviously, we no longer have the lowest insurance rates in Manitoba that the government tries to say that we do.

But the important part that I want to note about this, Madam Acting Speaker, is that we probably have some of the highest vehicle registration fees of any jurisdiction across Canada. Those particular vehicle registration fees are collected by Manitoba Public Insurance, but then are turned right over to the government of Manitoba. So those particular vehicle registration fees go right back into the pockets of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger). Those fees amount to over \$125 million every year and, basically, what it is is just a direct tax on the motoring public here in Manitoba. It's something that many people don't recognize. So, as a Manitoban, when you go to pay your insurance you also pay a vehicle registration fee. For passenger vehicles, it amounts to \$129 per vehicle, and a lot of the commercial rates are certainly much more substantial

than that. So it is a very substantial tax that Manitobans are paying.

Madam Acting Speaker, I do appreciate the opportunity to have had some discussion on this particular budget. Obviously it's a budget that we certainly can't agree with. There's certainly a lot of room for improvement in this particular budget, and I guess the concern is that this is a one-trick pony and there's no vision in this particular budget that Manitobans can look forward to.

Obviously, it's tight economic times here. The Province is going to be under quite a bit of pressure in terms of their generating revenue over the next year. But I'm sure this may just be the tip of the iceberg, Madam Acting Speaker, and I'm sure when we sit down and review the next year's budget, it certainly will be a lot more dramatic and a lot more concerning for all Manitobans.

With that, Madam Acting Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to debate this particular budget and look forward to hearing what other members have to say. Thank you.

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Wellington): It is a privilege for me to stand here today to express my thanks in appreciation for our government's 10th balanced budget. I am heartened and encouraged by the 2009 budget, as it is one which, once again, will bring many benefits to families in the Wellington constituency whom I am honoured to represent.

Before I enumerate the tangible benefits this budget will bring to my constituents, similar to what the past nine budgets have done, I would like to express my joy in welcoming two new colleagues to the government caucus. Madam Acting Speaker, what a beautiful, memorable day April 6, 2009, was. I was one of the hundreds of proud witnesses to the swearing in ceremony for Bill Blaikie and Frank Whitehead—[interjection]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Brick): Order. I just want to remind members that all members in this Legislative Assembly are named by their constituency.

Ms. Marcelino: Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker. I will be adding that they are members-elect from the constituency of Elmwood and The Pas, and when the Speaker welcomed them to this House, and they spoke supporting this year's budget, hearing them speak from their heart was an affirmation of the wisdom of the overwhelming support from the citizens of Elmwood and The Pas. The message of

these two by-election victories is very clear. The majority of Manitobans approve the steady and balanced plan this government has to build Manitoba's future.

* (15:00)

Madam Acting Speaker, I see in the honourable Member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead) the continuation of Minister Oscar Lathlin's passion to address urgent issues and the concerns of his constituents. I feel in the honourable Member for The Pas his readiness and joy to serve his people. Above all, I feel the spirit of solidarity born out of a similar struggle of his people and my experience in the old country, where vestiges of colonialism still oppress and marginalize a people who fought so hard to liberate themselves from Spanish and American imperialism.

Madam Acting Speaker, when the honourable Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie) spoke to this House on April 6, it gave me great pride to be a member of the New Democratic Party. An historian extraordinaire, the honourable Member for Elmwood walked us through the times of great leaders and visionaries of our party who believed in justice, opportunity and equality for all.

These leaders tirelessly and relentlessly pursued their goals of providing such things as health care, old age pension and workers' benefits to citizens and residents of this country. These leaders faced tremendous difficulty in doing so, but because they believed in the cause, they fought valiantly for it. Today, citizens and residents of this country enjoy these benefits as a result of the hard work of dedicated party leaders such as J.S. Woodsworth, Tommy Douglas, Stanley Knowles and many others.

Madam Acting Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the honourable Member for Elmwood for being the keynote speaker in a recent event in my constituency. Attended by over 300 people, friends and family of supporters, we were treated to a bit of the history of the struggle to put social gospel into practice. After the honourable member's speech, one attendee approached me. He is a young, professional engineer who came with several family and friends. He told me after hearing the honourable member's speech he wants to join the New Democratic Party, as he believes in the same goals and principles of the party and is very grateful for what the party has done for our country.

Madam Acting Speaker, interestingly, another attendee whom I know quite well because we are from the same church, was a great fan of Trudeau and Axworthy. She told me that she was not aware that the benefits we take lightly today were obtained with tremendous sacrifice by these dedicated leaders of our party. By the way, that attendee, along with her large family, consistently voted for the honourable Member for Elmwood when he was a federal candidate.

I look up to the honourable Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie) as a pillar of strength and a man of principles. The pillar is there visually and figuratively. He truly stands tall. He being a minister of a church which I am a member of makes him even more special to me. My father was a minister of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines. From him I acquired the interest and love in doing community work.

In the Philippines, to pursue ministry as a vocation means you are ready for a life of financial difficulty for yourself and your family. My father graduated from the Union Theological Seminary, an institution which produced ministers and church workers, many of whom committed their life to serving their parishioners and communities, at the risk of life and limb.

To date, some 20 clergy and lay workers of UCCP have been killed extrajudicially when carrying out their prophetic witness to their communities. From 2001 to March 2007, 27 religious workers were killed, 16 of whom were members of the UCCP.

I digress a little bit, Madam Acting Speaker, but allow me to express my appreciation and respect to church ministers who have decided to answer the call to wider public service such as the likes of J.S. Woodsworth, Tommy Douglas, Stanley Knowles, Bill Blaikie, Doug Martindale and Lorne Calvert—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Brick): Order. Once again, I just want to remind all members that we name members by their constituency.

Ms. Marcelino: I'm sorry, Madam Acting Speaker, the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale). It is to my joy and gratitude that they were and are members of the NDP.

I personally see budget debates as an interesting period in this House, as it is an opportunity for

myself and my colleagues to express our views on this very important document in the life of our province.

Madam Acting Speaker, I am inspired and energized by this budget at a time when economic uncertainty brings shivers to many family breadwinners, as well as to young and old working people. This budget is a beacon of hope, a tower of strength, a rudder that steers this ship to a safe and steady course.

This budget, just like the nine budgets before it, will provide support to Wellington constituents, community centres, organizations and institutions. Allow me to mention some of them: Freight House Community Centre, Burton Cummings Community Centre, Rossbrook House, Explorer's Children's Centre, Victor Play Centre. I have a long list of organizations—community groups, schools—which have accessed resources critical to their delivery of services to the community. But I will not read them now in the interest of brevity. Suffice it say, Madam Acting Speaker, that this government is intent on making Manitoba a province where its citizens can be proud of their choice of an NDP government for the last three terms and more.

Speaking of this government, I'm so inspired and energized by the care, concern and team spirit I see from day to day from members of our caucus. In our deliberations, it is evident that all efforts and energies are focussed on providing the best and most prudent way of using resources to address the needs of all Manitobans.

I'm heartened to hear, from time to time, from constituents who come to our constituency office, saying they appreciate the government programs that are in place to address the community needs. Many constituents come to our office to seek help with various issues. While not every issue can be addressed, we exert all our efforts to find solutions to pressing problems.

To this end, I commend the dedication and ability of my constituency assistant, Darlyne Bautista, who graciously attends to Wellington constituents' needs. Many a time it is already her lunch period, or past the work period in the afternoon, but because a constituent or constituents are still in the office with their concerns she does not mind continuing to work with them. I am a witness to these many instances.

I know the rest of my colleagues and their staff provide the same commitment to service. I have heard of constituents' comments that they know of several people who have approached the constituency offices of the honourable members from Minto and The Maples, and they received immediate response to their concerns.

Besides my constituency assistant, Darlyne, we have a newly arrived lawyer from the Philippines, Dan Cleto, who is a graduate of the premier university in that country and has solid work experience in the field. He volunteers in our constituency one day a week, and he's also available by phone on other days. He is doing this volunteer work while he is waiting to obtain his accreditation assessment for his foreign education and training. He handles issues relating to the Philippines for my constituents.

Madam Acting Speaker, surprisingly, last Saturday evening at the big community event I attended, a couple approached me. Both were all smiles, and with them was a young girl. They told me the girl's arrival was expedited by the document prepared by volunteer-lawyer Dan in our constituency office. It feels so good to know our constituency office has helped unite a family in Winnipeg. I was at the constituency office last Friday and I saw, with my own two eyes, four people being provided assistance by Dan Cleto.

Madam Acting Speaker, as my constituents in Wellington are multi-racial as well as multi-aged and at different economic levels in their lives, this year's budget will definitely build a strong and safe community for Wellington. This budget will provide \$213 million to the City of Winnipeg, an increase of \$10.5 million over 2008.

Some \$4 million is new funding for emergency services delivered by the City of Winnipeg. There's \$3 million more for Winnipeg Transit services. This budget also provides funding for Siloam Mission and the Winnipeg Transit services. This budget also provides funding for the Neighbourhoods Alive! project, which has been expanded to seven Winnipeg inner-city neighbourhoods now. Two recreation centres in Wellington will see enhanced activities and programming in partnership with the City of Winnipeg. New immigrants, who choose to live in the Wellington constituency, can access programs to help them adjust to their new life in Manitoba.

* (15:10)

This budget supports the hiring of 10 new police officers in Winnipeg. It will also expand the Lighthouse's programs for youth, all of which are in the Wellington constituency, Rossbrook House, Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, Brooklands Recreation Centre and Central Community Centre.

Madam Acting Speaker, budget 2009 will also see increased funding for shelters, security and services for children. As well, for those in Wellington constituency, who wish to upgrade the energy efficiency of their home, but do not have savings to do it, Power Smart loans from Manitoba Hydro was reduced to 5 percent from 6.5.

In this budget there is also increased funding for e-waste initiatives and for disposing old electronics, in addition to expanded support for the proper disposal of household hazardous waste.

Madam Acting Speaker, our government recognizes that strong families equal a strong province. Families in Wellington and the rest of the province can enter provincial parks free. In addition, this budget has a provision for a new provincial campground and a new youth project in Whiteshell Provincial Park. The Conservation Minister will be pleased to know that families in Wellington constituency will be considering recreation opportunities closer to home during these tough times. Free entrance to provincial parks for the next two years will provide more opportunities for Wellington constituents to take advantage of the province's great outdoors.

This budget will also enhance the Manitoba Shelter Benefit by changing income eligibility and providing more supports for people receiving employment and income assistance. Speaking of opportunities to reduce the need for income assistance, creating Rebound is one such new program made possible by this budget.

As well, the budget will take additional steps to provide people with access to healthy and nutritious food, provide funding for a range of housing options for individuals with mental health issues, increase support for children in care, implement the second phase of the Province's sexual exploitation reduction subsidy, fund additional child-care spaces and increase wage staff for child-care workers by 3 percent effective July 1.

This budget will also develop new school-based family resource centres, increase access to applied behaviour analysis services for pre-school and

school-aged children with autism and increase community living supports for Manitobans with mental disabilities.

Despite global economic uncertainty, Manitoba will keep its tax-cut commitments for 2009 without running a deficit. According to our Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), when the tax cuts in budget 2009 are combined with those announced since 1999, Manitobans and businesses are now saving more than \$1 billion in taxes annually.

I wonder, Madam Acting Speaker, how rich Alberta, with billions of surpluses for seven straight years, is now facing the biggest deficit in its history, forecast \$4.7 billion. In that light, Alberta's and other Canadian provinces' financial situations—no wonder the ultra Conservative and highly critical *Winnipeg Free Press* cannot but describe this budget boldly; prairie prudence. As the honourable Finance Minister said, some jurisdictions have gone into deficit to finance tax cut cuts. Our plan is different. It is about making the choice to be deficit-free while investing in the knowledge, economy and continuing to make strategic, affordable tax cuts that will help maintain the purchasing power of families and the financial strength of businesses.

Speaking of taxes, Madam Acting Speaker, budget 2009 keeps an earlier commitment to lower personal income taxes by increasing the personal exemption for every taxpayer by adding \$100 to the spousal and eligible dependent a month, reducing the lowest tax rate to 10.8 percent and increasing the first and second tax brackets to \$31,000 and \$67,000. Manitoba's new Primary Caregiver Tax Credit also began this year, saving caregivers up to \$1,020 annually.

For those with small businesses, and many of them are in Wellington, budget 2009 also continues to cut business taxes by dropping the small-business tax rate to zero before the end of 2010, down from 8 percent in 1999.

Madam Acting Speaker, budget 2009 builds for the future by investing \$1.6 billion in infrastructure that will create work for many Manitoba businesses, jobs for Manitobans, and help stimulate the economy. It will include investing over \$160 million as part of social housing renewal, the largest single investment in public housing in Manitoba's history; investments to upgrade and build roads and highways for a total of \$545 million; a five-year multimillion-dollar capital plan for Manitoba's public schools; \$46 million for waste-water projects;

partnering with the federal government and keeping priorities funded through the federal stimulus programs such as Building Canada plan; health capital projects, including the Westman Regional Laboratory in Brandon, the cardiac science facility at St. Boniface Hospital, redevelopment of the emergency department at Victoria General, and a new Aboriginal personal care home in Winnipeg.

Students who are residing in the Wellington constituency will appreciate that budget 2009 will provide a 6 percent overall increase in base operating grants and strategic program investments for universities and colleges; additional training seats and a new bursary fund for prospective apprentices; a 5.25 percent increase to public schools; doubling the amount of scholarships for Aboriginal medical students; and introducing a new incentive to encourage high school graduates to pursue careers in the skilled trades.

Wellington constituents will also see the strong commitment to families and to providing quality, accessible health care. The budget is increasing funding to attract and retain more physicians and specialists; increasing funding to hire core emergency room staff; adding ambulances to the fleet; expanding mental health crisis stabilization services for youth; adding child-care spaces and increasing wages for child-care staff; increasing support for children in care; and increasing support for Manitobans on income assistance.

Madam Acting Speaker, two days ago the Competitiveness, Training and Trade Minister announced that the provincial government is investing more than \$5 million in strengthening work-force skills and workplace initiatives for unemployed Manitobans. No doubt this is welcome news for our constituents in Wellington. Budget 2009 also makes significant investments in the apprenticeship program to ensure Manitoba industries have the skilled labour needed to grow their companies and create new opportunities. Many constituents of Wellington will agree that Wellington has a strong community spirit, making it an attractive place to live. Our government is committed to keep it that way.

Manitoba Public Insurance offers some of the most competitive rates in the country. Our hydro rates are the lowest in North America. Natural gas rates have fallen and housing costs are among the most affordable in Canada. Wellington constituents will also see that reduced tax burden through a

number of initiatives, including the elimination of residential education support levy and the increase in the basic education property tax credit from \$250 in 1999 to \$650 in 2009. All these factors help keep our cost of living the lowest in the country.

It feels good to meet with constituents of Wellington as I can share with them a balanced steady budget that allows our province to have the most stable provincial economy over the last decade under the leadership of this government. Last year Manitoba's economy continued to grow steadily, outperforming the country as a whole for the third consecutive year. Investments have increased in Manitoba. Companies in our labour force have expanded with more than 10,000 jobs added to Manitoba's economy in 2008. More than 71,000 new immigrants have arrived in Manitoba in the last 10 years. Many of these new immigrants are residing in the Wellington constituency. To these new immigrants and to those who have remained in Wellington, I say to them that, in the face of challenging times, our province is well guided by a government that is mindful of tough realities, yet faithful and committed to principles and policies which put people first. Thank you very much, Madam Acting Speaker.

*(15:20)

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): I'm pleased to rise today to speak to the budget debate, but, firstly, I would like to welcome the two new members that we have joining us in the House as of a couple of days ago: the new Member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead) and the new Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie). Certainly, I haven't been here that terribly long yet, and it's a tremendous privilege to be one of the chosen few that serves in this House. It's certainly been a steep learning experience for me. I think, probably, the Member for Elmwood will pick it up fairly quickly with his background, and I'm sure the Member for The Pas will too.

This was another typical NDP budget with no long-term goals. We see no long-term planning in the highways budget. We've said for years that we want to see a five-year plan, a 10-year plan in the highways budget. For quite a number of years has been the—typically the dartboard approach, where you spin the dart board and throw a dart and wherever that lands that might be the project for this year.

One of the other things that falls far short in that highways department—and I've always argued that

should be changed—is the money that returns out of the capital budget into general revenues every year. The capital budget is announced every year at whatever it might be and, ultimately, for various reasons—and no fault of the department, I'm sure—some of the projects don't get done. The money gets rolled back into general revenues where, I think, it should be put in a reserve fund that carries forward to the next year to address those projects because, ultimately, that infrastructure is getting into worse and worse shape. Every cent that's committed to it should be spent there.

Agriculture, we're still having trouble seeing any long-term plan coming forward to support the producers in this province. Most of the plans that seem to be coming forward are moratoriums and regulations that discourage the industry rather than promote it. There's no accident to the fact that Hytek has done their expansion in their hog barns in Saskatchewan in the last year. Saskatchewan is welcoming them with open arms. They are doing their plant facilitation and upgrade in Neepawa, and that's much appreciated. But the industry, the production portion of the industry, has already started to move out of this province.

The new manure handling regulations—the hog barn moratorium impacted the large producers. The new manure handling regulations that are slated to come into place in 2012 or 2013 are impacting the small producers. I have one producer who lives near me. They have about a 120-sow farrow-to-finish operation. There's no way they can afford to put in a lagoon storage system that will hold something like whatever the recommendation is—250 to 400 days a year of effluent.

Health care, we see money still being thrown at health care in huge amounts without being results-oriented. There should always be a revisit and see if money is being well spent by government departments, and that seems to not happen. We constantly hear the answer in the House to our questions that, oh, we put another \$40 million into it. It must be fixed. Well, it's not being monitored and it's quite unlikely it is going to be fixed.

Where do we want to be in five or 10 years in this province? We constantly get a rehash of old announcements in this House and in the budgets and Throne Speeches, and we know we're into an economic downturn at present time. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) seems to move along with the attitude of Alfred E. Neuman: What, Me Worry? It's

placing all their faith in the fact that the downturn in the economy will end very quickly.

Revenues have not been a problem for the last number of years; priorities have been. When we had the opportunity to put more money in places that would help us through the tough times, we didn't do it. The NDP government continued to spend every cent that came in and now we're going to suffer the consequences.

The NDP have a perception that they know better what needs to be done with our money than individuals do, so they try to create a nanny state. They try and educate people to blindly follow; don't ask questions and don't leave any room for any creative thought. Big Brother is supposed to be thinking for you in Manitoba at the present time. The attitude that the money is spent better simply because it passes through the government hands is absolutely wrong. I truly believe that I have some idea how to handle my own money.

We have a budget presented that was touted as being balanced. It's a stretch of the imagination to consider this anywhere near balanced. The deficit in this budget is at least \$88 million and, at the same time, our debt is growing by over a billion dollars. Our provincial debt is now in excess of \$11.5 billion and it's still growing. It may well be the biggest growth factor in our province, and that's alarming.

What does that mean? Not only are we the highest-taxed in western Canada, we spend half the year paying our taxes before we actually put any money into our own pockets. After that, we're still faced with having more debt than the other three western provinces combined. Alberta has no debt; B.C. and Saskatchewan's debt put together is less than ours.

Our debt equals \$9,500 per capita in the province. That's \$9,500 for every man, woman and child in this province. The combined debt in the three western provinces actually equals \$1,220 per capita. We have eight times the provincial debt per capita than the other three provinces have. Our debt grows, Saskatchewan and B.C. lower theirs, and Alberta, as I said, has none.

The Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) talks about debt to GDP, and he continuously throws out that figure in the House as being 23 percent. Saskatchewan, our neighbour to the west, is at 6 percent; Alberta is at zero; B.C. is at 15 percent.

Once again, we fall behind all three of our western neighbours.

We have seen other provinces develop long-term financial plans with clear goals. New Brunswick has set out a plan at the present time, saying, we are not going to be a have-not province in a certain length of time. They've set the goal; they're going to try to move toward that.

We've seen Saskatchewan in a dramatic turnaround in the last year setting long-term goals that they feel are achievable and have certainly moved them far ahead of us in just about every financial indicator there is. The NDP can't seem to develop a financial plan for the next week, let alone next year.

We see Saskatchewan raise basic personal exemptions by \$4,000. Our government raised our personal exemption by \$100. That \$4,000 in Saskatchewan leaves anywhere between \$500 and \$1,000 in every Saskatchewan resident's pocket. What happens with it? It stimulates the economy. It will be spent. Alberta is even higher. They have a basic personal exemption somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$17,000 or \$18,000.

*(15:30)

What happens with our \$100 of increase here? Well, it leaves a few pennies in our pockets. No, wait a minute, that's wrong. It's dragged back by ever-increasing licence and permit fees and, oh, yes, don't forget bracket creep.

I've been in business for close to 40 years. I have been accountable. I've had to do cash flows. I've had to do debt financing. I've had to develop plans to handle my finances, pay my debts down, to meet deadlines, to pay off loans. There's certainly an expectation that I will return borrowed money. I can't just demand more. The marketplace doesn't work that way. I can't arbitrarily change the rules. Those are the rules I'm working under. Government doesn't have to make money. They just have to break even and the NDP can't even do that and they've proved it with this budget.

The most common perception our western neighbours have of us is of our Premier (Mr. Doer) and our Minister of Finance acting like the little boy in *Oliver*, going to Ottawa and saying, could I have some more, please? I recently talked to a young lady who was just completing her on-job portion of her lab and X-ray training. She had about two months left. She told me that she had accepted a job in

Yorkton. Her family lives in Manitoba and she likes Manitoba, but the returns were much more lucrative in Saskatchewan. One of the best assets we have in this province is our well-trained, well-educated young people, and we continue to educate them and then export them with no return to ourselves or to the economy of this province.

Now, this budget has made some contribution to education and that's a good thing, but we must go beyond that and make Manitoba the best place in Canada for young people to stay and work and raise their families. Fully one-half of our doctors have left this province after graduation, some 1,500 since the NDP formed government. That is, indeed, a sad record. Once again, no long-term planning.

I look at this budget and I see another long string of broken promises. Wasn't it this Premier (Mr. Doer) that promised to fix hallway medicine with \$15 million over six months? Well, he fixed it. He changed the name. He now calls it corridor medicine, so the hallway medicine has gone. We've heard the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs (Mr. Ashton) use the phrase creative financing, but there is another phrase that jumps out even more than that, and it's called perception management. That is where the NDP introduces a lame budget, tries to spin it as balanced, and then spends money, thousands of dollars, on advertising to try and convince the people of Manitoba that something is in it that isn't there. People in Manitoba are more perceptive than that. They are not going to buy into the illusion. They know that for all the billions spent on their health care, their health care is not significantly better. Their streets are not safer. The infrastructure continues to erode, and they are not better off financially.

On the subject of infrastructure, Madam Acting Speaker, I am the critic for Intergovernmental Affairs. I do deal with municipalities quite a bit and I do have an extensive municipal background. There's certainly getting to be more of an infrastructure deficit in the municipalities. The projects that have to be undertaken are getting more costly, more extensive all the time, and the municipalities have been approaching other levels of government to try and get some more infrastructure funding into their jurisdictions.

In Saskatchewan, I'll refer to Saskatchewan once again. The last budget, the Saskatchewan government committed 0.9 percent of PST to the municipalities.

An Honourable Member: Tell me about Alberta.

Mr. Briese: Alberta, over the years, I hear the question about Alberta. Alberta, over the years, has handed huge amounts of money to their municipalities. I recall being in Alberta a few years ago at one of their conventions, and Ralph Klein spoke to the gathering. Ralph committed \$3 billion to municipalities for the next year: \$1 billion to Edmonton, \$1 billion to Calgary, and \$1 billion to all the remaining municipalities outside those two centres.

It was kind of an interesting conversation because some of the people—and it was a rural gathering that it was at—were complaining that they only got a billion dollars. Their president got up to the mike, and he suggested that maybe it was not a good idea to turn down a billion dollars. The thoughts were that too much was going to the urban municipalities.

The infrastructure, water, sewer, roads, bridges, those things that municipalities are responsible for, and a lot more—rec facilities, libraries—all the things that they're responsible for, they are falling behind. They are asking for part of the sales tax here, but there are other creative ways to approach them, too. We do have a thing in Manitoba called municipal-provincial tax sharing. It's a set formula that is in place, could easily be raised and could easily flow more money to the municipalities that way.

One of the things that I'm very concerned about at the present time is the rural water pipeline system that's out in the rural areas. Up until this time, up until the end of March, that system has been funded one third by the federal government, through PFRA, one third by the Province, through water resources, and one third locally in whatever way or form.

That's changed. PFRA is out of it. I have talked, I have received a letter on this. I've talked to PFRA, and the message I got from PFRA is that considerable federal money is going into the Growing Forward programs and that there is a lot of discretionary ability on the part of the Province to allocate that money. The answer I get back from the Province is they're still quite happy to put up their one-third funding. But if the municipalities have to put up two thirds of the funding, they can't do it. They just are not capable of doing it.

If there's money going into the Growing Forward program—and I don't hear protests coming from the

Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives (Ms. Wowchuk) so I presume that may be true, that there is money going in there—some of it should be allocated to rural water lines. There are extensive systems needed in the southwestern corner of the province right now because of the drought issues that are going on there. In my own area, because of a large pipeline going in and wanting to branch off, both the municipalities of Lansdowne and Westbourne are looking to develop some rural water infrastructure in the next year. It certainly would be helpful if the Province would address some of those needs.

The whole issue of infrastructure—and it's with some consternation that I see what's happening. Back probably, well, when the programs first started the infrastructure funding, there was a committee set up that included the municipalities and the municipal leadership in this province to assess application forms and to assist in recommending the allocations of infrastructure money. That was expanded about the time I became the president of the Association of Manitoba Municipalities to include the Northern Association of Community Councils and that whole system worked very, very well. It worked well for a number of reasons. We were more in touch, I think, with the municipalities. We knew what was out there. We knew what municipalities were capable of doing, and, I think, one other thing that made it workable, and the government probably appreciated, was it somewhat removed them from some of the controversy on some of these projects and took away a little bit of the heat they took on which ones they were funding and which ones they weren't.

* (15:40)

That committee is not in place this time around on infrastructure funding. All the applications are being assessed, I presume, in department. Those applications are going to be decided without municipal or Northern Association of Community Councils input.

There continues to be a continuous downloading to municipalities from the provincial government in just a huge number of places. Over the last five years, provincial sales tax has been expanded onto a number of things that municipalities use: architectural, legal, accounting. PST has been assigned to all those things at a time when, I think, the Province should probably be following the federal lead and removing PST from municipal expenses. It's just one more assault on property

taxes. The Province collects PST, which is raised mostly off of property taxes. A few years ago, the Province announced they were going to exempt all university properties from property tax. Big announcement. They were going to save universities \$17 million to \$20 million. Wonderful thing. Only thing is, all it did was shift the lost tax onto other properties. The Province put up absolutely nothing to do that. It just went onto more properties and exempted the universities. It's exactly what happened. It's exactly what happened. It moved onto the residential property. When you take one class out of it, it moves onto the other properties; it has to level out, and that's what happened.

Funding to municipalities is actually down, and has been down every year for a number of years as a percent of the budget. We once again see the attitude that they float the smoke and mirrors and say, oh, we've increased the revenues to municipalities. But, as a percent of budget, it's slipping.

Another place that we see the assault—and I know, I know I'm going to be told that the RHAs were put in place by the Progressive Conservative government of the '90s, but the 10 percent contribution to health facilities is extremely onerous on the municipalities, the smaller municipalities. We just have a new personal care home in Neepawa. The 10 percent contribution is \$3 million on five smaller municipalities. That's a tremendous outlay of cash. I think some people forget what the actual budget of a small municipality is, when you take whatever it might be, and in my municipality, it's probably—and I've been away from the municipality for a while—but it's probably \$800,000 to \$900,000 a year, half of which is school tax. That's a pretty small operating budget. Even in supplying doctors to these communities, communities are trying to be more and more inventive in how they get doctors to come and serve in their communities, and in some cases, they're putting cash outlays out there to get them there. And once again, that should be a provincial responsibility, but it ends up back on property tax.

The Premier (Mr. Doer), on several occasions in this House, has indicated that the Province took over social assistance. That's true. The Province took over social assistance, but he indicates that they took over the full costing of social assistance. Municipalities contribute \$1.3 million to the Province every year to pay for social assistance. Over the last number of years, the Province has actually made money out of that deal because their social assistance, the portion that was municipal, was less than that. That was a

seven-year average, that \$1.1-million figure, and, at the time, it was dropping. So it's well below that.

Agriculture—we, once again, saw very little concrete in the budget. There was a slight reduction in the school tax on farm property, 5 percent in this budget. That whole issue of a school-tax reduction on farms needs to be extended to production buildings.

Once again, I'll refer to Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan, in their budget, announced that they were going to go to 100 percent of the funding for wildlife compensation. We're still at 80 percent. We've been there for a number of years and I wonder, I really wonder why, when I do everything I can to protect my livestock and my crops, I'm still expected to eat 20 percent of the losses when it's wildlife damage. If you hit a deer with your car, you've got 100 percent coverage, but if a wolf comes along and eats my calf, I've got 80 percent coverage.

We've seen the demise—and I referred to it earlier—but the demise of the livestock industry in this province. This minister has piloted it so far down the road that we may never recover. Since BSE, she puts all her eggs in one basket. The Minister of Agriculture says the federal parent programs with the province are where she's going to make her commitments to the agricultural industry. Well, in the cattle industry, since BSE hit, these programs don't pay on negative margins, and I've had people tell me that their margins have gone from \$90,000 down to \$20,000. So there's no room there. There's nothing left.

I saw something that I thought was really, really interesting the other night at the Pork Council banquet. They announced that they had contributed 334,000 pounds of pork in the last year to food banks in this province, and I applaud that organization for doing that. They did that in spite of getting kicked in the teeth with Bill 17 in this House, by a government that refused to listen to the presentations that were made. We heard over and over again in those presentations that the manure from those hog operations was being tested, the land was being tested and the manure was being incorporated into the land at the rate that the crops would use it. It's a valuable commodity. They don't pump it into the rivers.

The NDP government seems to have the attitude that rural Manitoba is somewhat of a cesspool. That's absolutely not true.

One of the things that I brought to the minister's attention on several occasions and doesn't seem to concern her too much, is that with the drop in the cattle herds in this province—and they're massive; they're in the thousands and thousands and thousands of cows that are no longer there—we're seeing a lot of acres being torn up, some of them very marginal acres, to be put back in crop. And this is the government that speaks about how environmentally sound they are, and when you tear up permanent cover, hay ground, pastureland, you're removing a carbon sink, and a darn good carbon sink.

*(15:50)

Some of the land in the northern end of my constituency, the Crown land is going to be left ungrazed this year because of the drops in the cattle herds. In conversations with Karin Wittenberg from the—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Brick): Order. The honourable Member for Ste. Rose's time has expired.

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Madam Acting Speaker, I'm very pleased to have the opportunity today to speak in favour of this budget, the 10th annual balanced budget that this government has brought forward. I hope that I have opportunity to address some of the misinformation that the previous speaker put on the record.

Before I begin to talk about those topics, I want to take a moment to pay tribute to the people of the Swan River constituency. The Swan River constituency is a very large and diverse constituency with a broad range of people living there, but I have to say that it is, as many other constituencies, it is feeling some of the same challenges as others with the economic turndown that we're in.

I have to say, Madam Acting Speaker, we are not facing the flood challenge, but I want the people of this House to know that the thoughts and prayers of the people of my constituency are with those people who are facing the challenge. In fact, many of my constituents have called and have been prepared to come and offer help if it is needed and they will continue to be on standby should that be necessary. I think that's part of—one of the qualities of the people of this province. They're always willing to be there to help others who might be in need.

Madam Acting Speaker, I was very pleased to be able to attend both the swearing-in ceremony and the introduction of our two new members to the

Legislature on April 6; the Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie) and the Member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead). I was pleased to be able to hear their opening speeches. I can assure you that I know that they will bring a tremendous amount of knowledge and skill to this House.

The MLA for The Pas, who was once the Chief of OCN and acted as an adviser to the Chief of the Manitoba Assembly of Chiefs, will, indeed, have big shoes to fill, but I know he will represent the constituency of The Pas very well.

The MLA for Elmwood will bring a wealth of knowledge having served as an MP, as a minister, as an advocate and I know that along with his great sense of humour, he will add a quality and strength to debates that we have as government and in our caucus.

You know, Madam Acting Speaker, as I listened to those speeches, I was reminded of a question that I had been asked by a reporter just recently. A reporter started to talk about my family history and talk about—wanted to know why—we talked about the family and where my parents were and then he said, so are you a New Democrat because your father and mother were a New Democrat? I said, no, my mother and father influenced my thinking and they gave me very solid foundations to build on, but I'm very proud to be part of a party that stands for social justice and equality, a party that is willing to make investments in people, a party that will—when they are in government, rather than cut jobs in difficult times, and I am reminded of how the Conservatives acted in the '90s when we were in tough financial times and the number of jobs, the number of nurses who were fired, teachers who were treated very inhumanly in my opinion.

If you look at those records, I'm very proud to be a New Democrat. I'm very proud to be part of a government that's willing to make investments to keep people working and have the benefit of the infrastructure that will result from that, make investments in education so people can transition should the jobs be gone in one field.

I look at the Member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen), a mining community that may face some serious challenges. In my constituency where there's logging, where a government is willing to work with those companies and make investments so that people can have security, people can raise their families and not have to worry as in some places, as

they had to worry in the '90s under a Conservative administration.

Madam Acting Speaker, putting together a balanced budget during uncertain economic times is not easy. I look at the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) and the staff in the Department of Finance who have worked very hard to put forward a budget that will address the challenges that I talked about. It is because of good management that we have been able to triple the Fiscal Stabilization Fund to \$634 million, which includes a drawdown to support some very important services.

Even though we are in tough times, we continue to make a \$20-million payment on our deficit. We continue to make—increasing our investment in capital to \$1.6 billion, an increase of over \$625 million. Again, job creation, investment in infrastructure that will carry us forward as we get through these difficult times and be prepared.

The members opposite talk about this budget as if it's such a terrible budget. Well, let me quote—I just must, Madam Acting Speaker, quote from a few people. TD Bank, and I quote: "the Manitoba Government could have taken the easy way out. Notably, it could have opted to run a deficit, as has become the norm across Canada" and also the world in 2009, "or it could have elected to postpone previously-announced tax cuts." In the short term, "the infrastructure spending and tax cuts will provide some much-needed stimulus to the economy."

Very similar comments by CIBC: Manitoba will be rare amongst provinces; it's standing in surplus in 2009, as its diversified economy sees a smaller hit than the global downturn, although capital spending will boost the debt and GDP ratio somewhat.

Similar comments from Scotiabank, BMO, all saying that we have made the right decision.

I think the members opposite are having a hard time accepting that we are getting the endorsement of the financial community in the decision that we have made in this budget, Madam Acting Speaker.

I hear the others talking about spending and equalization payments, but I find it strange that they don't talk about the millions and billions of dollars that provinces like Alberta, Saskatchewan and B.C. get for transfer payments for health care and education and social programs. If you look at the amounts that those provinces get, Madam Acting Speaker, they are, indeed, more than Manitoba gets.

I wonder why they don't talk about the significant subsidies that go into the tar sands, into Alberta—but in particular in Alberta and the tar sands. Millions of dollars from the federal government goes into those provinces, but they seem to have this idea that Manitoba gets payments, other provinces don't. Indeed, Madam Acting Speaker, they have to look at the whole picture. The federal government provides money to those provinces.

I wanted to take a few minutes to talk about—I wanted to spend some time on agriculture, but I also want to take a moment to talk about some of my constituents and the impacts that this budget and this recession, this downturn in the economy has had on my constituents and how we are working together. You know, we have a logging industry in my area, both Louisiana-Pacific and Spruce Products. Both of them have been hurt because of the downturn in the economy and aren't able to sell their product but, you know, our government has been able to work with them to help them through, whether it be in job share, whether it be in training, some changes in the price of stumpage fees that they pay, because we recognize the importance of these industries, and we continue to work with them.

I also want to recognize some of the people in my constituency who have worked very hard and recognize the importance of primary health care, of preventative health. I have a very interesting story. We put in place primary health-care centres in a couple of communities, one of them is Camperville and the other one is Waterhen and this is to bring services closer to the community. But we've also invested in education and helped people get their education.

*(16:00)

I was very proud the other day to meet a graduate from Camperville, Dr. Sheila Menard, who is from Camperville, who has graduated and is now using the facility that we put in place, the Primary Health Care Centre. She comes once a week to Camperville and provides medical services. So I use that as an example to show that it is important to invest in primary health care, and it is important to invest in education to give people the opportunity to get the skills they need and have the facilities and then give them the opportunity to give back to their community.

I want to also recognize the work that people are doing in the area of healthy living and food production. I'm very proud that my department,

along with Healthy Living and Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, are working very hard to improve food production in the north, whether it be through greenhouses or gardening, and I'm pleased that in this budget we also announced that we're going to be able to increase the staff by opening a GO office in Thompson in the north so that we can provide more resources and support, so that, indeed, we can continue to help people control their own destiny by growing food and reduce many of their costs.

I want to also recognize the determination of the people of Winnipegosis who lost their skating rink and worked very hard, and we've been able to support them as well, so the skating rink can again become a reality. Because, again, recreation is very important and there aren't that many facilities.

Finally, Madam Acting Speaker, I want to recognize a group of people in Swan River who, as well, recognize the value of recreation and have been working very hard to establish a wellness centre. They have worked together to pull municipalities together because we know we have to do things on a regional basis, and they are working very hard in that area. I want to recognize the municipal leaders and the group of people who are working to establish a wellness centre in that area.

Madam Acting Speaker, I want to now speak on a few issues with regard to agriculture—*[interjection]* The member opposite, I heard the member talking about ophthalmology. Well, you know, there is also a group of people in Swan River that's working very hard. The Lions Club is looking to develop an ophthalmology centre and have a doctor come in to Swan River, and I say to the member I've worked with them, and we will continue to work with them. Unfortunately, when the members opposite were in power they were not even going to build a hospital in Swan River. I will never forget when I saw the first list of what the Conservatives were planning to do in the next year. I said to the Health Department, where is Swan River hospital? They said, it's not on the Conservative list. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) is right here; he will remember that well.

An Honourable Member: How could I forget?

Ms. Wowchuk: I wouldn't let him forget. That's right.

There was no hospital plan for Swan River. Well, we turned that around, and we've got dialysis in Swan River. We've got cancer treatment in Swan

River. The Conservatives never even thought of those kinds of things in a rural area. We've got that there. There are people working to get ophthalmology. We have increased ophthalmology programs in this province, and we will continue to work on that issue as well. I don't count on the member ever doing it because they never did a thing for Swan River while they were opposition other than close a hospital, which probably shouldn't have been closed in the first place.

But I digress. I digress. I want to talk a bit about the agriculture program and the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Briese) said, you know, this government has no plan. They said, we have no plan on transportation and infrastructure. There's a 10-year plan—a five-year plan laid out on everything that's going to be done. They say we have no plan on agriculture. Well, I remind him that we signed an agreement with the federal government on Growing Forward. It is a five-year plan and outlines the various programs that will be offered, whether it's AgriStability, AgriRecovery, AgriInvest, AgriFlex, which is a new program that is being developed.

So I would invite the member, if he wants a briefing I could tell him or he could talk to his Ag critic. He could talk about all of those programs. He should be well aware that there are programs and the producers have been very closely involved in having input in how these programs should work. Are they perfect? Absolutely not. Do we still have to work? Of course we do. But, if everything were perfect—I don't think anybody can develop something, a program that meets everybody's needs.

But, you know, I want to recognize my colleague from the Interlake as well. When the difficulties began in the Interlake, it was the then-MLA for the Interlake that called. He came to us and said, we are having problems with water. It was in August; we went out; we did a tour and just almost immediately we recognized what the challenges were. We knew we had a freight assistance program that worked in previous situations. We announced it immediately.

But, Madam Acting Speaker, that wasn't the end of it. That program was in place. It wasn't working to the best—there were still challenges with it. We made various other adjustments to the program. We put in place—along with the federal government, because this is a federal-provincial program—we did various things to try to get cash into the producers' hands.

More recently, on March 5, we announced the Manitoba Forage Restoration Assistance Program to help producers restore their farms, their forage fields. We announced assistance, a feed assistance, for producers within a defined area, of \$70-a-head for breeding stock and to cover the cost of feed. The other day, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs (Mr. Ashton) and the MLA for Interlake also announced assistance to help producers who have had their grain lands rutted up.

So, Madam Acting Speaker, we continue to work and address the challenges. There is a challenge for some producers who are outside the lines of the area that has been defined as a disaster area, and my staff and the federal government continue to work at looking at how we can resolve that challenge as well. So there are challenges, and we continue to work with them.

The members opposite talk about the pork industry. The pork industry, along with the beef industry, is facing real challenges because of country-of-origin labelling, high Canadian dollar, high input costs, but COOL is their biggest challenge. That's why we have to continue to work at increasing our slaughter capacity; that's why we made investments with Hytek; that's why we've made investments with Maple Leaf, to ensure that they have the capacity to at least meet some of those needs.

Is there need for more capacity for slaughter? Absolutely. Is there need for beef slaughter capacity? Absolutely. We will continue to work with them.

The member opposite talked about PFRA and, indeed, the federal government has changed PFRA. They have blended it into the Growing Forward budget. The problem is, Madam Acting Speaker, they've blended it, but they have not added the money in. They've put it in. They've cut this budget, but they haven't added that additional money into the Growing Forward budget. That's a problem for us, and we continue to work with the federal government to see how we might increase that funding. That's a challenge for us.

I was surprised that the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Briese) was critical about an aquaculture project. We have to continue to diversify. There is an opportunity to look at something new here. There were funds available and Manitoba was very lucky to capture those funds and to be able to do a model aquaculture farm for rainbow trout.

I'm not sure, the members opposite want to stick their heads in the sand and continue to do just what we do because we raise one thing. That's all we can do? Our farmers are far more innovative than that. You know, when we lost the sugar beet industry, what did our farmers do? Our farmers shifted from sugar beets to soy beans, and that's then become a very successful crop.

Now, there's another opportunity to raise fish. There are millions of people around the world that need food. We have the ability in this country to use our resources to produce more food. When we have an opportunity—and I hear someone on the opposite side poke fun at those people who are trying something new in order to produce high-quality food. I'm a little bit disappointed, Madam Acting Speaker.

The member opposite talked about the pork. I was at Manitoba Pork the other night as well. We talked about how Manitoba Pork had put in 334,000 pounds of pork, and that was through a particular program that was reducing the sow program, the number of sows in this province. What they forgot to announce, and I think it might have been an oversight on their part, what they forgot to announce was that the provincial government put in \$500,000 to process those animals. So the producers got money from the federal government to reduce their herd, and they were going to get rid of those animals.

*(16:10)

This provincial government put in \$500,000, created jobs at the processing plant, and created food for many, many people. I commend the pork producers, but I'm also proud to be part of a government that stood up and saw an opportunity to put money into food banks, Madam Acting Speaker.

As I look at this budget and I look at the various steps that we have taken, I want to also say that the members opposite talk about the reduction on farmland school tax as being minimal. Well, Madam Acting Speaker, that budget is just under \$33 million. The members opposite say now they would review, reduce, and eliminate education tax on farmland, but you know, it's very easy to say you are going to do something, but I'll say, look at the record. Under the opposition, when they were in government, they increased the portion on farmland. When we came into office, we reduced taxes, and have put back almost \$33 million into farmers hands.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to also talk about health care. I'm pleased that the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) and this government are working very hard to recruit nurses and doctors into this area. I'm pleased that there are going to be some nurses coming into my area from the Philippines, and I want to commend the Parkland regional health board for the work they have done in this particular area because it is very important.

Again, parks and recreation are a very important activity, and when you're in a slowdown of activities, being able to go to a park is one of the cheaper recreational facilities that you can have. I'm proud of the step we have taken to remove park fees so people can get into those parks and enjoy them.

Madam Deputy Speaker, during this time, I think it's important, and I wish the opposition would recognize this, when we are in difficult times, it's important to invest in our greatest resource. Our greatest resource is our people. By investing in people, investing in education, we give them the tools. But bricks and mortar projects are also important because it builds and modernizes the infrastructure that is very important to this province. So, by investing in bricks and mortar and infrastructure, by investing in people, and building our knowledge to the best we can, we are, indeed, steering our province through uncertain times towards prosperity. This is the path we have chosen.

Members opposite may not agree, but I would ask them to think very carefully about where we should be making our investment. The last point I want to make, Madam Deputy Speaker, is I'm not sure what the opposition would be doing. On one day, when the Member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faurschou) was speaking, he was saying we were spending—no, someone was saying we were spending too much money, and the Member for Portage la Prairie went through it and said, why have you cut some money for research in agriculture? You're cutting research. He doesn't look at the whole picture of what is being spent on research. We are making investments in people and in infrastructure, and we are maintaining services to the best of our ability in this difficult time. I'm very proud to be able to support this budget. Thank you very much.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I'm pleased to have this opportunity today to speak to the budget this year. First of all, I do want to congratulate the

two new members that have joined us here in the Legislature, the Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie) and the Member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead). I do want to indicate that I did campaign in both of those campaigns and spent a lot of time in Elmwood and in The Pas. I got to meet a lot of people and hear what a lot of people have had to say in that area. I do want to congratulate the two members, and I sincerely wish them all the best as they spend the next number of years here in the Legislature fighting for their constituents, as I'm sure they will. It's certainly an honour to be in a position like this. I came in in a by-election as well, and it is a little bit different from coming in in a general election, and a very interesting process to go through. I hope they enjoy the job as much I do. I have to say that I feel very privileged to be an MLA and to be able to represent people in this province.

I am very pleased today to have the opportunity to speak for the citizens of Charleswood who have put their faith in me for a number of years now through a number of elections. I feel very, very privileged to speak on their behalf.

I also speak on behalf of the future residents in this province, the young people, that, I think, are going to be impacted by this budget. I do want to indicate that a large part of what I say I also say, not just as a legislator, but as a mother of two young sons who want to participate in this province, and I hope they have a chance in their future to do so.

Prior to that, I would like to recognize and thank everybody in Manitoba that is working to keep our province, our homes, protected from this flood, whether they're volunteers or whether they are government employees. I know that I was speaking to one government employee from my area who's very involved in the flood and his conviction and commitment to working hard was really, really remarkable. I just want to say, on behalf of all of us in Manitoba, that I think we owe a great debt of gratitude to all of those people that do spend so much time trying to help their families, their neighbours and their communities.

Related to this budget, Madam Deputy Speaker, I have to say I'm very, very disappointed in it, and I'm very much of the belief that it's a sham. I say that after thinking long and hard about what I wanted to say today and I looked back at a number of my other responses to the budget speech. Every year I think I've been saying some of the same things. Some of the things I was saying and warning the government

about year after year are coming to fruition now. But this government has never tended to want to listen to what others have said.

The Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald), in particular, mentioned one day that she doesn't spend any time looking at what the opposition says to her, which I think is a real arrogant response, and just shows that they're not prepared to look at good ideas and to look at suggestions that come from elsewhere. That's really too bad.

I find the increasing debt load of this Province very, very disturbing, and I have talked about this numerous times in this House. I think the NDP have sunk this province into record debt levels, and it's going to be a debt that is going to be borne by future generations. It's going to be borne by my kids, my grandchildren and others that are going to have to decide whether they want to stay in Manitoba when there are a lot of opportunities and perhaps, in many ways, better opportunities elsewhere. I hope they stay here. I want them to stay here. I want them to enjoy a province that I'm very proud to live in. I see so much potential here. The citizens here are always people that just always come together to try to make things better. I want my kids to be a part of that; I want other kids to be a part of it. But I don't think the government is giving them the best shot at a future in this province.

The debt right now, the net debt, has ballooned to \$11.8 billion. That's up from \$11.1 billion a year ago. That's \$700 million more in just one year. Debt means borrowing. So, at a time when this government had a lot of money coming in from the federal government from transfer payments, we saw a government that still went out and borrowed money and cranked up our debt by \$700 million.

*(16:20)

The total debt in our province is at an all-time high. It's \$21.1 billion. That should be alarming to Manitobans, especially when we know what it means, because when we are increasing debt like this, interest payments are attached to that. Hundreds and hundreds of million dollars a year are going into interest payments when, instead, they could be going into health, education, day cares, roads or the many other pressing issues that we see in the province.

Our debt is now higher than the debt of B.C., Alberta and Saskatchewan lumped together. No wonder those provinces don't want to have much to do with Manitoba. We have seen this NDP

government firmly entrench us as a have-not province, and it's going to be very, very hard now to move beyond that.

Why was this NDP government borrowing so much money when they were rolling in the dough from federal transfer payments? That's another sore point for me. Why have they made Manitoba so reliant on federal handouts? Why should people from Saskatchewan, Alberta, B.C., Ontario, year after year after year, have to come to the aid of Manitobans? Why couldn't Manitoba be put in a position of standing on their own two feet? Saskatchewan did that. Saskatchewan took their province and became self-reliant, and that's what Canada is about. We help each other that need the help.

But Manitoba just took the easy way out, rather than putting the vision forward, rather than looking at what they could do to make Manitoba stand on their own two feet. They didn't do that. They were lazy in their approach and they just thought, oh, let the federal money roll in. Let the people from Saskatchewan and other provinces pay for a lot of our bills here. And they seemed quite comfortable. Comments from across the way indicate they feel entitled to this money. Well, they're not entitled to that money. They're entitled to make things better here in Manitoba so that we can have pride and stand on our own two feet. Instead, 40 percent of the bills in this province are paid for by other provinces.

That's like me turning to my neighbours after I've spent all my money. I've dipped into my savings, I go to my neighbours and say, you've got to help me. I don't have enough money. Well, I know what my neighbours would tell me, Madam Deputy Speaker.

It's embarrassing, and I've said this year after year. You know, I meet with people from other provinces. We holiday with people from other provinces, and it's embarrassing when they talk about our have-not status here, that we've always got a hand out to all the other provinces, that we don't seem to try to do anything different.

These handouts have doubled under the NDP, and that's shameful. That's not what a government is supposed to do in a province. So I ask this government: Why do they always have to have a hand out for federal money? Where's their pride? Where's their vision? Where's their tenacity to stand on their own two feet?

So they've cranked up the debt. They've increased our dependence on Ottawa handouts. They've taken \$110 million from the rainy day fund to pay for their spending and keep us out of a deficit, and they're running an operating deficit, despite all of the spin that has been put forward by all the members here and by their spinners out in the hallways. We do have an operating deficit in Manitoba. It's \$88 million, and this government, yet, has the gall to go out and say that Manitoba has a balanced budget.

And now they're spending—I would guess by the number of ads we're seeing out there, hundreds of thousands of dollars trying to convince Manitobans that it's a balanced budget, and the ads are slick. The ads, I'm sure they're hoping will work and that people will pay attention to them and get sucked into what is actually not true. It's false. It is not a balanced approach. It is not a balanced budget. It, in fact, is an \$88-million operating deficit. So what a sham that this government has put forward.

Then, to top it all off, they also want to decrease debt payments. They're breaching and breaking their own legislation. They're breaking their own law by putting that already into their budget, into all of their documents that they now are only wanting to pay \$20 million a year towards debt instead of the \$110 million. You can see what's happening. Somebody over there has to realize there's no free lunch. Somebody is going to have to pay at some point, and, again, it's going to be our kids if they haven't left Manitoba at that point for other provinces where they see a brighter light. So this government with this budget has dug Manitoba into a really deep hole, and I guarantee you that, by the end of this next year, that hole is going to get a lot bigger. There's a saying out there that once you're in a hole, stop digging, but this group here doesn't seem to understand that.

This has not been a government that shows self-restraint, never have and never will. They don't understand the concept. They're going to look for the easy way every single time. But one day, Madam Deputy Speaker, somebody's going to have to pay the piper, and despite the nice sound bites from the budget—you know, steady as she goes, living within our means, counting every penny is an absolute joke and an insult to Manitobans. Steady as she goes for this government, for this Doer government, is spend, spend, spend at levels that only good times can sustain, and I think they're seeing now they can't sustain that level of spending

with their own source revenues that will go down, with the federal transfer payments that they can't rely on in the next while. The predictions are for a worsening economy, and I think what we're going to find with this government is that they did not plan properly for what is coming and they cannot sustain this level of spending. So, when it was good times, they're spending everywhere, and what a snow job they've made in trying to convince everybody that this is a good budget. But the roosters will come home to roost, and then we're going to see what is really going to happen then. When there's a decline in GDP, then we'll see what's going to happen. So now, as the economy is contracting, let's look at the sustainability of all their spending.

Of the \$10.1-billion budget that they now have in Manitoba, 60 percent of that goes to health and education. The remaining 18 departments get to fight for the rest, and I think fight they have to. Every day we're reminded about how the other departments are struggling when we come to work and drive through potholes that you can put a kitchen sink into, and then we know that there is a serious, serious issue. Health-care spending at the rate it is at right now cannot be sustained, and I have to wonder what is going to happen in the next few years when the government cannot keep up that pace of spending.

It's almost comical in a way, but years ago, in 1999, when this government formed government, they came into government—but prior to that in opposition, they used to yell like crazy in here in opposition. They said, spend more money in health care, put more money in health care, and they said that day after day after day. They came to power in 1999, and they immediately accused us of reckless spending. Then they built that reckless spending into their base budget and they doubled it, Madam Deputy Speaker. So go figure. In fact, the first Health Minister for the NDP went into his office, and he talked to the media, and he said that every day he spends on the job is like a frightening ride on a runaway train. He says, the health-care budget is a disaster right now, it's crazy, we don't have any control over spending, the buck stops nowhere. That was the Member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak). Well, guess what? The buck never stopped. The train kept rolling and the buck stopped nowhere.

They ramped up spending, despite some of their ridiculous comments when they first got into power, and now we look at health care where they have put a lot of money into health care. They've doubled it in

their time in office, and it would be one thing if patients saw a benefit. Then you could almost say you can justify maybe some of this, but what has happened after doubling their budget, we do not see patients getting the bang for their buck that you would think \$2 billion more in health care should have provided something better for patients, but we haven't seen that. We should all be very worried about that, Madam Deputy Speaker, because if we continue to pour more and more money into health care, all it seems to be doing right now is propping up the status quo. It does not seem to be making a difference in terms of improving things for patients.

*(16:30)

I just would like to tell you about some of the things that \$4 billion is not improving. One, and the first one that comes to mind, is a patient dying in an ER after waiting 34 hours for care. How can a \$4-billion budget not have prevented something like that? A preventable situation he came in with, a preventable death. Unfortunately, we saw the Premier of Manitoba (Mr. Doer) say that this death embarrassed him. Well, that's an odd choice of words. It should do more than embarrass him.

We see 150,000 Manitobans right now that do not have a family doctor. So why can't \$4 billion, which amounts to millions and millions of dollars every second spent on health care in Manitoba—why are we seeing so many Manitobans without a doctor? Why are we seeing 19 ERs closed in rural Manitoba? You know, the government is so happy to say, well, we haven't closed any in Winnipeg, and that seems to be their Perimeteritis. They're focussed on that, but they don't seem to have the same priority for what's going on in rural Manitoba.

We also, despite \$4 billion in spending, see hundreds and hundreds of sick, sick ICU patients being put at risk by being shuffled from hospital ICU to hospital ICU in ambulances, trying to find a bed, trying to find a place for them. Why are we taking ICU patients and putting them at that extra risk? Why do we not have enough ICU beds in Winnipeg? Why have we seen 750 emergency surgery cutbacks at community hospitals? Again, we're loading up people that need emergency surgery, whether they're in an emergency department or whether they're on a ward at the Victoria Hospital, at Seven Oaks or at Concordia, instead of providing them with the service that they have had up until now. This government has deemed it appropriate to take 750 people that need emergency surgery—it's not like

getting a bunion done on a big toe; this is emergency surgery—and instead of offering that service now in three community hospitals, they have cut back that service, and they are putting these sick people into ambulances again and shuffling them around the city looking for a bed. We know of one case where a very ill woman was taken from Concordia Hospital's emergency because they couldn't do the surgery there, and they had to take her all the way to Grace Hospital because the Health Sciences couldn't manage her, they were full, and St. Boniface couldn't manage her because they were full. So this woman ended up at the Grace Hospital, and, thank God, by coincidence there was somebody there to look after her.

Madam Deputy Speaker, \$4 billion and we still see double the complaints of patient abuse in hospitals and personal care homes, something that this government should be very, very concerned about because when you see the number of physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional, mental, financial, inflicted on patients in our hospitals and our personal care homes, the government should be very worried that \$4 billion in health care isn't improving something as basic as providing safe environments for patients.

Appointments with specialists. The last report we saw on this showed that Manitoba had the longest wait in Canada to see a specialist. Why didn't \$4 billion buy us something better? We know we have a specialist shortage in Winnipeg; we know we have one in Brandon and in rural Manitoba. At Winnipeg, we're hovering anywhere between 80 and 100 specialists short. That's a significant number. We have had 12 cardiac patients die on a waiting list. We've got absurdly long waits for addiction treatments in The Pas. We've got brown envelopes full of money floating around the WRHA. We've had a 93-year-old woman being hauled all over Manitoba to find her a bed. We've had 1,500 doctors leave Manitoba under the NDP looking for greener pastures. We've got a nursing shortage that is dangerously high in our ERs and ICUs. We've got a health-care system that's rated dead last in Canada. Four billion dollars didn't even buy us the best health-care system in the country. Instead, we're rated dead last.

We have a maternity care crisis in Manitoba as stated by front-line health-care workers. We still have hallway medicine. We have nurses burning out from being forced to work overtime. We have RHA admin costs which have skyrocketed. We have wait

times that are not improving. We have elderly patients being forced into nursing homes far away from their families. We've got the longest length of stay in Canada. We've got highway medicine. We've got cardiac surgeries being bumped at an alarming rate. Many hours in Winnipeg we don't even have an ambulance available here.

So what do we get from this government for \$4 billion in health care? We get a lot of spin. We also get zero accountability, zero responsibility and zero leadership. This minister, on top of all these horror stories, calls her health-care system stellar. She has also said that health care is her badge of honour. Well, with all of those issues, I would think badge of shame is more like it.

So this from an NDP government that promised to fix health care. All they've done is they rode into power on a promise that they have failed to keep. Well, I'd say to the NDP, talk to patients because health care is not fixed, and you failed miserably. The money being added in this budget, you're just going to prop up the status quo. Madam Deputy Speaker, this budget did absolutely nothing to prepare patients for what's coming in the future. They have put patients in such a horrible predicament, and I think we'll see the health-care system failing a lot of people in the next several years.

For all of these reasons, I cannot support a budget that fails the people of this province.

Ms. Sharon Blady (Kirkfield Park): I rise today to put a few words on the record regarding my support for the budget and against the short-sighted, partisan amendment before this House. Madam Deputy Speaker, I'm proud to be part of a government that has spent a decade investing to build and stabilize our provincial economy, and that, when a global economic crisis hit, was able to respond, not in a panicked, hack-and-slash approach seen in other jurisdictions and at a federal level, but instead found ways to continue to invest in the stability of our economy and to continue to strengthen our economy while others struggle to adapt and recover all around us.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this 10th balanced budget is a demonstration of the strength and prudence of long-term planning, and the positive response that it has received by Manitobans is an indicator that we continue to move in the right direction. I believe the support of this government by Manitobans is also reflected in the recent addition of

the two new members to this Chamber. It is a pleasure to welcome to the government caucus the members for Elmwood and The Pas. These gentlemen have devoted their lives to working for their communities in numerous capacities before their arrival in this Chamber, and it is an honour to have them here to share their experience and leadership as members of this government.

Their addition to this Chamber is not only a re-affirmation that their communities believe that this government is on the right track, but that they as individuals embody the values that matter to their communities, to Manitobans in general, and to this government. However, Madam Deputy Speaker, their presence now means that those of us from the class of '07 are no longer the rookies of the Chamber, but I am hard pressed to consider either of my new colleagues rookies and know that their experience, insight and dedication to their communities and to social justice will strengthen this government even further. So I welcome my new colleagues here and look forward to working with them for a long time into the future.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in participating in this budget debate, I am proud of this government's prudence and desire to continue investing in Manitobans. In this budget, we see that the long-term vision of this government is not limited to planning for the good times, but to investing and preparing for times such as these where we must deal with the larger global circumstances that surround us, and to do so with the best interests of Manitobans at heart.

* (16:40)

The response to the budget in Kirkfield Park has paralleled the response throughout the province. I have heard back from so many in my community that they appreciate how this government has found a prudent way of ensuring, despite larger global circumstances, that we are not running to cut programs or abandon larger projects and long-term vision, but rather staying the course. My neighbours have confidence in this government because they see this government has confidence in Manitobans and Manitoba's economy. They have confidence in the fact that their needs are not being sacrificed in the name of short-sighted fiscal belt tightening, but rather that their needs are being invested in just when they need it most.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to share with the House the kind of feedback that I have been getting from my friends and neighbours in Kirkfield

Park, and I can assure members of this House that I will be speaking about real people, not fictional constituents like some members opposite have been creating over the past few days.

As I said, Madam Deputy Speaker, this confidence in the government and the budget is evident in various parts of my community. The first opportunity that I've had to see this was in what many others from the other side of the House would consider a rather unlikely source. This January, at the monthly luncheon meeting for the Assiniboia Chamber of Commerce, I had the opportunity to join other Chamber members to listen to Asper School of Business professor Robert Warren discuss the economic downturn and the short- and long-term implications for short businesses. He reminded us that Manitoba's situation is far better than most, crediting the stable economic growth that this government has fostered over the past decade. He assured Chamber members that those who chose to attend that the key to our collective successes would be the recent decisions to continue these investments in the face of the global downturn, and maybe some other fellow Chamber members that were not at that meeting might have done themselves a favour to be there, including some members opposite. According to Mr. Warren, we are continuing on the right path as investment in infrastructure is crucial to stabilizing our economy. By investing in highways, hospitals and projects like the inland port, we are creating opportunities for our small businesses and those Manitobans they employ.

In the discussions that followed, my fellow Chamber members were glad to hear that their economic opportunities would not be undermined in the face of crisis, but rather encouraged and nurtured. When the budget came out two months later, they were pleased to see that this planning and foresight continued. They were pleased to see that we would not be abandoning our plans to eliminate the small business tax in 2010 and that investment in infrastructure, commerce, skills training and, therefore, in Manitobans remained priorities.

So, both as a member of this government and as a member of the Chamber of Commerce, I am proud to stand by our government's balanced plan to help us get through this storm and look forward to working with the small-business owners in Kirkfield Park.

Like many others in my community, I am a parent, juggling work, children and making sure that

the bills get paid. As a mother, I believe that one leads by example and models behaviour for children to learn from and aspire to. Like many in my community, I also believe that actions speak louder than words and believe that government should lead by example in addressing the needs of the community, especially in tough economic times. Here, again, Madam Deputy Speaker, the feedback from parents and families in my community has been supportive of this government's leadership as demonstrated in the prudence and foresight of this year's budget. At a recent school board budget meeting, parents were pleased with the fact that our board will be utilizing the tax incentive grant available to them to help the board hold the line on property taxes. They were also pleased to know that they would be seeing an increase in the property education tax credit of \$50, bringing it to \$650 for home-owners and renters. At the same time, these parents are confident that their children's educations are secure, knowing that our government is continuing to invest in capital projects for schools and providing a 5.25 percent increase for public schools, which means \$53 million, the largest ever investment in public schools funding.

Madam Deputy Speaker, those of us with younger children are also pleased that this government is continuing in their investments in day-care spaces and in the training and retention of early childhood educators. As a mother with a son attending a local day care, and as a former educator, I know the valuable role that early childhood educators play in the healthy emotional, psychological and academic development of the children they work with. I am fortunate to have the opportunity to regularly visit the day cares in my community, as well as meeting with directors and staff to discuss their needs and concerns. At a recent meeting with day-care directors, they mentioned how much they appreciate the work that we have been doing to raise the remuneration rates for incoming ECEs and the ongoing investments in training so that young people see this profession as one where they can grow as professionals and, as a result, provide our children with the best education possible during their most formative years.

So again, real people, not fictional ones, are confident in this government and the ongoing investments we are making in education, both of our children and for those who educate our children.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to say that parents in my community are also happy to see our

investment in families continue, and the opening of the new parent-child centre located at Sansome elementary school was a day that many parents in the neighbourhood looked forward to. I was thrilled to attend the opening of the centre, and meet with families and those from the local parent-child coalition to see how this new site was going to meet the needs of so many families in the community.

I'm also looking forward to bringing my youngest there with his friends so that he and I can enjoy some time together in this wonderful new space, and so that he and I can make some new friends within the community. The moms I met there told me how important it was to be able to go to this and other parent-child centres to meet new people, and to be able to interact with their children in a safe, positive and nurturing environment and not have the distractions of household duties cut into quality time with their children.

It is this kind of ongoing investment in families, by providing support services and programs that families want and need, that demonstrates the visions and values that a government possesses and advocates for. These visions and values are ones shared by the parents I met that day. So, as a mother and a member of this government, I am pleased with how this budget continues to invest in children, families and education.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we all know that education, however, while it begins in the early years, is really an ongoing endeavour and requires ongoing investment in post-secondary education and in skills training and apprenticeships. With a teenage son looking to furthering his education and considering career opportunities, I hear the conversations that he and his friends have about the choices that they have before them. They all look forward to furthering their educations and know that opportunities exist for them here, and that post-secondary educations are a reasonable and affordable option for them. However, they are teenagers after all, and their priorities are not about budget lines, but rather the latest postings to YouTube or how they're going to get their next history assignment in on time. They really don't worry about the details and the actual investments that make those options possible.

Things that are a part of this year's budget, including the ongoing efforts to maintain affordable tuition, a 6 percent increase in base operating grants and strategic program investments for universities

and colleges, and the increased funding to students through the Manitoba Bursary Fund and the Great Futures Fund, those are the things that are going to help it happen for them. They don't worry about those details, but they know those options are there for them, and it's parents like myself that appreciate why those options exist for them.

Madam Deputy Speaker, while they may not recognize the full long-term economic value of these things or, for example, the value of tuition rebates, from their perspective as teenagers they do understand the idea of getting money back for the time and money that they and their families will invest in their education by building their lives here in the community that they've been raised in. So for them the tuition rebate is a reward they see on the horizon and there for them as they set out to build careers. Again, the details may not matter to them now, but they already recognize its value in their own way.

So, while members opposite cry wolf about the flight of young people out of Manitoba, I know of many young people in my community who look forward to continuing their education and their lives here in Manitoba. I wonder if, maybe, members opposite again are yet drawing from or creating other fictional Manitobans when they go on their flights of fancy about an exodus of youth out of the province, as our population statistics clearly disprove their fictions.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as a mother and as an educator, I am proud to support this budget and the investments it makes in our future through the ongoing support and developments it provides for post-secondary education.

There are so many things that I could add about the support that this budget has received from my community, whether it's about the enhancements to the Manitoba Shelter Benefit and its values to seniors in Kirkfield Park, or the ongoing investment in training and retaining health-care professionals and funding for more ER staff—things that matter to everyone in Manitoba. But, Madam Deputy Speaker, I know there are time limits on our responses, so in closing, regardless of what naysayers across the floor may say, the reality is that Manitobans—real Manitobans—have confidence in this government and in this budget, and I have heard so directly from real people, not fictitious ones, from within my own neighbourhood.

I guess in another closing point, maybe, point out that we've heard a lot of crying wolf and other references that I guess you say have a fictitious nature coming from members opposite. I may be wondering if the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger)—again I think of my children and the only people that I know of with imaginary friends tend to be five or six years old. So maybe the Minister of Finance, for members opposite, for the five- and six-year-olds in my neighbourhood, who want to discuss the budget with their imaginary friends, maybe there should be a bit of a rewrite with a few more coloured pictures so that members opposite realize and can discuss with their imaginary friends the benefits of this budget.

* (16:50)

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

But, again, I don't think that's within the time or the options available, but it's something that could be considered for comprehension levels at a future date.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is with the backing of so many real people from Kirkfield Park that I support the work of this government and the Minister of Finance in delivering this budget, and to say that I will be voting for this budget not only as a member of this House, but as a mother, educator and proud member of my community.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): First of all, I would like to pay tribute to the 92nd Vimy Ridge and the people that served so bravely to protect our freedom and what we have to talk about in this House today and for the days to come. Also, for those officers and military people and others that are protecting our country and our cities and villages and rural communities as well, I want to pay tribute to them.

Also, as we prepare to depart here before too terribly long, I also want to take this opportunity to wish everyone a happy Easter, Mr. Speaker.

Also, I want to pay tribute to the new table officers and welcome them here to the Legislative Assembly, and also pay respects and welcome the new members from The Pas and from Elmwood and congratulate them for their time and efforts put forward into preparing for the election, and also those candidates that ran against them. I know that elections are our democratic right, and we take that very seriously.

Those candidates that weren't successful, I want to pay respect to them as well. When you take an opportunity to serve, whether it be in this Chamber

or at the municipal level or at the school board level, it's very important. We need more people to step forward and be accountable. As we all know, we don't get many credits in this business, but we get an awful lot of negative, and it's very important that we dwell on a lot of those positives as well, because there is a lot of positive.

There is some positive in the budget. I'm not going to dwell on all those either, but I'm not going to dwell on all the negatives either.

I know the people of Lakeside were fortunate enough to re-elect me again in 2007. So this was my seventh budget since 2003. I can say, as they talk about the 10 budgets that they've presented in this House, that they were all balanced. But I tell you what, the people of Manitoba are not quite willing to accept all the information that's been put out there. We can tell by the information that's been put out, people in Manitoba, they talk about some of the things that they do right. Of course, there are some things they do right, and that's largely in part because they do listen to opposition once in a while. They do listen to what other people that have an opportunity to provide that input into those that have that chance. I know in particular the Finance Minister was out into people of Lakeside, and I know they gave him some input that was very important at one of the meetings that he was actually out. So consultation—we have talked about that time and time before in regard to not only budgetary items, but consultation on all issues that are so important to us here in the province of Manitoba.

The Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) talked about diversification, and we know that that's so important. One of those areas of diversification happens to be in the Lakeside constituency. That was to do with the trout farm that's been located in the town and the community of Warren. I'd like to pay tribute to Rudy Reimer, who's taken the initiative to work with the provincial government and the federal government on this initiative. I just think it's so important that, when we look at these initiatives, we're trying to find the best possible people in order to make sure that this project is, in fact, successful. If anybody can do it, Mr. Reimer can do it.

I was out and had the opportunity to tour the site. It's getting closer. The process that you have to go through in order to get those hoops done and the process of which the water storage and those other issues through the environmental licensing is horrendous, and it does take a lot of time, so we're

glad that the provincial government, we're glad that the federal government has seen the wisdom of trying to look at other alternatives. There are going to be some stumbling blocks there in regard to that, and that's in the processing of this fish. We have to make sure we take it to that next step as well. Unfortunately, the way the system is set up with the processing is also going to be one of those areas that we're going to have to look at in order to make sure that, in fact, those fish are produced and processed right here in Manitoba without having to have them shipped out. I know the fingerlings that are coming from Ontario are important as well. We'd like to see those grown right here in Manitoba as well. We certainly want to make sure that that project does move forward.

In regard to other things within the budget that affects the people of Lakeside, we did miss a lot. We did miss a lot when we look at what is actually out there in the budget for roads, sewer and water. That's so important when we are looking at rural communities. When I look back at the announcement that just came through from the Saskatchewan government in farm and ranch water infrastructure—and my colleague from Ste. Rose talked about the PFRA—one of the initiatives that's put forward by the federal government and the provincial government is \$52.8 million in southwestern Saskatchewan to expand the wide support and development of secure water services and resources to mitigate the effects of drought, for farmers, ranchers, municipalities, Indian bands and also those communities which need community wells, large diameter wells and on-farm wells. Cheaper buried pipelines, dugouts—there's some \$60,000 available for each applicant, to a maximum of \$150,000 per R.M. or Indian band.

It goes on to also talk about the voluntary food safety programs that are also so important: on the farm food safety, post-farm food safety, bio security, traceability program. It goes into quite amount of detail, and they talk about environmental planning as well—another some \$32 million. Agriculture innovation and commercialization, \$50.7 million. Farm business programming, \$27.3 million, in assisting producers in making decisions to help them get more products off the farm gate and onto the plate of the consumer.

What we boil down to, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that, when we look at the budget for the province of Manitoba, it is 200-and-some million dollars. The Province of Saskatchewan just increased theirs by

\$177 million to bring it into excess of \$440 million, substantially different numbers from when we look at the overall investment in the agriculture industry.

Also, we heard a lot of talk about the disaster dollars that were placed in regard to the flooding that went in the Interlake region and also into the West Lake region. I do want to pay tribute to James Bezan. There's been a lot of talk about what he's done and also the fact that he did work with the federal government and the provincial government in order to ensure that there was, in fact, money in place for the ag recovery program in order to help offset some of those forced sales of livestock within that area.

Unfortunately, there were some areas that were missed, and I'll stand up for the Member for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson). I'll stand up for people of the other rural reserves that were missed out and those communities of Woodlands, Rockwood and St. Andrews and ask that the minister take another look at it. We've had an opportunity to look at this particular situation, and it's unfortunate that rain doesn't know boundaries when we look at municipal boundaries, provincial boundaries. We need to make sure we look on a case-by-case basis. If we have to go back and revisit that particular issue, I would encourage the minister to do that. She has the staff; she has the wherewithal; it's whether or not she has the political will to do it. We would encourage her to do it, not only on behalf of the people of Lakeside but also people in the constituency of Gimli.

I know that there have been a number of people that have called the minister's office on this particular issue and also have contacted me, contacted the federal government, and we can take the leadership role. We can show the fact that there is a need there, a fact that rain knows no boundary, that, in fact, for those that need those dollars to be put in place, they'd certainly be allowed to have that same opportunity that's been afforded to those others within the province of Manitoba.

We also want to be assured that all Manitobans are—in fact, there are other areas within the province which were also very hard hit by the heavy rain—

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable Member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) will have 20 minutes remaining.

The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, April 14.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 9, 2009

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