



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

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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authority of
The Honourable Louise M. Dacquay
Speaker*



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Thirty-Sixth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, March 10, 1997

The House met at 8 p.m.

ORDERS OF THE DAY (Continued)

THRONE SPEECH DEBATE (Fifth Day of Debate)

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Marcel Laurendeau): The honourable Minister of Government Services, with nine minutes remaining.

Hon. Frank Pitura (Minister of Government Services): As I was just finishing off before we broke for the supper hour, another major, major announcement, I think, that took place last fall was the sale of the Hudson's Bay route to OmniTRAX. I think OmniTRAX will have a tremendous impact on the North in this province from the fact that its head office is going to be in The Pas, and ultimately we hope that in its negotiations with the federal government that it will be able to take over the terminal at Churchill. From that, the tremendous impact that it can have on the community of Churchill, as well as the community of The Pas and all the communities along that route will have a major economic impact to the North in terms of creating jobs and stability to the growth.

Some of the things that were mentioned in the throne speech that I would like to also respond to in terms of initiatives from Government Services, one of the areas that was mentioned, of course, was the openbidding service. As our department is involved in the openbidding service program, we will continue to explore venues within that openbidding service. This type of service allows Manitoba companies to bid on government contracts right across this country, but at the same time it does allow for some competition from outside Manitoba to compete against Manitoba companies. But overall, Manitoba companies will be the winner in this whole area.

Another area that we will be active in is proceeding to try to eliminate the internal trade barriers that exist within this country. Of course, the openbidding service

in some respects addresses that problem, but internal trade barriers within Canada are probably more restrictive than our external trade barriers, and so many of these barriers have to be addressed and removed.

Another area that we will be still actively involved in is regulatory reform. As you are probably aware, regulatory reform started under my predecessor, and as a result of that committee they went through many, many regulations within government and removed hundreds of unnecessary regulations that would impede businesses from operating in Manitoba. We are also pursuing the concept of better methods within government as well as a service, first type of customer service, within government so that government takes the approach that whether it is dealing between government departments or dealing with the public at large that the customer is always first in terms of their service.

Another initiative that is being taken by our department is the area of desktop management, which is in the area of hardware procurement and establishment between all departments of government. As well, we continue to challenge all our SOAs within Government Services, both in the Fleet Vehicles and the mail distribution, the materials distribution and the land management services to do a very good job of customer service, as well as operating their respective areas as a business and proceeding along that line.

The ultimate goal, of course, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is to keep the cost of government at the lowest level in Canada. I am proud to say that Manitoba's cost of government is now the lowest in this country. It is at a level that is competitive worldwide, as well. So while we are still trying to provide top quality customer service, we also want to be at the forefront of keeping government at lowest costs.

Some bright, bright lights coming in the future, of course, are the Canada Summer Games that are going to take place this summer in Brandon, which are going to have a tremendous impact on that community from the standpoint of tourism and the gathering of athletes

from across Canada coming into the great city of Brandon.

Of course, in 1999, Winnipeg and the surrounding communities will be playing host to the Pan Am Games, which will see the number of athletes arriving here in Manitoba in larger numbers than were in the Montreal Olympics in 1976, so it will be truly a very gala event. It will be something. Each and every one of us will want to take in some of the sports activities.

In summary, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have a lot of pride in the way our government has been operating in this province in the last number of years, and in the first area is in the area of the economy. If you take a look at the Winnipeg Free Press headlines on March 8 and March 9, talking about the job market that is racing ahead and how youth employment is at an all-time high, these are very positive factors in Manitoba's economy, which are also a testimony to the fact that Manitoba is moving in the right direction.

We do have the balanced budget, which will continue for many years to come. We also have sound fiscal management, which means that we are still spending our dollars carefully of the dollars that we do have. We have a very strong commitment to health, education and social services, the ultimate social safety net. But the best social safety net is a job. That is what we are doing in this province, creating jobs by creating a climate, and that climate attracts businesses to establish in Manitoba and create jobs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in Manitoba, our commitment as government is to create and preserve an environment where people will know that Manitoba is the best place to live, work, invest and raise a family. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Wolseley. [interjection]

Ms. Jean Friesen (Wolseley): No, indeed, I would not laugh at you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am very glad to see you sitting in that chair; I think you are doing an admirable job. I certainly look forward to your continuing success.

It is difficult to know what to say about this throne speech except it is thin. This is not even throne speech

“lite”; this is thin, thin, thin. I often wonder what instructions the Tories give to their throne speech writers. It must be quite a nice list. I would think they start with the usual suggestion, repeat the big lies, because that is what this one does over and over with the idea that—and it is simply a fancy of the Tory government—they have not had any tax increases. So the No. 1 instruction is, repeat the big lies.

Crank up the boosterism, I think, is the second one. I must admit I have a personal regret here. I looked for it, I did not find the quilting bees; I did not find the barn raising. Those are personal favourites, and I really miss them in this particular throne speech. I actually think there was room for it. Actually, there was room for quite a lot of things in this throne speech. It was so light that I had to search even to find the usual pieces on children and poverty that the government wants to talk about.

I think the third, their next instruction, must be, reannounce the urban sports camps. How many times has this government reannounced urban sports camps? I think we must be at about No. 3 or No. 4 now. Has anybody seen an urban sports camp in Winnipeg yet? Do you think we will see it this year? Well, we might. Hope springs eternal, and it certainly has to spring eternal about this particular Speech from the Throne.

Well, the Pan Am Games are there. I expect they will be there for the next two or three years, and then if the Tories are still here and if they think they can last until the Pan Am Games, then we will have the next throne speech which talks only about the Pan Am Games. We have, I think, one area that is missing from this throne speech, and that is sort of the praise for the great Leader. Now you have to hand it to the Tories, they do restrain themselves on praise for the great Leader. I think that is probably quite wise, because I think their polls must be telling them that their great Leader has become, in fact, an embarrassment. It is certainly something I hear. It is certainly what my nose tells me, and it is what the people in my riding tell me, that Filmon has got to go. I think judging from what is not in the throne speech that that is probably what the Tories are hearing, too.

* (2010)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not welcome the pages from last session, welcome them back to the Legislature, and the new staff who are at the table. I wish them many happy hours in this Legislature. I am sure they will certainly have many stories to tell their grandchildren about the events of the Manitoba Legislature. I also welcome the new ministers, the new Minister of Government Services (Mr. Pitura), the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Radcliffe), the new Minister of Energy and Mines, Northern Affairs, Native Affairs (Mr. Newman)—and he has quite a long list, I think, on his little sheet that he sends around. It must be quite a mouthful every time they go around the caucus table over there.

I also want to express some regrets about the ministers who were turfed this time. It is interesting to read Stephen Covey's book on leadership and loyalty. I gather in the Tory Party it is a one-way street. Two ministers were turned off, turned away. One of them, I know, is very well respected in Steinbach. I do not know Charleswood as well, but I certainly do know people from Steinbach, and I know the respect that that particular minister had. I also know people who worked in his department. He was a minister who was very well respected by his staff. It is not something you can say for all ministers for various reasons, but that particular minister was, and I think that was well known throughout most of the government. So I notice that such ministers have been let go, turned away, allowed to depart from the Tory cabinet.

The former Minister for Sport, I know, also had a great deal of support in the sport community of Manitoba. He was very well regarded. I think it must have been quite a shock to them, as indeed it probably was to him, that he was turfed out in such an unceremonious manner. I also appreciated the role of the former Minister of Sport as House leader. He was one of the ones that I always said was a straight shooter, straight speaker—

Hon. Linda McIntosh (Minister of Education and Training): When did you say that?

Ms. Friesen: Well, the Minister of Education in her usual charming manner wants to know when I said that. Well, I said that on many occasions. It is just that the

minister and I do not really have perhaps a conversational relationship. I am always ready to tell her my opinions on any Tory minister, and we could begin with her if she wants to.

So I want to note for the record that loyalty amongst the Tory caucus seems to be a one-way street. I regret very much both the manner and the nature of the departure of those two particular ministers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the content of this throne speech, as I said, was pretty thin, and it does begin with speaking about our province's transformation, remarkable and unprecedented. Well, it certainly has been. The depths of poverty that I see in my constituency are something which I think are ready to meet new records. I cannot believe that this government has ever walked down Furby Street, that any member of this government has ever walked down Furby Street, has ever walked down Langside Street, has walked down Beverley Street, and I am giving you these names because these are the names of the streets where the deepest poverty is found in Manitoba.

The new Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Radcliffe) wanted to talk about the boarded-up buildings in Montreal. He wanted to contrast them with the great prosperity that had somehow come to Manitoba, and I do not think he should take any glee in the economic conditions of Montreal. Montreal is in a very difficult situation, and the future of Montreal, I think, is something which should be of great concern to every MLA in this House. The economic future of Montreal is something which is of great concern to the future of Confederation.

So I do not take any, I think, pride perhaps, as the member for River Heights (Mr. Radcliffe) did, in the economic deterioration in Montreal. But he should, in fact, walk through parts of my riding and see what the abandonment of the inner city looks like, because that is what happened over the 10 years of transformation, this remarkable and unprecedented transformation, that this government talks about.

Later in the throne speech they want to talk about their agreements with the federal government for rebuilding the infrastructure of Manitoba, of the inner city in particular, and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it almost

makes you want to weep. A government which can so coldly and calculatingly withdraw supports from the inner city year after year after year, and then expect us to believe, expect us to accept that there is some sincerity in what they are talking about in this throne speech. It really, I think, if it did not make you cry I guess you would just have to laugh. That is certainly what many people I meet on a regular basis are doing. Is it really true, somebody said to me in the supermarket on the weekend, that the throne speech talked about aboriginal people? Is it really true that they talked about a new relationship with aboriginal people? It is breathtaking, and I promised that I would send them a copy of it, because, yes, it really does talk about a new relationship with aboriginal people, and this government's openness and willingness to deal with the educational needs of aboriginal people of Manitoba. It is quite breathtaking for a government which, year after year, has found new, inventive, creative ways to take away educational opportunities and job opportunities from aboriginal people.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the government begins its throne speech with a series of big lies. An economic plan, benefits of growth being shared fairly among all our citizens, a social policy initiative encouraging self-sufficiency, and a spirit of community and a quality of life based on our heritage of co-operation. Well, it is the usual pap and it is also the usual big lie about taxation.

Time after time, this government has put up on billboards, announces in its speeches that there has been no tax increases. I wonder who is left in Manitoba who believes them. I have not met many people lately who believe any element of that, and I think they might be advised to give some new directions to their speech writers next time. Even during the last budget I think there were clear analyses, not just by this side of the House, but by the press, which argued that the Filmon government had in its 1996 provincial budget—and we are only talking one year here, not the 10 years of transformation that they want to talk about—but in one year for an annual household income of \$40,000 you could project, as a result of that one budget, a 9 percent increase in income tax. Essentially the offloads and the user fees that were being imposed upon people in that one budget led to the equivalent increase in income tax of 9 percent.

If you took another example, a family of four in Fort Garry with a \$60,000 income, you would find an 11.5 percent equivalency to the increase in income tax. That is just one year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, one year in this government's transformation of the province of Manitoba.

We could begin to look at the cumulative effects of all the tax increases that this government has brought, and, in fact, I have one constituent who has them all in his pocket. He has a list and he keeps adding to it, and he brings it out every time he hears the Filmon government talk about no tax increases. He has had quite a few that he could add to it this year.

This no-tax Filmon government, of course, has led us to the position where we will have telephone service increases. Now that has nothing to do with this government; we know that—completely out of their hands. It is privatized now. The record of Alberta and the record of other areas in the world where telephone companies have been privatized have led inexorably to increases, I think, wherever companies have been privatized, and the reason for that is obvious. As you begin to put the capital that new technologies require into these telephone companies, somebody is going to pay for them, and it is not the shareholders. It is going to be the consumer. So telephone increases—of course, nothing to do with this government. This is a no-tax government, obviously. We would not want to talk about telephone increases to these people.

* (2020)

But what about fishing licences? What about the seniors who did not have to pay for fishing licences before? Is that not a tax increase? Well, of course, it is not because the Filmon government has not taxed anybody—no new increases in taxation as a result of this government. Those seniors are being challenged to become more independent, to be more resourceful. That is what it is all about, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is not a tax offload onto anybody.

What about the home care equipment, the ostomy bags, the equipment for other people who have medical difficulties at home? They used to be considered part of medicare. It was unavoidable. It was something which people did not choose for themselves, to be ill in

that way where they needed those kinds of assistance, and it was seen as part of medicare, but now there is an additional charge—but it is not a tax, not a tax, of course. No, no, this is simply independence at home. These are people who are now able to meet that challenge, and the truth is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that there is a two-tier system, and some will meet that challenge, but those who do not have the money are doing without. So we have two different versions of medicare in Manitoba.

What about the doubling of nursing home fees? Could we consider that a tax?

An Honourable Member: No, not by a Tory, no.

Ms. Friesen: Well, it could not be. I mean, after all, it is the Filmon government that brought it in. It could not possibly be a tax. So what is it, I wonder, the doubling of nursing home fees? Well, I guess it is just the family taking responsibility for those unfortunate people who get older and sicker. That is what it is all about. It is another version of independence, another challenge that the Filmon government is handing to Manitobans as they transform this province.

Drivers licence fees—well, there is another one. I think they have gone up twice, have they not? But not a tax, not a tax at all. Not a tax. [interjection] The Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Enns) assures me it is not a tax. I suppose it is just another way of funding the roads, is it? I mean, is that what that is about? Not a tax, of course.

Camping fees: The families who used to go on holiday and used to look forward to that and used to include that in their budget now have to increase the amount of money, and maybe some of them have to take fewer weekends or possibly no weekends at all. Camping fees, it is not a tax, of course, because it is the Filmon government which has put this in. [interjection] Oh, the minister wants to talk about sales tax, does he?

An Honourable Member: Let us talk about the sales tax. What did they do with the sales tax?

Ms. Friesen: Well, they broadened the basis of the sales tax to include school supplies and to include children's clothes. Now that is not a tax, clearly,

brought in by that nice member for Tuxedo (Mr. Filmon), clearly not a tax. It sure beats raising taxes, right? Sure, it falls on those people who are just unfortunate enough to have children.

Hon. Harry Enns (Minister of Agriculture): These are not taxes. These are sensitive economic adjustments.

Ms. Friesen: Well, you can always count on the Minister of Agriculture, can you not, and in this case they are just sensitive—and I quote from what the minister just said: These are not taxes; these are sensitive economic adjustments.

Well, try telling that to the people who came to the meeting I had on welfare rights and who talked about their inability to get eye examinations. These are people with physical disabilities who are now unable to get eye examinations in the same way they had been able to before, but that is not a tax increase, that is not a way of making the poor poorer. The Filmon government, in fact, has found many ways to make the poor poorer.

What about ultrasound? Ultrasound tests are now often required by doctors, in fact in many cases required by doctors, to anticipate the difficulties of birth, to anticipate a wide variety of problems that might occur, a very useful test and often ordered by doctors, but now there is a \$50 fee. What happens if you do not have the \$50? Just another sensitive economic adjustment on the part of the Tory government. I suppose that old one, the Northern Transportation fee, I expect, is still in place. Is it still \$50 or has it been increased? Has it been sensitively readjusted, to quote the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Enns)? I gather it is still at the \$50 rate. I wonder if that has proved the deterrent to medical evacuations that the government anticipated it would. Why else do you put in a \$50 fee other than to deter people, to deter people from being sick, to deter people from wanting to get medical help at their doctor's orders in Winnipeg? But that is still there.

University tuition fees have been increased, but that is not a tax, of course. That is something, just another adjustment, something which, of course, has no deterrent effect on the kinds of families that want to—

An Honourable Member: That is offset completely by the tax credit.

Ms. Friesen: The minister wants to say that it is offset by the tax credit, and indeed it is, in part, but only in part. No, I think the minister will have to look at the year-end results on that and to see, in fact, that it is not totally offset. Well, I think the minister perhaps is not quite as up to date as she might be with the range of university tuition fees. They are different in different faculties, and some of them are quite high and have become considerably higher under this minister.

What about the property tax credit? We are hearing a great deal at this time of budget making about the increases in property taxes as a result of the offloading of the provincial government onto local authorities for education matters. Well, I guess those are not tax increases either. What number am I up to now? I have not been counting, but it is certainly taking a considerable time to go through this list, and I must tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am only halfway through in these non-tax increases that the Tory government believes are in place in Manitoba.

The property tax credit, of course, has gone, and property taxes have increased. There is the double whammy, and there cannot be a member in this House who is not aware of the impact of those increases on their constituents. I suppose what is as galling as anything is the way in which the government believes it can stand there with 31 straight faces and say, and perhaps believe, that they are speaking the truth, that there has been no tax increase. Seniors who used to have a property tax credit, the people who are on fixed incomes and most harmed by the rising reliance upon tax credits, those have had them taken away by the Filmon government. What a surprise, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

What about soil-testing fees? The rural dental program which we lost? Now that is some time ago. It is not one of the recent ones, but I must say that my list is not quite up to date. There are certainly some areas that I have not been able to check, but soil-testing fees are certainly a relatively new addition. I do not know what the impact of that is upon a farmer's income, but I expect that it is considerable and certainly may act as a deterrent in some cases. Rich farmers will be able to

afford it; those in other areas will not, and so we have again the deliberate setting up of the conditions for a two-tiered society.

You want to talk about the transformation of Manitoba? That, indeed, is the transformation that has happened in the last year; a government policy which has set out to make the poor poorer. That is one of the most difficult things for my constituents to look at, those people who faced the 10 percent cut across the board in welfare rates.

Well, there is one I actually did not have on my list, a 10 percent cut across the board. Not a tax increase, of course; it did not take anything away from my constituents. That must be what the government believes, but, in fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that was a most cruel cut. If you have ever looked at what somebody gets on welfare, particularly a single person, that 10 percent cut was considerable, and it cut into food. But, of course, that was not a tax increase. The Conservative government does not look for tax increases from poor people. Surely that could not be the case. Surely my constituents said to me they know what it is like to live on this amount of money. Surely they would not take away another 10 percent from those of us who are at the poorest level in Manitoba, and I had to explain to them, yes, this was a government which set out deliberately to make poor people poorer. They did it in the name of independence.

What they were really doing was taking away the dependency from these people. I think that was how the member for River Heights (Mr. Radcliffe) referred to it. He did not want them to become dependent. He was, he said, representing his government. This is a government which was there for the, quote, sick, the disabled, the poor and the marginalized. Well, I look forward to taking that back to the next meeting at West Broadway. I look forward to telling those people that I met with, this time last week, who are facing difficulties in their eye exams, who are facing difficulties in getting their prescriptions filled, who are facing difficulties dealing at the end of the month with an absence of food, people who are handicapped and on provincial welfare.

* (2030)

This government is here for the sick, the disabled, the poor and the marginalized. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that cut of 10 percent across welfare was a most cruel cut, not only because it deliberately targeted those at the lowest level in society, but because it really was not a 10 percent, it was a 20 percent cut. Unlike the Harris government in Ontario which tried to do the same thing, the Harris government did take a cut across welfare, but the Harris government also made the cut applicable to rents. Not this government. It was the poor who were to suffer; it was not the landlords.

It meant in many cases that my constituents had far, far less to eat at the end of the month. I do not know if I can put it any plainer for members. They may perhaps have seen the letter in the Free Press. I believe it was over the weekend or perhaps it was at the end of last week. It talked about somebody feeding from the garbage at one of the McDonald's. That was in my constituency.

You do not have to look at that if you do not want to. You can turn your eyes away from that. You can close your ears to those people who are trying to tell you what it is like to live on 10 percent less, or 20 percent less, for their food and who, as well, have disabilities and are dealing with the issue of glasses, of medical assistance. But you will have to deal with the cumulative effects of this. You will have to deal with the underclass that you are creating. The transformation that you have created is, in fact, the creation—and I hesitate to say that it is a permanent underclass, but I think the potential is there. It begins with food.

The next step was children. This government took away by reducing, or forcing the city to reduce, the amounts given to young children. It also took away the food from young children; but it was not a tax. You would not want to think of that as a tax, would you, Mr. Deputy Speaker? These are people who in their ministerial salaries got a 14 percent increase.

I notice the heckling has stopped. I notice that they are all now reading assiduously their ministerial papers, and well they might for their 14 percent increase. Do I see any volunteers to come with me next time to a meeting of people with disabilities, people who are on welfare in my constituency, to tell them about your

compassion and your caring and being there for the disabled, the poor and the marginalized? I do not see any hands rising, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Let us talk about the increases in the fees for Vital Statistics, not a tax increase by this government's measure, but when you have to get your birth certificate, when you are coming up to your Old Age Pension or when you are trying to get it for a relative, when you are coming for your CPP or you are looking for social assistance of some kind, you will find that Vital Statistics will require an additional amount of money from you.

For those people who are on welfare, that is an inordinate fee, as is, of course, the increase in fees for Legal Aid. Many of my constituents have depended in the past upon Legal Aid. It was that sense, yes, they had the option. They had the possibility of challenging the decisions that were made on their behalf, and make no mistake about it, these people live very much at the mercy of government bureaucrats and arbitrary decisions. They know often very little of the rules. After all, the rule book itself, the regulations, is about six inches high, and the policy manual beyond that, I think, has 600 or 700 pages. They are at the mercy of the arbitrariness of many decisions that are made in government offices, and Legal Aid was a way out of that. It was a way of feeling that, yes, I have the option to appeal, although in some areas appeals have now been taken from them, and now a \$25 fee has been added to Legal Aid. There is a price on justice for the poor, and that is what it is, \$25.

They broadened the scope of the sales tax, as I have already mentioned, and they have, of course, in their offloading of costs onto the school boards led to a broader situation about where there is an increasing number of costs which are being laid upon parents and individuals. We have seen in a number of school divisions already charges that have been made that were not there in the past for supplies, charges for busing that have not been there in the past, charges for supervision at school for those who could not go home and those who were in special programs. All of these are tax increases, but the government seems to think that there are still Manitobans out there who believe that this is a government which has not increased taxes.

We have not talked about taxicab licences, about recoveries from municipalities, about the recoveries from fire prevention, about the increased fees for the retrieval of documents or for Freedom of Information. We have not looked at the environmental tax. All of those are additional taxes from a no-tax government. It makes quite a long list, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and, as I have suggested at the beginning, it is not complete, and I do look forward to completing it. Perhaps the government would help me with this and, in fact, suggest some of the other areas where they have not increased taxes. I am sure that they have some new and inventive ways in the next budget that we are looking forward to with some trepidation, some new and inventive ways of sensitively adjusting the incomes of the poorest Manitobans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I listened with some interest to the speech of the member for River Heights (Mr. Radcliffe). I thought at times we were descending to the level of a Monty Python skit. It was heading into the borders of that skit that I think Bill Cosby used to do. You know, we used to go to school barefoot through the snow, uphill both ways. Remember that one? Well, there is a Monty Python skit which is much the same. You know, one person was brought up in a shoe box; the other one was brought up to lick the roads. Here we heard about the hardship of the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Radcliffe) as he went through law school with a CN job that he had to work at, and he was proud to work at that; of course, leaving the implication that many Manitobans are not proud to have a job, and that could not be further from the truth. I meet people every day in my constituency who would give their eyes for a job.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the implications that the member for River Heights left, perhaps inadvertently, I think were quite false. I do not know of anyone who turns down the jobs that are on offer, but what the government is doing when it talks about the increase in the employment statistics, I think, is letting us believe that these are full-time jobs. Some of them are; no doubt about it, but many of them are part-time jobs. A full-time job, by the way, is now defined as 20 hours a week. How many of the jobs that the government claims have been created in Manitoba are more than 20 hours a week? How many times do you find people in your constituency, as I do in mine, who are working

two and three jobs in order to bring in the kind of wage that 10 years ago, before this transformation of Manitoba, would have kept a family of two or three in reasonable condition?

People are, I think, being forced into a very different way of life. The government can call it transformation. It is a two-tiered way of life. There is one way of life for those who have a full-time job and have some security and have some ability to think about the future, and there is a way of life which is increasingly true for young people. It is of part-time jobs, short-term jobs, jobs that have a sunset clause in them and that often do not amount to much more than 20 hours a week, and that really is not the basis for a secure future for Manitoba or for any other province in Canada for that matter. What it is the basis for is for an increasingly polarized society and for the extension, the expansion of the underclass that this government seems willing to turn its back on.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member for River Heights spoke with some pride about the article in the Free Press which looked at the number of young people working in Manitoba. Yes, there was some good news in that, but I think he has to be careful. Many of the jobs were jobs for students in high school. Increasingly, if you listen to the principals of high schools, you will find that what has happened in this 10-year transformation of Manitoba is that young people are working 20 and 30 hours a week and expecting to go to school at the same time, and I am not talking about university and college students; I am talking about high school students. I think that is a serious concern because what is happening there is that the first job of those students is no longer to be students, it is no longer learning, and that I think is a very serious consideration for all members of this House.

* (2040)

What happens is that the students are in 20- and 30-hour jobs, they are exhausted when they come to school. Sometimes, I am told by some teachers, the job takes precedence, the variable hours, the flexible hours that they have to work in order to keep that job. Their mind is not on their education. What they are doing, and I do not know if they understand this, but for many

of them the real danger is that they are going to be trapped forever in those kinds of jobs, that they will not be the stepping stone that they were for the member for River Heights. The long hours, the exhausting work, the inability to concentrate leads to low grades—over a certain number of hours, that is what most of the studies show. Low grades mean that you lack a future, maybe you do not even finish high school.

Those kinds of stories, I think, have to be looked at very carefully. Yes, there is room for some pride in them. There is a sense in which Manitoba's young people are out looking for work. They are willing to work. They want to work. They want to be part of that adult world, but for some of them, indeed, it is going to be a trap, a long-term trap in poverty.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will, perhaps, ignore the rest of the rising note of self-congratulation of the member for River Heights and look at some of the other areas of the throne speech. One of the ones that my neighbour found most amazing was the one which said, we are going to be open to educational opportunities for aboriginal people. Now this comes from a government which has almost systematically cut aboriginal programs.

I am glad to see the Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism (Mr. Downey) is here. Well do I remember in the early years when I was in this Legislature asking him, naively, on a regular basis about the urban aboriginal strategy. I remember even bringing in the interim report and then the post-interim report and then the strategy, but wherever did we ever see any results of that urban aboriginal study? I think they only spent a quarter of a million on it. I suppose, given the way in which some funds are handed out in this government, that was a relatively small cost. Perhaps we may even, nine years later, see some result of it, but so far nothing on that urban aboriginal strategy.

Perhaps one of the best places to begin, a plan, and it did begin with talking to aboriginal people. They did hire co-ordinators to go and hold group discussions and talk to people in the inner city and talk to people in other urban centres, and nothing came of it, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think perhaps it is a lot like the Boundaries Commission, another waste of money of this government. They spent close to \$1 million, a great

deal of disruption for school divisions and parents right across the province, and in the end what happened? Of course, this is a government which, as the previous speaker told us, is very efficient, very effective, very wise use of taxpayers' monies. Pity about that aboriginal strategy; pity about that Boundaries Commission. I am sure we will have other things to say about the increasing waste of money in this government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a constant refrain in this government, until this throne speech, of the Filmon government repeatedly claiming that aboriginal people living on reserves are not their responsibility. I wonder what has led to this throne speech, the mention of aboriginal people. Is it the recognition that there are serious and long-term economic situations in Winnipeg that this government finally will have to pay attention to? Is it an electoral program? I scarcely think so, but the Filmon cuts to aboriginal programs go back a long way. The Access program, for example, was cut repeatedly. The Northern Development Agreement was not renewed by the Filmon government. The Northern Youth Corps Job hired 500 young people across the North each summer. They cut that one in 1989.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I notice that my light is flashing, and I am very surprised. I had only just begun. I guess the list of tax increases of the Filmon government took me a little longer than I had anticipated. I perhaps should conclude with reminding the government that its arrogance is very evident. Its meanness is becoming increasingly clear. The big lies on taxation simply will not wash anymore.

I think every member on this side, and I would be willing to bet a few people on the other side of the House, as they go into coffee shops, find that people are saying to them, when is the next election, that guy has got to go. And I could not say it better myself.

Hon. Harold Gillehammer (Minister of Labour): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to be able to speak on the Speech from the Throne. First of all, I would welcome you and the Speaker back to this Chamber, as well as all colleagues. While we did get off to a rocky start the first two days, I am pleased to see that we are down to business now of the people of Manitoba and dealing with the throne speech. I would also like to

welcome back the Chamber staff and particularly the new staffperson. I think that we know and rely on the advice given from the staff in the many rulings that have to be made and certainly value your input. Also, I would like to welcome back all colleagues who are here to serve the people of Manitoba.

I proudly stand up to say that I support this Speech from the Throne that opens the Third Session of the 36th Legislature. I have been able to listen to a number of the contributions made by colleagues on this side and colleagues on the other side. I have to say that I have tried to read the public mood by talking to constituents, by following the media. There is a very positive mood, a very positive attitude in Manitoba, based on the policies of our government.

As I listened to the previous speaker, who talked about big lies and fees that she claimed were taxes, I simply wonder where she and some of her colleagues have been. One simply has to look at the headlines in papers recently. Mr. Deputy Speaker, 1996 was called the year when Manitoba turned the corner. The economy is full-steam ahead. Manitoba exports rise more than 120 percent, revving up the province. The third-party endorsement of what is going on in this province has been very, very positive, and certainly at odds with what we are hearing from members of the NDP and certainly what we heard from the Leader of the NDP and his pretend speech that offered NDP alternatives, and I will get into that a little later.

This speech, of course, is our plan which promises more of the same to Manitobans. It builds on our successes. The fiscal stability that people are looking for, the fact that there are many more people that have permanent work and are in the workforce. In fact, the Manitoba workforce is at its highest number in history; over 570,000 Manitobans are part of that workforce.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have offered a framework for growth, and the key pillar of that is our balanced-budget legislation, a piece of legislation that has been acclaimed across this country, across North America, and other jurisdictions are attempting to emulate it. That piece of legislation, of course, requires the province to achieve balanced budgets every year and repay the existing debt without increasing taxes. We

have had two consecutive balanced budgets, and I am sure the Minister of Finance, when he speaks on Friday, will bring in a third balanced budget. It prohibits any increase in income, sales, and payroll taxes.

* (2050)

Now, the member for Wolseley (Ms. Friesen) was talking about increases to fishing licences and camping spots. Of course, these have to reflect the costs that are associated with them. What we have said consistently is that we have not increased, and will not increase, the income tax, the sales tax, the payroll taxes, and business taxes, and we have been true to our word on that for many, many budgets now. In fact, to ensure that a government does not increase those taxes, there would have to be a province-wide referendum. This effectively extends the freeze that has been in place since 1988.

As well, it contains a manageable plan to pay down the province's existing debt requiring government to make annual installments. Even provinces of other political stripes not too far away have accepted the fact that budgets must be balanced, that the debt must be paid. Only the NDP in Manitoba are offside with that initiative.

It also includes penalties to ensure compliance should a deficit occur, or the Premier and all ministers will lose 20 percent of their ministerial compensation, rising to 40 percent for a second consecutive occurrence. This was put in place for that day in the distant, distant future when another party may govern this province and to be sure that they complied with the balanced budget plan.

As a result of that balanced budget legislation and our plan, we have seen tremendous things happening in Manitoba. The Conference Board forecasts a 2.8 percent GDP rise in 1996, well above the national average. We have talked about the gains in permanent jobs to the highest level in Manitoba history. Unemployment rates continue to be amongst the lowest in Canada, and I think the number announced this week was that our unemployment rate was at 6.7 percent, still higher than we like, but much better than most other jurisdictions in Canada.

As well, retail sales growth is at double the national rate for the second year in a row, and again this is paying dividends in the income that our treasury is experiencing and makes budgeting a lot easier for the Minister of Finance. As well, exports to the United States are booming. They are up 124 percent since 1990. Again, that trend is continuing into 1997.

We are the only province to record increased private capital investment for five consecutive years, and I am sure that will be six consecutive years, and the out-migration of citizens for Manitoba has declined for the past six years to now we are showing a positive growth. So Manitobans understand our plan. Third-party people within Manitoba and across Canada have endorsed our plan. Again, the only people who seem to be offside with it are the opposition parties, who fail to recognize that reality.

Besides the balanced budget, part of the framework for growth in Manitoba is an innovative economic policy, a fair social policy. Members opposite have been talking about social policy in most of their speeches. They have yet to recognize that we pay a higher percentage of our budget to support health care, education and social services than any other jurisdiction in Canada. They will find ways to criticize small parts of our budget in those areas but yet always fail to recognize that we have made a financial commitment to those particular departments.

At the same time Manitobans enjoy a quality of life second to none across North America, and we are very proud of that. As former Minister of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, I was acutely aware of the fact that many of the things we are doing in that particular department contribute tremendously to the quality of life that Manitobans enjoy.

There are many important economic signs. I mention the increased capital investment, building permits. There were articles in the paper this past weekend talking about the tremendous increase in building permits right across the province, particularly in rural Manitoba. Manufacturing shipments, retail sales and exports are all on the increase. Those of us who live in rural Manitoba are well aware of this, and the rural media, rural councils are all talking about the important

economic growth that is taking place in many parts of rural Manitoba.

My colleague the Minister of Rural Development (Mr. Derkach) and others have been able to document these many times, that such things as potato production and processing, hog production, new crops, nontraditional livestock are all part of the growth in rural Manitoba. We have seen tremendous changes taking place in rural Manitoba with the end to the Crow benefit, and I would like to just talk about that a little later too and how the adjustment fund is being spent by the federal government. But those of us who do live in rural Manitoba recognize the tremendous opportunities and the tremendous growth that is taking place.

Now, I talked about attitude before and positive visions, and we have listened to the NDP members talk in such negative, doom-and-gloom ways, and even, again, third-party people who watch the activities in this House are saying the same thing.

Last year Jim Carr, in an editorial in the Winnipeg Free Press, talked about the negative nattering of the NDP and devoted an entire column to that, and I do not want to get into all of it, but I do want to just comment that he makes the point that the New Democrats are building their opposition to the Filmon government one special interest group at a time. Of course, that is no surprise to us that any special interest group that comes forward can get support over there. He goes on to conclude, if that happens and the New Democrats win power the next time around, there will be dozens of interest groups who will expect the new government to turn back the clock to where it was before. They will expect to return to the good old days when we spent more than we earned, made promises we could not keep and created expectations of government that future generations cannot sustain.

It has taken us almost 10 years to correct the excesses that were there from the last time members opposite were in government.

Now, if members opposite think that I am just quoting from a right-wing editorialist like Jim Carr, I would like to balance this out by quoting from an article by Frances Russell, and the headline is, Doer's NDP lacks vision, and that, by the way, was supported

by two editorials this last Friday and Saturday in the Brandon Sun, where the Brandon Sun is urging New Democrats, as they have fallen into third place, to provide some alternatives to what government policy is, not simply to associate themselves with special interest groups and ride the wave of the day, to put forward policies that are a clear alternative to government.

Clearly, in almost 10 years in opposition they have not been able to do that, and it was recognized by Frances Russell in her article, where she says they are a party of tacticians and are not visionary. The NDP under Gary Doer has not put forward a coherent alternative—[interjection] The member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) says, just because I do not understand it. There are 31 of us over here and there is a whole world out there in Manitoba that does not understand it. There is the media and there is even Francis Russell who does not understand it.

It says: The New Democrats seem to be a party more concerned with mastering 15-second news clips than with providing the public with other options. This was almost a year ago, and this was repeated again this weekend in the Brandon Sun, lamenting the fact that your party has fallen to third place and that if you are going to stop that decline, you are going to have to come up with some policies. She goes on to say that the 1988 budget defeat has left the NDP freeze framed in the public's mind as a party of high taxes and incompetent administration.

It is interesting to listen to the member for Wolseley (Ms. Friesen) talk about fishing licences and camping fees when she was part of a party, not part of a government, but there are members over there who were part of that government who raised taxes many, many times, the sales tax, income tax, any tax. There was not a tax they did not like and a tax they did not hike, and that was their motto.

* (2100)

Again, she also draws the same conclusion, that they have become a coalition of single interest groups. I will not spend more time on her article, but I would make it available to members opposite if they wanted to read it in some detail.

So I read with some interest a press release put out by the New Democrats, and it says, Doer announces NDP alternatives, and this, I suppose, is similar to the pretend budget that the Choices group comes out with from time to time. Now they have a pretend budget and a pretend throne speech. I will only go through a couple of these that pertain to my responsibilities, but I think it is important that we see the direction that the party opposite would take this province in if, God forbid, the day should come that they would ever be in a position to make policy and make laws in this province.

(Mr. Peter Dyck, Acting Speaker, in the Chair)

One of the policies espoused in this document where Doer is announcing NDP alternatives—and I presume he was speaking for all of the members over there, although there has been some doubt, that some of them might have been out of town the day this was put together, but we will assume it represents all of their thinking.

One of the policies was a special all-party committee on economic co-operation to provide a strategic, co-ordinated response to the threat of mass layoffs and plant closures. It said, we should get all interested parties involved in attracting and keeping vital industries in Manitoba. This was a week ago. This, by the way, is a place where all parties can have some input, and if there are ideas over there, they should be brought forward. We have not heard them in their response to the throne speech. All of it has been negative. Virtually all of it has been negative. There have not been positive initiatives put forward by members opposite.

Now, what is a special all-party committee on economic co-operation? Many would see this as a veiled name for a process to interfere with normal business decisions. Certainly, any success in attracting business to a province has more to do with establishing a welcome environment. The NDP, of course, wherever they have governed have tried to alter that environment to make businesses nervous.

Businesses are going to expand, businesses are going to invest where there is certainty, and what Mr. Doer and whoever on that side is with him on this one is

saying is that they would alter the business environment here, and I think the result that we would see is that there would be no plant expansions, there would be nobody wanting to increase their workforce. They would be nervous about what a socialist government is going to bring forward.

A second item in these alternatives is a bill that gives government the power to act on plant closings in cases where efforts are being made to save industries and jobs. We need the ability to stop corporations from closing profitable operations and destroying jobs and communities.

Now, we have lots of mechanisms in place through the Department of I, T and T, the Department of Labour, the Department of Rural Development to work with plants, to work with companies, to work with businesses in Manitoba who want to expand, who want to stay here, who need some assistance. A bill as proposed by Mr. Doer and whoever over there is an act to prevent plant closings.

Again, you are not going to have any new plants coming to Manitoba. You are not going to have any openings or expansions. People are going to be very, very sensitive to the fact that big government is wanting to step in, and, Lord knows, the NDP government stepped in before. That was one of the reasons we had such a great growth in Crown corporations. The government of the Pawley years was prepared to bail out any company and get involved and take it over and throw taxpayers' dollars at it. That was their solution—[interjection] I think the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) makes the point, if there is a failing business out there, he has got his chequebook out and he wants to go and save it.

(Mr. Gerry McAlpine, Acting Speaker, in the Chair)

A third alternative suggested by the NDP is a new privacy act. To regulate the use or sale of personal information gathered by the provincial government, we need to ensure the protection of confidentiality into the computer age. Mr. Doer should know, and also his fellow travellers, that we announced this about eight months ago in a press conference downstairs. There were members of their party present. I think I maybe even briefed one of the opposition critics on this. They

knew this legislation was coming, and I am assuming their announcement that this is a good idea here is support for that particular legislation, and we are pleased to see that.

There is a fourth and final item here that I would reference, a bill to ensure mining safety by dramatically increasing fines for safety violations in Manitoba mines to a maximum of \$500,000, restoring adequate safety inspections and giving miners the right to refuse work assignments that would put them at risk. We have pledged to communities affected by the recent spate of mine disasters that we will do all we can to strengthen mining safety laws and make those laws effective.

I do know that in their travels they did hear that this was a need. They should also be aware that some months ago my predecessor, the Minister of Labour, charged the Workplace Safety and Health Division to hold hearings on this and bring forward recommendations. That is something that has been done. We will be acting on in this legislative session, and I am glad that we will have the support of members opposite.

I can tell you that many of the professionals within my department are very concerned with safety in the workplace, safety certainly in the mining industry, and I might just spend a little time talking about that, that the committee that was tasked by the previous minister to review this has brought back a report which is public, and I think that perhaps members opposite already know that. They have advised the minister's Advisory Council on Workplace Safety and Health, recommended that all maximum fines outlined in the act be increased tenfold.

So we will be making those adjustments. There will be substantial increases in the fines within the act that will be part of the solution in that that will be a deterrent, and it will be an incentive for all people who are supervising workers, that they have an obligation to be sure that that workplace is safe.

But lest we buy into the rhetoric that this is a newfound problem, the department has also brought forward information and statistics that would indicate that the workplace is far safer today than it was in the 1970s and '80s, that the number of lives that are lost,

even though one life is certainly too many, has declined from a high of 15 and 17 during the '70s and mid-'80s to 1995 when there was one life lost and last year where there were two. These are unfortunate and we have to work harder to be sure that these do not happen but, again, let not members opposite leave the impression that the workplace is not as safe now as it used to be and, in fact, the last time the penalties were changed was 1983.

If I recall, the government opposite was in power in '84, '85, '86, '87. No changes were made then. We are committed to bringing those changes. We have put in place policies and programs to ensure that the workplace is safe. The time lost rate and the days claim has diminished immensely since then. [interjection] Well, my friend the Minister of Justice (Mr. Toews) does point out that they had policies in place which closed many mines, and I guess with the rate of accidents, maybe that was a positive thing in those days, because mining and logging are dangerous industries. It is something we are going to address with new legislation, but there are certainly far fewer accidents and fatalities today than there were during the '70s and '80s.

I might point out that there were under 500,000 people working then. There are almost 200,000 more people working today than there were in those NDP years, so even though with this tremendous increase in the workforce, the volume of accidents and fatalities has decreased substantially.

* (2110)

Now, again, coming back to comments made by the previous speaker, where there was nothing but doom and gloom put forward, this is so at odds with what the media is saying, what business is saying, what chambers of commerce are saying, what industry is saying. I cannot believe that members opposite are not aware of those things. There are editorials every week and almost every day in some publications talking about the tremendous upturn in the economy, the creation of jobs, the tremendous things that are happening in Manitoba. It is being recognized across the country. I am not sure why members opposite are not aware of these things.

I might just read from one brief article here when it refers to 1996 as the year when Manitoba turned the corner. It talks about the tremendous upswing, the many thousands of new jobs that were created in the last 12 months, the average weekly earnings, which rose 2 percent weekly or nearly \$27,000 annually. Consumer spending rose more than 5 percent, leading the country for the second year. Manitoba's gross domestic product will grow by more than 2.5 percent. It is the fifth year it has exceeded this number. Manufacturing shipments were up 8.4 percent in the last 10 months, the highest in Canada. Food processing, transportation and machinery sectors will all export more than a billion worth of products this year.

Again, how can members opposite spread this doom and gloom? It does not sell out there, and that is what the editorial writers are saying. It was repeated twice in an editorial in the Brandon Sun this last weekend. It is just offside with the thinking of most Manitobans and, again, I would go back to what editorial writers like Jim Carr and Frances Russell are saying: Get out of the past and recognize what is happening in the world and bring forward some positive alternatives.

We are aware that the federal government also has a contribution to make, and one of the ways they are able to do that is, there is some \$26 million in funding that has been allowed because of the loss of the Western Grain Transportation subsidy, and this fund was put in place to help to transition rural Manitoba as that subsidy is gone. Western provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta have asked the federal government to dedicate that amount of money to road infrastructure. Most Manitobans are of the same mind. I know the member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk) is. A great need to repair and upgrade our roads out there. The Union of Manitoba Municipalities has urged that this happen.

It is with some concern that the announcements made by the Liberal government in Ottawa do not reflect what Manitobans want. They are using part of that, a good part of that, to fix little problems across various ridings. I am aware that there is one road that is going to be highlighted, a highway called No. 366 from Grandview to Russell. I am sure the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) is aware of that road, the

member for Swan River, and it would seem that if there is one significant and important road in Manitoba, Highway 366 must be it.

I am not sure what the motivation is for attaching this money to that particular road. Perhaps it is an attempt to at least recognize that some of that funding should go to roads. I am sure as they sat around the Liberal cabinet table or the caucus table with the Manitoba M.P.s and they talked about the many roads and highways in Manitoba that this one came to the top right away. It certainly is going to get the attention of the federal government.

I do hope that perhaps they consult with the Minister of Highways (Mr. Findlay) before they start laying asphalt out there to see what a million dollars will do on a provincial road, and there are many other roads in the province that need similar attention. There are a number of good projects that we do support with other programs. This was not the way Manitobans wanted to see that money spent, and I suspect there will be discussions about it during the months of April and May and even into June, and there may even be a price to pay for making that decision that that one road is going to be fixed.

So while we are happy that they are going to fix the water supply in Dauphin and bring natural gas to some parts of Manitoba, it is good for balance sake that they are fixing one road. I know that when the UMM convention is on and when CAP meets and a number of these people who have been advocating putting the \$26 million, \$27 million into roads and highways, reconstruction of those, that this particular road will gain some more attention.

The last thing I wanted to talk about is, and, again, because there has been so much doom and gloom and so many negative comments coming from across the way, a lack of recognition of how a business environment, an environment that promotes jobs and creates jobs in our economy—there seems to be no recognition of that. I want to just talk a little bit about the Workers Compensation Board. This is one of my new responsibilities, and I have had the opportunity to visit with the management and staff and some of the board members at Workers Compensation, and I think there is a good reason to talk about the history of the

Workers Compensation Board, some of the difficulties they went through during the 1980s and how that has been turned around.

First of all, a little bit of history about the Workers Compensation Board, and as a new minister I can tell you I am very proud of what this government has accomplished since we took office with that particular compensation board. Less than 10 years ago, and that would be around 1987-88, the Workers Compensation Board had an operating deficit of \$232 million. That is an operating deficit of \$232 million. At that time, inefficiency and mismanagement were the norm in that corporation. This was even an accepted practice by the government of the day. Businesses within the province were faced with ever-increasing assessment rates, hampering their ability to compete with other provinces.

It is no secret that when businesses are taxed in such a fashion, it costs the people of Manitoba jobs. I recall quite vividly the campaign of 1988 when this was one of the key issues facing small businesses across rural Manitoba and, in fact, all of Manitoba, that the proposed rate in workers compensation, I believe, was 21 percent and there was even going to be a deficit with that rate hike. That was the norm in those days, and that is how that \$232-million debt was accumulated. That was the order of the day; you could always tax some more. That was one of the reasons that the NDP were very unceremoniously turfed out of office at that time.

(Mr. Marcel Laurendeau, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair)

At the present time, our government has turned one of Manitoba's worst-managed corporations into a model for other provinces to follow. This past fall the Workers Compensation Board announced that it had eliminated its debt. That \$232-million debt has been eliminated, and I think this is just a tremendous success story that needs to be told time and time again. At the same time, with the elimination of that debt, we have also announced that they would be reducing rates for over 20,000 Manitoba businesses by 5 percent a year for the next three years. That is a direct cost that small businesses have to pay day in and day out.

We are now in a position where the debt has been repaid, where a modest reserve fund has been built up, and rates are declining at 5 percent a year, and we may even be in a position to do better than that. This reduction of 5 percent a year over the next three years means that employers will save \$40 million. That is money back in the hands of those who create jobs for the people of this province. There is a tremendous opportunity for small businesses to add staff, to expand, \$40 million that does not have to go into that fund. These reductions will take place while the corporation enhances services to injured workers through a series of new initiatives valued at \$5.4 million during this next three years. So we have done away with the debt, we are reducing the tariff by 5 percent a year for three years, and we are investing \$5.4 million over the next three years on new initiatives.

* (2120)

The corporation has also recognized the need to plan for the future and for the unforeseen events which lay ahead. Consequently, it will add \$35 million over the next three years to a rate stabilization fund which will total \$50 million by 1999. Now I know that members opposite have always spoke out against rate stabilization funds. They never created one when they were in charge of MPIC. They did not create one here with the Workers Compensation Board; in fact, both at MPIC and Workers Compensation rates were growing by double digits every year. There was a tremendous debt, and the fact that we are creating a rate stabilization fund will guard against unforeseen occurrences in the future. Again, I do not expect members opposite who have consistently spoken out against rate stabilization to support this.

So what does the future hold? This rate stabilization fund is symbolic of the new Workers Compensation Board. Gone are the days of large deficits and debt, huge rate increases, and substandard service. The Workers Compensation Board has balanced its books. It is reducing its rates to employers while at the same time offering enhanced services to injured workers.

Many people can take credit for these successes, previous ministers who have guided the corporation from 1988 to the present, the able leadership which has come from the board of directors, and the employees

who have performed well through many challenges which may have been faced over the past few years. All of these people have contributed to getting rid of this debt and putting the corporation in a position where they can reduce the rates.

As Manitobans, we can take pride in knowing that we have one of the finest Workers Compensation Boards in all of Canada. I know it will continue to provide a level of service to injured workers at reduced assessment rates well into the next century.

So, colleagues, this is again one of our success stories, one of the very positive things that are happening. All of these are reflected in this throne speech, and I am pleased to be able to support it and look forward to the contributions of other members.

Thank you very much.

Ms. Marianne Cerilli (Radisson): Mr. Deputy Speaker, well, it is interesting listening to yet another government member trying to have his cake and eat it too. We have listened to speech after speech of this government. On the one hand, they have tried to say that the economy is booming, everything is great, happy days are here again. We have the best economy in Canada. We have the most jobs we have ever had, the most people working, on and on and on, yet when it comes to government services and the budget for this province, you would think that the economy is not booming along as they say because they have continued to cut services. They have not reflected any economic growth in the revenue projections and the revenue that is actually coming to the Province of Manitoba from any kind of economic benefit.

So they cannot have it both ways, but that is exactly what they have been trying to do, and the public of Manitoba is seeing through it now, and they will certainly see through it after we finish this Throne Speech Debate and get dealing with the budget for the Province of Manitoba.

When you look at what is happening with this government's revenue projections, when they underestimated by \$188 million the revenue that is going to come to the Province of Manitoba. They have taken a number of pot shots at the federal Liberal

government, and maybe they deserve it—yes, I would say that they deserve it—but they do not talk about how they have \$69 million more from the transfer payments from Ottawa than they anticipated in their budget.

Now, this may, to the Tories, not make a big difference, but when you go back into the constituencies, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and you realize that there are now, what is it, 500 fewer teachers, 600 fewer teachers in Manitoba teaching in classrooms than when this government took office. When I go to my own constituency and an elementary school there that has been petitioning and going after the school board to reinstate their school counsellor, that is the result that we are seeing from this government's budget of trying to have their cake and eat it too. I can tell you that there are certainly more students in the school in Radisson that are fighting to retain and get back their school counsellor in that school. The number of elementary schools that have lost their counsellors is a testimony to this government's policy.

When you look at the rhetoric over there about taxation and then trying to say that they have not raised taxes, and you look at the increase in the special levy on property taxes, over \$120 million more now is coming from property taxes to pay for education in this province. That is the message that is going to come back and people are going to—and I can tell the member for Portage (Mr. Pallister) that it is not because property values have gone up. I know because I have sold a house in the last seven years, and I know that they have not gone up. [interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I hate to interrupt the honourable member, but could I have the members wanting to carry on a conversation do so in the loge. I am having great difficulty hearing the honourable member at this time, and could I ask the member to please put her comments through the Chair rather than entering into debate with the individual members.

The honourable member for Radisson, to continue.

Ms. Cerilli: Mr. Deputy Speaker, so it was one of the myths that I wanted to deal with in this throne speech.

A number of other members on our side of the House have been talking about the increases in user fees. I would look again to some of the casework that we all do in our constituency and the number of cases that we deal with where Manitoba citizens are now having to pay huge dollars to pay for prescription medication that was formerly covered under Pharmacare. It is another example of how this government has been offloading onto the backs of ordinary citizens so that they can maintain this claim that they have not increased taxes. But, whether they call it a tax or a user fee or a surcharge or a client fee or whatever other name they want to give to it, it has amounted to more and more money being transferred off onto people who are often least able to pay.

I wanted to make a few points about some of the things that are not in this throne speech debate. I have been looking forward to, at some point, having this government make a presentation about all the programs they are going to implement from the Children and Youth Secretariat. They have reports that they have been sitting on that have fine recommendations. [interjection] They have not hatched yet. They have been sitting on them, but the member for Wolseley (Ms. Friesen) says they have not hatched yet.

There are recommendations in those reports that would deal with, as we raised today, the whole question of the gang escalation problem in Manitoba. Mr. Deputy Speaker, rather than taking a fit against the federal government again, the Minister of Justice (Mr. Toews) should have just picked up the report from the Minister of Family Services (Mrs. Mitchelson) and taken it upon himself to hire a youth gang co-ordinator, but he did not do that.

There are a number of other good recommendations in those reports, one that affects the Department of Housing, where they should start promoting the SAFER programs and CRISP programs. Those are rent supplement programs that would do what they now say they have all of a sudden discovered, that there are aboriginal people in poverty in Manitoba. So we will see if they are going to implement that recommendation, if the Department of Housing is now going to start promoting those programs, so the number of people that would qualify for those rent supplement programs would actually know about them.

That is a recommendation, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would hope that you would recommend to the Minister of Housing (Mr. Reimer), so he is aware that that is one of the recommendations in a Youth Secretariat report.

* (2130)

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Pursuant to Rule 35.(2), I am interrupting the proceedings in order to put the question on the motion of the honourable member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux); that is, the subamendment to the motion for an address in reply to the Speech from the Throne. Do the members wish to have the motion read? [agreed]

THAT the amendment be amended by adding thereto the following words:

THAT this House further regrets:

THAT this government has failed to provide leadership in managing change in our health care, Education, Justice and other government departments; instead, they have shortchanged Manitobans by blaming the federal government for their own shortcomings and failing to provide services the citizens of Manitoba deserve.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? No?

Voice Vote

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion, please say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All those opposed, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: In my opinion, the Nays have it.

Formal Vote

Mr. Gary Kowalski (The Maples): Mr. Deputy Speaker, upon conferring with my colleague from

Inkster, I believe there is a desire to have a recorded vote, and if you will canvass the NDP members, I believe there is support for such a vote.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The member for The Maples has requested a recorded vote. Is there support? Yes? [agreed]

A recorded vote having been requested, call in the members.

The question before the House is the motion of the honourable member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), that is, the subamendment to the motion for an address in reply to the Speech from the Throne. Do the members wish the motion read? No? Dispense.

THAT the amendment be amended by adding thereto the following words:

THAT this House further regrets:

THAT this government has failed to provide leadership in managing change in our health care, Education, Justice and other government departments; instead, they have shortchanged Manitobans by blaming the federal government for their own shortcomings and failing to provide services the citizens of Manitoba deserve.

Division

A RECORDED VOTE was taken, the result being as follows:

Yeas

Ashton, Barrett, Cerilli, Chomiak, Dewar, Doer, Evans (Brandon East), Evans (Interlake), Friesen, Hickes, Jennissen, Kowalski, Lamoureux, Mackintosh, Maloway, Martindale, McGifford, Mihychuk, Reid, Sale, Santos, Struthers, Wowchuk.

Nays

Cummings, Derkach, Downey, Driedger, Dyck, Enns, Ernst, Filmon, Findlay, Gilleshammer, Helwer,

McAlpine, McCrae, McIntosh, Mitchelson, Newman, Pallister, Pitura, Praznik, Radcliffe, Reimer, Render, Rocan, Stefanson, Sveinson, Toews, Tweed, Vodrey.

Madam Deputy Clerk (Bev Bosiak): Yeas 23, Nays 28.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

Is it the will of the House to call it ten o'clock?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No? Okay. Order, please.

We will now be moving on to the proposed motion of the honourable member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Tweed) and the proposed motion of the honourable member for Concordia (Mr. Doer).

* (2140)

Ms. Cerilli: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I had been talking about how there were a number of omissions in this throne speech and how one of the omissions was recommendations made through the Children and Youth Secretariat process, and those recommendations span a variety of departments, including the Department of Housing.

When you read the throne speech, it is very obvious that the word "housing" is not mentioned once. There are a number of references to agreements with the federal government on labour, market training, on child benefit, on trade agreements, but one of the largest agreements being negotiated with the federal government right now has been completely eliminated or neglected to be mentioned from the throne speech. It is invisible; it is not there.

Yet you ask yourself why when this agreement is being negotiated to deal with over \$300 million of publicly funded housing—[interjection] Six hundred million dollars of publicly funded housing. Maybe there are more units than I thought. I thought there were approximately 12,000 units that were part of this portfolio. The Minister of Housing (Mr. Reimer) wants to correct me and say that there is even more housing.

There is co-op housing. There is off-reserve native and northern housing. There are a number of seniors apartments that are involved.

But we have to ask ourselves, why is this not one of the agreements that are mentioned in the throne speech? Is it because the government does not want to draw attention to this agreement? Is it because there has been so much criticism from the community social housing managers about the procedure that this government has undertaken, when they have been contacting us to complain that they are being excluded from any kind of consultation and negotiations on this agreement, that it is disconcerting when you have those who currently, who most intimately know best how to manage this portfolio of Housing and they are not being involved in the decision making for how to develop an agreement?

We have received letters from managers of this housing, where they get a phone call one day saying someone from Manitoba Housing is going to show up and wants to show up and do an inspection to look at assessing the value of housing developments as part of their corporation. The manager will say, well, I am not available today, and the staff person will then say, well, we will just do a drive-by inspection.

How, Mr. Deputy Speaker, can you do a drive-by housing inspection on an apartment block, or even if it is not an apartment block, even if it is a duplex? If that is any signal of how this Department of Housing is going to deal with these housing units—and the minister now is making some notes. Perhaps he is going to take this back. I can tell him. I have already written him a letter about this; he can check his mail.

It is not a very comforting sign to these social housing managers when that is the way they are being dealt with in terms of this federal takeover of their social housing programs. They are very concerned about the kind of relationship they are going to have with this government, because they look at how they are managing some of their existing properties and they compare that to the kind of management that they give and they have and the kind of relationship they have with CMHC. They are very concerned. Their concerns are warranted and borne out when they deal with officials from the Ministry of Housing who say that

they are going to do drive-by inspections on entire housing complexes.

That is one example, but we also become suspicious on this area and why this issue was left out of the throne speech, because this government cannot be trusted when it comes to maintaining the assets that are public assets. I am quite concerned about some of the properties in this agreement, in particular, which are those properties that have been in the news lately that are part of the Winnipeg Housing Rehab portfolio. That is some fairly good real estate. Some of those properties are older buildings that were formerly owned by the City of Winnipeg that have been refurbished that are on riverbank property. Some of them would—I can tell you I think they would be profitable on the private market.

The Minister of Housing (Mr. Reimer) is again taking some notes. I am wondering if what is going to be happening, if some of those housing developments are going to be sold off and if we are going to lose yet more social housing and public housing in Manitoba.

Again, we have good reason to be suspicious of this government and why they left this out of the throne speech and do not seem to be drawing much attention to this, because what did they do in St. Vital on Behnke Road? Sacrificed a perfectly good, quality housing development so they could build a parking lot for a Home Depot store. Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that the kind of management we want in social housing in this province? Is that the kind of trust that we want to give over to all of these assets, as the minister says, more than \$600-million worth? Maybe he is including in that figure the amount of money that is going to be transferred to manage and continue to operate, or if that is just the actual real estate value. We can get into those discussions later.

I have a number of questions and issues I would like to discuss with the minister on that one area alone, but I want to talk a little bit more about something else that was glaringly absent, from my point of view anyway, in this Throne Speech Debate and that was The Sustainable Development Act. We have had a draft white paper, we have had some talk about this, I think, even in the last session, in the last throne speech, and we are watching and we are waiting. We know there

have been lots of letters that have been written, there have been meetings behind closed doors, there has been some consultation with the public but not very much, and it is not there. There is no mention of it. There is some mention about sustainable development in fisheries and in wildlife.

I think they are going to review The Wildlife Act, wildlife management areas, but I guess, again, you have to understand that when aboriginal people, labour, municipalities, business, industry groups like the Manufacturers Association, the miners' association, all those, I guess, those are some of the special interest groups the members opposite are talking about, and including environmentalists. When they are all opposed to this draft legislation, I think we can understand why this government has not included this in the throne speech. We can understand why, and if they are giving this a sober, second thought, that is great, but it was conspicuous in its absence from the throne speech, any mention of this draft legislation or soon-to-be legislation for the province of Manitoba.

One of the other things that was particularly disconcerting about the throne speech, as I mentioned earlier, was the sudden mention of poverty. I do not think I have ever heard before this government mention poverty in the throne speech in all the years that I have been here. Again we have to wonder, what is going on? Is it because they now realize they are going to have over \$140-million worth of surplus again, and now they can afford to spread around the good fortune of Manitoba? All of a sudden, Question Period after Question Period after Question Period we have heard this government say aboriginal people are a federal responsibility, and now they have finally recognized it. Again, I am wondering if this is part of what has come out of the Children and Youth Secretariat.

* (2150)

I have one of the reports from the Children and Youth Secretariat here, and the statistics in aboriginal demographics in these reports would cause this government to pause and realize that when you look at the demographics of aboriginal people in our province, indeed the future and economic prosperity of this province is going to be linked to the future and economic prosperity of aboriginal people, when you

realize that especially in rural Manitoba the aboriginal population is growing and the aboriginal children's population far outnumbered that of any other community group in rural Manitoba.

So while the other communities are aging, particularly in rural Manitoba and in Winnipeg which is the largest aboriginal community in Canada, the numbers of aboriginal people are growing. When you look at the statistics, in '91 there were just over 116,000 aboriginal people in Manitoba and that comprised 10 percent, and in 1995 there were 160,000 aboriginal people in Manitoba.

So it seems like this government is finally recognizing what we on this side of the House, many of the members on this side of the House, have been trying to get through to them for many years, that, in fact, the future of this province, the prosperity and economic security of this province, is going to be tied directly to the prosperity and economic security of aboriginal people.

In rural Manitoba, 58 percent of the population is aboriginal, and when you look at, for example, the death rates for aboriginal children by accidents and violence, they are three to four times higher than the Canadian population. Injuries make up fully one-third of the causes of death in aboriginal people. They use 50 percent of the capacity of hospital beds in our province, aboriginal children do. You look at the fact that aboriginal children and youth under 15 make up 19 percent of Manitoba's children's population, and 43 percent of that population reside in the inner city area of Winnipeg. The member for Wolseley (Ms. Friesen) was talking about the circumstances of many of her constituents, and many of those constituents, as she said, are the people, the real people, who comprise these statistics that are quite sobering.

I am giving the members opposite, in some ways, the benefit of the doubt here in hoping that they finally really realize that and that the words in the throne speech are not just rhetoric. That goes, too, for their sudden realization and awakening to the fact that Manitoba continues to have unacceptable rates of child poverty, that even though we are now third in Canada in terms of the province ranking in terms of child poverty, that that does not mean our poverty rate has

gone down. The last reports that I saw, it was approximately 29 percent, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It just means that other provinces, particularly in Atlantic Canada, have gotten worse. So I do not think that it is any security or consolation that we no longer have that horrible distinction of having the highest rates of child poverty in the country. It has not meant that our rates have gone down. It just means that other provinces have gotten worse.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am also going to then give this government the benefit of the doubt in terms of this program we are awaiting, the child benefit initiative that they are going to be partnering with the federal government on, but we realize that the federal government, too, in their budget announcement did this sort of slight of hand where this new child benefit that is only going to address families who are low income and impoverished who are working is at the same time going to mean a reduction to the benefits that they promised in their last budget. So the real benefit or assistance to these families is going to ultimately be very small, some have said less than \$20 annually. So that is not going to go a very long way.

I have been reviewing some reports on the welfare of children in the country and was struck by a graph, a chart, that I think I want to entitle, it is not your imagination. It showed what we on this side of the House have been saying for a long time, that the gap between the haves and the have-nots in this province is growing, and it showed very clearly that in this province and in Canada the income for the lowest income earners, families in our province, is reducing, and the benefits and the advantages for those who enjoy the highest income are going up, as much as a 30 percent reduction for the second quintile and an increase for those families who are earning more than \$125,000 a year. Their income and their advantage will continue to grow.

We have to ask ourselves, is that the kind of community, is that the kind of society that we want to live in? I think the majority of us would say no, that we recognize when there is that type of disparity in our province and that there is going to be an increase in what is now being known as the social deficit. There will be an increase in violence. There will be an increase in crime. There will be an increase in

addictions of all sorts, and, ultimately, any cost-savings now, whether it is welfare reductions for families for their food allowance, will catch up with us in the long run and will mean that there will be a huge price to pay.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is a very grave concern when we hear of this government continuing to cut back on social allowance for these families, to force them into situations where they are going to have to work, single-parent families who have children who are not even in school yet, and there will be no assistance or provision for child care. What are those families going to do? What are those parents going to do?

We were just talking earlier this afternoon of the woman who was recently charged because she had left her child for a moment to run out and do the laundry, and her apartment caught fire while she was away and her children died. The people I was talking with said that could happen to any single parent. It was not a reflection of her ability or her capacity as a parent. It was a reflection of the circumstances that she was in of having to cope with small children alone, and to put those families into the kind of situation where they are not going to have any additional supports in terms of child care but are then going to be forced to take what this government is claiming are high-quality jobs, where we know that the minimum wage in Manitoba still is not higher than the poverty line, that is not the kind of province that we want to create. That is not the

kind of circumstances that are going to do what this government in the throne speech claims it wants to do, which is address the needs of low-income children and their families.

So I realize that the hour is late, and all of us are probably thinking of getting on home to our own families, so I just want to conclude for this evening by encouraging the members opposite to take seriously some of their own reports that have come from the Children and Youth Secretariat and other reports, whether they be in health care or education. We have heard the member for Wolseley (Ms. Friesen), our Education critic, talk about how the Minister of Education (Mrs. McIntosh) yet again has ignored recommendations in another report on education finance. What kind of confidence can we have in a government when they go through the expense of having committees, of involving the community, of producing reports and then they turn around and they ignore those reports, especially when they have good recommendations?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Radisson will have 20 minutes remaining.

The hour now being ten o'clock, this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow (Tuesday). Thank you and good night.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, March 10, 1997

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