

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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ALLAN, Nancy, Hon.	St. Vital	N.D.P.
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	N.D.P.
BLADY, Sharon	Kirkfield Park	N.D.P.
BLAIKIE, Bill, Hon.	Elmwood	N.D.P.
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BRAUN, Erna	Rossmere	N.D.P.
BRICK, Marilyn	St. Norbert	N.D.P.
BRIESE, Stuart	Ste. Rose	P.C.
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CULLEN, Cliff	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard	Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary, Hon.	Concordia	N.D.P.
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DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	P.C.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	P.C.
GRAYDON, Cliff	Emerson	P.C.
HAWRANIK, Gerald	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
HICKES, George, Hon.	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
HOWARD, Jennifer	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
JENNISSSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	N.D.P.
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LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
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STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon.	Dauphin-Roblin	N.D.P.
SWAN, Andrew, Hon.	Minto	N.D.P.
TAILLIEU, Mavis	Morris	P.C.
WHITEHEAD, Frank	The Pas	N.D.P.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, April 14, 2009

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYER

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 16—The Police Services Act

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I move, seconded by the minister of child and family services, that Bill 16, The Police Services Act; Loi sur les services de police, be now read a first time.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable Attorney General, seconded by the honourable Minister of Family Services and Housing (Mr. Mackintosh), that Bill 16, The Police Services Act, be now read a first time.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, the tabling of this bill marks the occasion of the complete rewriting of the police act of the province of Manitoba to make it into a modern and made-in-Manitoba act.

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

PETITIONS

Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Day

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): I have a petition that I'd like to present to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition.

Each year in Manitoba, many families experience the heartbreaking loss of an infant through miscarriage, at the time of birth, or shortly thereafter.

During this time of grief, families require support, understanding, and in many cases, the financial means to assume funeral and monument costs for their children. Unfortunately, the cost of a funeral for an infant that never left the hospital is usually not covered by private insurance plans.

Affording these children a dignified burial can help parents and family members work through their grief. Heaven's Little Angels, a registered charity based in Winnipeg, exists to help eligible families

fund funeral and monument costs for the infant they have lost.

Building awareness within the greater community of the challenges faced by these families is a positive and proactive means of establishing support and understanding within the community. Each of the 50 U.S. states commemorate Infant Loss Awareness Day annually on October 15.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To encourage the Minister of Family Services and Housing (Mr. Mackintosh) to consider establishing Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Day in Manitoba in order to increase awareness, support and understanding of the difficulties faced by families who have lost an infant.

This petition is signed by Otto Kemerle, Merlyn Onyschuk, Alain Delay and many, many others, Mr. Speaker.

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

Long-Term Care Facility—Morden

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

The background for this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

beds remain available for acute-care patients instead of waiting placement clients.

This is signed by Ken Letkeman, Vic Peters, Helen Thiessen and many, many others.

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 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.

This is signed by D. Sisko, Y. Sisko, W. McKelvey and many, many other fine Manitobans. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Neepawa, Gladstone, Ste. Rose, McCreary— Family Doctors

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.

Access to family doctors is vital to good primary health care. Patients depend on their family doctors

for many things, including their routine health-care needs, preventative care and referrals for diagnostic tests and appointments with specialists.

Family doctors in Neepawa, Gladstone and Ste. Rose are unable to accept new patients. The nearby community of McCreary has not had a doctor available to take patients in months.

Without a family doctor, residents of this large geographical area have no option but to look for family doctors in communities as far away as Brandon and Winnipeg.

Residents of these communities are suffering because of the provincial government's continuing failure to effectively address the shortage of doctors in rural Manitoba.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) to consider prioritizing the needs of these communities by ensuring they have access to a family doctor.

To urge the Minister of Health to consider promptly increasing the use of nurse practitioners in these communities in order to improve access to quality health care.

This petition is signed by Mack Wollmann, Steve Regoski, Steven Wollmann and many, many other fine Manitobans.

* (13:40)

Paved Shoulders for Trans-Canada Highway

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

The lack of paved shoulders on the Manitoba portions of the Trans-Canada Highway poses a serious safety risk for motorists, cyclists and pedestrians alike.

This risk was borne out again with the tragic June 2008 deaths of two cyclists travelling east of Virden on the Trans-Canada Highway and injuries sustained by two other cyclists.

Subsequently, the Government of Manitoba has indicated it will pave the shoulders on the Trans-Canada Highway but has not provided a time frame for doing so.

Manitoba's Assistant Deputy Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation told a Winnipeg radio station on October 16, 2007, that when it comes to highway's projects, the provincial government has a "flexible response program."

In the interests of protecting public safety, it is critical that the paving of the shoulders on the Trans-Canada Highway in Manitoba be completed as soon as possible.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) to consider making the completion of the paving of the shoulders on the Trans-Canada Highway an urgent provincial government priority.

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to clearly articulate a time frame for paving the shoulders on the Trans-Canada Highway in Manitoba

This petition is signed by Stuart Isaac, Stan Barty, Loretta Langlois and many, many others, Mr. Speaker.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table the Report of the Agricultural Producers' Organization Certification Agency representing the Certification of a Qualified Organization.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Provincial Ice Jams and Flooding

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): The last several weeks have been extremely difficult as Manitobans prepare for the spring flood on three fronts: unprecedented ice jams, rapidly rising river levels and overland flooding.

Over the last few days, we have seen the effective use of the floodway and the Portage Diversion, reducing water levels by five feet in Winnipeg. As water levels continue to rise due to rain, increased flows on the Red, the arrival of the Assiniboine River crest and increased flow on local tributaries, we're urging all Manitobans to remain diligent in their flood-fighting efforts.

The latest forecast indicates that water levels on the Red River are now expected to be higher than 2006, being closer if not exceeding those of 1979. We estimate that water levels north of the city of Winnipeg exceeded those of 1997 due to unprecedented ice jams.

This past weekend, we saw the devastating impacts of the unprecedented ice jamming in the communities of Breezy Point, St. Andrews and St. Clements. Luckily, residents were evacuated in time and no one was hurt. Early estimates indicate that over 200 homes were affected by the ice and extreme flooding.

Mr. Speaker, we announced that we would be there to provide disaster financial assistance. We're currently focussed on ring dike closures in the Red River Valley. Evacuations are under way in the communities of Riverside and Roseau River First Nation. As the temperature increases, we will also be addressing overland flooding.

It's also with the most sincere regret that I received the news of the elderly couple who were overtaken by the Woody River as they attempted to cross during the unexpectedly strong current. Our thoughts are with their families in this difficult moment.

Today, the Premier (Mr. Doer) is touring with the Prime Minister and the Honourable Vic Toews in order to show them first-hand the extreme conditions Manitobans face each year as the result of spring flooding.

In closing, I'd like to thank the municipal leaders and staff, provincial staff and the thousands of volunteers for their efforts in protecting their neighbours and communities.

Mr. Speaker, if I could say, it is a testament to the spirit of Manitobans that when we're faced with adversity, we work together. Thank you.

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

We also would want to commend and thank those municipal leaders, residents and volunteers who have been working so diligently over the past couple of weeks in communities from Emerson to Breezy Point in order to prepare for the rising waters on the Red River.

We know that municipalities have been working well together and that Emergency Measures staff and staff of other government departments have been working hard in order to address the situation that has presented itself to Manitobans over the past short while.

Mr. Speaker, we want to extend our concern and certainly our good wishes to those residents of Breezy Point, Petersfield and communities throughout the R.M.s of St. Andrews and St. Clements as they deal with the damage to their homes caused by flooding over the past couple of days.

We also want to extend our sympathy to the family and friends of Mary and Glen Silverthorn of Birch River, who very tragically passed away or were overtaken by the Woody River in the past couple of days.

Mr. Speaker, we have some concern, which we will address as we go forward, about the lack of notice and the contrasting pieces of information that seem to be coming from one hour to the next from government and announcements that had been made which turned out to not reflect the reality of what has been taking place on the ground. We will certainly deal with those issues through question period, but we will continue to call on the government to be diligent, to be forthcoming and to be accountable to citizens as we meet the great challenge ahead.
[interjection]

So the Attorney General (Mr. Chomiak), who is chattering away from his seat, is feeling defensive. I can understand that governments often feel defensive in these circumstances, but, Mr. Speaker, it is the job of the opposition to continue to hold them to account and to call on them to exercise the highest level of diligence possible in the circumstances. Thank you.

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

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

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, first, let me mention the elderly couple who have died near Woody River. Our condolences go out to family and friends. Certainly, none of us would like this tragedy to happen, but we've experienced the power of the floodwaters and the ice, and certainly it's not something to take for granted. All of us should be aware of the dangers that are associated with the conditions that we have in Manitoba at the moment.

I would like to echo the thanks to the volunteers, to the municipal leaders, to staff. I was on Sunday morning, after a call, in the area of St. Clements along the river north of Selkirk, and what I can tell you is that people had the highest praise for the local officials, the work that they were doing around the clock under incredible and difficult circumstances.

I would also say that it was very apparent that people in that area were very traumatized by the circumstances of a flood reaching levels that nobody had ever expected and they had been led to believe would never be achieved.

So my heart goes out to those who have been severely affected by the flood, and we just hope as the flood continues that we don't have more such circumstances happening.

* (13:50)

ORAL QUESTIONS

Provincial Ice Jams and Flooding Communication to Public

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Over the past few days we have seen the suffering and the heartbreak of many Manitobans who have lost their homes and have seen damage to their property as a result of the rising water north of the city. We've had reports from many residents south of the city of Winnipeg about rapidly rising and dropping water levels over the last number of days, which has created a significant level of anxiety in those communities south of the city of Winnipeg. We've also seen a rising level of concern among residents within the city of Winnipeg about the rising and dropping water levels within the city of Winnipeg and the impact that it could have on residents within the city.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Manitobans understand the awesome power of Mother Nature. Certainly, here in Manitoba, water and ice have been essential features of our province since Lake Agassiz drained away, but over the past five days there's been growing concern about the competence of the government in providing timely and accurate information to Manitobans who are impacted by the operations of the floodway, who are impacted by ice jamming as it occurs and rising water levels. The appearance is of a government that is lurching from crisis to crisis with last-minute requests for evacuations and changes in terms of the plans for the operation of the floodway, no notice or little notice in terms of the operation of the floodway and the communities affected by that.

What we see, Mr. Speaker, after months of spin and announcements about the new and improved floodway and an announcement just a few weeks ago of an ice-jam strategy which came from the government, we see no connection between what is actually happening and the spin that the government was providing to Manitobans in advance of this event.

Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the minister: What is he doing to restore public confidence in the information coming from government as they deal with these very serious circumstances impacting their homes and their properties?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): Mr. Speaker, in my statement to the House just a few minutes ago, I talked about how in difficult times Manitobans come together. I want to just contrast what's happening right now with the visit of our Prime Minister and the Honourable Vic Toews with the Premier (Mr. Doer) and the co-operative working relationship we have with the federal government, the co-operative working relationship we have with the affected municipalities and the many dedicated staff who worked countless hours over the past weekend to evacuate people, to save lives, to deal with unprecedented circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition may have chosen another course, but this government will follow the Manitoba tradition: In difficult times we work together.

Mitigation Strategy for Lake Winnipeg

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I understand the instinct of any government to not want to have to respond to questions on the most serious issue confronting the residences of the people of Manitoba today. We have many people who've been impacted quite severely, and we're hearing this directly from Manitobans in communities throughout the R.M.s of St. Andrews and St. Clements, communities such as Selkirk, Breezy Point and others, people who are saying, why is it that the government is advertising one thing when, in fact, something else is taking place? Why aren't we getting the warnings that we are entitled to? Why is it that the government seems to be making things up as they go along after this major investment in the floodway, after the major announcement three weeks ago about an ice-jam strategy? People are looking for the government to

be as candid and as forthright and as timely as they can with information as the situation develops.

Now, I want to ask the minister: Given the rising level of the water in the Red River as the melt is now under way as temperatures rise and then the fact that Lake Winnipeg continues to be frozen solid, can the minister indicate what planning is under way to deal with that scenario? What scenario could arise as a result of the Red River—[interjection] Well, the members opposite, it's a serious, important question. We're giving them an opportunity to anticipate what is an easily anticipated situation.

With a frozen Lake Winnipeg and rising waters in the Red River Valley, what scenarios have they looked at in that event, and what plans does the government have to deal with whatever scenario may arise as the water in the Red River Valley rises and Lake Winnipeg continues to be frozen solid?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I note that the Leader of the Opposition talked about the floodway. I want to note that last Wednesday, the unusual but not unprecedented operation of the floodway was started because of the fact that you had levels that put at jeopardy the city of Winnipeg. I want to indicate that the operation of the floodway combined with the other parts of our flood mitigation system, particularly the Portage Diversion, led to a drop during critical periods of upwards of five feet. That saved many Manitobans, many Winnipeggers inside the floodway, just as the ring dikes, the community ring dikes, that have been built post-'97 are making a difference in the Red River Valley.

So I hope the member opposite will acknowledge the positive benefits of the floodway because, once again, it's come to our rescue.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, for three years, we've been calling on the government to finish the floodway project by raising all of the bridges over the floodway. We've been calling on them to raise the level of the bridge on St. Mary's Road—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let's have a little decorum here. I need to hear the questions and the answers in case there's a breach of a rule, and if there's a breach of a rule, I'm sure you would expect me to deal with that issue. In order to do that, I have to be able to hear the questions and the answers. I ask the co-operation of all honourable members, please.

Mr. McFadyen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The failure to raise the bridge at St. Mary's Road is what created the ice jam only one kilometre into the floodway, which is what created the risk that the government was confronted with at the end of last week.

So we can avoid a repeat of the mistakes of the past, I want to ask the minister if he could respond to the question that was just posed which relates to things that could happen in the coming weeks. What is the plan to deal with rising water levels in the Red River Valley given the fact that Lake Winnipeg continues to be frozen solid? Is he confident in the government's plans, and what steps are being taken to protect all Manitobans south of Lake Winnipeg as the water rises and the lake remains frozen?

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Speaker, the operation of the floodway made a significant difference again. I would also suggest that the Leader of the Opposition might have taken the time to, if he didn't want to go and see what was happening at the bridge directly, some of the aerial footage because at no time was there an issue with the height of the bridge.

The discussions around the floodway expansion, Mr. Speaker, were always entirely with regard to capacity. With the construction of the notches at the floodway, the engineers—and, by the way, I'm not an engineer but neither is the Leader of the Opposition—determined the course of action. I want to stress again that we operated the floodway; it was the right thing to do.

He may want to criticize different elements. Our approach was we acted and it did make a difference, a dramatic difference, right here in the city of Winnipeg. We're proud of that.

Red River Floodway Communication to Public

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, I continue to hear concerns from residents upstream of the floodway gates, and a common concern is lack of notice and lack of information. As we know, over the weekend, river levels fluctuated dramatically. The *Floodway Control Structure Rules of Operation* state, and I quote: "For ongoing information a 1-800 number should be established that would provide current information of gate operations, potential impacts on water levels, and forecasts for the next few days." It also states this information is to be included on the Water Stewardship Web site.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the Minister of Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick) if she can share that 1-800 number with us and indicate whether it has indeed been posted on the Manitoba Water Stewardship Web site.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to make it very clear that when it was determined on Wednesday that the levels in the city of Winnipeg were going to place significant risk for residences in the city of Winnipeg, that's when the decision was made to operate the floodway with the unusual but not unprecedented circumstances of still having ice in the system.

I want to stress, Mr. Speaker, that the ice itself makes calibration difficult. Once again, I'm not an engineer but neither is the Member for Morris. That was the advice from our technical staff. I also want to indicate that we immediately made the municipal office and emergency personnel available, contacted people immediately. We do have a Web site. We do have a toll-free number. Information is available, but our first action was to get out there and talk to real people about the situation.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say this. We've acted for Winnipeg but we also acted in the valley, \$130-million worth of protection that can make a significant difference to this flood.

Operation Authority

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, the floodway operating rules are found under the Department of Water Stewardship, and over the weekend the Minister responsible for Emergency Measures said that he ordered the operation of the floodway. Last week, he said it was the Minister of Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick) that had ordered the operation of the floodway.

So, for clarification, I would like to know who on that side of the House ordered the operation of the floodway. Who's responsible for the ongoing daily operations of the floodway, if anyone?

* (14:00)

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): I didn't see the Member for Morris at any of the media briefings, so I don't know, quite frankly, what she's talking about, Mr. Speaker.

The decision was made. She knows the act, Mr. Speaker. She knows what happened last Wednesday. We were very up front. That was the first thing we

did, made sure Manitobans knew about it, but I hope that the member opposite isn't questioning that decision.

It was the right decision. We acted to protect Winnipeggers, just as over the last 10 years we have put \$130 million into protecting the Red River Valley.

To put it into perspective, Mr. Speaker, we are at or close to a 1979 flood. In 1979, upwards of 10,000 Manitobans were evacuated.

What a difference we've made in the last 30 years, and I'm proud that we as Manitobans, when faced with adversity, we work together. We don't nitpick, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Taillieu: Mr. Speaker, I know probably more than a number of people in this House the adverse effects of flooding and how it impacts people not only south of the floodway but through the city and north of the city, because I've seen those floods and I continue to be in contact with the people, my residents and constituents south of the city.

Mr. Speaker, many residents north of the city say they were caught off guard and flooded despite their best efforts. I would just, again, like to ask the Minister of Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick) if she can indicate what notice was given to residents north of the city when the floodway was put into operation, and, if she didn't do it, who did she direct to notify property owners north of the city of Winnipeg.

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Speaker, clearly the member—I just caution the member; sometimes a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, if she thinks she knows more than others.

I tell you, nobody knows more about the flood situation, Mr. Speaker, than those that went through it, and let's not forget, as we stand here in this Legislature and, unfortunately, turn this very difficult situation into more of our standard approach in question period, that there are a lot of people going through a very traumatic situation. That is what is most important.

And I want to note, Mr. Speaker, that the impact of the operation of the floodway is upstream, south of the floodway, and indeed people were informed. At no time did the level rise above the incoming crest but, you know, north of the city—since March 23, we've been dealing with an unprecedented combination of flow and of ice jamming.

I want to stress that the municipalities and our staff work 24/7—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Gang Activity

Zero Tolerance Policy for Court Order Breaches

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, the Winnipeg Police Association has indicated that one of the strategies in dealing with gangs is moving to a zero tolerance policy and ensuring that every single breach of bail or probation is enforced on a gang member.

Winnipeg's police chief said last month that after gang members who were breaching their conditional orders from the courts, that they should be acted upon as quickly as possible and that this was being looked into, a zero tolerance policy.

Can the minister tell us after nine years in government why there isn't today a zero tolerance policy on gang members who are breaching their court orders?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to be part of a government that's put in place a gang suppression strategy that actually has interagency police working on gangs and an overall strategy, in fact, that we've brought and we've shared it with all levels of government and we've been given credit, I think, for probably having the most proactive gang strategy in the country.

I'm very curious as to why, when we doubled the amount of money we were putting in the Spotlight program to deal with gang members on probation, et cetera, the member opposite said it was a waste of money.

Seizure of Assets

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, their strategies are put in place and the problem gets worse and worse both in Winnipeg and throughout Manitoba.

Representatives of the Winnipeg police force have said that one of the ways to break up gangs is to seize their assets, the profits that they're getting from committing crimes. Over the past several years, we've seen other provinces like British Columbia be very successful in seizing vehicles, cash and property from gangs who are getting them from the operation of their criminal activities.

In Manitoba, there have been several announcements, several laws brought in, but we haven't seen the results. I wonder if the Minister of Justice can tell Manitobans the total value of assets that have been seized from gangs in Manitoba over the last nine years.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, the member might know that the safer communities act that we put into place, that was led by the former member, has now been copied by almost every province in the country. And when we met with B.C., the actual ministers responsible, they wanted details of the fact that we've closed over 300 sites with respect to crack houses, prostitution, et cetera.

The member also knows—I think he's being a little bit too cute by half—we agreed, during the last review of the legislation we brought in on criminal property forfeiture that we would do a regular reporting to the House on that. He knows that, Mr. Speaker.

I think that he will find, as we have found, that the legislation we've brought in place should be more effective when we are operational, and we've copied some of the techniques that have worked in Ontario and B.C., as they've copied some of the techniques we've used here—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Reduction Strategy

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Well, it's going to have to be more effective because they haven't taken a dollar to this point, Mr. Speaker.

Last week, the United States Drug Enforcement Agency again cited Manitoba as a key source of drugs entering to the United States. Another U.S. DEA report indicated that Winnipeg was a growing area for drug trafficking of drugs, both in Manitoba and, of course, going into the U.S. as well. The drugs that are grown and sold here in Manitoba and shipped into the United States are often paid in kind with illegal guns that are coming back. More drugs plus more gangs equals more guns.

Does the Minister of Justice have any tangible plan, any specific goals on how he's going to rid the province of guns, drugs and gangs? Is there any plan in place with any goals in place to measure success?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, the unprecedented number of gang members that have been successfully

convicted under this government is unprecedented, virtually demolishing the Hells Angels that were allowed to grow during the lean and mean years of the 1990s, when the government didn't care what happened out there, when a thousand nurses were fired, when budgets were slashed, when the government just let—they closed the funding to Indian and Métis Friendship Centres—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Chomiak: —didn't care, and we're paying the costs. We're paying the costs of the uncaring, unsympathetic, mean-spirited government of the '90s.

But we have programs in place, Mr. Speaker, and they are recognized across the country as being some of the most effective across the country.

Crime

Unreported Incidents

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Steinbach, on a new question? On a new question?

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): This is like a juke box that only has one record. No matter what button you press, you get the same song over and over again.

The violent crime rate is bad under any measure, 15 percent increases in assaults and stabbings last year alone. Of course, unfortunately, we saw horrific acts of violence in Winnipeg and throughout Manitoba over the weekend.

Just as concerning as these numbers is the fact that there are certainly more crimes that aren't going reported in Manitoba. Many of the victims of crimes don't even bother to report their crimes because they don't believe that anything is going to happen to the criminal or anything is going to happen in the system under the NDP government.

Does the Minister of Justice have any estimate as to how many crimes are going unreported in the province of Manitoba?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, the Criminal Code is operated by the federal government, who make the laws. We are responsible for administration of justice in the province.

As the member knows, Mr. Speaker, there was a little while ago, when he was standing up and saying Manitoba was the car-theft capital of the world, we put in place measures, WATSS, the immobilizer

program, and the finding is that we've dropped it down 60 percent, and members opposite voted against and complained against every one of those strategies.

So, Mr. Speaker, it's almost pointless for us to point out the measures that we've undertaken because the members opposite are not prepared to work with us. All they are prepared to do, like they do on the flood, like they do on everything in this Legislature, is criticize and complain and blame, and people don't want that kind of politics anymore. People want politicians to work together to solve problems—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Victimization Surveys

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I understand that the Minister of Justice has his phony anger routine down, when he likes to give it in the House day after day, but we are offering suggestions and we are offering solutions.

Statistics Canada has said that 88 percent of sexual assaults, 69 percent of household thefts and 60 percent of physical assaults are going unreported. Victimization surveys overcome this underreporting by doing surveys of the general public and asking people if they've been the victim of crime regardless if they've reported that crime.

While the reported numbers in Manitoba are bad enough, to deal with the crime issue we need to know the depth of the problem. I want to ask the minister very specifically: Will he consider doing a province-wide victimization survey so we can see the depth of crime in Manitoba and whether or not we're making progress on it?

* (14:10)

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, the member knows that all that information is collected federally by Stats Canada and is provided almost on a monthly basis, which gives him the basis of questions that he asked.

Mr. Speaker, the most important thing I think that we have to understand is that we have more police now on the streets in Winnipeg than any other time in history, and the member opposite voted against every increase in police that we've brought forward. He's voted against every increase in prosecutors. It's up by something like 50 percent. They voted against every measure on police officers, on corrections officers and on prosecutors. They

voted against it and then they stand up in the Legislature and talk about reporting crimes.

I think our actions speak much louder than the angry cries that I hear from members opposite who, during the '90s, savaged all of those programs.

Mr. Goertzen: More phony anger from the Minister of Justice but no answers to real solutions that are being put forward both by other parties and by the Winnipeg police.

Mr. Speaker, the minister is wrong when he says that there's a monthly report on victimizations. In fact, Statistics Canada does that reporting once every five years. Victimization surveys are not being used generally in the provinces or in Canada.

I'm asking the Minister of Justice whether or not he'll take a positive step in ensuring that we have victimization surveys in Manitoba, so we can see the depth of the problem of crime, whether or not he'll commit to that and to making those results public, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Chomiak: I'm very proud to be part of a government that brought in the Victims' Bill of Rights, the first of its kind, I believe, in Canada and North America that provided, actually, people that work with victims of crime. The member may not know it, but there is something like 50 or 60 people in the Department of Justice who work with victims of crime. The member may not know it, but there's something like a thousand calls that come in every month dealing with domestic violence and matters of that that are worked with by people of the Department of Justice.

The member ought to know that the previous government cut victims' services. We brought it back, put in millions of dollars, have many people working on it, Mr. Speaker, and actually identify, legislatively and by mandate, victims. That's action, not political talk.

Crime Recidivism Rates

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons why Manitoba's violent crime rate continues to grow is because the vast majority of criminals who leave provincial jails are right back in trouble a very short time later. Between 70 percent and 100 percent of inmates leaving a provincial jail will be back in trouble with the law very quickly according to stats provided by Manitoba Justice.

In other jurisdictions it was considered an emergency, Mr. Speaker, when the re-offence rate was over 50 percent. In Manitoba, the Minister of Justice seems to think that 70 percent to 100 percent is acceptable.

After nine years of failure, what strategy does the Minister of Justice have to reduce the re-offence rate in Manitoba?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, I want to remind members opposite that it's more than just the unprecedented 210 extra police officers in Winnipeg, the additional RCMP, the 60 percent expansion of prosecution services, the almost doubling of the corrections, the expansion of Milner Ridge. It's the programs for mental health. It's the programs for addictions. It's the programs for behavioural therapy. It's the programs like Spotlight that have a probation officer and a mentor work with an offender on the street—that members opposite said was a waste of money—that has kept those offenders off of re-offending.

Mr. Speaker, while crime, mental health, addiction and social poverty are all interrelated with those issues, we have programming in place that deals with those issues, and I am very proud of the record we have on those areas.

Correctional Facilities Therapeutic Drug Treatment

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, all those programs and absolutely no results.

Our re-offence rate of prisoners is high and our violent crime rate is high because of drugs and addiction. Police officials have regularly said that 80 percent of crime is related to drugs and addiction. Both our party and the Winnipeg Police Association have said there needs to be an intense addiction treatment program while in jail for those who commit crimes, because those who commit crimes are committing crimes because of drug addiction.

We have called on the government to ensure a needed new prison has a focus on drug addiction therapy, Mr. Speaker. Will the Minister of Justice commit to a new prison dedicated to therapeutic drug treatment?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, I would rather put in place a program to prevent those children and kids

from getting addicted before they become involved in crime. I hope members opposite join us with our support to the federal government on changing the Criminal Code to take away the two-for-one provision that will mean people have access to programs sooner rather than be in remand, because the member ought to know that under the present regime, an individual is not found guilty and will stay in remand and continues to stay in remand at two-for-one or, sometimes, like in the case of Calgary, three-for-one. You can't provide them with programming unless they volunteer. That is a serious problem, which is why we've been urging the federal government to change the Criminal Code for five or six years.

Do they support our changes that we've asked the federal government to bring to the Criminal Code on the two-for-one? Do they support that?

Crime Reduction Strategy

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): The Minister of Justice continues to rely on initiatives by the federal government to change the Criminal Code. What he fails to recognize is the Criminal Code is the same in Manitoba as it is in any other province. The difference is our crime rate is much higher.

Mr. Speaker, the violence in Winnipeg and Manitoba is serious and it's growing. The formula is clear. Addiction is causing a high demand for drugs. Drugs provide cash for gangs. Gangs bring in guns and violence. But there are solutions, strategies of zero tolerance on court breaches for gang members. Let's strip the cash from gangs. Let's have proper measurement of crime. Let's have drug therapy in prisons. These are only some of the solutions.

Will the Minister of Justice look to any solutions, or do Manitobans have to simply accept more violence until a government with a will to change things replaces this government?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): That's one of the reasons why we signed a tripartite agreement with the federal government to deal with crime prevention recently, Mr. Speaker. I stood up with the federal Minister of Treasury Board and announced that program, and he indicated that he was very supportive of what we've done in Manitoba.

I don't know who they're talking to, Mr. Speaker. They seem to talk to a very small group of people. If you look at the situation with respect to gang and

gang violence, we've said it's the No. 1 problem here and all across Canada, and it's something that people have to wake up to. We've been on that for several years. We have many programs. We work with the other provinces. We've co-ordinated our prosecutions with Ontario and Québec to get across the barriers of provinces. We signed an agreement with the other provinces to deal with it, and our gang suppression strategy is amongst the leading in the country.

Crime Reduction Strategy

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): I think it's telling that this government's been in power so long they think they shouldn't have to face questions in question period.

At the risk, Mr. Speaker, of upsetting the very fragile and at times angry Attorney General, I want to ask him about the fact that Winnipeg has recently received the dubious distinction of being labelled the second most dangerous city in Canada. Dr. Rob Grierson, a doctor and medical director for the Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service, says that he sees at least one stabbing victim a shift, and Dr. Wes Palatnick, medical director for the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, says there's a rise in violence in Winnipeg because of the growth of gangs and illegal drugs. This is what people are saying who work on the ground.

I want to ask the minister: Who does he blame for this, the federal government, prior provincial governments, or his government?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, unlike members opposite, we're not looking to blame. We're looking to solve. We are looking to solve the problem. That's part of the problem with the Progressive Conservative platform. They want to point to people. They don't want to work with people to solve problems. That's why we have programs that work, Lighthouse programs that keep schools and recreation centres open 24 hours a day. There are over 60 centres that are now doing that. That's why we have training programs. That's why we have the Spotlight program. That's why we've dropped auto theft by 60 percent. And, by the way, stats about being the second, that's a *Maclean's* article that was put out about a month ago.

We get the same tired questions from members opposite, when, in fact, they do not understand what it's like out there. They should leave this building

some time, talk to some of the people out there. Then they'll get the impression what's happening on the streets.

* (14:20)

Mr. McFadyen: Well, if he's not happy with *Maclean's* magazine as a source, maybe he should look at what Harris/Decima research has found, which indicates that 57 percent of Manitobans believe crime is worsening and another 32 percent indicate that it's not improving; 89 percent of Manitobans either believe crime is getting worse or not getting any better. Presumably, Mr. Speaker, the other 11 percent would include the Minister of Justice and the Premier (Mr. Doer).

I want to ask the Minister of Justice: In light of these very disconcerting numbers, what is his strategy in order to change both the reality and the perception that exists among Manitobans about crime in our province?

Mr. Chomiak: I remind the Leader of the Opposition that they ran their entire last campaign from the Member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) on crime only, and that one-trick pony that Conservatives like to run on, that one-trick pony will not win you elections or by-elections, no matter how many mailings you put into places like Elmwood or The Pas, Mr. Speaker, because the issues are larger than just crime that the Tories and the Republicans in the States want to run on.

It's broader issues. It's social issues, Mr. Speaker. It's working with groups together in communities. It's education. It's equitable tax structure. It's all of those things. If the members opposite want to continue to fight crime and be their one-trick pony, let them be that. But they have to understand that the consequences—[interjection] Well, I don't mind, they've lost every—you know, well, I'll just say this: they can keep—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. McFadyen: Again, the minister is obviously angry at having to respond to questions in the House, but I would point out that no member on this side of the House has been on a U.S. photo-op tour with Republican governors, Mr. Speaker. We've been here working on the challenges that our province faces, including the issues of poverty, which their party has not addressed in spite of their promises to the contrary, on the issues of addiction and other areas that are significant issues within our province.

We have now an indication from the chief of police, Keith McCaskill, who said that over the past several years, they've seen an increase in gangs touting guns and that officers are encountering more violence and more situations where the people they're dealing with are carrying guns.

Mr. Speaker, what is the Attorney General's strategy? We've now asked the question several times. Rather than a partisan rant, how about a strategy for addressing the challenges that this province is facing?

Mr. Chomiak: Suppression, intervention and consequences are part of the overall strategy. If I went through the list of programs, I wouldn't have enough time to provide it to the member opposite.

The member ought to know that we've recently, in western Canada, got together with all the ministers to talk about gang violence, which is particularly acute in Vancouver and Calgary and large urban centres. But what members opposite probably do not know is it extends into rural and into northern Manitoba. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the police act that was tabled today has within it some provisions to provide for police cadets, auxiliary police to help deal with this issue.

I'll be very curious to see how members opposite vote, not only on the budget that includes programs for police, but on the police act and other measures to improve the situation on the ground. It will be very interesting to see how that member votes when the time comes to stand up and do a vote.

Provincial Ice Jams and Flooding Communication to Public

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, in the middle of the night, late Saturday, early Sunday morning, people were told that they had to evacuate their homes. Some were given only 10 minutes to leave. These homes were built according to government specifications, high enough, according to the government, that they would not be flooded and yet they were flooded.

Can the minister indicate to this weekend's flood victims in the regions north of Selkirk, in St. Clements and St. Andrews, why his government failed to anticipate the level to which the water rose and why the victims of the flood were so badly informed by this government when they built their homes?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to note, first of all, that there were many homes that predate many of the planning processes we have in place. I think that's important. That is not to point fingers or to blame anyone; that's just a historic reality, and we all feel for every single person that has been flooded regardless of what level they're at.

The second point is we, as a province, since '97, have been dramatically shifting our planning, so that we don't build below previously established flood levels. That is why, in addition to the ring dikes that have been put in place, we do have '97 levels plus two feet.

But I want to stress to the member and I'm more than prepared to provide him with a briefing with our technical staff; perhaps if he wants to talk to municipal officials. Everybody in the area said the same thing: This was unprecedented. This degree of flow in the river, this amount of ice and the strength of the ice, it was unprecedented, Mr. Speaker, and that's what happened—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, the minister's right that some of the homes date back to the mid-1800s in this area and they've never been flooded before, but some actually asked for dikes and for support and were refused because, of course, they would never flood.

Others, as the minister knows, were constructed more recently. I give you an example of Joe and Pat Smolinski who built their home just last year under this government. They were told to build it high enough, that it would never flood. Thankfully, they didn't believe the government recommendations and built it two feet higher than that but, Mr. Premier and Mr. Minister, they still needed to evacuate in 10 minutes in the middle of the night. Their garage still flooded when built at this level, higher than specified.

To the minister: Who in the government made the mistake and why was the government so wrong? Why were people north of Selkirk not protected as well as people in other areas of the Red River?

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I wish the member opposite would understand that the—in fact, the recent houses he referred to, that the municipalities and the Province have all established guidelines based on the flood record.

This was unprecedented. I said, Mr. Speaker—and I want to quote, actually, Steve Strang from St. Clements who said that what happened this weekend was the '97 equivalent for people north of Winnipeg in the three affected municipalities.

I want to stress, Mr. Speaker, that just as we did post-'97, when we sat down afterwards with the flood of record in '97, we will do the same with the affected municipalities here, but that member didn't see what happened coming on the weekend; neither did any of the officials or the municipal officials but we acted immediately and that's the most important thing.

Seven Oaks Hospital Emergency Services Reductions

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health. Imagine, if you will, that you go to the Seven Oaks Hospital at 10:30 in the morning in emergency, and a number of hours later at 7 o'clock you're told, well, you're going to require a CAT scan so you're going to have to go to the Health Sciences Centre. You wait till 6:30 a.m. Sunday morning before you're actually brought from Seven Oaks to the Health Sciences Centre in order to get a CAT scan.

I didn't say that Seven Oaks Hospital already has a CAT scan, just no one there, apparently, to run the machine. Well, Mr. Speaker, this is the type of health-care services that we are getting more of and seeing more and more of under this particular Minister of Health. It's time that this minister start investing in health-care services as opposed to bureaucracy.

What does the Minister of Health have to say about this particular individual?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, as always, if the member has a specific individual case that he wishes me to investigate, I'm very happy to do so and will look forward to receiving that information from the member. I'm happy to look into it.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, we know that in emergency room situations that triage occurs by medical professionals and that people who come in with urgent needs of course are prioritized in front of those that may have less urgent needs.

Further, Mr. Speaker, I know that the member continues to put incorrect information on the record concerning our expansion of investments in

community hospitals. I'm happy to remind the member that at Seven Oaks we've invested in several additional programs, including the refurbishment of the emergency room, staff, dialysis and the list goes on.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities— 35th Anniversary

Ms. Jennifer Howard (Fort Rouge): Mr. Speaker, the Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities is celebrating its 35th anniversary this Thursday, April 16. I rise in the House today to acknowledge the contributions of this inspiring organization. Since their establishment in 1974, the Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities has advocated for an inclusive and accessible Manitoba where we can all live, work and play to the utmost of our abilities.

People with disabilities face many barriers to exercising our fundamental rights as full citizens. The Manitoba League works to remove barriers to the services that many of us take for granted, whether it's the ability to get into a public building, receive communication in a format we can understand, or access transportation to school, work or recreation.

The league has made huge strides throughout their history. They were actively involved in advocating for the inclusion of people with disabilities in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Manitoba Human Rights Code. They were a vital voice for the creation of the first provincial Minister responsible for Persons with Disabilities in Canada, my predecessor Tim Sale.

The league has opened many doors for people with disabilities in Manitoba. They have worked with unwavering conviction that our society is better off when we make it accessible to all citizens. On behalf of all honourable members, I would like to thank all past and present board, staff and volunteer members of the league. They have truly enriched our province with their advocacy. Thank you.

* (14:30)

Ninette 125th Anniversary

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, the Turtle Mountain constituency is made up of many communities with a proud and rich history.

One of these towns recently reached a milestone that I would like members to recognize today.

Mr. Speaker, the community of Ninette recently celebrated its 125th anniversary. Ninette has an interesting and colourful history. The name of the town is believed to be derived from the French name Antoinette, for a heroine in a French Canadian novel. In 1889, Northern Pacific and Manitoba Rail line brought train service to the region, and once the rail line was established many changes took place for the small town.

Mr. Speaker, James Overend built the first store in 1899, and in 1900 the first grain elevator was built. Then in 1910, Ninette saw the opening of the sanatorium for tuberculosis patients. Under the guidance of medical superintendent David Stewart, the Ninette Sanatorium made unique contributions to the treatment of TB. For example, Ninette offered the first program of in-sanatorium training of medical students. Also, numerous studies were done and papers written by Stewart and the medical staff there. Nineteen seventy-two saw an end of an era for the sanatorium as a TB centre.

Other notable events held in Ninette include the 2004 Mobility Cup which was held at the Pelican Lake Yacht Club, and the renaming of the park, also in 2004, in memory of Terry Fox, who was baptized in the local United Church.

Many exciting events took place to celebrate Ninette's 125th. The opening ceremonies featured the unveiling of the Ninette postmark at the post office. Other events included a parade, fireworks, a garden party, free pontoon boat rides and sailboat rides on Pelican Lake.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the town of Ninette on its 125th anniversary. I would also encourage members to visit this friendly community located on the shores of beautiful Pelican Lake. Thank you.

Harry and Glenda Hobbs

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): Mr. Speaker, today I am honouring two special people, Harry and Glenda Hobbs. They have lived in Flin Flon for 33 years. They are accomplished writers who have contributed immensely to the culture of their community and province. Additionally, they are renowned for their warmth, humour, optimism and generosity.

Harry Hobbs was born and raised in Ontario and educated at Trent University, where the library at Sadleir House is named after him. He holds several degrees. He taught at Hapnot Collegiate in Flin Flon for 23 years as a teacher librarian. He was an awesome coach of the debating team. In 1976 he published his first novel.

Glenda Hobbs, a library technician for many years, worked in Winnipeg and at McIsaac elementary school. In 1985, Glenda was one of the first apprentice writers chosen to participate in the Manitoba Writers' Guild Mentor Program. She's served on the board of directors of the Canadian Authors Association of Manitoba as a regional representative since 1992. She is editor of the Flin Flon and Creighton area newsletter. She has published five books of poetry.

Harry and Glenda are an active literary team. In 1983, they established the Flin Flon Writers' Guild. Since then they have conducted various writing and public speaking workshops. They serve as writing facilitators with Writers' Village University. In 2008, they co-authored *Rocks and Rumours: Flin Flon Stories and Poems*.

Over the years, Mr. Speaker, Harry has received many notable Toastmasters honours and awards. On April 4, I had the pleasure of roasting Harry at his 40th Toastmasters anniversary. His chief roaster was Glenda. Many distinguished Toastmasters colleagues and friends from all across the province participated in this important milestone.

Mr. Speaker, Glenda and Harry are cultural treasures. I am proud to call them my friends. Thank you.

Can-Oat Milling 2009 Export Award

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, recently, Can-Oat Milling of Portage la Prairie was honoured with a very prestigious award. On March 12, the Manitoba division of the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters presented the company with the 2009 Export Award.

Each year, the Manitoba Export Award is presented to a company who demonstrates the ability to expand their markets, both geographically and numerically. Mr. Speaker, they are also required to show superiority in revenue growth, demonstrate significant and sustained export sales, have good corporate citizenship, create innovative designs and add to corporate line and expand employment, particularly in Manitoba and Canada. Can-Oat

Milling was chosen for this award because of its exemplary performance in all these areas.

Can-Oat Milling is an affiliate of Viterra, is the largest industrial supplier of oat products in the world with a yearly production capacity of more than 500 million pounds of oat products. In 1991, Can-Oat Milling opened its first facility in Portage la Prairie. Strong product demand led the company to open another plant in Saskatoon in 1997 and a third in Barrhead, Alberta, in 2006. These facilities are strategically placed to supply the west coast and Pacific export markets with the highest quality oat products, while the Portage la Prairie plant exports approximately 90 percent of its products to the United States, and the remainder is primarily exported to South America and Australia.

I would like to offer congratulations on behalf of all honourable members to CEO, Mr. Karl Gerrand, and all the personnel of Can-Oat Milling for receiving the 2009 Export Award. This is, indeed, a well-deserved recognition for which they should all be very proud. Thank you very much.

Health-Care Services Government Record

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, every year hundreds of hundreds of millions of tax dollars are spent in Manitoba to try to provide good quality health-care services to all Manitobans.

What we are witnessing more and more the longer this government seems to be in power is abuse of spending tax dollars in health care, Mr. Speaker. There are more and more examples of just how badly this government is not managing the health-care file as well as it could or should be. The priority needs to be health-care services and delivering them to bedside care and beyond, as opposed to building up a bureaucrat empire, something which this government has been very effective at doing. And one has got to start to question in terms of to the degree in which that empire is, in fact, running the Department of Health and, ultimately, the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) is not able to take back control of what's actually taking place.

The example I used today, I think, Mr. Speaker, in question period, is symbolic of a very serious issue. Manitobans have a certain expectation when they go into emergency services and those expectations are not being met. Seven Oaks Hospital is not alone. I've also had contact now from Concordia Hospital representatives and individuals

saying, what about us, Kevin? Start raising the Concordia Hospital file, also.

Mr. Speaker, there are serious issues that are there and I'm calling upon the government to re-assess its priorities, start looking at services as opposed to bureaucracy, and that's where the dollar needs to be spent, on services. You can have a CAT scan machine, but if you cannot have the people to operate the CAT scan machine, why have the machine itself? Thank you.

House Business

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Pursuant to rule 31(8), I'm announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered next Tuesday will be one put forward by the Member for Wellington (Ms. Marcelino). The title of the resolution is the 100th Anniversary of Chinese Settlement in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker: Pursuant to rule 31(8), it's been announced that the private members' resolution to be considered next Tuesday will be one put forward by the honourable Member for Wellington. The title of the resolution is 100th Anniversary of Chinese Settlement in Manitoba.

*(14:40)

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

BUDGET DEBATE (Sixth Day of Debate)

Mr. Speaker: Resume 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, and the proposed motion of the honourable Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) in amendment thereto, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Lakeside, who has 20 minutes remaining.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I'll pick up where I left off on on Thursday in regard to the debate on the budget speech that was on before the break on Thursday.

But I do want to commend this reeve and staff and the council for the job they did in handling the water in Balmoral over this past weekend. I know that we did lose one home for sure, possibly others,

and also the community hall in Balmoral was flooded as the result of the overland flooding. I know the council did everything they could. They brought in the RCMP and other emergency staff to deal with that particular issue.

Also, my understanding this morning that the R.M. of St. Laurent—there are parts of Highway 6 that are also underwater as the result of overland flooding, and certainly want to commend the staff of the R.M. of St. Laurent and council as well for looking after that particular issue. We know that this issue is very important, and the municipalities take great responsibility in trying to assure that not only the assets are protected, as well as life, in order to make sure that nothing does happen in a way that's going to harm those involved.

Also, I want to reassure those people that we will do everything we can to ensure that they'll be covered under the Emergency Measures program so that those dollars, where they're not covered by the insurance, that they'll be picked up by the Province to ensure that those people do return to the way of life which they were used to prior to the overland flooding.

Also, I want to talk about the budget that I had talked about. I was on the livestock sector when we left on Thursday, and we were talking about country-of-origin labelling. Whenever we're talking about that—we started debating this issue well over two years ago—and we're very concerned about where we were going to go as a province, what was going to happen to our livestock industry. What we've seen is significant change in the way the livestock sector is being treated here in the province of Manitoba.

Now, the government talked about increasing funding for two plants: one in Neepawa, one in Brandon—the Maple Leaf plant in Brandon and the plant in Neepawa as well, and we certainly want to see that grow and prosper in the province of Manitoba. But we have a significant export market. Some nine million piglets leave the province of Manitoba, in one way or another, through being grown and processed in the United States, or, the bigger pigs that are being exported for being processed in the United States.

Now, we know that the new administration—the Democratic change with Obama—has made significant changes, with Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack, and we know that those changes are not going to benefit Manitobans as a whole. We're very

concerned about where that's going to go. My understanding is that the federal government has filed a challenge on that particular issue. Unfortunately, what we've seen here in Manitoba as a result of that is a decline in those export markets. Also, the decline in the market for those pigs, as well, has emptied out an awful lot of barns. The uncertainty that is there—but what is surprising to note, Mr. Speaker, is that we've seen an increase in Saskatchewan.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Hytek feeds or livestock, Hytek investments out of La Broquerie, have made significant changes to their operation after purchasing the Neepawa plant, and they've bought a number of those hog farms in Saskatchewan that were in trouble. The Saskatchewan government is opening their arms to them and saying: Come on over; we'll do whatever we can to ensure that your industry is very strong and sustainable in the future.

That's the type of message we need to send out to those businesses that want to look at Manitoba. I know there is another processing plant that is wanting to look at Manitoba. We encourage the government to do whatever they can to ensure that we look at all options that are available to us to help those in the pork industry stay sustainable and also looking at ways that we can encourage investment into the hog industry as a result of not only the downturn in the market but also a country-of-origin labelling. But, before I leave the country-of-origin labelling, I also want to address the fact about the beef industry.

We know, Mr. Speaker, the beef industry has also been struggling since 2003, and we do need processing plants in the province of Manitoba. The announcement with Keystone Processors in the St. Boniface area is a step in that direction. It's not a federal-inspected plant, but even if we could go to the issue that we talked about some years ago also and that we've been bringing forward, and that's interprovincial trade where at least we could export that meat to one province or the other, that would make a substantial difference to our beef producers within the province of Manitoba.

I know that we have some 29 plants, and a lot of those plants are providing the sides of beef to Keystone, which also we still only have one or two customers within the province of Manitoba that we're going to sell to. So we've got to look outside the boundaries of the province of Manitoba. We've got to look outside the boundaries of Canada in order to

look at more exports in that particular area. So we want to see that happen. We want to ensure the fact that those processing plants that are going to be developed are sustainable.

We know that the plant in Saskatchewan has certainly had their troubles. Some of the management came from that particular plant to Keystone. Now we just err on the side of caution that we do everything we can to ensure that they have the tools at their disposal in order to sustain that industry. Without the federal stamp of approval within the processing plant, it's going to make it somewhat difficult in order to look outside the province of Manitoba at those new emerging markets.

I know with the cattle industry we've had five negative years of margins that has impacted the cattle industry. A number of producers, basically up in the Interlake area and up between Eddystone and through there, it might mean livelihood is based just strictly on cattle. A lot of those people won't be able to trigger the negative margin payout that will be indeed entitled to them and, as a result of course of the flooding that came about as a result of the heavy rains that came in last year, a number of those people did sell off their herds, and we do commend the federal government and provincial government for eliminating the problem with restarting those particular producers. Hopefully, we will see those producers back in business in very short order.

I know a lot of the land in that area is ideal for pasture land. It's not the best farm land, but certainly land that would be used for pasture land as a result of that and certainly want to see whatever we can do to assist those producers in re-establishing those herds.

I am very concerned though about the age of the producers. I believe now it's somewhere in the neighbourhood of 61 to 62. I've heard reports as high as 67. We're certainly hoping to see those reports come forward and see the age actually reduced in encouraging new producers to get involved in the farming sector. Unfortunately, we haven't had the hope and the initiative from the government in order to ensure that these new producers in fact are going to have a sustaining market and a sustaining industry.

Where we've seen other provinces, Alberta and Saskatchewan, take the initiative in trying to move forward in ways to increase the livestock sector in their particular provinces, we want to ensure that we do have that happening right here within the province of Manitoba as well.

Another problem we're going to have in regard to the livestock industry is the environmental issues. I talked a little bit on Thursday about carbon sink and the initiatives that were put in the Saskatchewan budget to look at some of those issues, but when we're looking at the environmental issues for the livestock industry, we need ways to give them incentives not to plough that land under, that pasture land that's marginal land, in order to sustain their livelihood. We want to make sure that those environmental licences and the environmental issues are going to be done in a way that's going to be able to be sustainable for those farms and those businesses in order to ensure that they're done in harmonization with consultation not only with the livestock industry, but also the grain industry.

*(14:50)

And we need to do more on value-added. We need to look at issues from the gate to the plate.

Ms. Marilyn Brick, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

Madam Acting Speaker, I know there are a number of issues that came out as a result of the federal budget. In fact, Saskatchewan has initiated an extra \$216 million in non-business risk management agricultural programming in Saskatchewan over the next four years. So they're definitely open for business. We need to make sure that we do that as well here in Manitoba. We can't be sitting back waiting to find out what's going to happen in the other province. We need the leadership role now more than ever in order to sustain the livestock sector.

By doing that, what we're talking about is also the fact that, as a result of those initiatives that are going on in those other provinces, we're not left behind. I know if you talk to the investment people, whether it be in Toronto, New York, Chicago, Hong Kong, agriculture will be the way out of this economy the way we see it here today. We know there are also other challenges that'll be coming forward in regard to what I talked about earlier with young farmers. We need a succession plan in order for those young farmers to get involved, to become part of the family farm in a way that's going to be meaningful to them in order for them to be able to have the income they need to provide for their families and also be fair to the other brothers and sisters that are a part of that family operation.

Also, we've had a number of issues and talks in regard to the WTO, the World Trade Organization,

in regard to what's happening on that front. Now's the time we need strong leadership and diplomacy to meet those needs and challenges. We understand the United States has dug in their heels on a number of issues. We have, on the other hand, been very open in our process in trying to get things done in a way that was meaningful in order to try and get along with those other countries in regard to those issues regarding WTO. So we have to do our diplomacy. We have to do our challenging in a way that's going to be sustainable for all of Canada and make sure that we are, in fact, at the table in regard to the WTO.

Also, we want to talk about the fish farming, and I talked a little bit just briefly on Friday in regard to that. I talked about Rudy Reimer from Warren, Manitoba, who was doing a project in both provincial and federal funding as a result of that. We certainly want to encourage more of that within the province of Manitoba, but we want to make sure that we also have the project and the people in place in order to see that be sustainable as well.

We also talked a bit about the lobster farming. Now, I have not seen that. I've heard about it. I haven't had the opportunity to see that, but we do have a number of barns, as I talked about earlier, that are going to be empty as a result of the decline in the hog operation, not only as a result of the downturn in the market but also the export market. So there are going to be a number of those barns that will in fact be sitting empty and that's going to be a liability we certainly don't want to have put on the backs of the farmers when those buildings will be sitting empty. So we need to find ways to assist them and ways to put something in those barns that is going to be a cash flow investment for them to help them come back as a result of some of those losses in a way that's going to be sustainable for them and their families.

Also, I want to touch briefly on the financial side of things in regard to the debt. I'm very concerned about the debt when we look at the overall picture of what this province is actually going to have. Now, there's proposed legislation that hasn't been brought forward in the House. They're talking about \$20-million payment going back toward the debt where we're going to have some \$100 million overall that's certainly not going to be paid back. I was fortunate enough to have a new granddaughter in January, Grace Elizabeth, and I'm scared to death for what her future is by not paying back more than the debt that's going to be there.

So, whenever we take a look at what's going to be handed down to the generations and the next generation and the generation after that, I'm very concerned about how we're going to be doing that. The note is that how many Manitobans can increase their debt by 10 percent and decrease debt repayment by \$90 million and deplete their savings by 30 percent, and can still call their household budgets balanced. So, Madam Acting Speaker, in regard to the long-term vision of budget 2009, they didn't provide Manitobans with that long-term vision that we had hoped and expected back from this government.

When we looked at the revenue coming from Manitoba Hydro and other Crown corporations, Manitoba Hydro, they're using \$265 million of that revenue to go towards balancing the budget as a result of changes in the accounting system. Also, when we look at this economic stimulus plan that's been encouraged in both Saskatchewan and New Brunswick, giving tax relief that is going to be meaningful for revenue losses, not only for the government, regardless of what the budget says. So I know the timing is also very important when we're looking at spending, that we don't spend more than what we have coming in, and then spending in a way that's going to be sustainable for all Manitobans in order to make sure that we don't overspend at a time when we need to be, in fact, pulling in.

Madam Acting Speaker, we also are concerned in regard to what was not in the budget. When we look at the overall spending that's going on within the province of Manitoba, we've had increase in transfer payments as a result of being a have-not province, which we certainly—

An Honourable Member: It's so bad you're choking on it.

Mr. Eichler: —yes, I'm almost choked about it.

As a result of the transfer payments, we have an increase in revenue that's coming into the province and as a result of that what we've seen is, in my opinion, definitely going in the wrong direction. We want to make sure that each of those expenditures we make are prudent and long term. I know the revenue that—or the expense that's being talked about in agriculture in regard to the Farmland School Tax Rebate going to 75 percent, which represents \$33 million—and I know the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) talked about that in her speech on Thursday. We certainly would want to see that

100 percent eliminated is what we've talked about in our party as a result of that.

I know that I've also brought up several times the fact that a number of the producers don't have the money to pay that in order to get that money back from the provincial government. Simply done would be a matter of the Department of Agriculture taking a cheque over, or a matter of a transfer going not only from the Department of Agriculture, just to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), in order to cover that off and do away with all that paperwork that's being done as a result of the farmer having to go in to pay the tax, then the municipality keeping track of that, remitting that money, then from the Province to the farmer as a result of him having to pay his tax to get that money back.

So, certainly, I see lots of room for change, and the result of some of those recommendations I think that there are ways that we can be prudent. Now is the time that we need to be prudent in order to ensure that we do our spending in the best way that we possibly can. I know that a number of the members have talked about the amendment we brought forward in regard to this budget. We would encourage the government to have a look at those amendments in a way that might help them down the road. We know very clearly that the government will not be supporting that amendment in any way, but we certainly do encourage the government to have a look. We do understand that a number of these issues were not addressed in the budget, but we certainly do want to encourage the government to have a look at that particular amendment.

There's one other issue I want to get into—I see my time is just about up—and that was on flooding assistance that was announced by the federal government and the provincial government on March 5. There was, as I talked about on Friday just briefly, a great injustice that was done, not only the producers in Rockwood, Woodlands and St. Andrews being missed, the minister assured me that her staff was in fact going to look at seeing if those producers can be included. I had a number of producers contact me on the weekend. As a result of being missed, there is a petition being brought forward to the minister. We encourage the minister and her staff to have a look at that, even if they do it on a case-by-case basis.

* (15:00)

Rain knows no boundaries, whether it be municipal, provincially or nationally. We need to

make sure that, in fact, everybody is treated fairly, regardless of what constituency they're in or municipality that they're in. So I certainly encourage the minister and her staff to do that.

Having said that, we will be looking forward to the comments brought forward by the other members.

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Conservation): Madam Acting Speaker, it's an honour to rise in this Legislature, as always, but particularly in support of this budget, not so much in support of the amendments to a perfectly fine budget.

Before I get into the budget I want to—since I follow the Member for Lakeside on the speaking roster today I want to say that I think he'll make a great grandfather for Grace Elizabeth. Congratulations to him. The grandpa from Lakeside, I think, has the perfect temperament and kind of jovial nature about him that I think he'll be a fine grandfather.

I do want to make sure that he knows that we have Grace Elizabeth's best interest in mind with this budget. We're not the government that has two different sets of books. He was talking in terms of Grace Elizabeth and not wanting to have a huge debt just moved to the next generation, to her, which I understand. I think that's a very proper, grandfatherly thing to be worried about. If I was the Member for Lakeside, I'd be thinking the same thing, maybe, but I want him to know that the debt-to-GDP ratio in this budget, and for nine years in a row, has actually improved, far from what members opposite cackle about across the way.

I'd also want to point out and this is—some bonding agencies who've taken this on and said that's a very good job that that Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) and the NDP government in Manitoba is doing, we're going to bump up their credit ratings. We've seen that numerous times over the last nine years. So I think Grace Elizabeth can rest easy, knowing that a government with a steady hand in tough economic times is making those good decisions. I think she can also be very proud of her grandfather who brings issues forward here in the Legislature.

I also want to welcome and congratulate the Member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead) and the Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie) on their recent victories. I was absolutely impressed with the speeches that they made in support of our budget.

They bring, I think, a wealth of experience, both members, and I also want to congratulate all of those who put their names forward to run in the by-election. I think it's a reminder that democracy is strong in our province and that we, all of us, whether we are successful in obtaining our seats here in the Legislature or whether we put out names forward and aren't quite as successful, I think we all should acknowledge those contributions made by Manitobans but especially the Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie) and the Member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead).

I also want to just, very quickly, Madam Acting Speaker, acknowledge that we are very well served in this Legislature by the people who work in this building and in this Chamber, from the clerk's table at the middle right through to everyone who works to provide us with the necessary infrastructure and supports. In particular, I want to pay a little bit of attention to Garry Clark, the fellow we've all come to know in this Chamber as our Sergeant-at-Arms, someone who has had some health problems. I wish Garry all the best, and I want him to know that I'll miss our conversations usually occurring at the back of the Chamber revolving around the NHL and the plight of the Toronto Maple Leafs and those sorts of things. So, for Garry Clark, I want to thank him for the work that he has done in this Chamber.

You know, last week I listened very intently to the speeches of my colleagues from across the way as they attempted to nitpick away at our very fine budget, and I was frustrated because I'd seen that movie played out before. I couldn't quite put my finger on where I had seen that kind of an approach that was employed by members opposite. I was racking my brain to see just where it was. It dawned on me over the weekend, the speeches reminded me of the 1969 landing on the moon and the walk by Neil Armstrong. I was reminded because there were then, and there are still now, today, people who don't believe that we ever went to the moon.

It was frustrating. I guess I'm getting old because I couldn't remember it last week, but over the weekend it dawned on me, the similarities between those people who still don't believe that we landed on the moon and those people across the way who think this is a budget that's not worth voting for.

Madam Acting Speaker, if anybody's familiar with some of the conspiracy theories that surround the argument over whether Neil Armstrong actually walked on the moon, they looked at pictures, pictures

of the lunar landing, and they point to something called the C-rock. It's a rock in the picture—

An Honourable Member: It's a Conservative rock.

Mr. Struthers: Maybe that's the explanation. Maybe the C stands for Conservative. That's a very good suggestion by my colleague from La Verendrye.

But there's a rock in the picture and they claim there's a C, the letter C, on the side of the rock. They say, well, that's a prop that NASA has put there. They made a mistake—maybe they didn't turn the rock away. The C was there because it's supposed to be, that's where it's supposed to be in the picture in this grand conspiracy theory that they have.

Another fact that people—fact, in quotation marks, that people point to are the uneven shadows in some of the pictures of Neil Armstrong and his colleagues as they walked on the moon, the uneven shadows in the pictures. NASA explains this and tries to talk sense into those folks who just won't accept that humans have walked on the moon.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

Another so-called fact that these conspiracy theorists point to are the inconsistent dust clouds that you see in the pictures and how inconsistent they are within the same picture. You know, it must have been staged. It must have been drummed up and dreamed up in Hollywood and put together as a set, that these pictures aren't real, that we never did get to the moon.

The other one that I thought was interesting is that these conspiracy theorists say, well, you know what, there's no atmosphere on the moon, there's no wind, so how is it that that American flag looks like it's waving, looks like it's fluttering in the wind, when that can't be possible?

Well, NASA said, it's not intended to look that way. There's a wire at the top of the flag that makes it look as if it's flapping in the wind, but it isn't. They've explained that. They've poked a hole through one of the conspiracy theories.

This is how I see the speeches last week that I heard about this budget. I don't want to refer to members across the way as conspiracy theorists, so I'll just use the word, theorist. Their theory is that it's not balanced. Well, how many facts do we need to put on the table before you understand that it is balanced, has been balanced nine times since 1999?

An Honourable Member: Even the Auditor says it's balanced.

Mr. Struthers: That's right. The Auditor says it's balanced.

How many people have to line up and poke a hole through your conspiracy theory before you start to understand that it is a fact?

An Honourable Member: I don't think too many of them are listening to you.

Mr. Struthers: I get used to that, Doug.

Mr. Acting Speaker, we have members who stand up and talk about the debt rising—members who ran two sets of books so they can pretend like the debt wasn't rising all through the 1990s? Members who ignored contributions to pension liabilities? They've got the nerve to stand up now and talk about debt? In a way, they're the experts.

Anyway, they know all about debt because they racked up a bunch of debt themselves and never made an attempt to control that or to at least even be honest enough to put it in one set of books and present to Manitobans.

They talked about spending out of control, and then with the very next breath they talk about, well, you're going to build my hospital? You're going to build my school? They say, oh, your spending is out of control, and you don't show any support for agriculture. But I've got to point out, the No. 1 area of overspending of this government, and for lots of good reasons, was in the area of agriculture. There's a fact that pokes a hole right through the conspiracy theory of members opposite, just like the fact that NASA put forward a poke through the conspiracy theories of those who don't believe people walked on the moon.

* (15:10)

Mr. Acting Speaker, I think we owe Manitobans an honest debate on this budget. I think we all, every 57 of us, need to understand that we have to take this seriously, and that we cannot base our votes, base our opinions, on those conspiracy theories that I heard last week coming across from members opposite.

I could stand here for a while and talk about things that are directly related to my department, like the expansion of camping opportunities for Manitobans, free access to parks for Manitobans, an increase to the amount of money for park

infrastructure. I could talk about the removal of commercial logging from our parks and replacing that with programs involving kids. I could do that. But I'm going to limit my comments specifically to one area, and that's education, because, for me, education is very important, even to the members that live in the constituency of Emerson.

Mr. Acting Speaker, education is the foundation of us moving forward. It also draws a very clear distinction between how the previous government, in the early '90s, responded to economic tough times, as opposed to how this government, today, is responding to challenges in the economy.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I was a school principal. A nice little school in Rorketon, Manitoba. It's part of Duck Mountain School Division, kindergarten to grade 12, 155 or so students. This opposition, when they were in government, were faced with an economic situation that was challenging. Their response was less than adequate. There are other adjectives I think we could put in there, but they were very less than adequate.

They took a very mean approach to this. They turned to education and cut education funding for public schools by 2 percent. What bothered me the most about that maybe was that they made the announcement and then took off back into their offices, and that—they were the kind of Ronald Reagan, trickle-down, according to—the Gary Filmon trickle-down version of that—was that it trickled down to my desk, in my little office, in my little school in Rorketon, Manitoba, and I didn't have enough funds to keep the kind of programming and staffing in place that was being utilized by the students in that little school. I had to lay off our part-time librarian as a result of the mean, short-sighted approach of the Filmon government as they responded to an economic challenge in the early '90s.

I want it understood very clearly, Mr. Acting Speaker, that we are not taking that approach. Our level of funding to public schools was 5.25 percent increase. We didn't bail out, like members opposite did. We are committed to public school funding. We have made that commitment. We've been re-elected on that commitment. Even when the economy has turned down, we've honoured that commitment with the biggest increase in education in the history of our province, \$53 million. It's not just on the side of operating, it's on the side of capital where we've made a difference.

Mr. Acting Speaker, in the early '90s, the response of the government before us was to cut nurses. This budget, this budget that I'm hoping that members opposite would support, is expanding nurses training. Expansion—not retraction, like we saw in the '90s; not an approach that caused long-term pain.

As a rural MLA, I'm also very proud that this is the government that understands that rural and northern students have a tougher time getting to universities and colleges than any other sector. Now, we've taken two approaches on that. We've moved forward with UCN, University College of the North. We've had good examples with the Assiniboine Community College—moving out closer, bringing educational programs closer to people: first year distance education and those sorts of things.

I'm very proud that we are increasing bursaries—bursaries that will get my constituents from Dauphin and Roblin and Grandview and Gilbert Plains, and Ochre River and Rorketon and other places into universities and colleges much easier. That, I think, is a very positive step in increasing access for rural and northern graduates so that they can then get an education, get a training, an apprenticeship, and then take the jobs that will be available in our communities.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I want to just close out by saying, very clearly, I want to assure members opposite of two things: first of all, humans have walked on the moon, and, second of all, this is a good budget and they should vote for it.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): It is a privilege to be able to rise in the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba to speak on a very important topic to all Manitobans, and that's the budget, this budget that's been brought in by the New Democratic Party and the Finance Minister, the Member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger).

Of course, I noticed that the Member for Dauphin-Roblin (Mr. Struthers) started off his speech by saying it was an honour to speak to "a perfectly fine budget." And that'll be the last time I quote him, Mr. Acting Speaker. You know, you'd have to be on some deserted island someplace to think that this was a perfectly fine budget and, as much as the government replied to questions in question period, the only thing they can say is that we voted against their budget. Absolutely we would vote against this budget with the crime that's going on in our streets, with the catastrophes that are taking

place in the health-care system, with the lack of planning and education that this government is working with and particularly the complete negligence of rural Manitoba from an agricultural perspective, and I want to elaborate on some of those issues as we go.

I want to say, though, that, you know, I come from the southwest part of Manitoba, the constituency of Arthur-Virden, and I'm extremely proud to represent the people of Arthur-Virden and that southwest corner of Manitoba, Mr. Acting Speaker, whether it's the expanded growth of the Peace Gardens that I fully support in regard to the efforts that they are trying to make the Peace Gardens into a conciliation area for international opportunities in peace negotiations. I think that's a commendable goal that we should all work with, and I'm pleased to see the government has put some funds into that resource.

So, as I said in my articles in the local papers, there are always some things in budgets that are good in each one of them, and low-cost housing opportunities, support for some of those areas, while encroaching on not being enough, they are always well accepted in many of these areas. I know I have some—not personal care homes, as well—I've got problems with personal care homes with lack of staff, but we've also got some low-rental housing that Manitoba housing is in charge of that certainly needs to be looked at in our communities in Melita, in Elkhorn and in other communities as well, and I encourage the government to look at some of those particular circumstances and opportunities that we can work together with to enhance. You know, there was some work done a few years ago in regard to a centennial that was held in the community of Kenton. Those are the kinds of co-operative efforts that I enjoy working with the government whenever we can on making sure that some of these things take place so that we can have a better lifestyle for more citizens in our communities.

* (15:20)

But, Mr. Acting Speaker, this budget is woefully lacking in some of the things that we warned the public about last summer, particularly in three areas. You know, the attack on agriculture continues, as was brought forth in Bill 17 by the Member for Dauphin-Roblin (Mr. Struthers) and the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) backing it. The vote tax, Bill 37, that was brought forward, and now the government has recognized the error of its ways

when our leader, the Member for Fort Whyte (Mr. McFadyen) stood up in the House and said, we will not take it. Now the Premier (Mr. Doer) has indicated that he doesn't think it's a good idea to take the vote tax either, but he won't rescind it. He's still going to charge forward with it down the road, as far as we know, and many of his colleagues must be wondering why they ever got into this in the first place because they didn't know anything about it. It was brought forward by the Premier and the Finance Minister, and they didn't know anything about it. A lot of backbenchers indicated that to me when it came in, as well as Bill 38.

Now, most of them don't have an interest in Bill 17 other than they felt that this is what they needed to do to save Lake Winnipeg. Of course, we continue with the dialogue and the dissertations from the government about how they're going to continue to push forward to clean up Lake Winnipeg. I'd like to see them look more beyond the agricultural community in an effort to do that. I'm speaking more pertinently of looking at ways of first removing the phosphorus from Lake Winnipeg as opposed to nitrogen, which comes from the atmosphere as well anyway, as the Acting Speaker well knows from his experience in these areas.

That isn't to say that the latter isn't needed as well, but there are priorities that need to be done. I think that the budgets that the NDP have brought in, the government of the day has brought in for the last 10 years, have not dealt with specific priorities that are of a general nature to support all Manitobans, Mr. Acting Speaker, as they purport to give lip service to doing.

I want to, just for a moment, dwell on the fact that our rural health care circumstances—I appreciate the fact that the Assiniboine Regional Health Authority, that the highways departments out in our rural areas, are doing the best job they can with the faculties that they've been given and the resources that they've been given, Mr. Acting Speaker, in some cases. I want to say that I don't blame the people on the ground as much because I know that the people in our hospitals are trying to work as hard as they can. Our doctors are doing the best they can, but they need direction. They need a plan for the future, and I think that that's what's most needed in our health-care system today.

I know that the 600 people that showed up in Virden at the meeting we called last August certainly indicated that. These people came from Melita to the

U.S. border, and the Waskada area, the Pierson area, the Birtle area to the north of me, my constituency. They came from Wawanesa, and they came from Brandon. They were all over at that particular meeting, Mr. Acting Speaker. Came from all over because they were concerned Manitobans about the future of health care delivery in rural Manitoba.

We can have more ambulances as has been announced. That's a great start as well, but those have been announced before in the province of Manitoba. I think it just exacerbates what we've been saying on this side of the House, that our health-care system has turned from hallway medicine into highway medicine.

I'm very concerned about the distances that people have to travel just to get health care in Manitoba. I know that Melita hospital was closed as well because of lab supports that were lacking, and it was a catch-22. The doctors needed a break there as well, and we continue to work in that vein. I know that the plan is that there will be another doctor in Melita before summer. I know that there will be another one in Virden coming shortly, and I appreciate the fact that there has been three new doctors this spring as the regional health authority said last summer that would be there in February.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I hope that we are able to continue to work as a government to make sure that the concerns of the concerned citizens coalition in the community of Virden and surrounding area, as well as the retention and recruit committee from the bulk of the municipalities that represent the whole regional health authority, that Mr. Tycoles, the reeve of Pipestone municipality, is the chair of, and do the good work of making sure that there's more interaction and more public input and more feedback from the government in regard to facilities in the future. There is no reason for our regional health authorities to be as protective with information, in some cases, as they have been in the past. I think the government has to give that direction.

In the past they've given the direction to make sure they don't give out as much information as they should, and, I think, the government has now seen the shortfall in their ways and is trying to provide as little bit more of that information to the public as people become more concerned. As communities, they shouldn't have to, Mr. Acting Speaker, take it upon themselves to raise funds locally, to build clinics themselves, to do these things in a manner

that if the government was truly managing the health-care system.

My advice is, to local citizens, if they want to maintain what they have, then they do have to come together co-operatively and have, basically, welcoming committees to keep these people on the ground in their communities. From the doctors and, hopefully, nurses that will soon be arriving, Mr. Acting Speaker, I commend these people for the work that they've done in those local communities in trying to enhance our health-care system.

I know that the school boards are concerned in our rural areas, Mr. Acting Speaker, because of the tax incentive grants that the government has put in place, and their only concern with this program is that it's not predictable. Last year it was put in place. There was no sign that it would be done again this year. I know the government is trying to look like it's hard-fisted and keeping taxes in line and that sort of thing so that the school boards don't raise taxes and so, in these somewhat trying recessionary times, but when you speak to the school boards themselves, they wouldn't even mind it so much, and more have complied this year. But they don't know whether they should or not, because they don't know whether they'll be caught next year having to make up a larger shortfall from having taken the grants that the government has given them this year.

I think that's the concern that's on everybody's minds in the constituency that I represent, and the three schools boards that I work with, Mr. Acting Speaker, and—it's soon to be four, I guess, as we move forward, I guess we have four now with the—but we will have, with the redistribution, it looks like a larger portion of that Park West as well in the Arthur-Virden constituency. But I want to assure all of the citizens of those regions that there are more predictable ways of handling education taxes and preparing school boards for a better way to manage their affairs, to give them better information as well, in their planning process, and I look forward to being able to do that when we replace this government.

Mr. Acting Speaker, the education tax on farmland that the Member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) just spoke of is a prime example of how this government loves to keep bureaucracies in place, loves to expand bureaucracies even, if I could. They are using this opportunity to nitpick away at reducing a few percentage points each year on a farmland education tax that could have been done away with years ago, and they've still got a situation where

they're forcing the rural municipalities to collect the tax and pay it to them. The municipalities are picking up the administration, which the government likes, the provincial government likes a lot, and then they turn around and say, but we've got a great program to give municipalities back some of their own funds. Well, if the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) was really paying attention, she'd just go and talk to her Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) and try to make this—or the treasurer, the Finance Minister, maybe even the Member for Dauphin-Roblin, the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers) could help her a little bit with this as well, and get it done.

There's just no reason. We can reduce and eliminate the small-business tax, that's great, but if we're going to continue to have reduced administration in some of our rural areas, then they could just stop collecting the education tax on farmland and pay it directly to the education department and not force the municipalities to go through that administration process.

I want to say, Mr. Acting Speaker, that when you look at the budget—one of the biggest things in this budget that bothers me the most is the fact that the—I guess before I get into the highways and infrastructure—is the fact that this budget is not balanced. If you look at the core budget, it's \$88-million shortfall in spending—being overspent—and that is a concern to everyone in Manitoba. I wrote in my articles recently about this bill. This is Bill 38 at work. This is what we filibustered, I guess, kept the members in the House last summer to make the point that the bill they were bringing in was wrong, that being able to use the Crown corporation surpluses to use as operating funds in the Province of Manitoba was wrong.

The problem that we've got is that they've got an \$88-million shortfall in balancing the books, but they still call it a surplus. Now they can say, well, we're the only ones with a surplus, they and Saskatchewan. Mr. Acting Speaker, I would say that when you look at the situation with Bill 38 and look at the opportunity to rob from Crown corporations in order to balance your books, that the summary budgeting that that allows is the bill that the government brought through last summer.

* (15:30)

But Saskatchewan has a balanced budget and they called it a balanced budget. Alberta has a deficit budget and they called it a deficit budget in spite of the fact that they took funds from their heritage fund,

which is their rainy day fund. They acknowledged that they took funds out of their rainy day fund, but they called it a deficit because they were spending more than they were taking in, even with those dollars, Mr. Acting Speaker.

The federal government did the same thing. In order to provide stimulus to the economy in the federal budget, they brought down an \$85-billion program over five years that we're seeing some of the benefits in the \$212-million announcement that was made today at CentrePort to continue to work with developmental opportunity. Mr. Acting Speaker, that's a great opportunity for Manitoba, and if we can get that in place and get it working and get it quickly moving, then we will see some of the business attractions to Manitoba.

Of course, we'll have to get rid of the payroll tax in order to attract the incentiviveness for some of those larger companies to come to Manitoba, or to bring new ones into Manitoba, at least, Mr. Acting Speaker, but that's another whole area, that getting rid of the payroll tax is a major concern for the people in CentrePort and for CentrePort's board. I know that. It has to be, and of course, tax being some of the highest-taxed individual, personally taxed people in western Canada. I guess, actually, for a family of four with two incomes and \$60,000, we're the second highest in Canada behind Québec. That concerns me as well, as we try to move forward to develop new businesses and attract new businesses to Manitoba.

But I want to say, Mr. Acting Speaker, that \$88 million is a shortfall in spending. That is in spite of the fact that there's been a decrease in the debt payment. I just want to look at—there's one area here, if you'll forgive me. I think I just want to raise the point that there are a few areas and options that we want to look at. One of them is the fact that that \$88 million is in spite of the fact that they took \$110 million out of our rainy day fund.

I said the federal government ran a deficit and they acknowledged it. The Province of Alberta ran a deficit and they acknowledged it as a deficit, but when the Manitoba government takes money out of their rainy day fund to continue to have an \$88-million shortfall, they call it a surplus. That's creative financing. It doesn't matter how you cut it, Mr. Acting Speaker.

You can pass all the laws you want. In fact, the government passed Bill 38 last summer to allow them to do this under legal terms. It allows them to

break the previous balanced budget and debt-reduction legislation which we challenged them on all last summer. They thought they had it fixed by bringing that in, but the other thing, besides using \$110 million from the rainy day fund to get the \$88-million, what-they-call shortfall instead of really a—they called it a \$48-million surplus, but they have an \$88-million shortfall in spending—is the fact that they will have to come back to this House this summer to put an amendment in place to their own Bill 38 that will allow them to reduce the debt payment under the bill that they just passed last summer, from \$110 million down to \$20 million. So that gives them another \$90 million to put into the budget. So there's \$110 million from the rainy day fund and \$90 million from the fact they'll have to change their own debt legislation, Mr. Acting Speaker.

That, on top of the fact that they took \$265 million out of Manitoba Hydro revenue this year to help get to the point where they say they have a \$48-million surplus, as well. Well, this is about as creative a financing as you can find, Mr. Acting Speaker, I would say. And I would say that Manitobans should be watching this very carefully because this government has passed bills in the House before, back in the early 2000s to take out \$203 million at that time over, you know, they took 75 percent of the profit of Manitoba Hydro for three years. They had a \$150-million surplus the first year, out of \$200 million. They took \$150 million the first year. Of course, there was only about 75 the second year which they took 53, and in the third year, fortunately for Manitobans, and it's too bad to have to say it, there were no profits in Manitoba Hydro or they would have taken even more.

So, Mr. Acting Speaker, that cost about 300 in interest payments and repayment opportunities. They just spread that amortization out over a number of years. That's a half a million dollars that they took out of Hydro in the '04, '05, '06 period of time, perhaps earlier. That's on top of the fact that this government has taken over a billion dollars in water dividends from Manitoba Hydro since they were elected, as well, over a hundred million dollars a year. A hundred million wasn't enough in water rentals and water dividends; this year, they're taking \$265 million more.

So, with \$265 million from Manitoba Hydro on top of \$100 million-plus in water dividends, with \$110 million out of the rainy day fund and another \$90 million, because they're going to change their

own legislation again, Mr. Acting Speaker, I think Manitobans can see that they are in a really tough position.

We've also got personal income taxes that are, as I said earlier, some of the highest in Canada. The rates here are, you know, down to 10.5 percent by 2011. Our neighbours to the west have been below that for some five or six years now, Mr. Acting Speaker, and we've got three levels of cutoffs. Saskatchewan has two levels and they just took 80,000 people off the tax rolls in Saskatchewan last fall because they had the foresight to increase the personal exemptions for people up to around \$15,000 for each man and woman in Saskatchewan. For a family of four that's very considerable when you put the increased child personal tax exemptions in there as well.

Now, Mr. Acting Speaker, that's somewhat foresight, but you know and you can say, well, they may have the resources to do that, but you have to look at tax rates as an opportunity for people to be attracted to a region as well. That's why I say we've got a wonderful opportunity to develop CentrePort here and many other businesses that could be developing further in Manitoba. A lot of them are public monies that are being spent to make those opportunities grow, but these are the kinds of concerns that we have as Manitobans and legislators in this Manitoba, from our side of the House at least. We're concerned that this government doesn't see that providing tax incentives is a way to attract people and actually grow the tax base in Manitoba.

I just want to finish, Mr. Acting Speaker, by saying that I think that there are many, many priorities and I'm surprised that the infrastructure budget is what it is. I'm surprised that it's as low as it is. I'm surprised that the government hasn't made a priority with the \$4 billion that they're getting. Forty percent of the Manitoba budget comes from the federal government in transfers and equalizations, and we're the only ones west of Québec that are getting the equalization in those areas. Everyone's getting some transfers, but Saskatchewan, B.C., Alberta, Ontario don't get that. I don't know how long they think that our government is going to be able to go on as a have-not province when they're still trying to promote the opportunities to say that we've got a summary, a balanced budget when other people have admitted that they've got deficit budgets under the same kind of spending regimes.

I have serious concerns about how these funds will be used to stimulate the economy in Manitoba. One of the examples from CentrePort, I was pleased to see today. I hope that works, Mr. Acting Speaker. I hope that we're able to see some of the schools and education facilities improved in Manitoba. We certainly are in need of more personnel in our health-care regions. I think that's a priority over new buildings in some of those areas. That isn't saying that some aren't needed, but I certainly want to say as well that with 40 percent of our budget, with \$4 billion of our \$10 billion coming from Ottawa we need to pay special attention to doing everything we can to make sure we're attracting as much business and opportunity to Manitoba as we possibly can so that we can expand the tax base of this province. I see CentrePort as a great opportunity to do that.

I just want to say, too, that while our debt to gross domestic product has grown to 23 percent, I compare that to B.C. at 15 and Saskatchewan at 6.3. We can talk about, as I said, the resources they have, but they've also done the other side. They've put sound tax plans in place to keep people at home and attract businesses to their provinces, and that will help them grow and they are growing faster than we are.

So, Mr. Acting Speaker, there are a number of concerns in agriculture. I know that I've been pleading with the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) to look at the drought that took place in southwest Manitoba. She's treated it totally differently than the concerns of the flooding in the Interlake and Westlake regions. I commend the government for working with the federal government to get the Manitoba Forage Restoration and feed assistance programs in place. I'm only asking today again in this speech to consider at least that \$70 a breeding cow opportunity in livestock in southwest Manitoba because certainly in the very southwest corners there are seven, eight municipalities there that are—it's a very small area—asking for that support.

With that, Mr. Acting Speaker, while there are many, many areas of concern in this budget, I just want to close by saying that I think it would be a grave day to have to support the budget. I see that the members opposite are going to vote against the cancelling of the reckless and environmentally harmful west side Bipole III line that they want to bring down the west side of the province.

* (15:40)

They're voting against the vote tax that we want to repeal. They're endorsing the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority's brown envelope tendering scheme, and they're failing to announce plans to tackle the corruption, waste and mismanagement of all of these areas, Mr. Acting Speaker.

With that, I believe that I will end on a positive note. I am hoping that Manitobans will recognize the difference between this kind of smoke-and-mirrors budget and the sound planning that can come forward from our side of the House. As the minister of highways said the other day—you know, he was challenging my colleague for Morris–Well, what would you do? I guess we could say in many areas we would just take over their ministries and do a better job. Thank you very much.

Hon. Diane McGifford (Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy): Mr. Acting Speaker, like my colleagues on this side of the House and on that side of the House, I'm very pleased to rise today and put some comments on the record to support this budget.

But, before speaking specifically, I wanted to take a minute to remember my friend and colleague, the Honourable Oscar Lathlin, who has been Chief of the Opaskwayak Cree Nation, Minister of Conservation, Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, the MLA for The Pas. Over the years, Minister Lathlin and I worked very closely together as individuals who believed in social democracy, as colleagues who believed in the importance of post-secondary education and as colleagues who believed in the importance of the University College of the North, particularly, Mr. Acting Speaker, in educating Aboriginal people.

I know that Oscar Lathlin and his achievements will probably be discussed more thoroughly when we do condolences, but today I remember him as an important force in my political development and particularly, as well, in my understanding of Aboriginal people. Certainly, I know that with everybody else in this House I do miss him.

On a more cheerful note, I wanted to join my colleague from Dauphin-Roblin and offer congratulations to the Member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) on the birth of his most recent grandchild, Grace Elizabeth. Certainly, one of the blessings of the aging process is grandchildren, and I wish it would happen for me; maybe it will. As the Member for Dauphin-Roblin (Mr. Struthers) said, our

colleague will make, in fact, he's already made a fine grandfather because I believe this is his third grandchild. I want to assure him that we'll continue to serve her and other Manitobans as an excellent government.

I also take this opportunity to congratulate my colleagues from Elmwood and from The Pas on their recent elections. I know that the Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie) spoke very movingly on the importance of principles of the social gospel, how they inspired his political life, and how they continue to inspire his political life. We're so glad that after a brief hiatus he has made the decision to join us here in this House.

I also want to congratulate the Member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead). I remember, many years ago, when I was the Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism, the then-Chief of the Opaskwayak Cree Nation, now the Member for The Pas, visited me and talked about the importance of education and libraries for his people. I recognized immediately that he was a grand leader, and we're very fortunate to have him join us in the House.

Along with many of my colleagues, I want to offer my sympathies to people who've been victimized by the floods. I know that when you lose a house you lose, in a sense, family history, mementos and photographs. It's a terrible thing.

And then, along with my colleagues, I want to congratulate the volunteers, the government people, municipal people, all of those who've worked so valiantly, Mr. Acting Speaker, during these times of distress and duress. Particularly, I congratulate the Minister responsible for Emergency Measures (Mr. Ashton), who has been stalwart in his work on this particular issue. So I do congratulate my colleagues.

Mr. Acting Speaker, of course, the Red River flows through my constituency, and people in my constituency have some concerns, but we're very fortunately protected by the Churchill Parkway road. About a week ago, there was an ice jam at the St. Vital Bridge. I know that the Member for St. Vital (Ms. Allan), her constituency was under much more duress than mine but, just seeing the jam, seeing the way the river was rising, certainly evoked my sympathies for those who didn't have the protection of a dike like the Churchill Parkway road.

While we're congratulating people, I'd certainly like to congratulate the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) on his ninth balanced budget—and I say

balanced budget, contrary to what my colleagues across the House have said.

Mr. Acting Speaker, this morning I was at a breakfast sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce in which the Premier (Mr. Doer) spoke. The Premier spoke about this budget.

By the way, I might say, I was sitting at the table of the University of Manitoba. I make this point because I know particularly the Member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) used to like to suggest that my relationship with the university was antagonistic and poisoned, but they invite me every time there's an event of this kind to sit with them. It was a great pleasure to sit with them this morning because one of the other things that members opposite like to do is to pretend that the University of Manitoba is a den of helots, without properly qualified professors—a kind of backwater university.

So I just wanted to say that this morning at this table there were some very, very distinguished researchers and educators. For example, Dr. Digvir Jayas, who is the vice-president of research, who's recently been honoured for some very important research on soil science, so important, I'm sure, to members opposite who pride themselves on their attachments to agriculture.

Also sitting was a wonderful researcher, Dr. Norman Halden, who comes from the Clayton H. Riddell Faculty of the Environment, Earth and Resources. He's done research in Churchill at the Northern Research Centre, and, certainly, he spoke very interestingly about this work.

Then there was Doug Ruth, who's the dean of Engineering, and an individual who constantly points out the importance of engineering to the world in which we live, and I think we're seeing just the most perfect example of engineering and how vital it is, Mr. Acting Speaker, because where would we be now without the floodway?

So, anyway, as I was saying, the Premier was speaking this morning at this Chamber breakfast and he talked about the budget. He talked about that we live in a time of adversity. He talked about the budget as a steady plan for challenging times. He also indicated that the budget really is based on the advice of many Manitobans. The Finance Minister, of course, tours the province in the early part of the budget cycle, meets with communities, gets their ideas, and many of those ideas do make their way into the budget. As a member of Treasury Board, I

can attest to this. But also at these public meetings there are financial experts, often there are medical people, people from the Chambers themselves, of course, members of the public. Of course, that's what the Premier means when he says this is a budget that reflects the wishes and wants of all of Manitobans.

The Premier pointed out that this budget breaks with the current North American practice of running deficits, because we're one of the two provincial governments in Canada, and one of the few governments in North America that has balanced our budget. A budget that is based on—[interjection] Yes, I think we do deserve congratulations, although my colleagues opposite don't seem to be breaking into applause.

* (15:50)

Mr. Acting Speaker, I think we're all quite familiar with Manitoba's 10-point economic plan, which the Premier (Mr. Doer) cited: a balanced budget, savings for the future, focussing on skills and knowledge—and I'd like to return to that later—growing through innovation, modernizing the infrastructure, strategic tax cuts, increasing access to credit and capital, tackling debt and pension liabilities, helping Manitoba communities, and building a green energy economy.

So those are the cornerstones of the budget. You know, I think I'd like to sum it all up by quoting from the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), and I suggest members opposite, if they don't have this handy, little pamphlet, they get one because I think it's very informative, and other constituents may be interested in it. I quote from the Minister of Finance: "Most important, Budget 2009 is a balanced plan that invests in your priorities like infrastructure, health care, skills-training and education. It also maintains the government's commitment to tax relief for Manitoba families and businesses."

Mr. Acting Speaker, as the Member for Virden—Arthur-Russell, pardon me—as he was speaking—

An Honourable Member: Arthur-Virden.

Ms. McGifford: Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire), thank you, I stand corrected. As the member was speaking, he was talking about the importance of training more health-care professionals, so I just wanted to assure him that we are training more nurses. Indeed, there are some 3,000 nurses in training today. We have begun a program in physician assistance which is extremely successful. More money allocated to that program in this year's

budget. We have increased the physician spaces from 70 when folks opposite were in power to 110 today.

It's a tremendous increase, but what always strikes me about it is if, during their 10 years in power they had had those 40 extra spaces, there would be 400 more doctors, but what they did was reduce the spaces in the Faculty of Medicine from 85 to 70. This government has also made a commitment to expand midwifery and many other health-care professions.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I want to speak specifically for some time about post-secondary education for a number of reasons, one of them being that I don't usually get the opportunity to say anything about post-secondary education in the House because there is such a paucity of questions on this matter. But also I wanted to pick up from where my colleague from Dauphin-Roblin spoke, because he did begin the discussion on post-secondary education, but most of all, last week I was sitting in the House and the Member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon) stumbled into a conversation about post-secondary education, which led me to believe that he really didn't know very much, so I wanted to provide some information for him.

First of all—[interjection] Well, one of the members opposite is suggesting that it's important to educate his caucus members and I couldn't agree with him more. So, I think we all, in this House, know what happened in the '90s. Tuition doubled. The numbers of students decreased. Young people went to Alberta, or thither and yon. The folks opposite cut university funding for several years in a row, minus two, minus one, zero. Actually, one year they gave a 0.1 percent increase. Then in 1999, they gave a bit of an increase before the budget. They didn't only cut operating funds to universities, now they like to posture in this grand manner and pretend they're great friends to universities and colleges, but my belief is they have little respect for post-secondary education. I remember the former premier, Gary Filmon, in the House, mouthing across the floor about post-secondary education being legislated obsolescence. So, not a very positive attitude.

Mr. Acting Speaker, what our government has done is to target three areas: supports for students, supports for institutions, and infrastructure for post-secondary education. I'm going to be brief because I know there are many people who wish to speak, but I want to point out some of what we've done.

We have frozen tuition over nine budgets. When we came into government in 1999, it was extremely important that we do this because, as I said a couple of minutes ago, tuition had doubled, students were leaving, enrolment was down. Mr. Acting Speaker, one of the fine results of our freezing tuition, dropping it 10 percent and freezing it, one of the outcomes has been a 35 percent increase in student participation, 35 percent.

Some of the other supports to students that characterize our watch are the Manitoba bursaries. Members opposite, there was, by the way, a Manitoba bursary for some of the years of the '90s, but then in 1993, in the heat of the summer in July, in the dead of the night, when no one was watching, they cancelled it. In 1999, there was not one bursary dollar coming from these people opposite.

Now, today, there's a \$9.2-million Manitoba bursary to assist students with their debts. We introduced a graduate scholarship worth \$2 million, which funds many M.A.s and many, many Ph.D.s. Of course, if we're to prepare ourselves for the knowledge-based economy, it is extremely important that we have students in this province with graduate degrees.

We've begun a rural northern bursary initiative, \$400,000, which has resulted in matched donations of almost \$800,000. Of course, this has allowed 59 new rural and northern bursaries.

The Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) is very rightly proud of the 60 percent, tuition-fee income tax rebate. If members want details about it, they can contact Finance or my department. Not only does it help students out if they have student loans, et cetera, once they graduate, but it's a very important retention strategy.

Last year, the Minister of Finance decreased interest rates on Manitoba student loans by 1 percent, from prime plus 2.5 to prime plus 1.5. While we're speaking about student loans, I should point out that this province has the lowest rate of borrowing in the country, it has the best payback record in the country and also has the lowest per capita loan. So, certainly, that is in part due to the Manitoba bursary which pays down student debt.

I'm also very proud of the fact that last year we began the Bright Futures program, which I established along with my colleague from Education, Citizenship and Youth, which will enable community organizations and partner schools to implement

programming which will improve high school graduation rates and so increase participation in post-secondary education.

This program is really directed towards students who are disadvantaged in some way, who are under-represented in post-secondary education, who come from low-income families perhaps whose parents didn't attend post-secondary education, because we know there are many indicators of post-secondary education attendance. One way of making sure that we have a representation from all economic levels in this province are programs like the Bright Futures program. So I'm very, very proud of this program.

Last, I'd like to mention the Manitoba Scholarship and Bursary Initiative, which provides \$5 million in funds to match donations in our post-secondary institutions.

* (16:00)

So, Mr. Acting Speaker, one of the things that this government has prided itself on for years is our support for post-secondary education, is our commitment to increase attendance, is our commitment to increase the range of learners in this province, and I think I've just provided some very convincing arguments as to how we are doing it, how we will continue to do it in the future. Having said that, I want to, along with my colleagues before me, promise my commitment to this budget, and, as well, while I'm on my feet, my commitment to post-secondary education. Thank you very much.

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Mr. Acting Speaker, I, too, am pleased to be able to put a few comments on record, and I'm going to be talking about the not-so-balanced budget that has been presented by the government of the day. Before I do that, I do want to congratulate the Member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead) and the Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie) for their successful elections. I trust that they will, as I think we all hope to do, try to represent their constituencies as best we can and to look at the total problems in Manitoba and try and do what is best for the province as well.

When I talk about the province, I think back of the '99 election where the Premier (Mr. Doer) stood at, it was close actually to my constituency, was standing on the sign that led to Grafton. They were saying that within six months and \$15 million, health care would be fixed. We, of course, know what has happened ever since then. I would say that it's—*[interjection]* The member is telling me the only

thing that closed Grafton was the fact that the highway was flooded, and that's, I guess, happening as we speak.

But, anyway, it's interesting how promises are made and somehow they forget that promises should be kept. Either that or they're very short-sighted in the promises that were made. So, Mr. Acting Speaker, I know that there are some sensitivities in regard to some of the comments I have made, but the reality is still there.

The other thing I wanted to put on the record was the fact that, at that time, the Premier said he wanted to thank everyone, of course, for the democratic election that had taken place, and that he would be the Premier for the whole province. I wish that were true but during the course of my discussion here, I'm going to show you how, I think, it has become somewhat partisan in his approach to the province. However, I do want to also indicate that there are some positives in this budget.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

I want to thank the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) for allowing the Garden Valley School Division board to come and meet with him on numerous times and for allowing us to—well, he has announced that we're going to be getting two new schools. I guess the proof is in the pudding as they would say. I'm confident that this will happen, but again, as I would indicate, promises have been made before and re-announcements have been made, but again, I am confident. The minister has indicated that I should get my arm, I guess, exercised and flexed so I can lift that heavy shovel. I will do that. I promise I will work hard at that. Again, I want to indicate how pleased we are, and I know that the end date has been set in place where the middle school is projected to be open in 2011 and the high school, in 2012. Again, I'm confident that this will take place.

You know, Madam Deputy Speaker, when these kinds of things happen, yes, we're grateful, but then when I look ahead and I look at the fact that when we move into those schools, I don't think we're going to have any fewer huts than we have today. The way the numbers are being displayed and the number of births that we're having at Boundary Trails from within the area, I think the minister may as well get used to it that he should be in the next budget announcing another two schools for the two following years and we would still be having huts.

Now, on the one hand, it's a good problem to have, but on the other hand, it does bring concerns.

I just want to indicate that, again, as a province and as a government, there needs to be long-range planning that takes place. I would indicate that the fact that we have 40-some huts in the Garden Valley School Division—and I will indicate that Western School Division, which is just west of Garden Valley, in fact, has a hut now and is looking at having an increase in the student enrolment as well—that we need to do forward planning.

I also know that, having been in this Chamber here for a while, the Minister of Labour and Immigration (Ms. Allan) and the Premier (Mr. Doer) and other ministers have at times been congratulating themselves for the fact that we've had a number of immigrants come into the province of Manitoba. I also recognize the fact that many of these immigrants have taken up residence within my constituency. So this is not something that's just happened overnight. The nominee program was started under our government. I'm pleased to say that it's been successful and I'm glad that the government and the minister have continued working with the nominee program.

But, Madam Deputy Speaker, the problem that I have with this is that we need to be forward-thinking, we need to be looking ahead. I find that that whole area of forward-thinking, being proactive rather than being reactive, is certainly missing within the constituency that I represent. And, talk about a constituency, I just want to thank again the people within my constituency, the voters, for the confidence that they have placed in me and for giving me the opportunity to be here and to represent them.

But I do have to indicate that there is an extreme frustration at times when I look at—and I've mentioned the whole area of education—the fact that we have so many students in huts and, yes, over a period of time we are trying to address the fact that they would have accessible washrooms that they don't have to go home noon hours or during their breaks to use a washroom at home but will, in fact, be able to remain in school to use a washroom. These are very real concerns that we have.

So, yes, we've had growth, but I would indicate that we have not been proactive in trying to address the needs that we have. So there's a lot of work that still needs to be done as our enrolments continue to

rise, and as the opportunity for employment within the region and the area continues to grow.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, yes, things are taking place in the whole area of education and we're grateful for that. But we need to continue to look ahead because while we're going to be in a temporary basis meeting some of those needs—and, again, it's three years down the road, that's the shortest that I can see it taking place, very often it's five years, but I'm hoping that we can fast-track this. I know that the minister has given me assurances that this will take place. So, while we're looking ahead, I am concerned, though, that we're going to be continuing to have some of the same problems that we have been experiencing in the last while.

I want to get back to the budget and the issues that we have there, and just put a few items of concern on the record as to some of the concerns that I have with this budget. I've said this many times in the last number of years when I've had an opportunity to get up and speak specifically to the area of the budget, that we make some of our worst decisions during the best of times. I speak from experience as well on that, in having run business for many years and been involved in numerous—when things are going fairly well, we make some decisions that we need to then live with later on when the climate, the financial climate changes. I see the same thing happening here, and that's why I am very concerned. This budget has simply put off economic decisions it should have made this year until next, a year that will be even tougher to budget than for the 2009.

Again, when I look at the budget and I fast-forward it, I think we are going to have some real problems coming next year. This budget is not balanced. Claims that it is are dishonest, and are symbolic of this government's crafty approach to accounting. They rewrote the rules to the balanced budget game in Manitoba last year with Bill 38, and now they're not able to make their required debt payment, they're trying to change the rules, with legislation coming soon, to their benefit. The simple fact that this government is spending \$88 million more than it is taking in, that's a deficit. That's also Bill 38 at work.

* (16:10)

How many Manitobans can increase their debt by over 15 percent, decrease debt repayment by more than 80 percent, and deplete their savings account by

20 percent and still call their household budget balanced?

Now I heard a comment from the other side there and I want to read, this was on 'OB March 26, and it's called *Excuse Me*. It's a rather interesting example of the approach taken to the budget. It says, excuse me. Who can come up with that one? The same person who called Fox News fair and balanced? This budget increases the provincial debt by \$861 million. It cuts scheduled debt payments by \$90 million and it requires pulling \$110 million out of the province's provincial piggy bank to not run a deficit. So for comparison, that's me claiming my finances are balanced after re-mortgaging my house, paying only the minimum fee on my credit cards and cashing in my RRSP.

Now sure that strategy might get me through the next several months, but ultimately it's going to catch up with me if I don't cut expenses or start making more money soon and that's the biggest problem I have with this—yesterday's budget. For something labelled balanced and steady, it actually represents the biggest gamble that this government has made to date. What happens if the provinces like B.C., Ontario and Alberta can no longer afford to contribute so generously to federal transfer payments that currently make up so much of our revenue.

Interestingly enough today on national news history has been made. Ontario, for the first time, will be getting some of the transfer payments that we have been so generously getting from them over the last years. So the tide is turning. Things are shifting. So I am concerned that this budget is not fairly displaying the finances of the province and, in fact, are leading Manitobans into a situation that they're going to find very, very difficult to cope with in the years to come.

I know that the Member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) this afternoon made the comment about a new grandchild that he had and he was afraid for this grandchild for the debt that they would have to be repaying in the years to come.

It reminds me of the Pawley years of huge debt, huge spending and someone had to pay for it. You can only borrow so much money and eventually it does have to be paid back. To continue on the budget and how they say that they're balancing it, they're using \$265 million of Hydro revenue to try and call this a balanced budget. Madam Deputy Speaker, that's money ratepayers expect and deserve to see

reinvested in the corporation, not used as part of the province's general revenues.

Another interesting statistic, for every dollar of tax relief there is \$13 of new spending. Now, if I take and I fast-forward, I put this into my own business or I put this into my own household, wow, eventually you do run up against a brick wall.

This budget continues our province's unhealthy dependence on financial support from Ottawa and provides absolutely no vision or commitment for making Manitoba a have province. Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, it reminds me so clearly of the— from '95 to— or actually that was the one time that it really hit but the fact that the federal government withdrew huge, huge sums of money and simply said, listen we don't have the money to give you. You better live within the dollars that you have. Then what do you do?

I know that the members opposite are very critical about some of the cuts that took place, and, Madam Deputy Speaker, no one loves to do that. In my own family if we don't have enough money and I go to them and I say, listen you will not get this item this year or we're going to have to cut back in another area, no one likes that. When you can spend lots of money, hand out gifts year after year, give whatever they want, yes, people are happy.

Now, on the flip side, I know that the government is going to take, well, all right, there are things that you need within your community and I will agree with that, but that's what you would call priority spending and making some tough decisions. When you have areas that are growing, there are some things that you need to put in place so that they can continue the growth that they have, and, in fact, continue to be taxpayers and contributing to the general coffers within the province. We can't presume that we'll always be able to rely on taxpayers from the rest of the country for nearly 40 percent of the provincial revenues. That's why I say that during the good times we make some of our worst decisions.

How can we trust the government when it's taking \$110 million out of a rainy day fund? How do we know it won't be more just like last year when they said they were taking \$60 million from the fund and then took \$100 million? How can we trust a government who, from budget '08-09 to its third-quarter forecast, at the same year increased the net debt by \$1 billion? They're increasing it by another

\$700 million in this budget, but who knows what that amount will really be by the end of the year.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, we see that our debt is going up. We see that more money is being withdrawn from our Crown corporations. The point is how long can you keep on spending the way we are? So it's a matter again of priority spending, and guess, I know that the government of the day will say, and I'm going to talk about some of the needs that we have within our own area that have not been addressed. I will come back to the comment that the Premier (Mr. Doer) made that he's Premier for the whole province. Will our revenues dry up totally this year? No, they won't, but there are going to be needs that need to be met within this coming year. I want to indicate also that day after day I've been rising with a petition regarding the personal care home and the needs that we have within southern Manitoba.

Again, I represent one of the fastest-growing areas in rural Manitoba. It appears that right now they recognize the fact that we have growth within the education system, but they have not recognized the fact that we also have growth within our seniors within the area that I represent. So, as I've indicated, I have, day after day, gotten up regarding a petition signed by thousands of people within the area, requesting that we have increased personal care beds within our community. I could be lobbying and saying that we need more beds at Boundary Trails Health Centre, which is a wonderful facility, and just on that we've got 26 to 28 beds on a given day that are being used for personal care reasons. Those people should be in a personal care home, but they have no place to go. Consequently, we have an obligation and one that we, of course, want to take care of, and that is looking after these people within the facility at Boundary Trails. It does not address the needs that we have within the area to be able to find appropriate accommodations for the people who built the country, who built the province, who have lived within the area all their lives.

Of course, that leads me just to another concern that I have. We now have a decree that has come down from the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) to her bureaucrats that we're going to free those 28 beds at Boundary Trails. We're going to empty those out, and any of the people who need to be in a facility of that nature are going to be sent—I mean, who knows where within the region. It could be 50, it could be 80, it could be 100 kilometres from where they have lived and resided all their lives. Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, this is not fair. This is not the way

we should be treating our elderly people by shipping them to some faraway place. It's just not acceptable, and so, again, this is something, an area, that we have reneged on. There's been no planning taking place.

We've known for the last 10, 15 years that we're in a growth area, but it's not been recognized by this government. I appeal to the minister to look at this seriously. I know the Minister of Health has toured Tabor Home, knows that the facilities need to be replaced. She has indicated that to me as well. I've talked to the RHA. They are in agreement that Tabor Home needs to be replaced, that we need to have a new 100-bed facility, but nothing is happening. We need to be able to accommodate the needs of the seniors within our region. I would ask, I would plead with the government to look at this very seriously to see if there is not some way that we can do this. I know that there are people who would participate in the venture, that would put dollars forward. In fact, I believe that there are some monies that have been collected already, and I know that the community is a very caring and a very generous community and would do whatever they could to be able to assist this project.

* (16:20)

We do have to have the final stamp of approval from this minister, from this Premier (Mr. Doer), from the Cabinet, to be able to move ahead and be able to build the facility that is so desperately needed in Morden. Again, Madam Deputy Speaker, it's not just Morden that needs that facility, but it's the surrounding area, the people who have lived there all their lives.

I want to also take the time just to mention the fact that those who are caring for the people in personal care homes are doing a wonderful job. They're going well beyond the call of duty and taking care of our people as best they can, and so I want to thank them for what they're doing.

But, just on that, to give a little bit of background to this, where those—both the Salem Home and the Tabor Home, where they used to be what we called senior homes, they have now become personal care homes. And again, to give an example: the average length of a person living in any one of these facilities is around two years. In fact, it's a little less than that right now. So really, this is at the last days of their life and we really need to be able to accommodate them the best that we can, and right now, we're not able to do that within the area, the

constituency of Pembina that I represent. As I said before, I would plead with the government to look at this favourably and to go ahead and to provide the funding so that they can go ahead. As we know, even if the funding would be announced today, nothing would happen for another three to five years, because that's generally how long any project does take.

I would be remiss if I didn't refer to another letter that I just got, and this was referred to the Minister of Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) and this came from the mayor of Winkler, Mayor Martin Harder. It was written on March 31—but he, too, was at the budget, he came and he listened to the budget and was extremely disheartened by the fact that no mention was made of southern Manitoba in the budget at all. So he came away empty-handed, as did many others, believing, and in fact knowing that, again, southern Manitoba had been overlooked, and for what reasons, no one was sure.

But, anyway, I will refer to the letter that was sent to the Minister of Transportation on March 31. The letter says: I'm again facing significant questions as to do with the future of Highway 32 through Winkler. This stretch of road is simply becoming unbearable as far as traffic and risks taken by commuters on this road. Last Wednesday, you referred—and he's talking about the minister—to Building Canada fund and how much would be accomplished through this program. I want to reiterate, the reason we did not put that project on our list is because it is a provincial responsibility and one-third of the cost should not be loaded onto the local taxpayer.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I have said this time and time again: the responsibility for Highway 32 rests within this provincial government. It is a provincial road, it's a provincial highway, and we need to address the concerns that are out there.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I just want to thank you for the opportunity to put a few comments on the record and, again, I appeal and I would ask the government to look favourably at the constituency of Pembina, as we are growing very rapidly and we do need to address the concerns that are out there. So, with those few words, thank you.

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines): I'm very pleased to get up and speak on the budget, in support of the budget, and against the amendments as put forward by the opposition. I'm pleased to get up, once again, because it's an honour and a pleasure to continue to

represent Assiniboia. It's a wonderful honour to be a minister in a government that represents all Manitobans and works hard for all Manitobans, now and in the future, and actually plans for the future. And it's wonderful to be part of a government that really is committed to the people of the province.

That's, I think, why I'm pleased to welcome two new colleagues on this side of the House, the Member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead) and the Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie). I'm pleased to see that they joined us, and I'm pleased that they were supported by the vast majority of the people in their constituencies. I think that's reflective of the fact that they do represent their areas. They represent the people of Manitoba, and, as part of this government, they actually do look after all parts of the province, all components of the province and all demographics in the province.

When we talk about the reason, I believe, that we continue to be supported by the vast majority of Manitobans, it is because of priorities. I look at the budgets when the 1990s came down and there was a downturn, and I look at the budget now, and I look at what the Finance Minister's done, and I'm pleased. I'm honoured to be a government that cares and does plan and does invest.

So an example would be, is when the members opposite were in government, they talked lots about taxes and they continued to have the highest taxes in the country. So I'm pleased to see that this government moved the taxes that were—in 1998, the small-business tax was a \$250,000 threshold and it was 9 percent, 9 percent a year, the highest in the country. Now I'm pleased to be part of a government that moved the threshold to \$450,000, net, and it's moving towards zero, and that's because small businesses invest, small businesses create the most jobs, small businesses do the most R&D and small businesses have the most innovations. So, when you're talking about new technology, you talk about new vehicles, geothermal, you're talking about energy heat pumps, air-to-air heat pumps, et cetera, that's all done by smaller, medium-sized companies that fall under this wonderful tax cut, and I'm pleased to be supporting that tax cut. I'm shocked that the members opposite have voted against dropping the tax rate for small business from 9 percent down to zero.

The corporate tax rate, I'm pleased to see that the corporate tax rate has been decreased by about a third, from 17 percent in 1998 to 12 percent. That's a

very substantial decrease of about 30 percent, and it's moved forward. But there are also some other things, like the research and development. What we've done is we've increased the research and development tax credit. We've moved to make it refundable. What that means is companies can now invest in processes and new systems, et cetera, and they can get the money back even though they're not profitable at that year, rather than wait for the year that they are profitable. They can invest now and get the money now to reinvest in their processes, their people and their business. That is very, very good planning, that's investing in the future and I'm pleased that this part of the House will be voting for that. I am positive that the members of the Conservative and the Liberal parties will vote against those progressive measures.

I'm also pleased to see that in this budget we've listened to what is happening in the mining industry. We listened and heard that they wanted some changes in taxation. We've moved to a progressive taxation system and that's very, very positive. I'm pleased that we continue to support the mining industry through the Mineral Exploration Assistance Program, the Prospectors' Assistance Program and through a dropping of the mining taxes, the Northern Manitoba Sector Council, a lot of training initiatives.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I'm pleased that while there are companies closing in B.C., in Ontario and around the world—around the world there are a lot of mining companies closed—I'm pleased that we opened a new mine in Wabowden. The interesting part about the new mine in Wabowden is it's employing people from Cross Lake and Wabowden and Norway House, et cetera. The people are trained locally, they're employed locally and it's a great story; sort of like the Bissett story where a new gold mine was started, 65 percent of the people were trained locally, employed locally, Aboriginal and Métis people. That's a wonderful success story where approximately 200 people of the 300 people are employed locally and doing a great job.

I'd also like to say the difference between us and them. In our case, we talk about the 1990s. What happened to education? I was a teacher in the 1990s. I was aware of the fact that I took pay decreases, even after a negotiated settlement. I know what happened. It wasn't how much money increased; it was how much money they took out of the system. It was a decrease in medical schools. What did we do, Madam Deputy Speaker? We increased the medical school from 70 to 110 people. Decreased school

funding during the 1990s under the Conservatives. In our case, in this budget, we've increased it by 5.25 percent or \$53 million. I really started doing research to find out whether \$53 million was the entire increase during the whole decade of the '90s. I would say it's close. I would say it's close. You know, that's pleasing because in one year we're able to do a lot more than they did in 10 years.

* (16:30)

As far as universities, they underfunded universities. They underfunded the positions, et cetera, and, Madam Deputy Speaker, I was there when—and what got me involved in politics was that the members opposite cut, cut, pushed so that we would have to increase tuition by multi digits. You know, we are going to continue to fund bursaries. We're going to double the apprenticeship spots. We're going to fund colleges more; we're going to fund innovation more; we're going to fund—have real bursaries; we have a tax-free rebate—tuition fee rebate, sorry—that will go to students that decide to stay in the province. Those are all innovative things. We are investing in education. We believe education is investment in the future. We think that, by doing this tax where tuition fees are rebated, more and more people are staying here.

I know the members opposite don't believe that, but under their jurisdiction, when they were in control, the amount of people in this province dropped. The amount of young people were leaving the province, not coming to the province, so the vast majority of people left. In our case, more and more people are coming, and I'm pleased that under our government we've now reached the 1.2-million plateau and that more and more people are coming to the province. That's why there's more building. That's why there are more houses being built. That's why there's more property being built. Under the Tories in the '90s, basically, the centre part of the city became very, very empty; there were people moving out of the province; young people didn't see a future; young people didn't see a direction of the province. That was sad. Under our government, we have new industries, a growing population, people moving in and an excitement.

When we talk about investing in the future, I'm going to go through a few. First one is the Composites Innovation Centre. This is where our government is working with the federal government and businesses to integrate new technology into things like airplanes and buses and farm machinery.

What it's caused is, it's caused so that people can take new-age components that are lighter, more durable, less corrosive, and we have a centre of excellence in the world here in Manitoba. I'd like to congratulate Sean McKay, the director, and all the researchers who are basically coming up with the products of the future. Because of that, Madam Deputy Speaker, we've moved, in organizations like Boeing, from 460 people to almost 1,500 people. That's a 300 percent increase, and that's partially because of the Composites Innovation Centre.

The Advanced Manufacturing Initiative. It's nice to see that the federal government and the Canadian manufacturers' association were talking about how the Advanced Manufacturing Initiative, which works with small- and medium-sized businesses to integrate technology, new systems, lean manufacturing, is a way of maintaining jobs, enhancing jobs, enhancing productivity and actually growing businesses here in Manitoba. National organizations are saying this is the way we need to proceed. I'm pleased, as Minister of Industry, that we've moved that forward and that we have a great program there. Same thing with the Vehicle Technology Centre.

I'm going to explain a few new things that we're doing here which are really exciting.

One: the doubling of research. Members opposite didn't understand the importance of research, whether it was medical research or food nutraceuticals or functional foods or even research as far as businesses. So I'm pleased to see that we made a commitment to double research. I'm pleased that, with my colleague the Minister of Agriculture and Food (Ms. Wowchuk), we continue to be leaders as far as functional food, as far as the Richardson centre. I'm pleased to see that we continue to get new products. In fact, just earlier today, I was trying a pea product that was produced in the Portage centre, pushed through by some local producers, and it's very, very healthy and it's good. So there's lots of production of new value-added food that's very, very important.

Medical research. It's neat to see that we have done a very good job on research on health. I'm pleased last year that one of the largest increases in the government's budget was in the MHRC, Manitoba Health Research Council, and in that case, what we did went up almost double, actually more than double. What we're doing is expanding it to more projects; more young students who are at the master's and doctorate level in research are learning

about processes, new ways of treating disease, illnesses and, hopefully, keeping people healthier. That's real good because what it does is that it creates jobs and also creates opportunity.

I'm pleased that we've become a centre for life sciences and biotech, not just in Canada but in all of North America. We are truly becoming the destination of choice. That, Madam Deputy Speaker, is because of the refundability, the research tax credit, and a lot of our tax credits, a lot of our education programs, on lab techs, et cetera. It's being caused because we have a good cost of doing business here, a good cost of investment.

The other things that I'm pleased that we're doing here are that we're focussing on the future. We are the government that committed to funding 50 percent of the operating of transit. We also are committed to rapid transit. Our money's where our mouth is, and we're moving forward in rapid transit. It's taken a long time since Mayor Juba first came up with the idea, but we're moving forward on it. I'm pleased to say that.

We're moving forward on waste-water projects. Again, one of the things that I as an MLA bothered me was the whole Walkerton tragedy. I think we need to ensure that we have decent water, that around the province people can trust their water. I'm pleased at the investments that we've made so far and the continued investment in both sewer and water projects. I think it's a wonderful legacy. It doesn't give a lot of political credit, but it's the right thing to do. I'm pleased we're doing that.

Also, another interesting thing is the new media tax credit. We have a game tax credit. People often say, well, why do you care about new media? Right now there are about 232 new media companies up from almost zero in the '90s. These companies are making games. They're new media three-D, two-D, all sorts of different broadcast design, et cetera. There are 232 companies; it's a growth rate of about 850 percent. I know it's not 1,000 percent yet, but we're getting there. What's nice is that these are companies that have great value added, lots of skills and lots of potential for good profitability. It's something that you can compete around the world. Well, I'm pleased that the minister of continuing education has worked with the colleges and universities to develop good programs to teach people how to do this skill, and that's very, very good.

We've also worked with businesses to create a grant program, which we've done, and that's a very, very successful grant and tax credit program. I'm pleased now that just on this Thursday we made a wonderful announcement which is (a) promoting our companies, (b) coming up with a list of specialties so that people can come up and partner or come to Manitoba and see the skills that we actually do have. It also is giving a whole bunch of training courses so people can upgrade their skill. I think that with New Media Manitoba, with courses at the university and Red River, et cetera, and in Brandon University, I think we have a great program, and I'd like to continue with the 850 percent growth that we experienced over the last three years. We'll continue to do that.

I'm also pleased that we are making investments in businesses, where we have the MIOP program, which will continue to support things and people.

The Tories will continue to vote against these investments. They'll vote against new energy projects; they'll vote against wind farms; they'll vote against university investments; they'll vote against new media investments; they'll vote against solar energy; they'll vote against refundability of research. They'll even vote against a road budget that's three times what it was in 1998. Now, I'm shocked about that.

So I look at what we're investing in. We're investing in nurses. This is a very, very important thing. One of things I got involved in politics is because I thought we should have regional hospitals, and I know that, when I got involved in 1998, that was partially because the Grace Hospital emergency was closed on weekends, evenings and special times. I thought it was sad. I thought it was sad, because they were committed to closing down Grace Hospital emergency. They did that. We didn't do that. Over the last two elections they keep on saying, oh, you are committed to closing down Grace Hospital emergency. We are not going to close down the emergency. We're going to keep it open. We're going to keep Grace Hospital open. The only group that ever closed it was the Conservative Party of Manitoba, and I find it passing strange that they continue to push that.

* (16:40)

As far as doctors, I find it funny that they didn't understand the cause-effect of closing down seats in the medical school and not having as many doctors. I found it strange that they got rid of, they cancelled,

they completely closed the training of diagnostic technicians, and then, five years later, they're saying, oh, shock, we don't have people to work in our labs or in lab techs or diagnostics. They didn't understand the cause and effect that if you cancel the training programs, then people aren't trained. They don't fill the positions.

So I'm pleased that we have new diagnostic programs. I'm pleased that we're training more doctors and giving them incentive to stay here. I'm pleased that we have a lot more nurses and giving them incentives here. I'm very pleased with things like the midwife program, because it's talking about traditions that are very, very important, and I'm pleased that we have commitment to Winnipeg and community hospitals and rural hospitals everywhere. I'm very pleased that we've been expanding services in Brandon and in Selkirk and in Steinbach around the—and Thompson and The Pas, et cetera.

I'm pleased that we're governing for all Manitobans. I actually think that we're balanced. One of the things that bothered me in the last election is when the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) went to northern Manitoba, smiled, talked about being committed to northern Manitoba, and then later that afternoon said that they were going to pull the money out of the highways budget up north and put it in the south. That's not governing for all Manitobans. That's not being fair and balanced. I believe we're fair and balanced. *[interjection]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The din is rising. Can we just—when someone is speaking, please respect the speaker.

Mr. Rondeau: I'm also pleased that we're paying the pensions. It's one of those things that we don't get a lot of credit for, but 40 years ago, when government stopped paying pensions, that meant that money was going to be paid in the future. There were no provisions to pay the pensions. I think it's right to fill the pension liability and pay the pension liability, and it's also very correct to continue to put money into people's pensions as they work. I think that pensions are deferred contributions. I think it's important to be there.

I think it's important to put the debt on the books. I know that there used to be two sets of books and lots of off-books transactions, transactions and information that was never provided the public. I'm pleased that this Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) and this government put all the debt on the books,

amortize the books—amortize the debt and show it in a credible form on gap financing.

I'm pleased that we actually work with the federal government on health and post-secondary. I know the members opposite keep on saying that we shouldn't be taking money from the feds as far as health and post-secondary, but we have agreements. When medicare was first established, the federal government paid 50 percent of the cost of health care. I'd love to have that. Now, they pay a lot less than 50 percent, but I think that the money that they're bringing in is important. It is a contribution to our health care. They all do contribute to post-secondary and research, and I think that we want to be partners in that.

I think also what we want to do is look at what type of society we have. I'm pleased to have the portfolio that deals with climate change. I think we've been a leader on climate change. I'm pleased that we have legislated that we are going to meet Kyoto targets. I'm pleased that we're working aggressively in green energy because I think what you'd have is a vision.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

You can look at the environment as a cost, but you can also see it as an opportunity. I believe that being green environmentally can cause positive economic growth. I believe being green creates industries in solar, in geothermal, in wind, in energy efficiency, and I'm pleased to be part of the government that is leading that charge. When the Canadian Energy Efficiency Alliance said that we were A-plus, the best in the country as far as energy efficiency, I think that was important. It sent a message, and there are lots of jobs created, money saved and positive feelings for that.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to be supporting this budget. I'm pleased to be part of this government that governs for all Manitobans. I'm pleased to be part of government that cares about the environment and the economy, and I'm also pleased to be one that's balanced as far as business, individuals, tax cuts and the provision of services and being fair for everyone. It's what we as New Democrats believe; it's what we will stand for. We believe in being a fair government for all, and, therefore, I will be supporting the government. I know Tory times are tough times. NDP times are good government for all. Thank you.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to speak to the budget. First, I would like to congratulate the two new members to the Manitoba Legislature, the Member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead) and the Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie). As an MLA for the past five and a half, six years, I can say that it's been a great opportunity to represent great people in your community and try to make a difference. I welcome them to their new jobs and welcome them to the debates that we certainly will have within this building on many issues.

I'm proud to speak on behalf of the Minnedosa constituency. As I just had indicated, I've represented this riding now for five and a half, six years in the Legislature, and, over the past number of years, I have met many people within my communities who are either community leaders or just natural leaders within their own communities, within their organizations. Through those individuals, I've been able to learn a lot about my communities and learn a lot about the issues that are important to not only their communities but also to themselves.

I've learned of many issues that have been hard to deal with. We've worked on losing jobs within our communities through government centralization. We've worked on issues where Hydro employees have been relocating to other communities because of the changes in the structures. We've seen individuals face floods and have volunteers come to their aid and work with them tirelessly to fight back the flood waters and the ice floes. On that, I think I want to share my thoughts and thanks to the many government employees and the many, many volunteers who are working tirelessly with residents and community people to fight back the flood waters and the ice floes to get through these trying times and to ensure that these people can get back into their homes and move forward past this very difficult time.

Back to the point of the budget, when I was listening to the words of the Finance Minister, I kept thinking how disappointed this budget was to not only my constituents but to Manitobans as a whole. There just seemed to be so many things missing from this document, and I feel that I would like to put on the record a few of the ideas that I think should have been included in the document and could have actually helped many Manitobans in the short term.

This budget has seen an increase in debt load. The net debt is \$11.8 billion. That's up \$700 million

from last year, and it would appear that our total debt is in the vicinity of \$21.1 billion. That's a staggering number in itself, but a point that would create a parallel to that is that it's more than Saskatchewan, Alberta and B.C. have in debt in total, Mr. Speaker. I think that that should be a strong message and a concern to the government in that they need to be looking at this debt and looking at ways to reduce it.

* (16:50)

Of that \$10.1-million budget that the government has earmarked in spending, 60 percent of that money goes into health care and education, Mr. Speaker. That is a huge amount of money that goes into two large departments, not departments that aren't deserving, but they are two departments that have a lot of issues and a lot of things that need to be addressed. By allowing only 40 percent of the remaining budget to go into Family Services; Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives; Seniors; Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, it really gives me great concern that there doesn't seem to be a balance in how these dollars are being allocated, and there doesn't seem to be a concern on how these dollars are being spent.

Included in the budget 2009, there does not appear to be a layout of plan for Manitoba's economic growth or a road map for where the Province in planning to go in the next five to 10 years, let alone the next year, Mr. Speaker. We've seen how this government manages in good times by spending instead of saving and by growing its debt. It turns out it manages the same in bad times. This budget has simply put off economic decisions it should have made this year until next year, a year that will even be tougher for the budget than the 2009 budget.

Manitobans are concerned. There seems to be an increase in spending. The simple fact is that this government is spending \$88 million more than it is taking in, and, Mr. Speaker, that's a deficit. It's a very concerning amount of money to be spent when we have some very serious issues coming to the province over the short term.

In this recession, we see a number of seniors who are on fixed incomes looking at ways to reduce their spending, to look at ways of reducing the amount of money that they take in from their pension allocations. I know my parents are on a fixed income, and part of their strategy was to look at the amount of money they're getting from their pensions and to reduce that amount of money that they're

getting so that there was more in there, in the pot, for them to look at or to keep them sustained over the long term. So I think that they're looking at their future and they're looking at ways to deal with the storm of the recession, and I just didn't see that in the budget from this government.

There are a number of issues within the areas of government: 60 percent increase in funding in Health and Education. Mr. Speaker, 4 billion of it is in Health. Living in a rural community, I see a number of concerns, a number of issues that just are not being looked at or are not being dealt with. There are some very serious systemic problems that need to be addressed, and I fail to see, from this government anyway, that they're taking this seriously.

For example, the community that I live in, Souris, has technologists who are both very close to retirement and have indicated over and over again that there just doesn't appear to be a strategy from this government to deal with the recruitment issue and dealing with the aging work force within their facility and others within the communities. In the community of Souris, if the lab technologists should not be able to work, that would close the ER. I do know that in another community in Westman, I believe it's Melita, that was a big factor in that ER closing was they just didn't have the lab technologists available to keep that facility or the ER open, so we need to be looking at the issue of workloads that these individuals are faced with.

I do know that one of the individuals that works out of the facility in my home community has indicated that she works full days and every second weekend on, and that makes it really difficult for individuals who are looking for a quality of life and are looking for opportunities to enjoy their family time. Rural technologists do work in conditions that are isolated. They do work on call, so there are a number of things that need to be looked at, and it just doesn't seem to be something that is on the radar screen for this government.

I believe in the last election, the Premier (Mr. Doer) himself had been in Brandon at Brandon University in the health, or the health department at the university and had promised more nursing positions or spaces for nurses within that facility, and I've been hearing from that facility that they're very concerned about that. I was pleased to see that there's been some mention of moving forward on this.

I believe that that will address definitely a shortage of nurses within some of the rural facilities.

I know that there are individuals who live in my community and communities on the other side of my constituency in Minnedosa, young people, who just don't want to leave home—they like living in Minnedosa, Souris or Rivers—who are looking for opportunities to get a nursing degree or some type of education in the area in health care, but just don't want to leave their home communities.

So I think that, when we can provide opportunities for these individuals to live at home, live in their own communities and get an education, it definitely works in the favour of retention and, actually, recruitment, for these individuals to remain in those smaller communities. These are individuals who know rural life. They know what it's like to live in a small town. They don't mind that the services and the opportunities are more limited than they would be in an urban centre. Actually, they prefer that, as we do as a family. I think that there are opportunities here to help address the retention aspect of health care by offering programs like the nursing program in Brandon and giving more positions. I'm going to be watching very closely to this government's interest or nod towards a medical school proposal that's being discussed quite frequently in the Westman area. I believe that, again, it speaks to the points that I identified earlier, that if you can keep individuals within the region, within those communities, then you have a better chance of having them stay in those communities and actually work in those communities and actually play a big part in not only being professionals within that community, but be a part of that community through different organizations and groups.

Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of things that I would have liked to have seen addressed in the budget. One of them would have been the proposal for the Minnedosa-Neepawa health-care facility. That has come up through numerous conversations I've had with community leaders and just very concerned and interested individuals in those communities. We are very interested in looking at opportunities that can help stabilize some of the

health-care challenges that we face in rural Manitoba. I think this is one proposal that needs to be considered and moved on rather quickly.

Another one would be the Rivers phase 2 renovations for the Riverdale Health Centre. They've raised half a million dollars locally through fundraising, through municipal councils, through different organizations. They really do need to have a facility expansion so that they can ensure that their doctors are working in conditions that are acceptable for them confidentially as well as aesthetically. They do need to have facilities that they can be proud of and that the community can go in and feel comfortable that their needs are being met with in a good effort.

Mr. Speaker, I've also spoken to a number of individuals with regard to ophthalmology concerns in the community of Swan River. One of my cousins lives in Swan River, and he's had a detached retina and has had some very serious issues with his eyes. If he didn't have a family member or a friend that lived in Saskatchewan where he's receiving care, it would be very costly for him to be receiving his treatments. I do know that it's ironic that Swan River does have an opportunity to have an ophthalmologist provide care and support there in that community. They've done what they need to do again, just as Rivers has. They've raised local funds, more than \$300,000 for the necessary equipment. The Swan River valley hospital has space to accommodate this service. Again, here's a community, just very similar to Rivers, who have done what they need to do to make sure that a program opportunity does become a reality for that community.

The community—

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable Member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat) will have 15 minutes remaining.

The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow (Wednesday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, April 14, 2009

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