

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

Official Report
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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, April 14, 2008

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYER

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 19—The Liquor Control Amendment Act

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister charged with the administration of The Liquor Control Act): I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak), that leave be given to introduce Bill 19, The Liquor Control Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur la réglementation des alcools, and the same now be received and read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Swan: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to put forward these amendments that support recommendations contained in the *Safety in Licensed Premises* report released in December 2007.

These changes address safety concerns of the public respecting licensed premises and also provide more flexibility within the act for both the public and the hospitality industry.

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

Bill 200—The Waste Reduction and Prevention Amendment Act

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I move, seconded by the MLA for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), that Bill 200, The Waste Reduction and Prevention Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur la réduction du volume et de la production des déchets, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Gerrard: This bill will provide for banning of the use of single-use plastic checkout bags in Manitoba starting in January 1, 2009.

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

PETITIONS

Dividing of Trans-Canada Highway

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

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

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

This is signed by Richard Wiebe, Karen Saunders, Vivienne Pearn and many, many others.

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

Personal Care Homes—Virден

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by Wayne Unger, Kevin Bergson and Wayne Gardner.

Retired Teachers' Cost of Living Adjustment

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

Since 1977, Manitoba teachers have made contributions to the Teachers' Retirement Allowances Fund Pension Adjustment Account, PAA, to finance a Cost of Living Adjustment, COLA, to their base pension once they retire.

Despite this significant funding, 11,000 retired teachers and 15,000 active teachers currently find themselves facing the future with little hope of a meaningful COLA.

For 2007, a COLA of only 0.63 percent was paid to retired teachers.

The COLA paid in recent years has eroded the purchasing power of teachers' pension dollars.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to consider adequate funding of the PAA on a long-term basis to ensure that the current retired teachers, as well as all future retirees, receive a fair COLA.

This is signed by Carrie Munro, Janice Biy, John Biy and many, many other Manitobans.

* (13:40)

Provincial Nominee Program

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

The current government needs to recognize that the backlog in processing PNP applications is causing additional stress and anxiety for would-be immigrants and their families and friends here in Manitoba.

The current government needs to recognize the unfairness in its current policy on who qualifies to be an applicant, more specifically, by not allowing professionals such as health-care workers to be able to apply for PNP certificates in the same way a computer technician would be able to do so.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Premier (Mr. Doer) and his government to recognize and acknowledge how important immigration is to our province by improving and strengthening the Provincial Nominee Program.

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by D. Bell, C. Smith, M. Polvorosa and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Provincial Road 481

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

Provincial Road 481 between PTH 68 and PR 276 is in a state of major disrepair.

Potholes and washboarding have become common along this stretch of road.

The safety of persons travelling on this road has been compromised because of this deterioration.

The road is the primary transportation link for the people of Cayer and Crane River and is the only road residents can use to access these communities.

These roads are subject to heavy travel and have worn down over time with little maintenance, leaving them in a state that presents a safety risk to the people who rely on them.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) to examine the state of PR 481 to see first-hand the state of disrepair that this road has become subject to.

To urge the Minister of Infrastructure to consider action that will see the road repaired and subsequently maintained for the safety of local residents.

This petition is signed by Maurice Neault, Sylvia Thibut, Alfred Zastre and many, many others.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Labour and Immigration): I'd like to table the 2007 WCB Annual Report; the 2007 Appeal Commission and Medical Review Panel Annual Report; the 2007 Fair Practices Office Annual Report and the 2008-2012 WCB Five-Year Plan.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I would like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us Mr. Kevin Toyne who is from Toronto and is the guest of the honourable Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler).

Also in the public gallery I'd like to draw the attention of members where we have with us today Gordon Crook, principal of Technical Vocational High School and Susan Gustafson, principal of Stony Mountain Elementary School, who are the guests of the honourable Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth (Mr. Bjornson).

I'd also like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today grade 7 students from Cecil Rhodes School under the direction of teachers Ben Ganden and Andrea Powell, who are the guests of the honourable Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Pharmacare Deductibles Increase

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, while in opposition the NDP Health critic condemned the government for increasing Pharmacare deductibles and he called it, quote, a tax grab on Manitobans and a tax on all Manitobans and a tax, most importantly, on the sick, end of quote.

I'd like to ask the Minister of Health to explain why they railed against this in opposition and now that they are in government, they have increased the Pharmacare deductible by a whopping 34 percent.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I thank the member opposite for the question. Certainly we do acknowledge that in this year's budget we have made an increase to the deductible for Pharmacare of 5 percent. This is going to represent an increase for individuals using this

program somewhere in the neighbourhood to about \$2 to \$6 a month, depending on use.

We do know that according to the Canadian Institute of Health Information that Manitoba enjoys the most comprehensive Pharmacare coverage in the country. We also know the single greatest cost that exists in health care today is the rising cost of pharmaceuticals. We think that this strikes a good balance to ensure that we can maintain the best program in the country.

Mrs. Driedger: I remind the minister that the previous critic called this a tax on the sick, where seniors had to cash in RSPs to be paying for it.

Pharmacare deductibles increased in 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, but not in 2007 during an election year, but they increased again in 2008.

So, despite all the handouts that this government is getting from Ottawa, I'd like to ask them: Why the assault on seniors and low-income Manitobans?

Ms. Oswald: Mr. Speaker, and, again, I'll say to the member opposite that we know that this is the most comprehensive program in the country. We know that those costs are rising. We also know that during our time in office we have ensured that costs of palliative drugs, for example, the kinds of drugs that oftentimes our senior citizens and their families rely on in what is arguably the most difficult times of their lives, we know that we have provided coverage for those drugs so that people can be in their homes and go through that difficult time.

We also know, Mr. Speaker, that since we've been in office we've added over 2,000 drugs to the Pharmacare formulary. That's helping every Manitoban.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, this minister is talking out of both sides of her mouth.

Seniors have slammed rising deductibles saying that it's going to force them to choose between milk and medicine. The Auditor General slammed this government for mismanaging Pharmacare and because of this management Pharmacare deductibles have now skyrocketed by 34 percent under this government.

So, again, I would like to ask the Minister of Health: Why doesn't she get her act together better, better manage her Pharmacare program and instead of forcing seniors and poor Manitobans to pay for her mismanagement, do her job?

Ms. Oswald: Once again, I think that adding 2,000 drugs to the Pharmacare formulary, making palliative care drugs free under our program, ensuring that even more families have access to this program—and don't take my word for it; take CIHI's when they say we have the best program in the country.

I think if we want to talk about assaults on senior citizens, maybe we should talk about what would happen to the health-care system if, as the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) would have it, he slashed this year's budget by \$135 million which is what he said he would do by maintaining a level of economic growth.

We increased our budget by over 6 percent. He said he'd keep it somewhere between two and three. What would seniors think of that?

Payroll Tax Reduction

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, it's a well-known fact that the payroll tax kills jobs.

The president of the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce is quoted as saying, and I quote: Nothing would help this economy more than sending the signal of eliminating the payroll tax. That signal would be that we are now open for business; we're a great place.

Great place if you want to stay small, but we are the last place you want to be if you want to grow your business, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, is the Minister of Finance even aware that Manitoba is the only western jurisdiction that has a payroll tax, and if he is aware of that is it just that he doesn't care?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, this budget eliminated capital tax for manufacturers July 1, '08, which puts manufacturers in a very competitive position. It also increased the Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit to 70 percent as of last January, which also puts them in very competitive position. The marginal tax rate for exporters is among the best in the country now.

The member raises the payroll tax. He will know that the payroll tax is paid by less than 10 percent of all businesses in Manitoba, and for those businesses they have seen a reduction in their corporate capital tax, their corporate tax, from 17 percent to 12 percent, 13 percent this year going to 12 percent.

There have been significant improvements in reducing taxes for business all across the province.

* (13:50)

Provincial Debt Increase

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, no matter what numbers you use, no matter what spin the NDP would like to put on it, no matter how much you want to turn a blind eye to it, the reality is, the fact is Manitoba debt is ballooning.

A minister recently was asked the question, how can his government, how could they increase debt in such uncertain economic times? Do you know what the answer was of that particular minister? His answer was, because we can. What arrogance, Mr. Speaker.

Does the Minister of Finance share that arrogance and is he prepared to increase debt, simply increase the debt of this province to a point where it's going to be an albatross around our neck? Is he prepared to do it simply because he can?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the debt as a percentage of our economy has reduced by 30 percent since we've been in office. It's at a record low. It's about 22 percent of our economy, 22 cents on the dollar, to invest in new hospitals, including a new hospital in Brandon, new roads, including new roads in Brandon and outside of Brandon, new bridges, including new bridges in Brandon, new health-care facilities for paramedic services, emergency services, including new facilities in Brandon. In addition—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Minister of Finance has the floor.

Mr. Selinger: In addition, Mr. Speaker, there's been additional investments for schools as well as for our university capital.

All of these things have been done while we've had our debt as a percentage of the economy declining because our economy now, for the first time in history, has exceeded \$50 billion.

Mr. Borotsik: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance can't continue to snow Manitobans the way he is. What he has to tell Manitobans is the economy grows on an inflationary basis. Debt does not have to do so.

The numbers that he talked about, the infrastructure improvements that he talked about, Mr. Speaker, the minister doesn't understand, but those can be funded out of cash flow. They don't have to be borrowed. There doesn't have to be additional debt that's going to saddle Manitobans and the future generations of Manitobans.

I go back to my question. He can talk about all the dollars he spends. Why can't he manage the finances of this province better with excess revenue coming from the federal government? Why can't he manage his expenditures better and not have to borrow for those financial infrastructure improvements?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, we've had the benefit of six credit-rating upgrades since we've come into office. We tackled the public-sector pension liability for teachers and public servants. Under the members opposite, it doubled while they were in office. It was projected to grow to \$8.4 billion. We've put a plan in place to bring that down and we've funded that as well as making key investments. Our cost of servicing the debt is six and a half cents on the dollar. Under members opposite, it was 13.2 cents on the dollar.

We've been responsible, and we've given more value to Manitobans for improved capital.

Livestock Industry All-Party Delegation

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, some pork producers are losing \$20,000 a week and may have to euthanize weanling pigs because of challenges like low commodity prices, country-of-origin labelling. This NDP government refuses to call the Standing Committee on Agriculture. It's a disgrace.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier (Mr. Doer) finally recognize the depth of this crisis, lead an all-party delegation to Ottawa to tackle the issues affecting the livestock sector? Will he do it today?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite wants to call the Standing Committee on Agriculture. He wants to take a delegation to Ottawa.

Mr. Speaker, I'd much rather work on a much more immediate basis. I can tell the member opposite I met with Manitoba Pork this morning. I met with them this morning to review the situation and look at what options might be there.

Certainly the industry is facing significant challenges because of high input costs, the high Canadian dollar and concerns about country-of-origin labelling. All of these issues are very pressing for these people, and we will continue to work with producers and we will continue as we have—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, Manitoba's cattle industry is also struggling under the lingering effects of BSE and challenges like low prices, the effects of the high dollar and also rising input costs. Our cattle producers are being forced from the industry, yet this provincial government does nothing while our multimillion dollar livestock sector struggles and struggles. Producers are being devastated and so are rural businesses and communities.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier again: Will he do the right thing, lead an all-party delegation to Ottawa, tackle the challenges that are in the livestock sector, or has he written off that sector too?

Ms. Wowchuk: It's quite interesting, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite talks about how urgent this issue is. They just had a convention this weekend. Do you know, as I understand it, there was not one resolution on the livestock industry at their convention. You know what they talked about? Their one resolution on agriculture was, guess what, how do we take barley away from the Canadian Wheat Board.

Rather than offering supports for farmers and giving them power in the marketplace, they were looking to take that away. Yet the member opposite says he supports agriculture. I say if he supported it he would have had a resolution at the convention.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. If members wish to have a conversation, we have two loges here. We need a little decorum here.

The honourable Member for Lakeside has the floor.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, the reason I waited to respond to—that answer that she just gave was pathetic and uncalled for. This minister doesn't take this very seriously obviously. I say shame on her.

Last year the Premier (Mr. Doer) led an all-party delegation to Ottawa—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Once again, I ask members' co-operation. We need some decorum here. I need to be able to hear the question and then the answer in case there is a breach of a rule.

The honourable Member for Lakeside has the floor.

Mr. Eichler: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the Premier led a party delegation to Ottawa to talk about justice. The government needs to think about this long and hard, about the consequences of ignoring these industries. Their failure to do so will devastate farm families, businesses, industries of which they serve in our rural communities.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier today get on the phone, start the process, start an all-party delegation? Let's get it done. Enough rhetoric. Let's get action.

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows that the Prime Minister is in Winnipeg today, and the Premier is meeting with the Prime Minister today. He will certainly raise this issue with the Prime Minister. But, despite that, our government has stood by the industry.

There is no doubt there are serious challenges right now. Mr. Speaker, when safety net programs are being put in place, this is done in consultation with the industry. That's why we now have AgriStability, AgriInvest, and this government has increased the funding to those two programs by \$70 million total.

South Perimeter Bridge Repair Project Status

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Taxpayers, especially those on the south side of the city of Winnipeg, want some straight answers from this NDP government. The south Perimeter bridge project has been bungled from day one. It's been under construction and reconstruction for far too long.

Can the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation explain how his government so badly bungled the south Perimeter bridge project and what he plans to do to fix it?

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): The project has not been bungled, Mr. Speaker. This government indeed has put in unprecedented amounts of money into transportation infrastructure, \$4 billion over 10 years.

This is a record we are very proud of. Our engineers are certainly working very diligently and hard on a lot of projects throughout the province of Manitoba. I will tell you this government has more projects under way than they ever dreamed of. We will see them when it comes time to vote for this budget, an unprecedented amount of money in infrastructure, and we'll see how they vote on this budget.

* (14:00)

Mrs. Mitchelson: The minister can brag about the money that he spent, but when he spent \$12 million on a project that's been so badly bungled that we're going to have to spend millions more in order to fix the problems, Mr. Speaker, there is a problem and there is an issue with this government.

The south side of the city of Winnipeg is growing, and it's critical that vital infrastructure projects are started and completed on time. Taxpayers are frustrated, and rightly so, and motorists what some answers from this government.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister today deliver a firm deadline for the completion of the repairs to the westbound lanes of the south Perimeter bridge? Will he give some confidence to motorists that infrastructure dollars are being spent wisely?

Mr. Lemieux: I can tell you, and the member opposite is correct, 341 minimum in funding will be spent on bridge construction over the next number of years, Mr. Speaker.

Shortly after this bridge was built, Mr. Speaker, our engineers noticed an unacceptable amount of cracking in the bridge. The bridge is safe. We know that it certainly needs some work, but I can tell you, with regard to the accountability, with regard to tax dollars, this government will ensure that tax dollars are well spent and will ensure that this project is also taken care of in an acceptable way according to the taxpayers.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite, when they were in government, did very little with regard to construction projects in this province, and I'll certainly expand on my answer after the next question.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Only an NDP government could say we'll spend \$12 million and bungle a project so badly, and it's good use of taxpayers' dollars.

Mr. Speaker, motorists on the south side of the city of Winnipeg will have extra time as they're

travelling and sitting on the side of the road to think about why the south Perimeter bridge was so badly bungled. They'll question why the NDP so badly mismanaged this project and why it has taken so long to complete.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister now take some responsibility for this bungled mess and tell Manitoba taxpayers today how much the problems have cost to date and how much more it will cost until the repairs are complete?

Mr. Lemieux: Manitobans can rest assured that we're making every effort to protect the taxpayer investment in this project. We're currently in negotiations with the original contractor to recover the costs associated with repairs, and if negotiations fail, we'll have to seek compensation through the courts and other means.

Where the bungling happened is when the members opposite were in government, and that member was a member of Cabinet when they raised gas taxes by \$200 million and cut the budget in transportation in the 1990s. That's the bungling, Mr. Speaker.

School Divisions Funding Process

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Year after year, we have seen this Minister of Education bungle the education funding announcements. Last year, it was a directive to school divisions to redo budgets at the last minute after changing the rules on approved surpluses. This year's poorly planned announcement resulted in confusion, frustration, unanswered questions and damage control.

I ask this Minister of Education: When will he start taking his responsibility seriously and allow for better up-front planning rather than leave school divisions scrambling year after year after year?

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): I was very proud of the unprecedented funding announcement this year, Mr. Speaker, the result of that unprecedented funding announcement of \$53.5 million.

Had we followed the lead of the members opposite when they were in government, which past behaviour dictates future behaviours, when they said we don't need more money for Education in the budget this year because the enrolment is flat or declining, it would have taken over 35 years for them

to meet those single-year announcements that we made this year at \$53.5 million.

Mr. Speaker, people's property taxes are going down throughout this province. We're moving towards an 80-20 funding model, and we continue to increase funding for education every year and will continue to do so. That's our policy.

Mr. Schuler: As a result of some school divisions not accepting the tax-incentive grab, \$5 million in the Education budget is currently unaccounted for. When asked about this \$5 million on a local radio station, all the Minister of Education could say was, and I quote: That's money that's been left on the table. That's money that is not spent, and I'll have to leave it at that.

Leaving it at that is no answer to both the children and the parents who are looking to see where that money's going to go. I ask the Minister of Education: Please explain to the taxpayers of Manitoba what exactly is going to happen to those \$5 million.

Mr. Bjornson: That is a budget line for the Department of Education. That money will be spent for the education of our students here in Manitoba.

You know, it's quite interesting, Mr. Speaker, listening to members opposite during the debate, or during the announcement, I should say, they likened this to poking school divisions with a stick.

Mr. Speaker, \$53.5 million is poking school divisions with a stick? What they were doing in the '90s was beating them senseless with a crowbar.

Mr. Schuler: During the 2007 election campaign, the NDP promised to provide the annual grants and proposed budgets to school divisions earlier in the budgeting process to allow for better up-front planning. Yet with this year's funding announcement, the Education Minister failed to provide clear information to school divisions which resulted in uncertainty, mixed messages and damage control from this NDP government. This left school divisions confused and frustrated.

I ask the Minister of Education: Why has he failed to live up to his promise?

Mr. Bjornson: Our promise is to fund 80-20 and we're moving towards an 80-20 funding, Mr. Speaker.

I love the reference to the election and the promises made during the election because they

promised to strip school divisions of their taxing authority. They promised to fund at—well, they said they didn't need to fund more because there is declining enrolment or flat levels of enrolment in our schools. Now, if they funded \$10 million to elite schools, to their schools of excellence program, that's all they're going to increase, that leaves a \$43.5-million shortfall of what we funded this year, Mr. Speaker. What would that amount to in the number of teachers that would have to be cut? Probably close to 700 teachers.

That's not the way we operate. We're funding education in a meaningful way and we'll continue to do so, Mr. Speaker.

Gun Crime

Government Reduction Strategy

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, another day goes by in Winnipeg and, again, another gunshot victim. In breaking news this afternoon, another Winnipeg died from gunshot wounds.

So I ask the Minister of Justice: Why has he failed to make our communities safer?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, we have 52 Lighthouses in the province of Manitoba that provide a safe place for 130,000 children—[interjection]

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Chomiak: Members opposite voted against it.

Mr. Speaker, we're putting in place \$500,000 to hire recreation directors. Members opposite are going to vote against it. We put in place the Turnabout program to help kids under 12 get on the right track. About a thousand kids have been helped. Members opposite voted against it. We put in place the arson task force which includes the Office of the Fire Commissioner and provides three full-time staff to the Winnipeg Arson Strike Force. Members opposite voted against it. We introduced the Spotlight program to deal with probation and serious offenders. Members opposite—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Hawranik: Mr. Speaker, let me set the record straight. We're not going to vote for this budget because simply he did not provide for enough police officers in Manitoba. That's why we're voting against this budget: public safety.

Public safety is the No. 1 issue for Manitobans but not for the NDP. Last month there were four separate incidents involving guns and three Winnipeggers lost their lives. This month so far, there have been three separate incidents involving guns and this afternoon another Winnipegger lost his life.

So I ask the Minister of Justice: Why has he failed to make public safety a priority?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, the vision laid out by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) in the election campaign just a year ago—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable minister has the floor.

* (14:10)

Mr. Chomiak: —and the vision reiterated by the Leader of the Opposition on the weekend in Brandon, I understand, is that spending at the Department of Justice should be limited to the rate of inflation, which, in fact, would see a reduction in funding to police officers in the city of Winnipeg, Brandon, rural and northern Manitoba, according to the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, they cannot have it both ways. They either support the extra police or they continue to vote against the extra police, as they have done for nine consecutive years, an increase of 150 police officers on the streets. They voted against it.

Mr. Hawranik: Mr. Speaker, it's all about setting priorities and, obviously, justice is not a priority of this government.

Illegal guns are flowing into Manitoba and are adding to all the gunshot incidents in Manitoba. Last week the budget did not make public safety a priority. It did nothing to address the flow of illegal guns into Manitoba.

So I ask the Minister of Justice: Why did he fail to stop the flow of illegal guns into Manitoba, and why does he refuse to support the creation of a joint firearm enforcement unit?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased to be invited to Ottawa by the federal Minister of Justice, the only provincial minister to stand behind and to support the law that's coming into effect May 1 dealing with dangerous firearms, suggested by the Member for St. Johns (Mr. Mackintosh). It will see higher sentences if you use a firearm in the

commission of an offence and reverse onus on bail if you used a firearm.

Mr. Speaker, that bill as proposed by the Member for St. Johns has been passed through Parliament with this government's support, with my support beside the Minister of Justice as we supported that measure, and, as the member knows, firearms are in federal Criminal Code jurisdiction. We support it and we'll stand with the federal government on those provisions. I wish the member would support us—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Plastic Checkout Bags Proposed Ban

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, more than 100 million plastic checkout bags from grocery stores and other retail outlets end up in the Brady Landfill site each year. Present plastic bags are made from petroleum products. They last a very long time, don't degrade quickly, and they clog up landfill sites and create a plague on the environment.

We can help our environment and reduce greenhouse gas production at the same time by banning such single-use plastic checkout bags in Manitoba. Leaf Rapids has already done so. It's very popular.

I ask the government: Will the government support the ban of plastic checkout bags in Manitoba as is outlined in Bill 200, the Liberal bill?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Conservation): Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the guests in the gallery, there is to be no participation.

The honourable minister has the floor.

Mr. Struthers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As evidenced, I think the people of Manitoba who are here in the Legislature and all around the province want this government to work with the industry to make sure we have a comprehensive approach to taking care of not just plastic bags but all other kinds of waste streams that we should be concerned about in Manitoba.

We've been working proactively with the industry in terms of tires and tire stewardship. We've been working with the industry in terms of products,

electronic products, hazardous waste. We've been working on that, based on the good model we have here in Manitoba which is the oil industry.

So, Mr. Speaker, we're working with not only the industry but municipalities and other groups as well to make sure we have a comprehensive, thorough program.

Biodegradable Bags Development

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, plastic checkout bags have been banned in Bombay in India, in Paris in France, and in a variety of other places like San Francisco. Recently, only a few weeks ago in South Australia, they announced they are going to ban plastic checkout bags by next year.

We need to get on board. Right now in the Mountain Equipment Co-op you can go down and get biodegradable bags. The only problem is they're made in Europe. They're from cornstarch.

Why will the government not support our agricultural producers and the development of a new forward-thinking industry and businesses in Manitoba making Manitoba-based agricultural products plastic bags, an issue that we can export all the way around the world?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Conservation): Mr. Speaker, over and over again, right across the environmental spectrum, this government has shown leadership time and time again. I really appreciate the Leader of the Liberal Party finally getting on board and waking up to the fact that the environment is important. It needs to be considered when we make decisions.

I think he has to understand we don't want to just one-off, one-off, one-off. We want a comprehensive program that makes common sense that will work in the best way for Manitobans, and, to that end, I suggest the Member for River Heights stay tuned.

Police Services Resources

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we have found with this government is spending smarter is quite a challenge when you take a look at health care and the amount of money that we pump into health care—every year it keeps on growing—and the side effects that it has on issues like justice.

I brought up the question to the Minister of Justice. We have thousands of police hours being invested in the Health Sciences Centre every year because this government just doesn't get it, doesn't understand you can spend smarter and get better service, whether it's in health care, whether it's in safety.

My question for the Minister of Justice is: Specifically, what is he doing to deal with the thousands of hours spent annually at the Health Sciences Centre where we have police there as opposed to on our streets in Winnipeg?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I just want to note for the record that the member is on the record as opposing the additional police that we have put money in for at the City of Winnipeg. So I want to start with the premise that the member has said that we don't need extra police in Winnipeg and, in fact, has voted against it.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, the issue of police is something that I think our new police chief, Keith McCaskill, and the City Council who are responsible for the police force of Winnipeg are looking at in terms of utilization of time. They know that community policing is a priority. They know that we've given the money for police in schools. They know that we've given them something like close to 100 additional police officers. We've asked for community policing in that regard, and we leave it to the City of Winnipeg and the police chief to utilize resources.

With respect to issues at Health Sciences Centre, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Education Week Celebrations

Ms. Erna Braun (Rossmere): This week marks Education Week in Manitoba. Can the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth inform the House of some of these celebrations happening across the province?

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): Of course, Education Week is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the achievements such as those of my guests in the gallery today, Mr. Gordon Crook and Ms. Gustafson, who are recognized in Toronto at the learning partners gala event as two of Canada's outstanding principals. It's also an opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to

celebrate what teachers do each and every day in our classrooms on behalf of our students with their innovative teaching methods, with their connections to their students and their communities and certainly their contributions to their schools and their communities.

Mr. Speaker, this week also we will be celebrating Education Week in partnership with the Manitoba Teachers' Society and the Manitoba Association of School Trustees. It's a fine week for everyone to celebrate all the magic that occurs each and every day in our schools.

Agriculture Industry Fertilizer Costs

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, grain and oilseed producers are preparing to hit the fields this spring. These farmers are facing the highest input costs in history. Last year Manitoba producers were paying exceptionally high fertilizer prices relative to the U.S. producers. This minister refused to call the Standing Committee on Agriculture to review that situation.

We're asking: What is this government doing today to ensure that our producers are not being gouged again this spring?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Indeed, input costs are at a high level, and part of that, Mr. Speaker, is because of the high dollar.

Our producers have been making plans. Our producers have pre-purchased fertilizers in some cases, but these fertilizer dealers operate in a free market. They actually have a cartel on the sales of this fertilizer and can determine how much fertilizer has been available. There has been a request for the Competition Bureau to review this, and they have said that there is not a case for the Competition Bureau to review these prices.

But, Mr. Speaker, our producers are looking at the various options and some of them are—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

* (14:20)

Personal Care Home—Russell Black Mould Problem

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): My question is to the Minister of Health, Mr. Speaker. The Russell and District Personal Care Home, which was scheduled for reconstruction back in 1999, still stands as it did

that day, and it falls short on many measures of standards if you were to measure it against some of the most modern personal care homes.

Mr. Speaker, a year ago or so, a resident was moved out of his room because of the black mould that was found in the room. To date, that room is closed and no people can move into that room. At the same time, 22 people are on the waiting list to get into the personal care home.

I want to ask the Minister of Health whether she is aware of this and what steps she has taken to ensure that other residents aren't being affected by black mould in that facility.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I thank the member very kindly for the question. Certainly, regular audits of safety and security are done of personal care homes. In a particular case, as the member has cited, we will want to review the situation to see if there is danger, if further mitigating efforts need to take place.

We know that we have to ensure that we invest our health capital dollars as wisely as we can, and, certainly, investing in the safety of residents has to be job 1.

Low-Speed Vehicles Licensing Classification

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Mr. Speaker, low-speed vehicles travel at less than 50 kilometres per hour and are designed for urban use. There is certainly a growing public interest in getting these vehicles on our streets. Manitoba firms like Northland Machinery have been unsuccessful in their efforts to have their low-speed vehicles licensed for use in Manitoba because of the stalling by this government.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister responsible please tell this House when a new classification will be created for low-speed vehicles to be used in Manitoba, and when will he take this step so local companies can participate in this growing market?

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines): I'm pleased to see that in the green legislation that was just passed, the climate-change legislation last week on Friday, what happened was it was tabled. We, in it, have a special section that's talking about how we're going to get low-speed vehicles on the road.

It's nice because we have Westward Industries that are producing lower-speed vehicles that are

marketed around the world but can't be sold in Canada. We have ZENN. We have numbers of vehicles that are produced in Canada, marketed around the world but are not being driven in Canada.

We're going to be one of the first jurisdictions in the country to allow the safe use of these low-speed vehicles here in the province. It'll help our greenhouse gas emissions. It'll help our manufacturers and it'll save Manitobans money.

Rural Emergency Response Services Wait Times

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, the budget of 2008 was another letdown for rural Manitobans. Last fall the Health Minister acknowledged that her government needed to do more to improve the ambulance wait times in the southeastern corner of Manitoba, but I didn't see anything in this budget that would assure the residents of Sprague and/or Piney that they won't have to wait up to an hour and a half for an ambulance.

Could the Minister of Health give any peace of mind to my constituents in the southeast that in the event of a critical episode like a stroke or a heart attack where time is of an essence, they will not have to wait an hour and a half for an ambulance?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I thank the member for the question. I certainly can say that our investments in emergency medical services have been extensive and continue to do so. Probably one of the single greatest things that we can do is ensure that we are monitoring actual response time and data, and we've been able to achieve that through the investment of the Medical Transportation Co-ordination Centre. We have a very good and accurate picture of what those response times are.

The second thing we absolutely need to do when we know those response times is get medical professionals into the field. That's why we're building our complement of paramedics, Mr. Speaker, the first time in Manitoba history we'll be offering a primary care paramedic program, and that's going to work to help Manitobans with their emergencies.

Mr. Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Cecil Rhodes School Video Club

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Wellington): Mr. Speaker, today I have the privilege of highlighting the work of the Cecil Rhodes School Video Club, which operates under the direction of Andrea Powell.

Every year for the past six years students in the video club have created award-winning videos highlighting issues as diverse as pollution in Lake Winnipeg, and poverty and hunger in the city, to the power of wind energy, and the need for water conservation.

This year's videos, entitled: *It's in the Bag*, which highlights the environmental dangers of plastic bags and advocates for the use of reusable cloth bags; and *Leaving Your Mark*, which addresses our carbon footprint on the environment, have both won national awards.

Each year a group of students participates in filmmaking workshops, after which they embark on the process of planning, creating and editing their own short film. The students meet at lunchtime to do most of the work.

Over the six years the video club has existed it has received over 20 national and international awards for their films.

Mr. Speaker, the videos the club produces have often had social justice or environmental themes, providing the students with the opportunity to be involved in finding solutions for the challenges we face in our world today. The video club, therefore, not only trains students in the art of filmmaking but provides them with leadership skills and teaches them the importance of social responsibility.

On behalf of all members of this House, I would like to commend and thank Cecil Rhodes School and Andrea Powell for their efforts in enriching their students' education, and with extracurricular activities like the video club.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Chinese Men's National Curling Team

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Mr. Speaker, this year's Elm Creek Curling Men's Bonspiel had an international flavour as the Chinese Men's National Curling Team participated in some friendly local competition.

Team China trains in Québec but came to Manitoba a few weeks ago to watch the men's Canadian Brier in Winnipeg before heading to Grand Forks to play in the world curling competition. While in the province, their Canadian coach looked for a place the young team could get some practice before their big competition. What he found was a local bonspiel of 23 teams in Elm Creek. So the team, ranked 15th worldwide, made a trek to the community to participate in the weekend activities.

Welcomed to the town and the bonspiel, Team China discovered friendly curlers, but certainly teams eager to take on this new competition. With an enthusiastic audience of locals as well as visitors from Carman, Gimli, Morris, and local media, Team China won their first three games of the bonspiel before being defeated by Elm Creek's Ian Woods team in the semi-final.

Woods' team went on to win the bonspiel, and I am sure the local team will fondly recall their victory against the international competition for years to come, but before Team China left Elm Creek en route to the larger competition in Grand Forks they were given gifts from the community and, in return, they gave a signed banner to hang in our local curling rink to commemorate this new excitement to the local competition.

With an additional team to root for in the world curling championship, the residents of Elm Creek, as well as the entire world, watched the progress of Team China during their first trip to a large competition. They ended fourth after a defeat from Norway in the bronze medal game on Saturday. However, despite not reaching medal placement, Team China certainly had much to cheer about their success throughout the week, including an upset against Team Canada during the round robin play.

The residents of Elm Creek enjoyed hosting Team China, showing them small-town hospitality in friendly Manitoba.

Jeanne Perreault

Ms. Marilyn Brick (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to pay tribute to the life of Jeanne Perreault.

Jeanne was a tireless advocate and lent her hard work to numerous community organizations in my constituency of St. Norbert. She was a retired teacher, having taught for 35 years at St. John's Ravenscourt School and served as a school trustee for the Seine River School Division. Jeanne also

served in countless volunteer roles: she was a counsellor at Pregnancy Distress Services for 25 years, served in national, provincial and parish councils of the Catholic Women's League, was a member of the board of directors for the St. Norbert Arts Centre and served on the Fort Garry Library Board.

* (14:30)

Jeanne also received a number of awards recognizing the important contribution she made to her community. She received the Order of Saskatchewan from the Manitoba Métis Federation for advancing the cause of Métis women, the Order of the Gate of Fort Garry and the Prix Manitoba Award for Heritage in 1996.

Jeanne Perreault was an active member of the St. Norbert neighbourhood advocating for the recognition of the important role the community has played throughout Manitoba's history. As president of Heritage St. Norbert, Jeanne worked hard to safeguard the heritage of this section of our province for the benefit of future generations preserving historical structures like the Trappist Monastery ruins and the Hotellerie, now the St. Norbert Arts and Cultural Centre.

Mr. Speaker, Jeanne Perreault not only advocated for strong neighbourhoods and community organizations, she worked hard in promoting these values throughout her life.

Her hard work as an educator, her service to her community and her friendship made a huge impact on those who knew her and she will be greatly missed. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tolstoi Hotel

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, on February 28, the Tolstoi Hotel, better known as Elsie's Hotel, closed its doors. Elsie Kolodzinski owned and operated the Tolstoi Hotel and bar for 68 years—since she was 28 years old. As the longest-running hotel owner in the province and at the age of 87, Elsie has decided it's time to retire.

In 1940, Elsie married Walter Kolodzinski and together they purchased the Tolstoi Hotel. Together, they served the community and built a legacy. Since Walter's passing in 1983, Elsie has been the sole proprietor of the hotel and bar.

Elsie and her legendary hotel have been featured on CBC's *24-Hours* public affairs program and when

On the Road Again with Wayne Rolstad came to town, the community celebrated in a big way.

In addition to her warmth and generosity, Elsie was also well known for her homemade pickles. As an alternative to celery stalks, she would use her homemade pickles in her Bloody Caesar cocktails she prepared for her customers.

These past few years, Elsie's four daughters have been helping out and her son-in-law has been managing the bar—but under Elsie's supervision, of course.

Elsie will not be selling her hotel. Instead she will continue to live in her apartment adjacent to the bar. As for the bar itself, Elsie says it will be converted into an area to host family events for her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Elsie treated others with kindness and greeted absolutely everyone with a big hug. In return, they had nothing but respect for her. We would like to take this opportunity to thank Elsie for 68 years of service to her community and to the province. The old-fashioned hospitality of the Tolstoi Hotel and bar will be difficult to find anywhere else in this day and age, and it will be something we will forever hold in our hearts.

While Elsie's hotel and bar will be sadly missed, we thank her for the wonderful memories, and we wish her the very best in her retirement. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Victims of Crime Awareness Week

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): It is critical that we take a moment to mark the National Victims of Crime Awareness Week. From hate crimes, to violent crimes, to property crimes, we must all support victims through their time of need and support their calls for justice. As elected officials, we must all do our part to ensure that our streets are safer and that victims of crime have access to the services they need.

Mr. Speaker, I was thrilled to support Manitoba's Victims' Bill of Rights. Our bill is the strongest, most comprehensive and enforceable statute of its kind in Canada. It gives victims the right to protection and assistance, as well as information about the investigation and prosecution of the crimes which victimize them.

I also know the important role that our beat cops play in catching criminals and was a strong supporter to increase the number of police officers on our

streets to one of the highest levels of any province in Canada.

Dealing with crime is also about making sure our young people have a safe place to be after school. I've always believed that a strong enforcement strategy is most effective with a strong prevention strategy. The Lighthouses that can be found all over Manitoba are safe places for young people to go and study and offer evening recreational programming. These two approaches are important investments in making our streets safer.

I would encourage all my honourable colleagues to take some time during this year's National Victims of Crime Awareness Week to support the excellent work of our front-line workers. They are making sure that victims of crime can access the justice that they deserve. We must all stand beside victims of crime during their time of need. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS BUDGET DEBATE (Third Day of Debate)

Mr. Speaker: Resume debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) that this House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government and the proposed motion of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen), standing in the name of the honourable Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale), who has 23 minutes remaining.

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise and speak in favour of this budget and vote for this budget. I'm going to just highlight a few items. There are so many items in this budget that are good news for Manitobans that I can't possibly cover all of them, but I am going to comment on the ones and put on the record the ones that are of most interest to my constituents in Burrows.

I'd like to begin with our announcements on public safety in this budget. For example, we are providing funding for 20 more police officers, something that the Attorney General (Mr. Chomiak) pointed out the opposition is going to vote against and the third party will probably vote against as well, given their past record of voting about 98 percent with the Conservative caucus.

Ms. Marilyn Brick, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

I'm sure they're going to vote against this. We're also adding two more prosecutors, and I'm sure that the opposition and the third party are going to vote against that as well.

I'm delighted that we are piloting a new Mediation Services project to provide conflict resolution services to parties involved in private prosecutions. I suspect from the announcement that it will be delivered by Mediation Services. I'm not quite sure because it wasn't capitalized in my speaking notes, but if it is, I would commend the government for using an excellent non-government organization, a non-profit organization founded by the Mennonite Central Committee but now a stand-alone organization. I've taken two courses at Mediation Services; in fact, I'm working on a certificate in conflict resolution. I need to take about 18 days more courses and then I'll have a certificate. I can probably only take one or two courses a year, but I'll try to take more and finish it sooner. It is a wonderful organization that I can highly commend. Anything that gets people out of the court system and out of the legal system is good in a number of ways because then it frees up space for more serious cases. Also, there are many, many benefits to conflict resolution in terms of the individuals and their satisfaction with the outcome.

We are also funding recreation programs, and this really speaks to the issue of prevention because we know that incarceration isn't the only solution. Incarceration is important for those people who are incorrigible, but we also need to prevent people from getting involved with the law in the first place. We are expanding the very successful Lighthouses program which offers sports, arts and music and other activities for youth, for children and youth actually. One of the most recent openings was the Gilbert Park recreation centre in the Burrows constituency and I'm glad to see that we are expanding Lighthouses to more schools and recreation facilities.

We also announced a First Sports initiative for community centres and sports groups to purchase equipment and supplies. We are also initiating a \$500,000 announcement for recreation directors in inner city recreation centres, and I commend this initiative by our government. Probably there are a lot of people that do not realize that, even though we have dozens of recreation centres in Winnipeg, a lot of them do not have paid staff. People might assume that they all have paid staff, but, in fact, many of them don't. They run on volunteers, and I think it's

good that we're actually putting this money into the areas of greatest need in the inner city so that these recreation centres can be open for longer hours, provide more programs, get more youth involved and keep them off the street and out of trouble. So this is another good initiative that I support.

Now, I'd like to continue with what budget 2008 means for you and your family. We know that this budget invests \$5 million new funding to improve access to quality child care in Manitoba. We have continued to expand child care partly through our five-year plan. Unlike the opposition who, when they were in government, cut the child-care budget by \$10 million, we are expanding child care in Manitoba.

I would also like to comment on education and skills development. We are reducing the interest rate on student loans by 1 percent, one of the many things that we are doing for students.

We are offering the tuition-fee income tax rebate, which returns 60 percent of eligible tuition fees to graduates who live and work in Manitoba. Recently, my wife and I were on holidays in Georgia, and we were staying with two educators, one of whom is a dean of Humanities, and I found out about what they consider to be a very successful program that started in Georgia, I believe, and spread to other states. It's called the HOPE Scholarship. It's based on academic criteria. So, if you get, I think, it's a B-plus or higher, you get the HOPE Scholarship. I did a little reading about it. I know that my wife's cousin actually got one of the HOPE scholarships, and she was very pleased with it.

*(14:40)

I was curious. I know about some of the programs in Manitoba but didn't know about all of them. So I sent an e-mail to the special assistant to the Minister of Advanced Education, and he sent back a list of all the ACCESS programs, bursaries and scholarships in Manitoba and it amounts to a page and a half. There was some in there that I wasn't aware of. Actually, when you compare the HOPE scholarships in Georgia with what we're doing in Manitoba, Manitoba is doing much, much more because we have many programs. The per capita spending is much, much greater than in Georgia as well. So there are good ideas in other places, and we might consider borrowing from these good ideas, but we're already doing great things in terms of assistance to students and to universities and increasing the funding to universities because we

believe it's important to fund universities and to help students.

We are investing \$1.1 million more in adult learning and literacy programs. Some of these literacy programs are in the Burrows constituency. In fact, I was on the advisory board of Open Doors for nine years, and I know how important adult literacy programs are. The minister tries to visit many of these programs. So the Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy (Ms. McGifford) came out and visited the Open Doors Adult Literacy Program at King Edward School.

Some of those students go on, they graduate. Some of them get their GED; some of them get their grade 12 standing; and some of them go on to community college and even university, which is excellent to see. We are adding new apprenticeship training seats as part of our commitment to add 4,000 seats. You'll recall that this was an announcement during the election and we are keeping this election promise and beginning to fund it in this budget. We're working with the federal government to provide \$18 million for training and employment support and skills upgrading.

Next is healthy families and healthy communities, and we are investing \$16.6 million more in housing through HOMEworks! We're providing new funding for people making the transition to employment. We're providing \$3.5 million to extend the Manitoba Shelter Benefit to help single adults and couples on income assistance and to support a pilot project for individuals with mental health challenges.

We are adding \$23 million to continue making changes to better protect Manitoba's children. We are supporting young adults affected by fetal alcohol spectrum disorder in the area of housing, education and training, recreation, crisis services, family connections and mentoring. This is an interesting area where we are consistently expanding our programming and services to the community.

At one time, you know, we started with FAS programs in schools. In fact, I believe that a school in Point Douglas was the only school in Canada that had a FAS classroom. Now it's expanding to other school divisions and from kindergarten or grade 1 to grade 6 and now to grade 8, and now it's being expanded into secondary schools. Not only in education, but in many, many other areas there are programs for fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and not just for children but for young adults.

I would like to now go on to advancing the quality of our health-care system. We are investing \$7.2 million to educate and hire more doctors, another election commitment and promise that we are keeping. We are providing an additional \$3 million to increase the number of nurses, health-care aides and allied health-care workers for personal care homes in Manitoba, another election commitment that we are keeping. We are investing \$1.8 million more for cancer screening to ensure earlier diagnosis and treatment.

Under the heading of Aboriginal Manitobans, we are introducing a new bursary program that supports and encourages Aboriginal students to enter the medical profession by providing Aboriginal medical students up to \$7,000 annually. We are providing \$500,000 to improve Aboriginal academic achievement.

We're providing the first \$250,000 for a \$1 million capital fund for friendship centres across Manitoba. This, I hope, will benefit the friendship centre in Point Douglas constituency, but there are 14 friendship centres in Manitoba. I remember very well in the 1990s, I believe it was in the '93 budget, when the government of the day, the Conservative government, cut all the funding, the operating funding to all friendship centres in Manitoba. We promised that, when we formed government in 1999, we would restore their funding, which we have done. Now we have added a capital fund, which will go a long way towards improving the infrastructure of those friendship centres.

We are providing resources to support First Nations communities' bid for UNESCO World Heritage Site designation on the east side of Lake Winnipeg. If they are successful in that, this will be very important to Manitoba and to eco-tourism and to preserving the boreal forest.

We are providing more than \$200 million in funding for the City of Winnipeg to provide local services including transit services and public safety. We're providing \$29 million more for road improvements and bicycle routes.

Madam Acting Speaker, I could go on and on and on. I have many more highlights to read into the record of programs and services that are going to benefit my constituents in Burrows and all Manitobans, but I will conclude with just a few items having to do with our reductions in property, personal income and business taxes. We have increased the Education Property Tax Credit to

\$600 in 2008, saving Manitobans an additional \$24.5 million annually, and we remember that in the 1990s, the property tax credit was reduced, and we have consistently improved it.

We are reducing personal income tax for every taxpayer by increasing the basic personal exemption by \$100. We are lowering personal income tax for families by adding \$100 to the spousal and dependant amounts in 2009, and we are providing benefits to Manitobans by increasing the personal tax credit in 2009.

Madam Acting Speaker, this is only a small sample of the many good things in this budget. We hope that the official opposition and third party will vote for it because it's a good budget. It provides many, many improvements for all Manitobans, and it's a pleasure to speak and to vote in favour of this budget.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Madam Acting Speaker, it's a pleasure today to rise to speak to the Budget Address, the budget debate, because I think it's time that Manitobans were given the privilege of understanding exactly where the shortcomings of this budget and this government are, and it needs to be repeated time and time again.

One kind of waited with anticipation the budget of this year because it's been a significant time since the House sat, and so we were hoping that in that period of time, the government would have had time to really establish a strong budget for Manitobans. This is in a period of time when the economy of our province is strong and not any credit to anything the government has done. I mean they like to pat themselves on the back, but this government has done everything to discourage any kind of growth in this province and it likes to use the old hammer on anybody who shows any success and come down with a bunch of regulations that actually choke business or choke off growth.

Madam Acting Speaker, we have seen businesses leave this province simply because of the anti-business climate that has been established under the regime of this government.

We were hoping that in this budget there would be some address of the issues that are facing this province and are hurting the economy of this province. Whether it's in business or whether it's in any growth industry, Madam Acting Speaker, there are always needs, and government is there not to establish itself as a counterpart to successful

businesses, but to, in fact, do everything it can to ensure that the climate and the attitude is right for businesses to flourish, for the economy to flourish and for jobs to be provided in this province.

Madam Acting Speaker, the one area that I look at, just one simple area that one has to look at, is the area of resource development. If we look at that we have to say, why isn't the government promoting the development of our resources of this province for the betterment of the people here and for the creation of jobs and the growth of our economy?

Saskatchewan, just to the west of us, this year announced the development of two major potash development mines. The one mine at Tantalton will—

An Honourable Member: We have a mine?

Mr. Derkach: Somebody said, we have a mine? We have a potash mine? Where? Wake up, Member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff). We don't have a potash mine in this province—or Selkirk. But, Madam Acting Speaker, this province could learn a lot from what the direction in Saskatchewan has been.

* (14:50)

Over the course of time, Saskatchewan has developed potash resources. They started to develop their resources when there was a demand for potash. The cycle has gone from demand for potash to no demand, and now we're up at a cycle where there is an extreme amount of demand for potash around the world.

All we have to do is look at fertilizer prices, and we understand that there is opportunity in that area. Madam Acting Speaker, Saskatchewan, with its Crown corporations and also with its private development, have begun the development of two more potash mines in that province, one at Tantalton, and that's a \$2-billion potash mine that's going to be developed. There are going to be more than 2,000 employees working at that mine for a period of seven years until that mine is fully developed, after which time, 400 people will be employed at the mine.

Madam Acting Speaker, one of the best resources in North America and in Canada lies in Manitoba. It lies just across the Saskatchewan border at a place called McAuley and a place called Harrowby. There are two sites where we know that there are two significant deposits of potash. Now, last year, BHP, who have ownership stake in Manitoba Potash Corporation, announced, not with the help of this government, but announced a

\$17-million fund to explore the potash development sites at McAuley and Harrowby.

Now, Madam Acting Speaker, the minister says, be honest. Well, if he has information that, in fact, his government has put money into this research, then I want him to stand up on a point of order and tell us exactly how much money the Manitoba government has invested in this exploration, because the amount is zero.

Madam Acting Speaker, this government is a partner in the ownership of those potash resources. Why would we not be developing those resources at this time? Why would we not be doing like Saskatchewan and investing our money, together with a private company, to establish the jobs that are so badly needed in this province—[interjection] Oh, well, all of a sudden, here we go. The Member for Interlake calls this corporate welfare.

The development of true jobs in this province and the creation of a potash mine would be corporate development. That's good. I'm going to write about that in my next report to the Legislature, Madam Acting Speaker, because I like that comment, and I'll make sure that Manitobans understand where this member is coming from. The development of a potash mine and the resources and the jobs that would be created is corporate welfare.

Well, Madam Acting Speaker, the list goes on. So there is no vision by this government in terms of where it should be putting its priorities. This government relies so heavily on transfer payments from Ottawa that it no longer has the flexibility and the capability of making many of its own decisions because we're becoming quickly a welfare state under this regime.

Madam Acting Speaker, 40 percent of our budget now relies on federal transfers. That should be an embarrassment to any province in this country, and it would be because it means that other provinces have to take out of their taxes in order to be able to support the terrible decisions that are being made by this government, the terrible investments that are being made by this government, and the missed priorities of this government.

You know, this government could have done a lot with regard to the agricultural industry in this budget, but what did it do instead? We know that a certain sector of the agriculture economy is under extreme pressure, and it is up to us, as legislators—it is up to government—to ensure that in those times

there is some support for that kind of an industry which feeds the world. Whether we like it or not, we are still a province that relies very heavily on the agriculture economy.

Madam Acting Speaker, no growth area in this province is greater than that in the southeast corner of our province, the Steinbach area, the Winkler area. Those areas of our province which have used their knowledge, their talent, their ingenuity to be able to create the kind of economic climate there that all of us would like to strive for. They are agricultural based and so, therefore, they have looked at the window of opportunity in the whole hog development area and have put their money into the development of excellent quality hog rearing facilities.

Madam Acting Speaker, if the government had any concerns about the quality of the water, the quality of the effluent that is coming out of those hog barns, they could have done something entirely different than what they did. They could have said to the industry, look, we know that you are probably one of the best stewards of the land. Indeed, there hasn't been one example in this province as long as I can remember and as long as I have researched that has ever had the misfortune of having a hog lagoon pollute any body of water.

But we can't say that for human sewage lagoons. We can't say that for this city of Winnipeg that dumps raw sewage into our pristine river at least seven times a year. We wonder why children can't swim in Lake Winnipeg when that kind of activity is happening. We have a government that is turning kind of a blind eye to it. They say, oh, yeah, we'll fix it in 50 years. Well, in 50 years a great deal of damage can occur.

Coming back to the hog industry, if this government had wanted to effect positive change in that area, the CEC hearing did not say that we should put a moratorium, a permanent moratorium, legislate it, and disallow any growth of that area of the province, which has shown tremendous population growth, tremendous economic growth and has contributed richly to the economy of our province. The government could have said to them, look, in the next five years we are going to invest X million dollars and, together with our universities and our agricultural producers, we will find better ways to deal with the effluent, if, in fact, there's a concern about it. But, instead of doing that, did they provide any hope? Did they provide any reason? Did they

provide any kind of solution to what they perceive as a problem?

It's far easier to go in front of the media, who, bless their hearts, listen to our Premier (Mr. Doer) as if he were a god, and say to them, oh, great, we're going to ban all hog production in the province. Give the Premier a hand for that. Well, that is so short-sighted, because, truly, there has not been any thought given to this. It may look good on the television screen, right here in our main city in Winnipeg, because those people, perhaps, don't understand what the real issues are. But, if you really study the issue and if you really want to effect change, then why don't we invest the kind of money to allow the industry to continue to grow, to allow the industry to continue to flourish in this province, to add to the economy of our province and, at the same time, put resources in place that will find solutions to the problems that are either perceived or are there?

That's not the approach of this government, Madam Acting Speaker. We've seen this in other sectors. The government puts its police out into the province. That's a negative response to anything that you ever want to do. Instead of putting their resources into finding solutions to the problems that may or may not be there, this government decides to put police out there to close down operations, to come down hard on Manitoba citizens. But what about the government's own enterprises? Are the water police coming down on the government's own enterprises?

I look at the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers), who boldly announces the development of cottage lots along our lakes and our areas in this province. Anybody who develops a cottage development along our lakes, Madam Acting Speaker, is obliged to enter into an agreement with a municipality to ensure that there is adequate facility for effluent disposal. Now the Minister of Conservation, the Member for Dauphin, entered into those cottage development sites in my area along Lake of the Prairies, and then, when he was approached by the municipalities who asked him, when are you going to enter into a development agreement to ensure that there is room for the effluent from these cottages, he said, well, we don't have to. Well, what do you mean you don't have to? How are you going to ensure that there's adequate space for your sewage? Right now we're all full. He said, no, we're government. You don't understand, we're government.

* (15:00)

I'm sorry, is there another set of laws that applies to the government that doesn't apply to ordinary Manitobans now? Does it mean that now those cottage developments that the government itself has promoted are okay to pollute the water of the Assiniboine River by dumping their sewage wherever they can and the government doesn't have to provide for adequate space in existing sewage lagoons, or provide for a plan, or enter into a development agreement with the municipality?

Madam Acting Speaker, if you think this is a fairy story, I ask you to go and check with the R.M. of Boulton, Shellmouth-Boulton, check with the Town of Roblin, check with the R.M. of Shell River in which these developments lie and there is no agreement with any of those municipalities to deal with the effluent. Now that's how hypocritical this government is in everything it does.

Madam Acting Speaker, it's fine to stand up on podiums, on podiums and say, well we're enlarging the cottage development in our province by 400 lots, but we are not providing any capability to deal with the effluent that comes from these cottages because we're government, we don't have to. That's exactly what the response was when the municipality asked why there hadn't been an agreement entered into for the disposal of sewage from those cottage sites.

Madam Acting Speaker, what does the budget do for our province? There's a little bit of scattering of money here and there and everywhere. If we compare ourselves to other jurisdictions, what do we find? We find that our province is overtaxed by thousands and thousands of dollars per family compared to other jurisdictions, whether it's in Saskatchewan, which the government has always in the past compared itself to.

Now, I want you to compare yourselves, NDP government of Manitoba, to the people and the regime, a tax regime, in Saskatchewan. How do you like it when families in Saskatchewan are paying thousands of dollars less every year in taxes than they are in Manitoba? Their economy is growing because their attitude is different. They are providing opportunities for their citizens to grow. *[interjection]*

Oh, and somebody says, oil. Well, you know, there's always an excuse, isn't there? There's always an excuse with the NDP government. It's always somebody else's fault.

Now the reason Saskatchewan is doing better than us is because they've got oil. Well, we've got oil too. But, Madam Acting Speaker, they are developing resources. They are encouraging agriculture to flourish. They aren't putting bans on agriculture development in their area. They're not putting soil zones on their citizens where fertilizers cannot be applied. They are finding real solutions. They're saying, if that is a problem we are going to find solutions in order to be able to carry on the business of the day, to be able to grow our province, to ensure that the future generation of our province has a healthy, a vibrant economy in which to invest and which to live in. But that's not the attitude of this government.

You know, our Premier (Mr. Doer) blasts the United States for everything. Whether it's the war in Iraq, or whatever it might be, he's against it all. But, when it comes to guys like Schwarzenegger, some other guy by the name of Jessie Ventura and some other guy by the name of Bobby Kennedy, all of a sudden those have become gods. Now, we're not in Hollywood—[interjection]—or Bobby Kennedy Jr., is that who he is? Yeah. We're not in California, folks. This is Manitoba. We're not on film. We're not a movie industry. We are a province that has multi-resources, has tremendous potential, but that potential has to be the focus of our attention.

So, regardless of where we look, Madam Acting Speaker, we always have to look at the strength that we have in this province and we have to build on those strengths. That's where this government falls short.

I want to talk for a minute about agriculture, Madam Acting Speaker, because that's sort of the heart of my constituency and that's where I come from. Since this government took office nine years ago, we have seen the agriculture industry under extreme fire by this government. No matter what they do, it's just not good enough for this government. I can understand why. They've got one member, one member who, I think, was a farmer at one time in her life—is no more. She is the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk). They have nobody else to put in that portfolio, so it doesn't matter what kind of job she does. They don't have anybody else to put in there. But I can go around this province, and when I mention her name—and it's not because of her, because I think she comes from a family that many Manitobans respect and like—but the job that has been done on agriculture in this province is shameful. This government has always dragged,

kicking and screaming into any program that is developed through the federal government. When it comes time to stand up for Manitobans, this minister will only blame either Ottawa, the farmers, or somebody else.

Now let me tell you about the cattle industry. We have an important industry in this province in the livestock sector. The cattle industry of our province has always been a very strong industry, and the purebred industry, the purebred cattle industry, is one of the finest in North America. People from our area who raise purebred cattle are known right through North America and even beyond.

As a matter of fact, my own neighbour this year sent 25 bred heifers to Russia because of the quality of the herd. We see that repeated in every segment of this province. As a matter of fact, one of our MLAs raises purebred cattle—and they are some of the finest in North America—and is known for that.

But, Madam Acting Speaker, we're going to lose that industry because this government doesn't understand how to deal with issues. While other provinces have taken it upon themselves to grow their industries, this minister stands there, wrenching her hands, blaming Ottawa and blaming everybody else under the sun.

We look at farmers, the farmers, ranchers initiative in Dauphin, where the government invested some \$4 million-plus and got nothing out of it except some rusting equipment that lies in Dauphin. This is an embarrassment to that government and an embarrassment to us as a province.

But Ranchers Choice could have survived, because there was a clause that the government did not allow those investors to use. Now in Crocus Fund and in other investments, farmers, or people who invest in those, can get a 30 percent tax credit, but that was not extended to Ranchers Choice. They did not get a 30 percent tax credit for the investment that they put into Ranchers Choice, whereas other smaller industries did. Even a grocery store, people who invested in a grocery store got a 30 percent tax credit. Yet, if you invested in Ranchers Choice, you didn't get a 30 percent tax credit. Now is that the way you build a province? Is that how you make an initiative come to reality?

Madam Acting Speaker, this government just doesn't get it, doesn't understand how to go about ensuring that we have good growth, good investment in this province. Instead, it kills initiative because it

wants to be the top dog. It wants to have its finger on the pulse, so to speak, but it doesn't understand how business is run and, therefore, every time they turn around they lose it.

How many more initiatives are there out there like Ranchers Choice, and how many more failures are there that we don't even know about today?

Madam Acting Speaker, my colleague in the front bench is telling me that I have to sit down, but before I do I want to say—

An Honourable Member: Here, here.

An Honourable Member: More.

Mr. Derkach: No, I need to sit down, Madam Acting Speaker. I could go on for days.

Let me just say one more thing. I want to talk about the environmental, the Green Plan. Now many years ago when there was a different government in place we had something called the Round Table on Sustainable Development. We had a program for youth which was called—it was just a simple name—Green Team. What was this all about? It was about encouraging young people to get involved in green projects around the province. Through those projects, Madam Acting Speaker, these young Manitobans got experience in parks. They got experience in any enterprise that dealt with sustainable green types of initiatives throughout our province.

What did this government do with that program? It destroyed it. It killed it. Today there is no remnant of it at all. They even didn't like the name. They didn't like the name, but today they want to call themselves green. Yet one program that employed thousands of students around the province—

An Honourable Member: It's still running.

* (15:10)

Mr. Derkach: Well, Madam Acting Speaker, it's running as a lame duck. Anybody who was involved with the Green Team program before will tell you that very thing, that today the program is a disaster compared to what it used to be. Today, it's only a shell of what it used to be. That's the kind of hypocrisy we see from members across the way. They talk the great line, but, when it comes to the action, you really have to wonder where they're coming from.

Oh, yeah, their friends, they look after their friends, all right. I could go into that at great length,

but I'm not going to because that would take me another 40 minutes.

So, Madam Acting Speaker, suffice it to say that we can't vote for this budget. I will not vote for this budget because it's an embarrassment to us, as legislators; it's an embarrassment to Manitobans; and it's an embarrassment to Canadians. Those Canadians who look at this budget are going to wonder where we are truly coming from in this province. We have truly become the welfare state of Canada. Thank you.

Mr. Drew Caldwell (Brandon East): I seem to have the ill luck or ill fortune of following up the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) on far too many occasions in the past number of years, Madam Acting Speaker. It's quite depressing to stand up after enduring the cheap demagoguery from the Member for Russell.

But, as I am up and as I am going to say a few words on the budget, Madam Acting Speaker, I think it first appropriate to mention the people in my home constituency of Brandon East and to thank them for their ongoing and great, generous support. Brandon East is one of the most dynamic constituencies in Manitoba. It's a very active constituency. People who live in that constituency are engaged with their community, engaged in making their community a better place to live. It's a true privilege to have been born and raised in Brandon East and today to follow in the footsteps of my predecessor, Len Evans, in representing that very fine constituency.

Madam Acting Speaker, this budget presented, our ninth budget as a government, is probably, in my estimation, the most balanced budget that we have presented thus far during our time in office. I say that generously. I don't say that in any way to restrict the accolades which our government will place on this budget because this budget is deserving of accolades, but it is balanced in the sense that there is no blockbuster, home-run announcement like the Brandon Regional Health Centre which we made in a budget in the early 2000s, which was a much-needed medical facility for western Manitoba that had been promised seven times over 11 years by members opposite when they were in government but also cancelled seven times over those 11 years.

When we were elected in '99, that regional health centre, which was nothing but a glint in the eyes of the members opposite for their entire term in office, when we were elected in '99, we committed to building the Brandon Regional Health Centre,

something that, incidentally, was needed in that region for probably a couple of decades, Madam Acting Speaker, before it was finally built. But that was a blockbuster announcement for Brandon and western Manitoba, creating a world-class, state-of-the-art medical centre for upwards of 200,000 people in the western Manitoba and Parklands region of our province. So that was a blockbuster announcement in a previous budget.

A budget or two ago, Madam Acting Speaker, we had another very, very historic budget announcement in the development of Assiniboine Community College at the former Brandon Mental Health Centre complex, a complex which has the finest collection of institutional architecture in the province, if not western Canada—monumental architecture. We've just, a number of months ago, completed the first phase of that historic, unprecedented development, the development of ACC on Brandon's North hill.

We've just finished the first phase of that, Madam Acting Speaker, with the opening of the Manitoba Institute of Culinary Arts. I know that many of us in the House, certainly on the government's side, at least, and I expect my colleague from Brandon West, have eaten at and visited the Manitoba Institute of Culinary Arts. It's a world-class, world-standard educational facility that provides an experience in Brandon, a dining experience second to none. It's also, first and foremost, an educational facility that is going to provide generations of students to Assiniboine Community College with the finest quality education possible for those studying for the hospitality and tourism sectors.

So we've had, just with those two announcements, tens of millions of dollars in two unprecedented and extremely important facilities in Brandon: Brandon Regional Health Centre, and, as I said, the ACC at BMHC which were very, very exciting announcements in western Manitoba, and really, for this government, legacy-building announcements. So, in that way, Madam Acting Speaker, this budget is far more balanced because, with this budget, we don't have a single, grand-slam, home-run announcement. We've got a number of singles, doubles, triples and a couple of home runs.

In the budget that was just announced for Brandon in my home community—and I'm just going to touch upon a few things, I'm sure we'll miss some, I'm not speaking from notes—announcements

supporting the two recreational facilities in our community that are being developed, the Brandon Family YMCA in downtown Brandon and the Brandon University fitness and wellness centre at Brandon University. Both of those projects, multimillion-dollar projects, will enhance healthy lifestyles in Brandon, will enhance recreation opportunities available to the whole community at Brandon University with the fitness centre and, certainly, downtown, with the friend and family YMCA, the entire community will benefit tremendously from those two exciting projects.

I'm very much looking forward to the beginning of the development and construction phase of both those projects. I happen to live in downtown Brandon in Rosser ward, so I'll have five blocks to go work out at the Brandon University gym, or six or seven blocks to go to do the same at the Brandon Family YMCA when it's developed on Princess Avenue in downtown Brandon. So both of those projects, Madam Acting Speaker, are noteworthy additions to my home community of Brandon, in fact, that were announced in this budget.

We have as well, the continuation of what has been an annual commitment to the development of infrastructure in Brandon, in particular, roadway infrastructure. Over the last number of years, we have invested millions of dollars in the reconstruction of Richmond Avenue, 18th Street, 1st Street, the development of the Eastern Access Route coming into Brandon from the south and the east. As I speak here in the House today, work is progressing on the \$17-million twinning of the 18th Street bridges over the Assiniboine River, which is a huge project for Brandon and something that's much needed, given the traffic flow on 18th Street which is also No. 10 highway, the tremendously increased traffic flow through my home community of Brandon, which is, as all people of Manitoba know, growing quite dramatically during this decade, Madam Acting Speaker.

So this budget made commitments, and to the continuation and the development of 18th Street. There are commitments, ongoing commitments to the further development of the Eastern Access Route into Brandon. There are intersections that are being developed through the good work of my colleague, the Minister of Transportation and government services.

On the education front, although I've touched upon the commitment to the fitness centre, the

wellness centre at Brandon University, we are also very, very proud to announce the development of the second phase of the Assiniboine Community College project on Brandon's North Hill, and that second phase is the development of the trades building for ACC, which will be a multimillion-dollar project to further enhance post-secondary educational opportunities for young Manitobans interested in pursuing a career in the trades. As all members of the House know, we do have a very, very acute skills shortage in the trades, not only in Manitoba, Madam Acting Speaker, but throughout Canada and, in fact, throughout North America. So the development of this particular project at Assiniboine Community College is going to provide meaningful, long-term opportunities for young people to achieve their dreams in terms of their post-secondary education in western Manitoba.

*(15:20)

I'm very, very proud of the ACC project. This project is the largest investment in post-secondary education ever made in the history of this province outside of the city of Winnipeg, and certainly the Assiniboine Community College campus on Brandon's North Hill with the wonderful monumental heritage architecture that exists on that campus will make this college the most attractive and architecturally outstanding certainly in Manitoba, probably in western Canada, if not the entire nation. I'm very much looking forward over the next number of budgets in the years to come to seeing the further development of Assiniboine Community College in Brandon.

Madam Acting Speaker, this budget also, apart from infrastructure, recreation facilities, educational facilities, continues our investment in health-care services and developing health-care excellence in Brandon and western Manitoba. Specifically is a commitment of \$7 million to redevelop the Westman Lab in Brandon, and the Westman Lab, as the people in Brandon East will know, is part of the Brandon Regional Health Centre complex. It exists in the neighbourhood of First Street and McTavish Avenue, actually a little bit east of First Street on McTavish Avenue.

The Westman Lab is a very important facility for Manitoba, Madam Acting Speaker. Clinics and hospitals throughout the province utilize that laboratory. It was in sorrowful shape when we were elected. We have made some investments into that facility over the preceding years, but it's been placed

in the context of the entire redevelopment of the Brandon Regional Health Centre, and I'm very happy that this budget year saw significant dollars allocated for its redevelopment.

I should touch upon the investment that the Doer government has made in developing health-care excellence in western Manitoba because it really is unprecedented. It began with the \$50-million development of the Brandon Regional Health Centre with state-of-the-art surgery facilities, neonatal units, state-of-the-art patient services, Madam Acting Speaker, an extraordinarily needed facility that was developed in Brandon, one that, as I mentioned earlier, was promised and never carried through with by the members opposite when they were in government, promised repeatedly and never carried through with.

That first \$58 million was followed in fairly quick order, Madam Acting Speaker, by the development of the first magnetic resonance imaging machine, the first MRI suite in provincial history outside of the city of Winnipeg. It was a multimillion-dollar development, followed by the development of more CAT scan facilities in Brandon, the replacement of the ambulance fleet in western Manitoba, in fact, the replacement of the ambulance fleet throughout the province of Manitoba.

Recently, we furthered the investment in Brandon at the Regional Health Centre with a \$20-million announcement to develop a CancerCare Manitoba treatment clinic in Brandon, as I said in this most recent budget presented and tabled in this House last week, with the redevelopment of the Westman Lab.

Madam Acting Speaker, we're in the neighbourhood of \$100 million in investment in health-care services infrastructure in Brandon since we were elected in '99. I think it important to reiterate and put on the record that every single dollar of that \$100 million investment was voted against by members opposite. When they had the chance to support health-care services in Brandon, they voted against it. Every single budget has been voted against by members opposite, and I think that speaks volumes of the commitment that the Conservative Party has for health-care services, not only in Brandon, but throughout the province of Manitoba. Every single budget has been opposed by members opposite. In Brandon, that means \$100 million at the Brandon Regional Health Centre

and associated infrastructure was not supported by members opposite. I'm very proud to stand with a government that does believe in investing in our health-care services in Manitoba.

Madam Acting Speaker, there are other highlights for Brandon and for western Manitoba in this particular budget. An issue that's important to me as the first general manager of the downtown biz in Brandon in another life, 20-some years ago, it was the \$250,000 investment in Renaissance Brandon, which is matching the municipal contribution to this downtown development corporation. I had occasion to work very closely with the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) and members of the business community, as well as members of the Brandon District Labour Council over the last couple of months in Brandon, and certainly Renaissance Brandon, the corporation of Renaissance Brandon, deserves to be supported and their work in revitalizing downtown Brandon deserves to be supported by members in this House. I would urge members opposite, in particular my colleague from Brandon West, to support the budget when the vote takes place later in this session so that we can have in Brandon a continuation of the united voice in support of developing Brandon, as we had in the last couple of months in that community.

Madam Acting Speaker, also, although they're not specific to Brandon, they are important areas of support that this budget addresses in the child-care field. There are \$5 million additional child-care dollars in this particular budget. There are hundreds of thousands of dollars, I believe it's a million dollars, but it's hundreds of thousands of dollars at the least, in support for infrastructure improvements to friendship centres across the province. Those who labour in friendship centres will recall that their entire funding was cut during the 1990s. When we came into office there was no funding for friendship centres in our province. We restored that funding in this budget, put significant dollars into improving the infrastructure of friendship centres across the province. I'm very proud of that, because friendship centres do yeoman work throughout the province. Certainly, in Brandon I know that the work they do on literacy, the work they do on neighbourhood development and poverty issues, the work they do on housing is very, very important to my home community. I'm very, very proud to be supporting friendship centres through this budget and each and every day.

The budget also makes some noteworthy improvements to every Manitoban's bottom line by increasing the property tax credit to \$600 a year, saving Manitobans an additional \$24.5 million annually. I believe the property tax credit available to Manitobans was \$125 when we came into office. Now it's \$600. That's a tremendous benefit for every property owner in Manitoba. Certainly, my constituents in Brandon East do appreciate having increased property tax credits when they fill out their income tax on an annual basis. This increase continues the good work that we've been doing on that front.

I also should say, Madam Acting Speaker, Brandon East being a working class constituency and folks with modest income, our regular increases to the minimum wage, our annual increases, scheduled annual increases to the minimum wage are very much appreciated by those working families in my home constituency that saw their earnings erode dramatically during the 1990s. We're in a situation economically now where I believe we've had six credit rating increases and bond rating increases as a province over the last nine years. That's an unprecedented number, and it speaks to the very good work by my colleague, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), and in fact all members of government, in ensuring that we present a balanced government. We support housing, we support education, we support health care, but we also support the retention of monies by people who are earning them.

* (15:30)

Our tax record: there has never been a government in the history of the province that has provided so much tax relief to so many sectors of the province. That's not something common for New Democratic governments. I know the myth is that we are not very friendly on the tax side, but our record is the best in the history of the province, and I'm very, very proud of that.

My light is flashing, Madam Acting Speaker, so my remarks have to come to an end. I would like to thank my home constituency once again for their generous support, and I would like to thank my colleagues in government for presenting a fabulous budget again in 2008.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Madam Acting Speaker, I'll start my comments a little differently than the Member for Brandon East (Mr.

Caldwell) started. He talked about having the ill fortune of following one of my caucus colleagues. I'm pleased to be following the Member for Brandon East, and I just want to indicate to him in his first statements or comments, when he started off, he said this budget did not hit a home run. Well, I would tend to agree with him. I would actually venture to say that it struck out before it even got to first base.

Madam Acting Speaker, this budget was an extremely boring budget. With the exception of the Member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak), who always gets extremely excited in this House and manages to applaud all of his colleagues as they answer questions or in any other activity that goes on, there were very few on the government benches that paid much attention to the budget or applauded. It was only, from time to time, when the Member for Kildonan sort of started the applause that we saw scattered applause on the government side, until the last, when the budget was over. I guess, maybe, they were quite excited after an hour to be able to stand up and applaud and get the budget over and done with, because I sensed on the government benches that there's a bit of boredom, there's a bit of tiredness that's sort of starting to set in in government.

Things like the annual budget are not quite as important as they should be, and maybe they weren't paying that much attention, and that is why they will stand in unison when the budget vote is called and vote for a budget that's very mediocre and has absolutely nothing to excite Manitobans. As a matter of fact, I think Manitobans, very few of them, would even realize that a budget had been presented in this Chamber. There's nothing for Manitobans to get excited about.

Madam Acting Speaker, there isn't any government that presents a budget that's all bad or all good. There were several things, of course, in the budget that I would support, and that's not unusual. But there are several things that I would have to vote against in this budget because they do nothing to ease the minds of taxpayers in River East constituency and many other constituencies who have worked hard and contributed with their tax dollars to the province of Manitoba. They're seeing no break and no relief in times of unprecedented revenue growth.

Where is that growth coming from, Madam Acting Speaker? Most of that growth is coming from unprecedented transfers from the federal government. When you see a provincial government that is

getting almost 40 percent of its revenue from a senior level of government, that raises alarm bells. It raises alarm bells in my mind. It's not something I as a Manitoban, or any of us as Manitobans, should be very proud of. Why do we feel that it's our God-given right to go cap in hand to the federal government on a regular basis and beg for more money, ask Canadians in other provinces to have to contribute to poor Manitoba because we can't manage? We can't manage our finances. We can't grow our economy. We can't make our province as good as or better than other provinces. Why do we always have to depend on other provinces and the federal government to provide the resources for us, to provide the services that we need to provide? That just speaks to how Manitoba is not growing, is not producing and not contributing to the Canadian economy, and it disturbs me.

So I couldn't vote for a budget that does nothing to try to bring us out of that dependency on Ottawa. I have heard my leader say, and I would tend to agree with him, that the Premier (Mr. Doer) has become nothing more than a deputy minister in a department of the federal government, because we have 40 percent of our revenues from Ottawa. So we are like a government department, a Canadian government department, and the Premier is just managing that department on behalf of the federal government, and not doing a very good job of it, I might add.

You know, I get tired from time to time when we stand up and ask very legitimate questions in this Legislature and we get a history lesson of what happened back in the dark days of the '90s. Well, Madam Acting Speaker, we tend to forget and we see the Premier as he points across to our side of the House and talks about what happened in the '90s. If we are going to go back to the past, let's go back to the '80s, those wonderful days in the late '80s when the Premier sat around the Cabinet table of Howard Pawley, and when they gerrymandered and manipulated Autopac rates and kept them artificially low before elections and raised them high after elections with the stroke of a pen, and that Premier sat at the Cabinet table and agreed with the signing of that document when Cabinet made the decision, not the Public Utilities Board, but Cabinet made the decision on what Autopac rates were going to be.

You know, it wasn't the Premier of the day who stood up with Jim Walding and said: We are deceiving the people of Manitoba; I cannot support that budget, and forced an election. No, he sat back, was prepared to support the manipulation, the

cooking of the books, and he stands now and gives us a history lesson of what the 1990s were like. He was also a minister in the Cabinet benches who, along with his Premier, got sued for a land development, and we have seen that suit settled out of court. It cost the taxpayers of Manitoba \$100,000. We've never seen the details of that settlement because, in order for that settlement to be signed, all parties were muzzled, and none of the information will ever be made public about that deal.

So let's not just go back to the '90s when we're talking about the past. If this government truly wants to be a government of the past, let's go back and discuss what happened in the 1980s when members of this Premier's own government, a member stood up and voted against his government because of the dishonest—

Point of Order

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Brick): The honourable Premier, on a point of order.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Yes, on a point of order, Madam Acting Speaker, I'd like to thank the Member for River East for her very generous words on the Rail to Trail path in northeast Winnipeg, and thank Mr. Buhler, and thank all the people of northeast Winnipeg for making it happen. I'd like to thank the member for her laudatory comments on something that should have happened a long time ago. Thank you very, very much.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Brick): The honourable Member for River East, on the same point of order?

Mrs. Mitchelson: No.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Brick): Thank you very much. There is no point of order.

* * *

* (15:40)

Mrs. Mitchelson: Well, thank you very much, Madam Acting Speaker. I really wish the Premier might have enlightened us a little bit on the settlement, the out-of-court settlement that happened that he and his Premier, Howard Pawley, were involved in, and the details of the \$100,000 of taxpayers' money that had to be paid. What are the details? If anyone should disclose that, it should be the Premier who should stand up and honestly disclose to the taxpayers of Manitoba exactly what

they paid \$100,000 for. We're all waiting for that kind of information.

The next time we see the Premier go back to the '90s, I may just have to stand up on a point of order and talk about his actions when he agreed to manipulate Autopac rates in the 1980s. So, if we want a history lesson, he wants to go back and provide history lessons about the '90s, we'll go back to the '80s and remind Manitobans exactly why the government was turfed out.

I know the Member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) speaks from his seat. He and I have a long history and a background. He remembers well the Autopac rally on the front steps of the Legislature where we had the horses and the wagon. He still believes that I have the horses in my garage, that I've been feeding them and we're just waiting for the right opportunity to bring them back again. We do have a long history, and we may just see that happen in the very near future.

Madam Acting Speaker, I have digressed a little. I would like to come back to some of the issues that are pressing today and talk a bit about what some of the people in my constituency are having some issues and problems with. Not only is it families that are requiring child care and child-care supports in the community, but it is child-care centres that are being treated questionably by the government and the Department of Family Services.

The government will be hearing more from me around this issue. I've been trying to work with child cares in my schools, in my community. The programs that were started in River East School Division many years ago and I believe they were started before I even got into the Legislature, to meet a need in the community, where before- and after-school programs in my elementary schools. They were programs, I think, that could be a model for good programming right throughout the province of Manitoba. They've worked very well for many, many years. They were unlicensed spaces in our schools. I think that the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson), if he and I had the opportunity to talk, he would probably think that they are pretty good programs and they really met the need of many working families in our community.

Just a couple of years ago, they were told that they would be required to become licensed. After about two decades of working well and being well supported by families in the community, they were told that they had to become licensed. Now there was

some controversy between whether it was the school division that required them to become licensed or whether it was the child-care division of the Department of Family Services that required them to be licensed.

I spoke to staff in the Department of Family Services in the child-care division, and they told me that it was the school that had changed the rules. The families thought it was the school that had changed the rules. So they gathered together and went to a school board meeting and presented their case. The school board all along was saying, well it wasn't us; it was the child-care office that has made the decision. We found out, and the school division decided that they would write a letter indicating that they would continue to support the child cares in their schools, that they wouldn't provide any of the programming, they wouldn't be responsible for staffing as they had always been and they wouldn't be responsible for liability. That's the way they started, and they indicated that they would continue and allow those daycares to provide the service that they had been providing. We found out then, when the school wrote that letter and reconfirmed to the child-care office that that was the case, that the child-care office then decided that wasn't good enough. They required these child-care spaces to be licensed.

Madam Acting Speaker, they've put in all kinds of hoops that these child care facilities have to crawl through, one of them being getting a new fire licence, or whatever it is, that the rules and the regulations around fire safety that apply to the school aren't good enough for our child care. They're good enough to house 500 or 700 students during the day, but they're not good enough for before- and after-school programs for 50 or 60 or 100 children after school. So they have to. The fire safety code and the licence that the school has is not good enough to be on the file for the child-care facility in that same school, in that same facility.

They're having to go through hoops. They are being told now that teachers, qualified teachers with their degrees that have been running the child-care programs, are no longer qualified enough because they don't have all of the courses that an early-childhood educator has. So those teachers have to go back and get their early-childhood educator licence or certificate in order to run those child cares.

Now you tell me, Madam Acting Speaker, that a teacher who has a university education and has

taught a classroom of grade 1 students, 30 students, is not qualified to run a child care with less students and different ratios. There's something wrong with this whole situation, and I will get to the bottom of it. I will be asking questions. I am putting the government on notice. I don't think there's anything that we—I mean, I certainly will argue strongly to use some common sense in the delivery of child care when it's so desperately needed by so many working families to say, let's, as government and an opposition, sit down, use some common sense and try to get to the bottom of this and ensure that parents and children are put first in this whole scenario.

When you've got programs that have been running for 20 years and have provided service in a community and there hasn't been one complaint by a school, by a parent, by a child, by a worker in the system that we now have to turn things upside down and change the way we're doing things, it just doesn't make sense to me. This is a very heavy hand of a government and a bureaucracy that isn't using common sense.

Then we talk about more money going into our child-care system. How much more money is going in to try and turn things around in these centres rather than providing new services elsewhere? It just boggles my mind, Madam Acting Speaker, and I will be asking those questions. I will be working with my community and I will be trying to get the kind of child care that my community deserves. I don't want to see families denied the kind of care that they've been receiving.

We have parents that line up to have their children attend those schools because of that programming, and now we're turning everything upside down and creating these kinds of issues. I don't understand it. I'd love to sit down with the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson), the Minister of Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh) and see whether we couldn't enhance child care right throughout our province by looking at the model that works so successfully in River East school division.

Now that River East and Transcona have amalgamated, and we know there's a need in the Transcona area, why wouldn't we expand upon the programs that River East had in place rather than try to change them? Let's build on success, Madam Acting Speaker. Let's not tear down success and try to change it when there's no need to do that and when there's a need in our communities for the kind of child care and the good child care that has been

provided in those centres. So that's one issue that I've heard a lot in my community, and it's one that I'll be pursuing and one that I'll be following.

* (15:50)

I see that my light is flashing and I'm not going to be able to get onto other issues at this moment. But rest assured that I'll be working and trying to ensure that all of the issues that I deal with in my critic responsibilities and other issues in my community will be brought forward through the Estimates process. Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker.

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): Thank you very much, Madam Acting Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to our 2008 Manitoba budget, and it's my pleasure to add a few comments. But I'd first like to start off, listening very closely to the speech from the Member for River East and the comments that she had relating to some of the problems she's encountered in her community. I have to wonder, first, at her most recent comments here just a few moments ago relating to child care in this province of Manitoba.

I'm just wondering whether or not she had a resolution at her party's convention this past weekend calling upon the federal government to reinstate the national child-care program that was in place in Canada but had been cancelled by the federal government. I just wondered whether or not she had put a resolution on the order paper for her party's convention. But I take it that they did not do it because child care maybe wasn't that important to her party and that you can only tell—

Point of Order

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Brick): The honourable Member for River East, on a point of order.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Point of order, Madam Acting Speaker. My constituents didn't refer to the federal program at all. They referred to the changes that the provincial government is making that are draconian and getting rid of child-care options and opportunities in River East. That's my point.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Brick): Seeing no other speakers on the point of order, the honourable member does not have a point of order. This is a dispute over the facts and not a point of order.

* * *

Mr. Reid: Well, that's interesting, Madam Acting Speaker. The Member for River East could have said that it was important to her, but she chose not to do that. She said, like our Deputy Premier (Ms. Wowchuk) has said here in question period today, agriculture obviously wasn't important to the Conservative Party either because they didn't talk about agriculture or have a resolution on their convention floor.

I know when we go to our conventions, these issues are important to our party all the time, and we talk about these issues at every one of our conventions. So it's interesting to note, it's obvious by their failure to incorporate or to include these issues in their convention, it's obviously not that important to you as a party. So you have to question why you would want to raise it here in the House during your comments on the budget if it's not that important to your overall party in that regard.

But I digress, Madam Acting Speaker. I want to add some comments about the latest balanced budget that our Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) has brought in to this Chamber here just last week and to congratulate the minister on what I think to be a very balanced and fair budget for the people of Manitoba.

This budget, I think, goes a long way to addressing many of the problems that we see in our communities and expands on programs and services that people living in our communities have had the opportunity to take advantage of since we have come into government. We're quite proud that we've been able to add further to those and I'll talk a few moments about them.

But, first, let's talk a bit about some of the progress we've made in the province of Manitoba. Our budget not only is balanced, but we've been able to pay down some of the debt and some of the liabilities with respect to pensions as a government, and we've made investments into the very vital services, whether it be health care or education or family services and so many other areas. One could speak at length about the number of initiatives that our government has made investments in on behalf of the people of Manitoba.

Now, I look at the comments that were made by the Member for River East here just a few moments ago, and she talked about auto theft being an issue, and she started talking about Manitoba Public Insurance and about going back to the '80s, whatever was happening with MPI in the '80s. But I can tell her today, Manitoba Public Insurance is operating a

very tight ship over there. In fact, I believe it's been announced already that the most recent rebate to the ratepayers of Manitoba will be going out to folks just next month, as it has in the past two years, and I believe once earlier in this decade. So we have had some very good efforts made on behalf of Manitoba Public Insurance on behalf of the people of Manitoba, and I want to congratulate MPI on those efforts.

Now, with respect to auto theft, I know that the Premier (Mr. Doer) and the Prime Minister were together for some announcement that was happening here in the city of Winnipeg today with respect to auto theft. Now, it's nice to see that the federal government has finally come to the dance; they have decided they are going to dance and that they want to start taking this matter seriously.

We have had the opportunity in this province under the direction and much debate in this province regarding auto theft and the cost to the ratepayers and the people of Manitoba with respect to auto theft. I believe it's some \$30-plus million a year that's spent on auto theft in the province of Manitoba, and we had to get that under control. We had to find ways and solutions that would address that problem, whether it be the Lighthouses program or the Turnabout program or the Neighbourhoods Alive! program as preventative programs.

We've made an investment in this budget into recreation projects in the inner city, which I'm quite proud that we have made that decision to invest in those types of services for people of the inner city, because I think socially that's the right thing to do in the province of Manitoba and to make those investments to encourage our young folks to be engaged in meaningful activities that are beneficial to themselves and to the larger community as well and that will cause them in some way to stay away from other less desirable activities.

But MPI has recognized, when we struck the Rick Linden task force a number of years ago, back to the early part of this decade, and we brought the experts together in Manitoba under Rick Linden's direction and guidance, whether it be the police forces of Manitoba or other interested folks, we've decided that we would put in place a multi-pronged strategy to prevent auto theft in the province of Manitoba. We started with the WATSS program, the Winnipeg Auto Theft Suppression Strategy program, and, of course, that was to monitor those that are caught and convicted of auto theft and to put them in

a monitoring program to try and prevent them from re-offending.

Of course, our Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak) just announced last week that we would be moving to the ankle bracelet program as a means to monitor the whereabouts of individuals that were involved in that type of illegal activity. Of course, the next phase of that program in addition to the WATSS Program was, I think, our very successful immobilizer program in the province of Manitoba. That immobilizer program is only possible because we have a publicly owned auto insurance company here in the province of Manitoba, because you don't see the immobilizer program in place in any other province of Canada or any jurisdiction in North America. It's only Manitoba Public Insurance that has been able to bring that program forward—*[interjection]*

I listened to the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach), but I have to think back to what his comments that were made by his Member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) where he said that he didn't support the immobilizer program. You can only look to the announcements that were made today as a result of the news that was released today where our auto theft figures are down just about 50 percent now, year over year. I think that's a tribute to the hard work that's done by Rick Linden and the auto theft task force, Manitoba Public Insurance and the many police forces in the province of Manitoba and the great work that they have done to bring down auto theft in this province.

It's been a multi-pronged approach and I think we're seeing some success in that and it's the trending down overall that is positive and we're going to see a continuation. Of course, that's going to be a savings for those that pay the cost of insurance in this province, auto insurance in this province. We're going to see that those attempted thefts and auto thefts are going to continue to decline and that we're going to see a benefit for the ratepayers of the province of Manitoba.

We have to also look at the fact that we have had many other opportunities for folks. Our economy is doing well in the province of Manitoba. We have seen a 3 percent growth in our economy last year. We're expecting to see just about that same level in 2008, and I think that bodes well for the province of Manitoba.

We're seeing more people moving to the province of Manitoba. Our population is increasing

and more people working in the province. We're seeing less and less people on employment and income assistance in Manitoba as people move into the work force and our government has put in place programs to assist folks in that regard.

* (16:00)

Now, our government also recognizes that we have a responsibility as well, and we have taken steps every single year that we have been government and we have raised the minimum wage in the province of Manitoba. It's now \$8.50. I think it's quite wise to have it, perhaps, higher than that level. I'm sure that, in successive years, the government will look at what steps we can do with respect to the minimum wage. We'll balance that off, of course, with the needs of the other folks in the overall economy of the province of Manitoba. But I think we're moving in the right direction to move the minimum wage into an area where it will assist low-income working families and individuals that are living on wages at that level.

Now we have invested, if you just take a look, we have the building cranes downtown here building our new Hydro building. We're quite proud of the fact that that building is moving forward towards its completion. We have the Winnipeg floodway under construction and will be nearing completion in 2009, as well, I believe. It's creating many thousands of jobs.

I know the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), perhaps, doesn't support either of those initiatives, but I'm sure that he will talk to many folks around this city and the province and that you'll find that many Manitobans support our government's efforts in that regard to bring new opportunities downtown through the Hydro building and the employees that will be working there on behalf of the people of Manitoba. Of course, the work on the floodway to protect Winnipeg from flood. *[interjection]* There's lots of private development. I'm sure if the member just left this building once in a while, he would go out into the public and he would see all the great works that are going on out there.

In fact, if you want to come into my community of Transcona, we just announced a week ago that we're constructing another condominium complex right in the heart of Transcona. Bond Street project, I believe it's called, and you'll see that new project move forward very shortly. I'm quite proud that, not only my community, but so many other communities

of the province of Manitoba have made the investment into them. Manitobans who have left our province for some time are moving back from other provinces, and that's why our population, in addition to the immigration folks that are coming to Manitoba, is growing and creating so many other opportunities here in Manitoba.

Now we also have another interesting announcement, perhaps, for the Member for Inkster. I know he has family in Transcona and his family, I'm quite thankful, have been very supportive of myself and our party over many, many years. But, on May 24, just next month, we have the opening of the Transcona Buhler Recreation Park, 140 acres of all-activity, all-age recreation opportunities for the people of northeast Winnipeg. We're quite proud that our provincial government has made an investment into that project. We're hoping to see as many Manitobans as possible come out to our grand opening on May 24, and their announcements will be out soon.

Now with respect to other projects in Transcona. Of course, I'm quite thankful that our Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson), who will, no doubt, be speaking here shortly, will talk more about this. But I'm quite proud of the fact that, despite a slightly declining student population enrolment, we're seeing an increase in funding in River East Transcona School Division. Of course, we also have, with that, other opportunities for folks. I'm thankful to our Minister of Education, when he announced his \$53.5 million, the highest level in public school funding in 25 years. I'm quite thankful to our government for the work they have done on Education and, of course, it has been able to assist the people of northeast Winnipeg as well as other parts of the province of Manitoba.

Just this evening I'm going to be attending Westview School to talk with parents regarding the school trustees' decision to put the Westview School under review for possible closure. We're going to be talking at some more length about what steps can be taken with respect to retaining the education services of Westview School for the western part of Transcona community.

We also, as a result of our budget, have invested some \$200 million more into the city of Winnipeg. I know that the folks in my community are interested in having some of our regional streets and our collector streets, including Gunn Road, incorporated into the repair list or projects of works to be

undertaken in this year. I know our provincial government has made the investment into those streets. I'm hopeful that the city council, now, of Winnipeg will see fit to make sure that those roads are upgraded to be able to service the greater community. I'm hopeful that that decision will be made shortly.

I know our government has, as a part of our ninth consecutive balanced budget, made investments into more nurses and more police officers. Of course, this week, and I know the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) has indicated several times and it was reiterated in the budget, that we have 1,789 more nurses working in the province of Manitoba than we had during the 1990s. Of course, we have 235 more doctors since 1999 as well, not to say that we're content to rest at that point. We're going to continue to train more doctors. We've expanded the number of spaces to 110 per year, and we're going to be training and employing some 700 more nurses here in the province of Manitoba.

But we have a great start toward addressing the issues with respect to health care in the province of Manitoba. I know that there have been many announcements with respect to waiting lists, with respect to the various surgical procedures. Our government has made great strides and progress toward solving those dilemmas.

I know that in northeast Winnipeg Concordia community hospital has now started, as a result of last year's budget announcements, construction of the expansion of the emergency ward. I've been through that facility several times taking a look at the construction and visiting folks in the hospital. Of course, there's great progress being made on that emergency ward, in addition to other health-care facilities around the province where we have made our investments.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

Now we have also invested some \$1 million into Community Places programs. I think that's a wise investment because there are many community organizations that take advantage of Community Places. The demand always exceeded the supply of funds that were available, and so I think it's a good move to expand the Community Places program in Manitoba.

With respect to services in our community, I know the members of the opposition have said

through question period here today and in past that they don't support our government's initiative with respect to the hiring or the funding of new additional police officers and prosecutors here in the province of Manitoba. I know our minister and our government have announced that we would have funding in place from 155 new police officers, and we've announced 20 more for this budget.

We have obviously more opportunities to train folks, but I'm not sure—Mr. Acting Speaker, I'm starting to lose my voice here, so I think I'm going to have to conclude my remarks at that point and say that we have made significant investments into vital services in the province of Manitoba. I think that it would be wise if the members opposite would recognize that we have made those investments and that we have also made investments in the announcement that came out today, to hiring 10 more new workplace safety and health officers, and have made the investments into that area as well in prevention programs, which I'm thankful for.

So, with that, Mr. Acting Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to add my comments with respect to the budget. I'm sorry I'm losing my voice.

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): I welcome to put a few comments on the record on behalf of residents of the constituency of Lac du Bonnet. I listened with some interest, some of the things that the Member for Transcona put on the record. I just thought I'd make a few comments with regard to it.

He indicated that he talked about resolutions at our annual general meeting. I just want to bring to his attention the fact that I knew about a resolution that was put forward in the NDP AGM by the Lac du Bonnet NDP association agreeing with our position on the east-side versus the west-side line for Manitoba Hydro.

So there are lots of things that, of course, we can point to in AGMs, and so on, to determine whether or not they support us or not, but, obviously, the Lac du Bonnet NDP association agrees with us. But the interesting part of it all was the fact that we understand the Lac du Bonnet NDP association was really shut down at that AGM, that they really didn't have an opportunity to put forward that resolution, and they weren't allowed an opportunity to be heard.

* (16:10)

Ed Schreyer supports our position with respect to bringing the Bipole III down the east side of Lake

Winnipeg. Of course, why wouldn't he, because there are reliability issues? In fact, that's the position that was taken by Bob Brennan of Manitoba Hydro, that the east-side line would have been the most reliable place to put the bipole line. Cost, of course, is an important factor, \$1.5 billion dollars less in cost to go down the east side versus the west side. There's going to be significant energy savings going down the east side because the line is that much shorter. There's going to be a positive impact on Aboriginal communities by putting the east-side line down on the east side of Lake Winnipeg. There's also going to be less impact on the environment; 60 kilometres less of boreal forest will be cut down as a result of the line going on the east side of Lake Winnipeg versus the west side. All of the arguments with respect to whether it should go on the east side or the west side favour us on the east side, and I think the Premier (Mr. Doer) should be listening and taking note of all of those arguments.

Secondly, the Member for Transcona (Mr. Reid) talked a little about auto theft. I guess the question is whether or not the Premier, after standing hopefully shoulder-to-shoulder with Prime Minister Harper, whether the Premier is going to now embrace the auto theft initiative put forward by the Conservative government in Ottawa. If he's going to do that, is he then, during the federal election, going to campaign for Jack Layton? I hope not, because Jack Layton does not support this particular bill. In fact, the bill has been brought forward as a private member's bill a couple of years ago by a Conservative member.

Now the Conservative government, of course, has embraced that particular bill and the direction that it's taking. Because of that, it went through committee and the NDP justice critic, in fact, amended it with the help of the Liberals. They amended that bill to reduce the penalties for auto theft, for auto thieves, who are convicted three times of auto theft. There was a minimum penalty put in the bill itself for requiring a two-year incarceration period for the third time convicted of auto theft, and the NDP and the Liberals combined to delete that particular provision from the bill. So the question remains as to whether or not the Premier will, in fact, support this bill, and secondly, whether he will continue to support Jack Layton in his efforts here in Manitoba. Only time will tell, when the federal election is going to be called, as to whether or not that's going to happen.

With respect to the budget motion, Mr. Acting Speaker, the motion that we made, the amending

motion, one of the points in the amending motion indicates that we would not support this budget, of course, because it doesn't address the priorities of Manitobans. Firstly, because it increases Manitoba's reliance on taxpayers of other provinces through equalization payments. Equalization payments are really a barometer in terms of how the province is doing relative to other provinces. If Manitoba does poorly compared to other provinces, in relation to other provinces on the economic front, it will receive more equalization payments. If it does better relative to other provinces, of course, we will have decreased equalization payments.

Again, what we've seen is an increase in equalization payments to this province of almost \$200 million, which would indicate to me that Manitoba, economically, is doing poorer relative to other provinces across the country. The Premier (Mr. Doer) and the Finance Minister really should send a letter of thanks to all the other provinces who are contributing. We're the only have-not province in western Canada. They should send a big thank-you to Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia in particular, whose economies are booming, Mr. Acting Speaker.

Also of interest in the budget was the fact that this NDP is increasing spending of 6 percent without any emphasis on getting results on behalf of Manitobans. We've seen today in question period, as well as other question periods last week, and, indeed, last session and sessions before that in answers to questions that we pose as an opposition with respect to improvements on highways and improvements to education or improvements to justice. We see time and time again ministers standing up and giving answers to questions, stating that they spent more compared to the previous year.

That's not the point, Mr. Acting Speaker, that's not the point at all. What we're looking for is not necessarily increased spending, but increased results. To point to increased spending as an indication that you're actually doing something for the province is not correct. What we're looking for is increased results as a result of increased spending and that we're not seeing across this province.

Another reason why we would vote, of course, against this budget is that there's been a number of failures on the Finance front, one of which of course is the fact that taxes are out of line with other jurisdictions across this country and in particular in western Canada. While there's no denying that each

budget we've had some decrease in some categories of taxes, at the same time what we've seen over the years is an increase in user fees and permits and licences to make up for those tax reductions. So the reality is that the taxpayer ends up paying perhaps even more than what they did in the previous budget.

Our taxes are not competitive with other provinces, we're not in line with other provinces. To point to a \$100 increase in the personal exemption and to say that that's a massive decrease in taxes in the budget is wrong because what Manitobans should be told by this Finance Minister is that an increase to the personal exemption of \$100 means that an average Manitoban is going to save \$10.90 a year. That's the tax saving on a \$100 increase to the personal exemption, \$10.90.

My message to Manitobans is, don't spend it all in one place; \$10.90 is absolutely nothing when compared to inflation. We need to increase the personal exemption, equal at least to the rate of inflation and to have done that the personal exemption would have had to have increased by almost double what the Finance Minister reduced the personal exemption at.

The other thing is payroll taxes have not been reduced. In fact, there's no plan to reduce them in this budget or any other budget. It's a tax on jobs, and clearly the fact remains is that a payroll tax results in a disincentive to Manitoba businesses to hire more people to expand their businesses and so on. So that's another reason why we would vote, of course, against this budget.

The debt, as we see, is increasing in this budget. It's unconscionable to increase the debt at a time when we have record high revenues. I look at the budget and I see \$560 million more in revenues coming to this province than we had last year, \$560 million more, and yet the Finance Minister has the nerve to stand up in this House and say we're going to increase the debt; \$560 million in increased revenues in his estimation isn't enough to cover inflation or to cover new programs or new infrastructure. He's going to further increase the debt of the province, and our children and grandchildren are going to have to pay that back over a number of years. Mr. Acting Speaker, \$560 million dollars in new revenue—about half of that came from increase in equalization payments. Of course, that means that we're not doing as well compared to other provinces across this country.

Mr. Acting Speaker, \$560 million dollars more in revenue and yet he increased taxes through user fees once again. He also increased 5 percent to the Pharmacare deductible to all of our people who are chronically ill, who are elderly and who are on fixed incomes. Not a week goes by that I don't get a call from a constituent who is concerned about the cost of prescription drugs in this province, and some of them, in fact, who are on fixed incomes are going to see an increase in the hundreds of dollars because currently they may have a Pharmacare deductible that's in the thousands of dollars.

*(16:20)

That all comes at a time when we've seen a massive increase in the cost of drugs besides that. But we've seen this government in the last nine budgets they've increased Pharmacare deductibles six times, every year except 2007, and, oddly enough, that was an election year, so, obviously, they were thinking in terms of an election and would not increase it at that time. But now that the election's over, they feel that it's necessary, then, to go after the sick and the elderly in this province and to make them pay more when we have \$560 million more in revenues.

In terms of Justice failures in this budget, I can tell you they are many. I timed the budget speech. It was 54 minutes long and during that time I can tell you, Mr. Acting Speaker, that there were only two minutes devoted out of 54 minutes to Justice, all at a time when justice issues and crime is No. 1 priority for Manitobans and not much of a priority for this government.

There are a number of failures that I can point to in the budget with respect to Justice. First of all, with respect to taking on the gangs of this province, we've seen a proliferation of gun-related crimes and shootings across this province like we've never seen before and that's, of course, related to gang activity within the city and outside the city.

Hells Angels came to Manitoba under the watch of this NDP in the year 2000. Finally, they certainly were cut down to size over the last year or so, and kudos to the police, the joint forces unit, the RCMP, Winnipeg city police and other police forces across this province who took them on and, in fact, put a serious dent in their activities here in Manitoba. But what we've seen is other gangs now stepping forward and trying to establish a turf for themselves. As a result of that, we've seen a lot of gun activity in this province. In fact, even today, another death in the

city of Winnipeg as a result of gunfire, and we see a Justice Minister who doesn't seem to be concerned about that.

In fact, last year in Estimates when I asked him a question about how many gang members there were in the city of Winnipeg he couldn't answer. All he could do was answer generalities, saying there are thousands of gang members in the city of Winnipeg and thousands of gang members outside the city of Winnipeg. That, to me, tells me the entire story. When a Justice Minister can't answer, in fact, how many gang members there are in the province in a certain period of time, obviously he has no interest in determining that there are gang members, and he doesn't see that there's a problem within the province, contrary to what the RCMP and Winnipeg city police tell me.

Legislation has been a failure from the get-go. We've seen a couple of pieces of legislation in which the Justice Minister stood on a soapbox three and four years ago and introduced a couple of pieces of legislation, The Civil Remedies Against Organized Crime Act and secondly, The Criminal Property Forfeiture Act. They stood on a soapbox in front of all the cameras and said, we're taking on the gangs of this province.

Well, that's the last we heard of it because there hasn't been a single charge laid under either of those two acts. There has never been a single conviction under those two acts and two failed pieces of legislation that, certainly, the Justice Minister should be wearing that, and he will be in the coming session.

Thirdly, during the last election, the Justice Minister promised an extra 100 police officers. A hundred police officers simply aren't enough. They have the highest caseloads in the country—investigative caseloads in the country here in Manitoba. They're the most overworked police force in the country. We would have proposed 350 new crime fighters here in Manitoba. That certainly would have gone a long way towards meeting the demand for investigative services and would have gone a long way towards taking on the gangs and criminal organizations of this province.

There are a number of segments to the Justice portfolio that the minister ought to be aware of that need to be strong. Every link in that chain has to be strong or we're going to be—or we'll have a very weak justice system in this province and those are investigations. We need a police force that is staffed

properly, that doesn't have to do a great deal of paperwork, that, in fact, will spend more time on investigations in order to charge more people that are charged with—that have committed criminal offences.

We need more prosecutors in this province to ensure that the Prosecutions department is not understaffed, more judges in order to deal with the sentencing of criminals so that trials are not delayed time and time again in order to get justice for victims in this province. We need to have more incarceration facilities, more jail cells. I know that there is a prison expansion under way in Milner Ridge Correctional Centre in my constituency, another 75 beds, but that's not enough. We need more jail cells in order to make all links within the Justice Department strong.

I'll point to a couple of agricultural failures too. I know my colleague for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) has dealt with that issue very effectively last week and this week and will continue to do so and stand up on behalf of farmers who are suffering across this province. I appreciate all of his efforts in doing so. But the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) really has had a couple of failures over the last number of years that really speak out loud and clear to all Manitobans and all farmers.

First of all, the BSE crisis occurred a number of years ago, and farmers are still suffering from the effects of the BSE crisis without any real solution offered by this government. The only solution that they came up with in the BSE crisis was to offer more loans to farmers. The last thing that a cattle farmer needs is a loan at a time when beef prices are at an all-time low. That's the last thing they need is more loans.

The second huge failure by this Agriculture Minister is, of course, the way she has dealt with the hog industry in this province by the Conservation Minister placing a moratorium on hog production in Manitoba. Hog farmers lost hope that they would be able to expand and continue to invest in the industry, and they are dropping out now. We have a number of hog producers in my constituency who are losing thousands and thousands of dollars every week on the hog industry in Manitoba. The response from this minister is simply to look at perhaps providing more loans to agricultural producers. That's the last thing they need is more loans. She has to answer for that failure, and she will certainly be answering for that failure over the next few months in particular. I don't necessary blame the Agriculture Minister for not providing programs that would help our livestock

industry because I really think the direction is coming from the Premier (Mr. Doer). He is the one who, in fact, should be wearing those two failures and, certainly, it affects all of rural Manitoba; it affects all of rural Manitoba businesses, down from agricultural suppliers to farmers, of course, firstly to agricultural suppliers and lenders within rural Manitoba.

There have been a number of failures in Lac du Bonnet constituency as well. I want to speak to just a few of them, one being drainage issues within the constituency, particularly in the R.M. of Lac du Bonnet, near the town at the intersection of PTH 11 and Provincial Road 315. Every year for the last five years in spring thaw, there has been a massive flooding issue that has taken place there, including, of course, not only spring melt but now it seems it also includes when there is a heavy rain in the province and heavy rain in Lac du Bonnet area. A number of businesses and residences are negatively affected. I would ask that the Minister of Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick) certainly should be looking at that issue, considering it seriously and dealing with that issue to the satisfaction of residents and businesses within that area.

A personal care home, of course, in Lac du Bonnet requires expansion. There is a two-year waiting list within Lac du Bonnet for that personal care home. Seniors' housing in Pinawa needs to be constructed. The Powerview-Pine Falls hospital, the primary health-care centre is located in the basement, not the correct place within that particular hospital for that particular unit to deliver effective services to residents. I would ask that the minister consider putting that particular project on the five-year plan as well as the personal care home expansion in Lac du Bonnet.

With those brief remarks, I would give up the floor to another member from government. Thank you.

*(16:30)

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): Mr. Acting Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise today to speak in favour of budget 2008. It's especially a pleasure to do so after the Winnipeg Comedy Festival and, of course, the Tory convention.

At any rate, I was reading with interest the Tory policy on education. I think what they were talking about was merit pay for teachers, voucher systems

for students, more standardized testing, no increase in funding because enrolments are flat, enrolments are declining so we don't need to increase the funding, and they were going to strip the local school boards of their autonomy with respect to their taxing authority. It's abundantly clear to me that their policy was written on education by Fred Flintstone and Barney Rubble. The only thing missing was the issuance of a slate and a piece of chalk at the beginning of every school year with respect to their policies on education.

What are we doing on this side of the House? Well, this year's budget 2008 includes unprecedented funding for our public school system of \$53.5 million, and it includes 33 school divisions that will see reductions in property taxes when you combine the increase and the \$75 education property tax credit. Of the three that are increasing the taxes, on a home assessed at \$125,000, the increase is \$1 in one division and \$2 in another. There's only one anomaly where increase is a little more substantive at \$46, but 33 school divisions in the province of Manitoba are going to see a reduction in taxes. Even the ones that raised their taxes and have the property tax credit applied to the increase, five of them are going to see a net reduction of over 5 percent. So that's a significant investment in the education system and a significant investment in finding balance between property taxes as a means for funding the education system, as well as the increased funding of \$53.5 million.

Now, clearly, a sports analogy was used earlier here about the budget and how we've been hitting some home runs, and this is our ninth year at bat, and we've had several home runs. I'm pleased that the members opposite remain on deck swinging at the air because, with the announcements that they had proposed at a 2 percent cap, even they were to increase education funding by 2 percent. That impact on this year's budget alone is the equivalent of laying off approximately 735 teachers, Mr. Acting Speaker. That to me would be absolutely devastating to the public education system when we're trying to put more supports in place for children, particularly supports in place for children who are high needs; particularly supports for children who come from, perhaps, war-affected countries who need more support; particularly supports for children who, as a result of a very ambitious immigration program, need more support in English as an additional language.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

So I'm very proud to be part of a government that has been able to find that balance between increasing funding for education and mitigating the impacts on property taxes, Mr. Speaker. So it is, indeed, a privilege to be here to speak about that.

The other part of that impact on property taxes, of course, is the commitment in budget 2008 to increase the farm property tax rebate up to 75 percent. As somebody from rural Manitoba with a very vibrant community within the constituency of Gimli, I know that that has resonated very well with the farmers in the area, that we have gone beyond our initial promise of a 20 percent rebate on education property taxes and are committed to continue to work towards the 80 percent goal and doing so by moving it up to 75 percent this year.

Speaking of agriculture, I'm very proud to be on this side of the House with the best Agriculture Minister in the entire country of Canada, Mr. Speaker. Our minister has proven herself time and time again in this climate where there have been a number of different hardships that have affected the agricultural community in Manitoba, and her voice has been very strong among her caucus colleagues and among Cabinet with respect to doing what is right for the farmers in the province of Manitoba.

Of course, budget 2008 addresses a lot of those issues when you consider the \$8.8 million more to the Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation to reflect increasing crop values covered by production insurance. It includes investing \$14.7 million with the federal government to support producers of cattle and other ruminant livestock, \$60 million in loan supports for hog producers. The list goes on and on with respect to the programs and initiatives that have been brought forward with consultation with the stakeholders to address the many concerns that we see in the agricultural sector.

Now, one of things referenced there, of course, is the \$14.7 million with the federal government, and it's really curious to hear members opposite talk about transfer payments the way they are. This is a system that has been in place in Canada for a number of years, and it is a system that serves Canadians well across the country. It would be interesting to see if the members opposite think that elimination of \$4 billion is a good thing from our provincial budget.

I guess, by extension, what they're suggesting is that we shouldn't be supporting rural communities with tax-share agreements with rural communities because it would be the similar argument: if we as a

province should not be accepting money from the federal government, then should we be giving money to rural municipalities? Well, that's rather curious that they would be advocating one way, but I don't see them standing up saying we shouldn't do that for rural municipalities through the provincial tax-share arrangement that we have, which is, as members opposite should know, the richest in the country. What would that mean in rural Manitoba if we didn't have the provincial tax-share agreement that we have, which was part of the vision of the Ed Schreyer government, and which is something that we have continued to work with to improve, for infrastructure improvements and a number of other different initiatives with rural Manitoba to support the rural economy, and to support the rural municipalities and assist them in making decisions that they might not have been able to do so because the finances would not have been there to do so without the Provincial Municipal Tax Sharing Agreement.

The increase this year was an additional 6 percent. Now, perhaps the Member for Fort Whyte (Mr. McFadyen) had suggested a 2 percent increase in that or maybe, by extension, of suggesting we shouldn't be getting federal transfer payments, that maybe he's suggesting we should eliminate that altogether. I don't know.

Rural Manitoba has certainly done very well under this NDP government and will continue to do so. I'm very proud to represent the constituency of Gimli. That is a very diverse economy in the community of Gimli. There have been a number of things that have been done to support the residents of the constituency of Gimli. Certainly, budget 2008 continues in that vein.

Case in point: Budget 2008 is going to invest \$2.4 million to expand dialysis in Gimli and, of course, the neighbouring constituency, to my colleague in the Interlake, in the Peguis area as well.

Budget 2008 includes the commitment to more nurses and more doctors, and we've seen a significant increase in the number of rural doctors practising in Manitoba, the number of nurses practising in rural Manitoba as well. Having 10 more medical spaces available at the school for doctor training is a very significant investment, as we know that a population that continues to grow will continue to need more services provided.

What's very important coming from one of the older communities, that is to say, the oldest community, with respect to the average age of the

citizens of Gimli, I think it's very important to see the Primary Caregiver Tax Credit increased, introduced and committed to in budget 2008.

Also, as many of the bedroom communities within the constituency of Gimli have a number of students who go on to post-secondary education, I was very pleased that once again the tuition freeze has been extended in budget 2008 and that there has been commitment to more bursaries and supports for students from rural and northern areas to have a greater access, Mr. Speaker, to the post-secondary institutions, the fine post-secondary institutions that we have here in the province of Manitoba.

Of course, when those students go to those institutions, they'll see a lot of changes. My colleague Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy (Ms. McGifford) recently announced our commitment to support the Domino project at the University of Manitoba.

Now, another thing that obviously would be very important to me as a member of the Legislature for the constituency of Gimli is what we've been doing to protect our water. This is something that goes right to the core with respect to our support for educational programs. Now the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) stood up and talked about the Green Team program, suggesting that it no longer existed. Well, that's absolutely wrong. The Green Team program exists. Then he corrected himself and suggested that the Green Team program doesn't look anything like it did when it was originally created by his government back in the '90s. Well, that's partly true. It's now better funded than it had been in the 1990s, and some of the directions of the Green Team reflect our priorities in government and the community needs as we've heard from the people who participate in the Green Team program. What the member doesn't recognize when he talks about talking the talk and walking the walk on education for sustainable development, or the whole notion of sustainability, is the fact that Manitoba has been recognized, not only nationally, but internationally as a leader for education for sustainable development, and that it goes to the core of our curriculum and is part of every single curricular, not every singular curricular outcome, but there are a number of curricular outcomes that identify the need to live in a more sustainable environment. That's through a number of different curricula that the Province has been developing. We are recognized, as I said, not only nationally, but also internationally.

* (16:40)

The education component is part of it. It's the investments in a number of different areas in our water that are critical to the future of our province. Some of those investments are very significant with respect to waste-water treatment facilities and, also, to provide an additional support for conservation districts, renewing our agreements with partners, as we have had partners in the past with Ducks Unlimited and Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre. The contribution to the Nature Conservancy of Canada increased to \$400,000 this year and the initiatives to support wetland protection as well.

It's also these investments that are complemented by a lot of the legislative initiatives which are critical to the health and well-being of our very important resource, that resource, of course, being the water that is so important here in the province of Manitoba. The regulations regarding phosphorous restrictions for lawns and standards for nitrogen and phosphorous for large waste-water treatment facilities, and new limits for smaller systems in lagoons and the new rules around the use of septic disposal and more resources to monitor and inspect, particularly north of Winnipeg in a very vulnerable ecological zone and, of course, in cottage country. Multi-year funding to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by supporting sustainable farm practices, trucking technologies, active support, active transport initiatives and green heating technologies. Yes, Mr. Speaker, these are just a few of the very important initiatives, legislatively and financially, that we have been proud to bring forward to the people of Manitoba who understand the need to be responsible stewards, understand the costs of being responsible stewards, but know that it is the utmost importance that we proceed with these initiatives.

The other thing about being from the constituency of Gimli is how much I've enjoyed my commute back to Gimli more when you consider the unprecedented investment in our highway system. That is one thing I did tell my constituents after the election: they better be prepared to slow down this summer because there is going to be lots of highway construction throughout the province of Manitoba. But it gives them time to slow down and enjoy the beautiful environment that we do enjoy here in the province of Manitoba. I know that last year's projects that were initiated are going to be continued throughout the Interlake region, and the highways in this province will be something that we can point to

with respect to the commitment that we made as a government in capital investment in these highways. It will be a very pleasant drive enjoying much that rural Manitoba has to offer with all this infrastructure investment.

Of course, one of the other initiatives that is very important to the fine community of St. Andrews and my neighbour in the constituency of Selkirk, St. Clements, is the fact that we have, once again, committed to ice jam mitigation measures with an additional Amphibex, and supporting a innovated project that was developed locally, with essentially an ice drill, that has come from necessity as the mother of invention with respect to some fine constituents and their vision for how they can address the issue of ice jams in the Selkirk community. That is something that has plagued the Breezy Point area of my constituency almost on a annual basis because of the ice jams. We've taken tremendous step to mitigate that.

When you're talking about flood protection and the impact of the ice jams, we know that the single largest investment that we have made for infrastructure would be the extension of the Red River Floodway and the potential damage of \$12 billion that has been avoided by this commitment to this investment in infrastructure. Of course, it's not just about the water that's flowing through our rivers. It's also the water that we drink. It's about protecting the lakes and protecting the water that we drink as well. Of course, clean water projects have been a big part of budget 2008 with clean drinking water projects in Grandview, Grosse Isle, Melita, and water supply distribution system upgrades for Hnaua and Watchorn Provincial Park as well, also funding wastewater upgrades in communities across Manitoba including The Pas, Roblin, Thicket Portage, Waterhen, Wabowden. These are all very important investments in our infrastructure, and very critical to the health and well-being of our communities. *[interjection]*

I see, Mr. Speaker, that my colleague is saying I should keep going for a little while. Okay, I just had to be clear on that, just had to be clear.

Additionally, when you consider the fastest growing segment of our society with our First Nations communities, I was very pleased that budget 2008 provided an additional \$500,000 to improve Aboriginal academic achievement. You know, Mr. Speaker, a couple of years ago during Estimates, one of the only items that the opposition flagged a couple

of years ago was a \$3-million increase to the Aboriginal Education Directorate and were questioning the value of that investment. Well, they didn't do their homework on that, as they tend not to do when it comes to education budgets, and that, of course, was through the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

As you know, we need to do research to support our First Nation orders, and find how we can best meet their educational needs. An additional half million dollars to improve the Aboriginal academic achievement is a very important step forward as we work toward that end. Of course, supporting First Peoples Economic Growth Fund, partnering with First Nations interested in developing cottage lots, or cottage-lot developments, I should say, adding more resources to speed up the settlement of outstanding land claims—these are all very important and critical for First Nations communities as they work as partners to become more viable communities and support the growing economy that we have here in Manitoba.

Also, what we are seeing in budget 2008 is a significant commitment to northern Manitoba and to our urban centres as well, when you consider the addition of a fire-suppression initiative with an additional \$1 million for another helicopter to help fight fires in northern Manitoba, introducing disability insurance for volunteer firefighters in Aboriginal Northern Affairs communities. These are all very important to those communities, delivering water safety education programs, such as Ice Smart, sled safety and training for life guards and swim instructors. Budget 2008 addresses all corners of the province of Manitoba.

What's particularly surprising for many, as my colleague from Brandon had suggested, we are not known as a tax-cutting party, a party that supports tax cuts, but we are able to do so with \$120 million in tax cuts for Manitoba businesses: dropping the small-business tax, and saving an additional \$9.7 million a year; reducing the general corporate income tax; eliminating the corporate capital tax; extending the investment tax credit, and a number of other initiatives that are supporting some of the new technologies and new medias that are coming to Manitoba, where they know it is a very business-friendly environment and a very good place to do business with the educational system, the infrastructure and the health care that we are able to provide for our community.

So, with those few words, I am very pleased to stand here and support the budget 2008. I know that the members opposite might reconsider and line up and support budget 2008 for all the good things that this means for the province of Manitoba and the people of Manitoba. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Speaker, I too want to make just a few comments in regard to the debacle we call the current budget, this, now, being the ninth debate that I've been part of.

Before I begin my comments on this lacklustre and visionless budget, I would again like to say that I want to thank the people of Springfield for their continued support.

* (16:50)

I happened to be out in Springfield yesterday to a wonderful dinner where the firefighters, first responders, paramedics, the services—the police services—the protection enforcement agencies were all honoured at the Oakbank Baptist Church. It was a lovely dinner, just a fantastic banquet, and then they had a wonderful service where the Winnipeg Police Choir was part of the performance. It was a great pleasure to be there with the Honourable Vic Toews, a federal minister. He gave some wonderful comments, and I was allowed to address the group as well and mention how much we appreciate all of them.

So, once again, I would like to thank the people of Springfield and East St. Paul for their continued support. They've sent me to the Manitoba Legislature to represent their concerns and issues in this House, and one of those things is to be able to speak to the Manitoba budget.

I'd like to refer this House back to a few comments that were made, and I am quoting these particular comments. They go as follows: Found wanting. The government had been found wanting in the care of the aged, sick and unfortunate, and in help for farmers. This individual goes on to say: The Manitoba administration had been content to trod forward, from day to day, sticking to the familiar road and remaining content to be pushed along by the crowd.

Now, that is an unbelievable current condemnation of this current budget, and those were words spoken in this very Chamber and were reported in the *Tribune* of March 27, 1957. These comments were by Gurney Evans of the PC

Winnipeg South. His comments were about a government at that time that had gotten content, that had become so stale that could not find its way forward and actually was visionless, was not responsive to the needs of its people. I believe that these comments are very reflective of what we see in politics today, here in Manitoba. We have a Douglas Campbell-style government currently here in Manitoba, a government that is drifting, a government that really has lost its way. I'd like to point out that it wasn't soon after that the government of the day was defeated and Duff Roblin was elected as Premier.

I would like to add a few more comments to the record, and that is another individual who spoke on a budget and said: Lack of long-term road planning and lack of good business management; and goes on and on to discuss the budget. That would be none other than Duff Roblin and it was reported in the *Free Press* April 3, 1958. It was his comments on the—in fact, the headline is "Roblin lashes government for imprudence and tax waste." That, if you would have read the papers of the last couple of days, is exactly what we're reading about the current NDP government: government imprudence and tax waste.

We have come full circles since 1958, and it's interesting because it was that summer that the government was then defeated. We have the same push by the crowd, really, really no plan to speak of.

I caution members of this House. We've heard the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) reference the storm clouds that we're seeing south of the border. I happened to go online last night, and I understand another couple of financial houses are concerned about, potential, another \$15-billion write-down. Yet we have a government that every penny, and then some, that it collects, it spends with no vision and no plan. That is of great concern to this Chamber and, I know, to many Manitobans.

Of course, budgets are there because there is a need and things have to be funded. We know that we need a solid health-care system, education system, road system; however, what we saw in this budget is really no plan for addressing any of those.

We saw the previous announcement by the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson), who made a funding announcement and then promptly, somehow, worked it out that over \$5 million were left on the table. I mean, those kinds of poorly laid-out plans, bungled plans, of this government and the current

Minister of Education, speak to the imprudence that Duff Roblin was speaking about when he was speaking about the Douglas government. That's what we see today. We see, basically, a government that's become tired and has lost its way.

I'd like to get back to the coming storm clouds. I guess I find myself more and more concerned that we have a government that is prepared to take up to almost 40 percent of its budget from other taxpayers outside of the province of Manitoba and spend it on a deficit-spending basis. Now, we've heard the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) try to spin his way out of it. Basically, what the Minister of Finance is saying, ah, but we're making payments down on the Visa card. It's just that the mortgage keeps increasing.

Somehow, Manitobans are supposed to be comforted. They're supposed to find great comfort in the fact that it's the Visa payments that are coming down, but that the mortgage is increasing substantially, and it is, in the end, the mortgage that this government, this NDP government, will leave to the next generation. That is what they will inherit from this Premier, this Cabinet, and this NDP government. That is of what's concerned, especially when you read on a daily basis the storm clouds that are coming. There really wasn't that plan that was laid out. What kind of plan was laid out in case that we would see a downturn in the economy? What kind of province will we see in a year from now if the taxes that have realized this year aren't realized next year?

We know that the interest rates right now, currently, are low. We've heard the minister crow about his costs of servicing debt. It's not because he's paying down the mortgage. It's just that he's getting lower interest rates. What happens if interest rates start to climb up? This government and this province could potentially be facing an unbelievably severe crisis, and it will be ill-prepared to deal with it at that time. Yet we see the government is not funding our highways to the tune that it should be doing. We know that we have areas of this province that are wanting for schools. Minister of Education clearly

doesn't see the need. We see the province continuously offloading responsibility on school boards, offloading responsibility onto municipalities and is willing to offload all kinds of blame on the federal government, and yet has spent recklessly or, as Duff Roblin called it, imprudence and tax waste. That's what we're seeing out of this government.

It is a concern for the good people of Springfield and East St. Paul. I have spent a lot of time, as I always do on weekends when we're not sitting in this House, and evenings, traveling my constituency, and there is a growing concern about the storm clouds coming. Yet we heard almost nothing from this government. Instead, the spending went up. We know that it went up by more than 6 percent, and in the end there's not going to be a lot to show for. That's probably what bothers people the most. What do we have to show for all of this? There really isn't a lot. We've got overcrowding in schools in a lot of areas. In fact, we have the province that is pushing a massive, massive housing development. The province is the developer and is supposed to be the watchdog, and yet has planned for no schools. The Minister of Education has yet to make an announcement, what he plans on doing on that. We hope that he listens to the opposition and actually does something about those problems and does it soon.

Again, we're not seeing a plan. We're not seeing where the minister's mind is focussed on those things. We know that they're focussed on press releases. We know they're focussed on spin. We know that they're focussed on all kinds of feel-good announcements of things that might be coming. We need concrete. We need the government to come forward and actually stand up for individuals—

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler) will have 19 minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, April 14, 2008

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