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DEBATES
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PROCEEDINGS

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, June 2, 2009

The House met at 10 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: O Eternal and Almighty God, from Whom all power and wisdom come, we are assembled here before Thee to frame such laws as may tend to the welfare and prosperity of our province. Grant, O merciful God, we pray Thee, that we may desire only that which is in accordance with Thy will, that we may seek it with wisdom, know it with certainty and accomplish it perfectly for the glory and honour of Thy name and for the welfare of all our people. Amen.

Orders of the day; private members' business.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): We're going to go straight to Bill 200. We don't need leave this time because it's the first one on the Order Paper.

Mr. Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Gerrard: I request leave to have Bill 200. I'm sure that there's mutual agreement.

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement in the House that we go directly to second reading of public bill No. 200? Is there agreement?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, there's agreement.

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

**Bill 200—The Highway Traffic Amendment Act
(Booster Seats)**

Mr. Speaker: I will call Bill No. 200, The Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Booster Seats).

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the MLA for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), that Bill No. 200, The Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Booster Seats); la Loi modifiant le Code de la route (sièges d'appoint), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable Member for River Heights, seconded by the honourable Member for Inkster, that Bill No. 200, The Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Booster

Seats), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, Bill 200 requires the use of booster seats for children under the age of eight, children who've graduated from infant and toddler seats but are not yet 145 centimetres in height or 36 kilome—36 kilograms in weight, at which point a booster seat would be no longer required. So this is a missing gap in the legislation that covers the use of seatbelts and child restraints in Manitoba.

This measure is needed because there are about 300 children each year in the age four to nine age group who are injured in motor vehicle accidents in Manitoba. In a study from 2000 to 2005, only 34 of 1,611 children injured in this age bracket were found to have been in a car seat or a booster seat. Booster seats can significantly reduce injuries in motor vehicle accidents for this age child. Adult seat belts are not appropriate, but rather they can result in what's been called the lap-belt or the seat-belt syndrome, that is, that the child in an accident with a seat belt on where the child is too small may have abdominal injuries, spinal injuries, a variety of other injuries which can be very disabling, particularly if it's a spinal injury.

Put it bluntly, the safety of our children is at stake. Child safety seats, when used correctly, have been estimated to reduce the risk of death and injury by 58 percent.

The other thing about this bill is that there is substantial evidence that not only will it save injuries and save lives in children, but it will also save the government money. Now, this NDP government is not very often interested in saving money, but most Manitoban citizens are.

An Honourable Member: That's not true though.

Mr. Gerrard: Most—well, then, support this bill.

Motor vehicle accidents are the most common cause of injury and death in children in this age group. *[interjection]* You will be counted. The MLA for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen) has spoken and said that he hasn't—that it's not true that he doesn't support children. Well, we hope that he will support children in saving money in this—by making sure that this

legislation passes this morning second reading and goes to committee.

We need to act because, you know, this will save scarce health-care dollars and resources. It's been found, in a very careful study, that for every dollar spent on a child restraint device, it saves \$32, and there can hardly be a better return on investment. I would challenge the MLA for Flin Flon. Get up and give me an example of a better return on investment that he's ready to cite.

In Canada, the booster seat legislation is now in effect in almost all other provinces. The province of Québec was first and implemented legislation in 2002; Ontario was second, and its booster seat legislation came into effect September 1st, 2005; Nova Scotia, January 1st, 2007; Prince Edward Island, January 1st, 2008; New Brunswick, May 1st, 2008; British Columbia, July 1st, 2008; Newfoundland and Labrador, July 1st, 2008.

Well, in Manitoba, we have introduced this last year, and we're introducing this measure again this year. Last time, when I introduced it, the Minister for Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross) got up and said, oh, but it's far too expensive to purchase booster seats. Well, if the minister and her staff will look on a variety of places where you can purchase booster seats, what she will find is that booster seats can be bought for as little as \$25. That's a couple of trips to McDonald's restaurant—maybe one if you've got a large family. This is affordable for saving lives. This is a very cheap way to save kids and to save lives.

*(10:10)

It is interesting that Manitoba has signed on to Canada's road safety targets to 2010, and this Canadian document says specifically that one of the main goals—and Manitoba signed on to this—is to achieve a 95 percent minimum seat-belt-wearing rate and proper use of child restraints.

Now, it's interesting that Manitoba has spent some time developing a provincial injury prevention strategy, and it's titled, Injury Free Manitoba, Manitoba Healthy Living, October 2006, and it refers to the Road Safety Vision 2010. But there's a very curious omission, because in the Manitoba document, it mentions that the target is 95 percent minimum seat-belt-wearing rate, but there's a total omission of proper child safety restraints, totally omitted.

This government, quite frankly, has been negligent, and this was sadly reported at a conference

last year in Durban, South Africa, and it was noted there by people who were at the conference that people are watching Manitoba, as it's a great province but with a lousy government, and it hasn't been able to bring in booster seats. And so we're trying to help out by bringing forward the legislation.

And there has been some inspections in Manitoba, by the way, and from 2007, only half the children for booster-seat age were appropriately in booster seats on July the 14th, in Plum Coulee. In August 11th, in Morris, it was only 40 percent were in proper booster seats, and August 25, 2007, not one child was in proper booster seats. The results for 2008 are fairly similar. There were only 40 percent—36 percent near Camp Hughes at Brandon who were in proper booster seats, and a little bit better this time in Selkirk where, in fact, about 57 percent made it into proper booster seats.

There's a long way to go. We need to pass this legislation for the children of this province. And, you know, we even want to try and help the NDP out with its budgeting by saving some money. We know it's difficult times, and this would be a good time to do this. So I urge all members to get on board, vote to support the safety of children and bring this to a vote today so it can go to committee stage and we can move this forward. Thank you.

Ms. Erin Selby (Southdale): Well, once again, I'm going to stand in this House and claim myself an expert on this particular issue, only because of the number of car seats I've bought in the last few years, and booster seats. And just to refresh your memory, I bought three of the car seats when the girls were born, the kind that are kind of like a bucket and they face the back. And as they got older, we moved up into the larger car seat with the harness strap, as they were about a year old. And from there, we went into the booster seat with the back, and then at one point, when my sister-in-law was working as our nanny, we bought another set of booster seats to have in her car. So overall, I think I have bought at least nine car seats in my lifetime.

Now I noticed that the bill that the Member for River Heights is proposing is to have children in a booster seat until they're eight years old or 36 kilograms in weight. And if I've got the calculations right, 36 kilograms is 80 pounds and 145 centimetres should be about 4.9 inches, if I have that correct. To me, the numbers seem a little strange. We currently in Manitoba have a law that

requires children to be in a booster seat until they're five years old or 50 pounds.

Now with my daughters who are getting longer and longer and longer, but they don't seem to be getting any wider, it took them until they were about seven and a half years old until they reached that 50 pounds, and so they were in their car seats for that long a time. Now, if I were to try to wait until they reach 80 pounds, I'm not sure how old they would be. At the rate they're going, they might be 13 or 14 before they reach 80 pounds. My daughters are turning nine this summer, and they're just over 50 pounds right now, and I can guarantee that if I told them, I know you've been out of your car seat for about a year now, but we got to put you back in it again, there would be mutiny in the van wherever we were driving.

I do think it's important for parents to understand the importance of booster seats and, and I, I have sort of made it my business to talk to parents about that when I see sometimes the odd person who has a three-year-old or a four-year-old not in a booster seat because, of course, Manitoba law recognizes that that is too small. I know there's some cases where kids are exceptionally tall or exceptionally heavy and, and really don't fit the booster seat any longer but in most cases until you're five years old or if you're kind of on the skinny side, like my three girls are, you might be closer to seven and a half, eight years old before you reach that 50 pound mark and, and should really be safely in the, in the shoulder strap.

The other thing you have to think about is that booster seats are not all built the same. They don't all have the same capacity in terms of weight and height. The booster seats that my daughters were in up until about a year ago were the kind that you just place on your car seat and they have a back on them and the, the regular adult's seatbelt goes over their shoulder but there's a shoulder adjustment built into that back so that it hits them in the right spot and doesn't hit them in the neck when they're, when they're still a little bit too short to, to fit it properly.

And with every intention, as I said, to keep them in there until they were 50 pounds, as we did, but the problem is that the booster seat only went up to about 50 pounds as well. And this was a well-known brand name booster seat, one that's sold in many different stores, one that a lot of parents would probably pick up, and that one doesn't have the capacity to hold someone up in to 80 pounds or

4.9 inches, that the child would actually outgrow it and be too tall.

One of the problems with that is that the booster seat with the back only goes to a certain height. Now once your child's head is more than half way past that back of the booster seat, in a case of an accident if the child's head is actually higher than the back of the booster seat, that becomes a real risk because their head whips back and can whip back further than where the booster seat is and can cause whiplash.

So you certainly want to make sure that the particular booster seat that your child is in, is actually got the height requirement for wherever your child is at. Four point nine feet or 80 pounds would have been too big for the booster seats that my daughters had, and now they are eight and a half, almost nine years old, they would actually be in more danger with their old booster seat because of how tall they've gotten. Their head would certainly be coming over the top of it.

The other thing to talk about is the fact that there are many different kinds of booster seats on the market. I just mentioned that some of them have different heights that they, that they accommodate. Some of them have different weights. There's also, of course, the two different booster seats. There's the kind with the back and the kind that are, have no back. They look a little bit like maybe something you'd see in a restaurant, those booster seats you put in the—on the restaurant chair.

There's some that are similar like that for your car. They just sit on top. The child's back rests against the back of the, of the actual car seat and the strap still goes over them and it boosts their height correctly so that their height is enough that the shoulder strap fits. But one of the problems is, is that the child is a little bit forward and not necessarily thick enough for that, for that chest strap and it leaves the child so that the bottom strap that's going over their laps is tight enough but the one that's going across their chest, in some cases is not, if you have a smaller or thinner child.

And there have been some studies that show that children that are in the backless booster seats can actually pop out of the seat in an accident, a, a terribly unfortunate way that they're not actually protected to the full extent that they should be if they had a back one. Now, at this point you can, of course, buy both booster seats. Parents can buy the kind with the back. They can buy the kind without the back but the kind without the back are

significantly cheaper. The ones that have the backless booster seat are usually in about the \$30 range. So of course many parents tend to buy that one thinking, well, why would I, why would I pay the \$200 that the, that the ones with the back can actually go up to if, if the \$30 one is just as good.

Well, they, of course, they are both sold in stores, but there is some theory that the ones without the back are not as safe and I think that we need to be really clear that when we're legislating safety that we keep in mind that, that parents have to understand how everything works. So I think that the, the law that we have in place right now is, is, is a, is a strong law in terms of five years or 50 pounds. I would be, I would be hesitant if we were only using age because, of course, one five-year-old compared to the next five-year-old can be very different in age and height.

* (10:20)

My daughters just had their dance recital on Sunday night and the differences in ages and heights, and that, is, is really remarkable when you see a, a number of eight-year-olds lined up on the stage. Well, you have eight-year-olds that are almost the same height as me, and you have eight-year-olds that are the size of, perhaps, an average—*[interjection]* Yes, perhaps the member sitting down from me there, exactly, the member for Assiniboine.

The other thing that the Member for Kirkfield Park (Ms. Blady) and I were looking at, that if you legislate that people have to be 4.9 feet before they can get out of a booster seat, there may be a few members in this House who are going to have to back into a booster seat. We'll see about that.

Of course, I think that safety is really important, and I think it's hugely important for people to use booster seats, to use car seats and to use them to a safe point. But we've got to keep in mind that, just because a booster seat keeps your child safe when they're 45 pounds, it doesn't mean that they're going to be safer if they stay in it till they're 80 pounds. In fact, they may not be. As I said, some booster seats are not made to go to that degree of weight and to go up that high.

But I think the most important thing we can be doing right now is educating people on the importance of using that car seat all the time. I think for the most part that message is getting out, that you see people—it's also convenient when they're babies. Let's face it, when you can put them in that sort of bucket seat and they fall asleep in the car, and you

can take the bucket out without waking up the baby, that always works out. When they get a little older, it's a little more challenging to keep them in that car seat. But, as long as you educate both the parents and the children of how important it is, I think they all recognize that, following the current legislation of keeping your child in that booster seat from five years or 50 pounds will cover the majority of the booster seats that are on the market and will probably ensure that most children will be in that booster seat for—from what I've seen of my daughters' classmates—probably a little longer than five years anyways. Once they reach 50 pounds they're probably safe to put the car strap over their shoulder as well, and once they reach about eight years old, most children are probably pretty close to 50 pounds, although some may be in a bit longer.

Overall, I do think it's important that we use car seats and booster seats, but I think we're not to make sure that the ones that we're using are actually made to protect children of that height and weight. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): It's my pleasure to rise in the House today to put a few words on the record in regards to Bill 200, The Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Booster Seats), as brought forward by the Leader of the Liberal Party of Manitoba and, the member from River Heights and his colleague, as well, from Inkster.

And I just wanted to say that, as a grandparent myself, I'm certainly very aware of the use of car seats and booster seats in regards to what is required today and what, and what is practical, and what is really practical, Mr. Speaker.

And today I wanted to say that I disagree with some of the points that the member from Southdale has just indicated, Mr. Speaker, because the number of them aren't very much common sense. And I have with me today some of the recommendations and information that's been brought forward by the Manitoba Car Seat Coalition in regards to booster seats and the prevention of accident, injury and reductions of those. And, of course, they've provided a good deal of information there in regards to what's available in other jurisdictions. And, of course, my colleague, the member from Steinbach, and myself had the opportunity of meeting with some of those people from the booster seat—Car Seat Coalition back about a year ago, and very much we're entering into the opportunity of looking at the booster seat requirements that they were looking for.

The situation in Manitoba is such, I think, that the bill that's been brought is very reasonable. It is certainly parallel to what's been happening in British Columbia, Newfoundland, P.E.I. and New Brunswick, a number of other provinces, including Ontario and Québec, where children are either eight or nine years old. They're in that size range of the 145 centimetres, about four foot nine, as the member from Southdale has indicated, as well as from 80 pounds in weight, Mr. Speaker.

And I take some exception to the fact that I think, when the member from Southdale started off, she was talking about—confused between child seats, car seats and booster seats. Certainly we want our children as babies and young people required to be in child seats in cars till they—and, of course, they have to face the rear now, Mr. Speaker, and be strapped in as well. They're very convenient nowadays; they interlock and be able to take those out. My daughter can handle those very well in her car and my son and his family have, have just had another child as well. And with two grandchildren born in the last year, and, and others that have outgrown booster seats, even—it's, it's been a pretty important part of our lives.

I grew up on a farm, Mr. Speaker, at a time when there wasn't probably very much implementation of, of booster seats; they weren't talked about as much. We used child seats in our cars in those days. There was no laws to do it. There was a requirement of safety, though, because we travelled on gravel roads as opposed to pavement a lot of the time, and I think that's even more important, given the fact that I know of circumstances in our neighbouring community from where I grew up and farmed all of my life, where accidents of this nature have happened, with families in them, young children and there's been rollovers. And fortunately, because they were strapped in seats, there was very, very little injury, never mind loss of life.

And so I, I believe that this is a good bill. I believe that the—that this is something that I would certainly support. I believe that the situation that we've got in, in Manitoba today should—we should have unanimous support for this kind of a bill in the House. I know the, the members may have been just a, a—you know, there are the different kinds of booster seats you can buy. Certainly, the, the car seat coalition has indicated four different kinds that you can have today. And, and whether it's the, the backless kind or the high-back ones, it's depending, I think, on the parents. Not so much even the cost, but

the size of your child. Well, the member said, well, children are of different sizes. They certainly are, Mr. Speaker. My granddaughter's much, much smaller than her two brothers were at certain ages where child seats were required and as they grew up.

But I think that, Mr. Speaker, we're in a situation today where when you look at the number of other—and I just made a little note here while the member from River Heights was speaking, one of the situations—if you can—any time you can reduce injuries by 58 percent, I, I think it's, it's not only a cost saving to the government of Manitoba, but it's something that they should look at, given the way they spend money on other programs.

Perhaps they could even be cognizant of bringing a program in to deal with support for booster seats in Manitoba of this nature, Mr. Speaker. When you're looking at—this is a government that brought in a, a program for purchasing hybrid vehicles, if you would—dollars, rebates, back to people that bought hybrid vehicles. I mean, the cost of a booster seat is nowhere near the, the rebate on a hybrid vehicle. They've got support for bicycle helmets in the province and, and while bicycle helmets may not be of the same cost, they sometimes can be actually more than a booster seat as well.

So, if we really were supportive of these kinds of things, they could take some of the money that they're wasting on the \$640 million that will be lost by building the west-side line, and it would only be a very, very fraction amount needed to support, to support the addition of booster seats in the province of Manitoba, Mr. Speaker.

And the idea of having whiplash in regards to a booster seat being too tall, and those types of issues can certainly be dealt with by the types of seats that parents would buy. And headrests are mandatory in vehicles today, Mr. Speaker. As well, front seats, back seats, and I, I just—I, I don't feel that that was a, a—as much of a concern as the min—member from Southdale made it out to be, because in practical reality, that's not something that's going to be a, a, a damage. Certainly, if there wasn't that kind of safety equipment or somebody removed the headrest and those things, those are other concerns.

But the booster seats in this regard, I certainly feel the belt positioning of straps is required for children of, of those ages because to, to have them sit in the seats without a booster seat, Mr. Speaker, those straps can be too close to the neck. They can

cause much more severe injury in an accident than you can if the booster seats are, are there and the child is raised up, even that five to six inches. And I believe that it's a, a very much a practical solution to an issue of a, of sustaining or reducing and eliminating, actually, the types of injuries that we've talked about.

Some of the information here—that actually surprises me, that says that there's only 35 children age five to nine die each year in Canada due to motor vehicle crashes but there's an awful lot hospitalized, Mr. Speaker, and I, I thought it might be higher than that. But probably it's that low because of the fact that we're already using child seats in Manit—in Canada and we are using booster seats in most provinces.

*(10:30)

And so I think that's why this type of a bill—I'm surprised the government hasn't brought something like this forward themselves over the last few years. It's certainly—it's something that, that we support from this side of the House and that I personally support. And I just wanted to say that I believe that if, if we had—you know, I know that members of the opposit—or the government side, pardon me, including the reference that the member from River Heights made to the member from, from The—from Flin Flon, that they have children or grandchildren of their own or nephews and nieces in this House as well, Mr. Speaker.

All of the government members I'm assuming do, and, if they would take a look at, at, at what their family and siblings want in regards to their own brothers and sisters, in this case in the House, their families or extended families, they should ask them a little bit more about what they would require or what they'd want, Mr. Speaker, in regards to the safety of, of their own children.

I believe that there are many members, whether it's Southdale or any of the other constituencies that they represent, would be very much in favour of this kind of legislation.

So, with that, Mr. Speaker, I believe that the weights and the sizes are something that are parallel to what had been asked for in other provinces and the fact that booster seats do prevent accident and injury is a, is a given in my mind. And I would very much support this bill and would hope that the members of the government side would make it unanimous. Thank you.

Ms. Sharon Blady (Kirkfield Park): Wonderful opportunity to take a chance to, you know, put a few words on the record about this, the bill, Bill 200. Again, as was mentioned earlier by my colleague from Southdale, that we've been kind of comparing the numbers and looking at the gr—growth rates of our own kids, and I mean it's something that mums do, we talk about these kinds of things.

And having had a, you know, my two young boys, you know—one is now taller than me—I know that in looking at this math again, there would've been some issues with him being in a booster seat up until, you know, waiting for, for one of these markers before the age of eight, and it could've kept him in a, a booster seat quite a bit longer. And yet at a time when he really didn't necessarily either need to be there or really where it wasn't actually in his own best interests.

So, I think that the thing that we really need to consider here is that we do already have a track record of keeping things safe and putting children's safety as a priority. Right now, for example, I mean I do have my five-year-old who's, I guess he's about five and a half, he is in a booster seat. But that's because he is only 40 pounds, and he's been forty pounds for about a year and a half now, because, as is the tendency with my kids is, they get to a certain weight, and then they hold there, and then they grow for about nine, ten, twelve, eighteen months and just get taller and thinner. They're little beanpoles. They're, they're also known as the little buttlless wonders. I don't know if that's parliamentary language, sir, but—I—that, Mr. Speaker, but it is one of those things that I, I have these kids that are—you know, my five-year-old, I give it till he's 12 before I'm now again the shortest person in the house.

So, sometimes the dimensions—each child is unique, and it's very hard to, to work around those things and put absolute cut-offs or absolute numbers around things because, for example, I can't say that, you know, when my other child was eight, he was probably at or around the, you know, the four-and-a-half foot mark, but I couldn't honestly tell you if he'd actually made it to 79 pounds at that point. I'm sorry. I'm using the old school numbers; that's just the generation that I'm from.

Also, too, as was mentioned by the member from Southdale, for those people with multiple births, it can get pretty costly and, again, you're, you're navigating a lot, and you're having to worry about a lot there. And, again, we're not just looking

at overall safety, but we're also looking at what families can afford. And with multiple births and multiple chairs, it can get very costly when you're looking at an average cost of \$75. But, I know that I've looked at chairs and actually purchased chairs that have been double that quite easily. So, again, for multiple births, that's an issue.

The other thing, too, is that we have to look at is that we are encouraging people to come to Manitoba, and we've had phenomenal growth in our population, and for immigrant-immigrant populations, this can become one of those extra costs to moving into Manitoba. I have family that has moved here from India and when you take a look at the costs and the conversion rates, I was just—we were—the member from The Maples and I were talking about this, that he's talked about how, when arriving here and helping immigrant families with multiple children, that when you suddenly have to have a number of car seats—part of the reason why many come to this country, and I know it's the case with—within my own family, is to help send remittances back to the home country. Well, you're tying up a lot of money on things like car seats that—and it prevents that from happening, that this isn't to say that the children's safety isn't important, but you also have to look at the psychological aspect.

When a chair costs \$75 Canadian, the conversion factor on that is 3,000 rupees. From a psychological perspective, coming from India and arriving here and seeing the number 3,000 and 3,000 rupees, that's the same way we would probably envision something like \$3,000. So the idea of having to suddenly put in that kind of money—again, people do want to keep their kids safe. But, again, when they get to a certain age and a certain amount of mobility in the car, to keep investing that kind of money as the child grows through even another layer or two of seats can really be cost prohibitive.

So we want to keep children safe, but we really have to balance out a whole bunch of other effects, and, as was mentioned earlier, the kinds of chairs that are available—and while broadly there is a larger issue of safety, again, it doesn't—it doesn't always work—and, as was mentioned before, and this is the—with the—from the member from Southdale, and as was commented on by the member from Arthur-Virden, height is actually an issue. Like I said, I, for some reason, despite the fact that I'm vertically challenged myself, seem to be producing offspring that, you know, tend to grow like weeds

and will again surpass me before they're in their teens.

But what that means is that those ages, and fitting into those windows there, they don't necessarily fit into car seats. Their narrow little behinds might still be wiggling in the width of the chair, but their heads have far surpassed the top, and I would much rather have them securely in a lap seat in the centre seat in the kid zone with a proper lap belt and, again, you can get modifiers on the straps to ensure that they don't cut across your throat. I know that because, as someone who is vertically challenged, I have to employ them myself. So I know they're there. I would much rather have my child secure within the back seat in the kid zone without risk of head movement than have them in a car seat where there is the risk of whiplash or other injuries.

And so, again, I think a lot of this really comes down to educating parents, educating ourselves and, honestly, I think, also educating car manufacturers. I think we're at a point now, maybe in light of what's happened economically with the likes of General Motors, maybe now that the federal government owns a share, we can start having a say in car design, and, you know, maybe we, as the general populace, as the owners, as the shareholders in an automotive company, maybe we could all, you know, think about, as shareholders, what we'd like to see, and maybe integrated car seats that do factor in longer periods of time is the way to go. But then again I'd also, you know, wonder why GM got rid of the EVs, because—but, then again, that's a whole other issue and I'll save that to the documentary film makers to discuss who killed the electric car.

But the point is, now that we're shareholders in a—federally, we're shareholders in an automotive company, maybe these are the kinds of things that we can look at in a broader spectrum, because I really don't think the automotive industry has given enough consideration, both to children, and, again, to those of us who are vertically challenged.

So I know that my car gets adjusted on a regular basis just for me to get in and out as opposed to when someone else over five six drives the car. So we've got a lot of ergonomic issues here as well where safety is a factor. Granted, safety has improved incredibly. I'm sure more than one member in this House, along with myself, can tell tales of when we sat in the back seat of cars without seat belts, or we sat in the back seat of hatchbacks

basically like projectiles, so I'm glad that we've moved forward and we're no longer travelling around, especially on much busier highways, much busier roads at higher speeds than we were 30-some-odd years ago.

But I don't know if we can legislate absolutely everything, and I don't know if using these kinds of markers, arbitrary height and weight markers, are really going to work and ultimately be safest for everyone. I think we have to do something that's very holistic. I think that this is something that can be addressed within a larger package, and, then again, ultimately, I really think it's about educating people and educating a collective society around safer habits. So we need to be safer how we drive anyways. It doesn't matter if your child is in the best car seat in the world and they're in there until they're twelve and a half, if you're driving around like a maniac talking on your cellphone and running through radars, you know, photo radars, it really doesn't matter. You know, again, you can be in the most industrial designed SUV and have your child in a car seat, but if you're not driving prudently, then you're putting your child's life at risk in a way that no car seat will ever compensate for.

* (10:40)

So, I see my time is running out, Mr. Speaker, and I know there are plenty of other folks that would like to add a few words on this and, so, thank you again to the members of the House for this ongoing discussion that we're having on this bill. Thank you.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): You know, Mr. Speaker, it would be very interesting to see what New Democrats from across Canada had to say about similar legislation as it has been introduced in seven other jurisdictions. I suspect that the NDP in Manitoba are the only political party in Canada that would actually oppose this particular bill, and it's disappointing because I don't even believe the government understands what it is the bill is proposing.

The member from Southdale is talking about, well, you know, she could have a child and that child could be like 10 feet tall or whatever height that she wants to imagine and at 13 years old is going to have to be in that child restraint or that child boo-booster seat, Mr. Speaker. Well, the reality is, if the member would've read the bill itself, she would have found out that there's an age limit, after eight. So after eight you're kind of cleared from having to wear a booster ch—a booster seat.

Now, common sense would say any good mother or any good father, if a child is small and they're nine years old, well, it might in their best interest to keep them in that booster seat, common sense again, Mr. Speaker; if the child is super tall or—and they're seven years old, that they should be exempted. Well, that's, you know, that's nothing new. Other jurisdictions have recognized those issues, incorporated in the legislation that they have already passed. They've already passed that legislation. It's not like we're saying, let's lead the pack; we want to be No. 1. We're saying, let's be No. 8. You know, you know, it's not the type of thing, it's not the type of thing in which the government needs to shy away from.

So let's think about some of their other logic. Well, Mr. Speaker, you know what they say: Well, it's about education. You know, you hear the member from Kirkfield: It's about education. Well, can you imagine if the government would have applied that same principle on seatbelts? It's about education; we don't need to have mandatory seatbelts; let the public learn.

Can you imagine how many lives have been saved because of mandatory seatbelts, how many injuries have been minimized because of mandatory seatbelts? Well, why not use that same principle of logic, get that, logic, Mr. Speaker, and apply it to this particular bill.

Why doesn't the government see the value of protecting our young people in society? What have they got against allowing this bill from passing, so that we could be No. 8 in terms of bringing it in to Canada and protecting our toddlers, Mr. Speaker. You know, society moves along, and quite often government resists any sort of change. Well, I would suggest to this government that this is a very positive change, and it is something that should be acted upon, and I don't understand why it is that the government doesn't see the merit for the bill.

You know, read the legislation. Acknowledge that when an MLA brings forward a bill that makes sense and can make a positive difference in the province of Manitoba, allow it to go forward; allow it to go into the committee stage, so members of the public will be afforded the opportunity to be able to add their comments to the bill.

Mr. Speaker, there's nothing wrong with this bill. I would have thought it was a no brainer. You know, at one time, you could actually—and I can recall the days when you have kids running around in the back

seat of a car, and I mean running around, popping their heads out the window, taking a look as the car is mobile. But as society has changed, we've seen the value of safety, and that is something, that is something that we should be taking seriously.

You know, I don't know how to take the comments when the member said, well, there's the immigrant community, and they're coming here and it becomes a cost factor. Well, Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that the immigrant community would value safety measures such as this, that when you start assigning, you know, a \$25 or a \$35 booster seat, how do you associate that to the amount of lives, not to mention other types of injuries that could be saved by having it made man-mandatory.

Where there is a will, Mr. Speaker, there is a way. And one of the things that immigrants have clearly shown is that they will make, they, they have the will and they will make a way, no matter what the circumstances is. I've seen, you know, the, the love of kinship and family members expressed by immigrant communities, and it is second to, to no others, no other community that's in the province of, of Manitoba or, in—indeed, in, in Canada.

It shouldn't be a cost issue. I don't understand why it is the, the, the two members that have spoken to the bill, have said, well, it's about cost and it's about education. No, I don't believe, I don't believe that those are, are valid arguments. And other jurisdictions across Canada have acknowledged that those are not arguments to, to be used to prevent good legislation from turning into to reality.

So my suggestion is to the government is very simple: read the legislation as being proposed. If you have a difficult time, you have some concern in terms of the heights or the weights, or whatever it might be, well, raise it up in the, in committee stage. Bring forward an amendment. If you feel that it needs to change, well, then, let's, let's, we're open to, to, to change, Mr. Speaker. You know, friendly amendments are often brought forward in committees. You have third readings. But the, the bottom line is, is let's just recognize the value of what's being talked about here, that being our toddlers, our young children. Let's assign some value to that and, and, and pass this bill accordingly.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to members of the government to come onside and support this particular bill. Thank you.

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 200, The Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Booster Seats), brought forward by the member opposite.

I listened very carefully to the comments by the Member for Inkster and the Member for Kirkfield Park (Ms. Blady) and the Member for Southdale (Ms. Selby) with respect to this particular bill. I know the, the Member for Inkster says that, that the—*[interjection]* I'm sorry, I didn't catch that.

An Honourable Member: Arthur-Virden. You also listened to Arthur-Virden.

Mr. Reid: I, I may have missed that part of it, so I'm not sure if the member was, was aware of that or not, but had I heard those comments, I would have made reference to those. But I thank the Member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Fauschou) for his advice.

Mr. Speaker, it's—I listened very carefully to the comments, in particular made by my three colleagues that I've mentioned here today, but I, I do want to make reference to the comments that were made by the Member for Inkster when he was saying that the, that the NDP is opposed to the safety of children in this province. I don't know where he gets that concept or that notion from, because listening to the comments made by my colleagues, here, was very clear that we're very, very supportive of providing opportunities to provide for the safety of our children in this province and, indeed, for all Manitobans. So that's nothing new.

We have taken steps as a result of the actions of this government, through various pieces of legislation and policies of our government, to provide for the safety of our children and, and the safety of our Manitobans living in various communities throughout the province, whether it be on the farms of this community, whether it be northern Manitobans that operate and live about and, and work on the lakes in Manitoba, or for Manitobans that live in urban population centres. Mr. Speaker, our government has taken steps and a lot of those recommendations and policy changes that we have made as a government have come forward as a result of the Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures All-Party Task Force that was in place in this province and came forward with some 47 recommendations in 2007.

And I'll just reference, Mr. Speaker, some of the recommendations that were made, for injury prevention recommendations that were made by that

particular all-party task force. And one of them that I found that, that was quite exciting, not to say that the others weren't, but that particular task force recommended that, that the government put in place policies and action to deal with those that are riding bicycles in this province. And the, and the provincial government came forward, through the Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross), with a safe cycling program in the province of Manitoba here, where the provincial government provided, or promoted, the use of bicycle helmets for those Manitobans that were of particular low-income situations that needed some assistance with pu—buying or, or acquiring bicycle helmets to provide for, for cycling safety.

* (10:50)

Now, Mr. Speaker, I know that our provincial government has supplied some 44,000 low-cost bike helmets to Manitoba families. I think that's significant. That's a part of their recommendations in the policy that our government brought forward from the Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures task force. And in fact in 2008 over 580 schools and early learning child-care centres participated in our program to provide for the safety and the injury prevention of our children in this province.

In addition to that we have over 3,000 free helmets, 3,000, for the member of Inkster, 3,000 free helmets to provide, provided to the families in community groups that work with low-income children. Now that's, that's important to the safety of our children. So the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) says that we're—the NDP is not concerned about the safety of the children in this province. There is one prime example of the steps that we have taken as a provincial government to provide for the safety or our children. And I will get to booster seats in a few moments if you'll bear with me.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I know that living in northeast Winnipeg—and I know our provincial government is quite proud of the steps we have taken with respect to our investments in green spaces in this community and, and all of the communities of Manitoba. And I know just driving to the Legislature just a few weeks ago, I happened to drive along Gateway avenue in Winnipeg here and I noticed that the, the Rails to Trails program, if I can use that term, where the CP rail line between Gateway and Raleigh was converted into a, a walking trail, into a cycling trail.

Mr. Speaker, I saw literally dozens and dozens and dozens of Winnipeggers and perhaps others that were using that trail one particular morning that I drove past. So I'd say that our provincial government policy has provided a safe place for children and for adults to get their exercise and to take part in recreational activities. And I did note there were joggers, there were walkers, there was skateboarders, there were cyclists using that particular green space and trail. And, yes, the cyclists there that I saw were wearing helmets.

Now I have to assume that they were taking the safety and prevention measures necessary to care for themselves and their children but I must say, Mr. Speaker, this is just another example of one of the programs that our provincial government has brought forward to provide not only green spaces for Manitobans, but also provided a safe place for them to get their recreational and exercise opportunities. So another example of the, of the efforts that our provincial government has made with respect to, to folks living in northeast Winnipeg and that their particular safety.

Now I want to refer back to the comments that were made by my colleagues, the member for, for Kirkfield Park and Southdale with respect to their families. I listened very intently, even though my children are somewhat older now and—but they are still living at home, that I do recall when they were quite young, and I listened in particular to the Member for Kirkfield Park talk about one of her children who is, as we might term to be, in the 90-some percentile of growth with respect to the development of her particular child.

Well, in my family, Mr. Speaker, we had a similar situation and I'm not—I'm vertically challenged as the member opposite referenced, just slightly below average height for the normal population male but the children in my family are all taller than me and I, I know that when my children were smaller, booster seats that the, the member opposite for Inkster referenced quite often, this would've been a problem for my eldest child, in particular, because he was in the 97 percentile for growth at a very, very early age and the booster seats didn't fit him.

So it was a problem and yet this particular bill is calling it, it's mandatory for the children to be in that particular booster seat up to a certain age when there has to be other alternatives available or decisions that, that parents would make, that with respect to the

safety of their child. And, yes, we did use common sense as parents and we made sure that as our child—our children were continuing to develop and grow we had them in, in child safety car seats. And that as the child continued to outgrow those car seats, as they did, that we placed them in the normal passenger restraint devices inside the vehicles that we were operating at the time.

But we made conscious decisions to provide for the safety of our children without having a law have to say to them or enforce upon us that we were required to keep them in a booster seat until they were eight years of age, as is recommended in this legislation because I, I know that—I know there are, there are exceptional circumstances where children will develop at different rates, Mr. Speaker, so I'm not sure how that this would of protected my child who had outgrown a booster seat at a very early age.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I also want to reference with respect to Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation. The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation obviously has a, an interest in the safety of the travelling public whether it be under our PIPP program in the province of Manitoba here or as a part of the insurance operations of the corporation itself for the protection of all Manitobans. And I won't go into the details about the PIPP program because I'm sure members opposite are quite familiar with the PIPP protection measures that are in place through legislation, whether you're an operator of a vehicle or a passenger in a vehicle, or you're a pedestrian in Manitoba, PIPP provides coverage for those, those folks.

But I do know that Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation has provided support for operations that are providing car seats and booster seats for individuals in Manitoba, and I would like to thank—I think if I recollect correctly, the Manitoba firefighters and the Winnipeg professional firefighters association were actively involved where MPI and the firefighters worked together so that if families wanted to have the appropriate fitting of booster seats or car seats within their vehicles, they could attend to a fire hall within the city of Winnipeg—which is my experience—and get some guidance on how to affix or attach those particular booster seats or car seats properly in those vehicles.

And I do know, Mr. Speaker, that there are obviously going to be ongoing program developments with respect to the safety of the motoring public, especially for our children, and that

I'm hopeful that our new car manu—our car manufacturers, whether it be the government motors now that own the, what was once the biggest automobile manufacturer in North America or the world, will obviously be participating with the automobile manufacturers together with our Manitoba Public Insurance and members of the public organizations like fighters, firefighters, to provide for the protection of our children, and to make sure that these vehicles are constructed in as safest fashion as possible to protect everyone travelling inside of our motor vehicles.

So, Mr. Speaker, I have to say that our government has taken the steps necessary to provide for the injury prevention of our children, and I think, with respect to this particular legislation, we have taken the steps necessary already, whether it be in the farm safety walkabout program, the Safe Play Area grants, the bicycle helmet program that we provide to low-income families—or free to those families—and, of course, to other Manitobans, as well, but we have taken many steps to provide for the safety of our—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The member's time has expired.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I'm pleased to put a few brief comments on the record with respect to this.

I have two children: one, Victoria, age seven years old; one, Tommy, age five years old, and both of them are in booster seats in, in my car and my husband's car, and that's the way they travel.

Mr. Speaker, in my opinion, this is happening all across Canada. Seven other provinces have caught on to this and done what's in the best interest of children in those provinces. Once again, we're one of the last provinces to get on board and get the picture of where we need to go and move forward.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's regrettable. I think members opposite should support this legislation, and we would encourage them. They have a choice to do it right now. They have a choice as to whether or not they will support this legislation to bring us on par with other provinces in Canada on protecting children when it comes to the safety in vehicles. They have a choice. The question is: Do they have the political will to make the right choice today and support this legislation?

Ms. Jennifer Howard (Fort Rouge): It's my pleasure to put a few words on the record today about the safety of children and some of the things that this government has done to protect the safety of children. And I do want to remind members that it's not as if there is no law currently. There is a law, and this discussion is about expanding that law, and I appreciate that that is the discussion.

I also want to just remind members that while perhaps none of us in this House have an issue when it comes to paying for and affording booster seats and car seats, there are many families in our constituencies that do have that issue. And I don't think it would be responsible to bring in a law without taking a look at how you help people to obey that law, whether it comes—whether it's an issue of affordability or an issue on—or an issue of education on how to use those seats.

Recently, I was watching a television program, a news program, that was talking about the, the need for people to install these seats properly, and was showing, in very disturbing detail, the impact of not being able—of not being able to install those seats properly and what happens when that kind of education hasn't happened. And I think none of us in this House would want to be responsible for telling families to do something that could then endanger their children.

So, while this—

* (11:00)

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable Member for Fort Rouge will have eight minutes remaining.

RESOLUTION

Res. 14—Economic Stimulus

Mr. Speaker: The hour being 11 a.m., we will now move on to resolutions and we'll deal with Resolution No. 14, Economic Stimulus.

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Transcona (Mr. Reid):

WHEREAS the provincial government has balanced 10 consecutive budgets, including budget 2009; and

WHEREAS budget 2009 includes a debt management strategy with components totalling \$417 million; and

WHEREAS in these uncertain economic times, governments across the globe are making it a top priority to invest in infrastructure to stimulate the economy and create jobs; and

WHEREAS budget 2009 committed \$1.6 billion in capital investments, a \$625-million increase over 2008 and a plan that will create and maintain over 10,000 person years of employment; and

WHEREAS most jurisdictions in Canada are funding infrastructure through deficits this year; and

WHEREAS the provincial government will be funding economic stimulus while still maintaining a balanced budget.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly support the provincial government in its plan to stimulate the economy through investments in infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale), seconded by the honourable Member for Transcona (Mr. Reid),

WHEREAS provincial government—dispense?

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

Mr. Martindale: My resolution resolves that the Legislative Assembly support the provincial government in its plan to stimulate the economy through investments in infrastructure, and I hope that members opposite will support this resolution because we are partners with the federal government, their Tory cousins, in spending money on infrastructure to stimulate the economy. And so their ideological cousins support a stimulus plan for Manitoba and for all of Canada, and I would hope that they, too, would support a stimulus plan to do things like create 10,000 jobs.

Budget 2009 committed 1.6 billion in capital investment, a 625-million increase over last year, to priority infrastructure: housing, 160 million; schools, hospitals, highways and bridges, 535 million; water and waste water. This plan will create and maintain, as I've said, over 10,000 person years of employment. In housing, we are investing 160 million in social housing as part of the largest ever single investment for projects such as Lord Selkirk Park and Gilbert Park in Winnipeg and Brandon Tenant Park.

In post-secondary education, we are investing capital improvements at the University College of

the North, Red River College, Brandon University, Assiniboine Community College, University of Winnipeg and University of Manitoba, and I would think that the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) would support this; how could he possibly vote against infrastructure spending for Brandon University in his community—in fact, I believe, in his constituency—but he's probably going to vote against money for Brandon University.

Highways, building and improving highways with a total of 535 million for Manitoba roads, including the Trans-Canada Highway, PTH 59 North, PTH 75, PTH 8 north of Gimli, First Street in Brandon and PTH 10 south of The Pas. We have increased support of 122 million which has been added to the province's highway renewal plan for year 3 of the 10-year plan, which will continue to improve safety, accelerate infrastructure renewal and help stimulate the economy. We are developing a new all-purpose road in partnership with communities on the east side of Lake Winnipeg.

In health, we are proceeding with health capital construction projects, including the Westman Regional Laboratory in Brandon, hemodialysis services in Russell, Gimli and Winnipeg, the cardiac science facility at St. Boniface hospital, redeveloping the emergency department at Victoria General Hospital and constructing a new Aboriginal personal care home in Winnipeg.

For water, we are investing 46 million in water and waste water projects.

In education, for the budget for 2009-10, our government is launching an ambitious four-year, 310-million capital program to improve Manitoba's schools. And here's something that I think members opposite should support for a reason for supporting this resolution: our multiyear capital plan provides funding for—listen to this—schools in where? Well, two new schools in Winkler, one middle school, one high school; two new schools in Steinbach, one middle school, one high school; one new school in La Broquerie, one middle school, and this includes 3 million to ensure 15 more schools can accommodate students with disabilities; 12 million for roofing projects at 53 schools; 13 million for structural renewal projects at nine schools and 13 million to replace or upgrade heating and ventilation systems in 29 schools.

The Conference Board of Canada is forecasting Manitoba will have the highest real GDP growth in

Canada in 2009 at 1 percent, according to its provincial economic forecast released May 8, 2009. The board noted and I quote: The provincial government is not staying on the sidelines. More money will be spent on infrastructure projects this year. The Province is moving forward with a four-year 4.7-billion infrastructure program to support the economy. This year alone, the Province intends to invest 1.6 billion in infrastructure with \$135 million coming from the federal stimulus package. There it is again, the federal stimulus package. All in all, total nominal non-residential investment is projected to rise by an average of 10.4 percent in 2009-10.

Well, let's talk about the debt. We are the first government in Manitoba to address the pension liability. This fiscally responsible approach has earned Manitoba six credit upgrades—catch that?—six credit upgrades since we took office: Moody's Investors Service, AA1; Dominion Bond Rating Service, A high and Standard and Poor's, AA positive. Since 1999, net debt to GDP as a percentage has decreased more than 25 percent from 31.5 to 23 percent this year. Debt-servicing costs are down over 50 percent from 1999 at six cents of every dollar in revenue, down from 13.2 cents in 1999-2000.

And I would like to recommend an excellent book, an easy read form—especially for members opposite and it's Pierre Berton's book, *The Great Depression 1929-1939*. And just rees—reading from the flyleaf, it says there are lessons to be learned from this timely exploration of the follies and tragedies of the hungry '30s. As Berton makes clear: Canada's political leaders failed her in her most trying years. In the midst of plenty, people were starving or stultified because their own government refused to take bold steps necessary to deal with unemployment, drought and despair.

So what do members opposite want us to do? They want us to put all the money available into the debt and not spend anything on job creation or stimulating the economy. It wants to take money out of health and education and justice and family services and, instead, put it into the debt, which was what governments thought was the right thing to do in the 1930s.

But if members opposite would study history—and I would commend this book to them—they would learn about the experience of the 1930s and what—especially, what the federal did, but what, also,

provincial governments did and municipalities did. And quoting from page 349, Pierre Berton writes: The people were angry because of the authority's grudging attitudes towards relief payments. That was partly Mackenzie King's doing. Like Bennett, he was obsessed with the dogma of the balanced budget, if not in 1936, then in the succeeding year. He raised the sale tax and the corporation tax slightly but not the income tax, and because he, too, was convinced that Ottawa's money was being spent recklessly, he reduced grants and aids to the provinces by 25 percent.

So the federal government had a choice. They could have invested money to stimulate the economy, but instead they were preoccupied with the debt, and so they took all steps necessary to reduce the debt including cutting payments to provinces and municipalities.

Now, since then, I think people—I think there's a consensus, except for the members opposite, that stimulating the economy in difficult times is a good thing to do. It's certainly being done by many governments in western Europe, the United States, Canada. Every province in Canada I think probably has a stimulus plan, if not an outright bailout plan for multinational corporations as in the case of Ottawa and Toronto or Queen's Park, but—except for the members opposite who don't support that. It would be very interesting to listen to their arguments about why paying down debt is more important than anything else including stimulating the economy and creating 10,000 jobs.

* (11:10)

Now, I'd like to go back to the federal-provincial commitment to infrastructure investments. The Province announced a joint funding investment with the feds of over 160 million for infrastructure projects under the new stimulus funding, up to \$8 million for intersection safety improvements at highways 207 and 206 along Highway 15 under the provincial territorial base fund. The governments of Canada and Manitoba will be providing up to \$12.2 million in financial support to the Manitoba Sikh Cultural and Senior Centre and the construction of the new True North MoosePlex Hockey Canada Centre in Winnipeg.

And there are many other investments in the knowledge-based infrastructure. There are too many things for me to expand on or to talk about in detail

because I have run out of time but I'm sure that my colleagues will talk about our stimulus plan and where we're investing money.

And I look forward to hearing speeches from the members opposite about why they're opposed to investments in their community, why they're opposed to investing in job creation in their communities and therefore, why they can't support this resolution. I would hope that they might support the resolution because they've had a change of heart or a change of mind but we will see. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): I certainly won't disappoint the member from Burrows in regards to the final comments that he made there. We certainly don't support this resolution and, Mr. Speaker, there are a host of reasons why.

Mr. Speaker, there's a whole host of reasons why this government needs to be able to understand that there's a difference between spending money and managing money. I think that when you look at the, at the economic stimulus that's here, the governments of the day that are spending money on economic stimulus are at least being honest with what they're doing; they're working with deficits. And like Canada, like Alberta, like other provinces that are stimulating the economy, they are at least saying, we are using the funds over and above our regular operating monies that we would take in as revenues to use that as a stimulus for the economy. And we call it a deficit because, of course, it is more than we're taking in.

Now we've got a government here that passed its Bill 38 so that it could use summary budgeting to hide from Manitobans and future generations and offload onto future generations as the Pawley government did in the '80s; more debt for the future of Manitoba. The member from Burrows failed to recommend, or failed to realize that we've got a \$21-billion debt in this province and he failed to realize that that doesn't even include the \$7-billion shortfall for transportation that this government doesn't even have on the books yet. Never mind the—another three or four billion for water and sewer.

I know there's a number of projects that the federal government has provided money for the Mani-provincial government here to stimulate the economy and go forward with, and I, I will give credit where credit is due, Mr. Speaker. They're matching some of the dollars in those areas but they're matching it out of \$4 billion of economic stimulus that's come out of equalization payments

that this province has got and you've heard me mention that in this House before.

I think it's a, it's a shame to use smoke and mirrors from a government that the member is talking about here from Burrows on economic stimulus. And one of my colleagues, I heard them say that, that, did they put him up to making this speech today? Well, you know, it's an oxymoron to, to look at economic stimulus in an environment of NDP budgets because what they're saying and what they're doing are two different things. The fact that they had to pass Bill 38 so they could have summary budgeting, so that they could even have a \$110-million stimulus debt payment a year ago, passed last October, we're not even a year into that bill, Mr. Speaker, and then, in the budget they come down to 20, then they tried to get away with, with—presently they've got before us, zero budget payments as far as the debt goes in that budget.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

And I, I don't believe that Manitobans mind paying down one half of 1 percent of their minimum credit card payment at a time when, particularly under a bill that the government passed on their own accord, just six months ago. And the—even five weeks after they passed their own budget this spring, they were still stating that they didn't have an economic stimulus and they said, well, we're doing exactly the same as what the federal government did. They didn't know what their numbers were either.

Well, I submit to you that the federal government has now come out, and with a very reason why they increased that debt to \$50 billion last week, and that's because they have now settled with GM, given another \$10 billion worth of stimulus to own a portion of General Motors, at 12 percent, apparently we own now. And that's going to help re-establish union jobs. It's going to help re-establish the company; put it on a stronger footing for the future. Yes, there are going to be huge changes to be competitive with other car manufacturers in the world, and I think that that's just maybe how out of synch things have gotten in regards to that area or maybe it's world trade issues, Mr.—Madam Deputy Speaker.

But, to—for this government to come in and say that they are providing a, a stimulus that's basically based on other people's money from Ontario, Alberta, other provinces in Canada, coming through the equalization payments that we get from the

federal government, which all other provinces in western Canada don't get any of, Madam Deputy Speaker. And so to, to say that we're—things are rolling along well in this House and outside this House, I've heard the members and the Premier (Mr. Doer) and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) declare that, and we are on, on an even keel somewhat. But, if you take that \$2 billion in economic equalization payments out of the budget that we have in Manitoba, our budget would drop by 20 percent, and this province could be on its knees.

I know the member from Burrows might be able to understand that, Madam Deputy Speaker. Certainly from the statements that he's made in the House in regards to this bill, somebody either put him up to it or he has no experience in regards to economics at all, and I know that he's well educated in regards to a number of areas. But economics is, obviously from his statements, isn't one of them.

And I, I would certainly say that, that for him to stand up and say that this government has basically got an \$88-million surplus at a time when they had to take \$265 million out of Manitoba Hydro this year to balance the books, another 110 out of the rainy day fund, which basically it's there for, Madam Deputy Speaker. But also to say that they're taking 90 and tried to take \$110 million out of the infrastructure budget is, is basically—or pardon me, not out of the infrastructure budget, but out of the debt payment that they said they would pay down is a, is challenging the integrity of Manitobans on the ground in our, in our province, at the very least.

Mr.—Madam Deputy Speaker, you know, it's fine to say that we're increasing the infrastructure capital investments budget by \$625 million to \$1.6 billion, and it will create all these person-years of employment, but if you don't spend that money, you're not making any kind of person-years in jobs. And I want to go back to the budget that we've seen in transportation infrastructure where the minister has indicated 535 million, I've said in this House before—the member today from Burrows said that they've increased it by 122 million. They lapsed over \$100 million last year. So, if you even carried it forward, they've put no new money into infrastructure at all this year in Manitoba, in highways infrastructure, at least, and particularly—and that's coming right out of the province's own quarterly statements, the third-quarter statements, carried forward at the same rate, they'd be well over \$100 million in shortfall, the money that they lapsed.

So, this is kind of another nice news story for the government that wants to put out that they're doing something but, in fact, have done very little. And I guess, you know, there is a, a—just for the member from Burrows in his comments, you know, that we would sooner see some debt payments.

Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, there was a 30-year plan back in 1995 when the Progressive Conservatives brought in balanced budget legislation, debt reduction and taxpayer protection were all parts of that bill. And that was a plan to eliminate the debt, not just the deficit in Manitoba, but eliminate the debt in 30 years.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, we're almost halfway there now. If we'd have been able to keep on track, but we've had 10 years of NDP rule in this province right now, and the budget—the debt of the province has, has more than doubled. And we've got nothing to show for it because we're paying virtually no debt payments now at all. And the reason you do that, of course, is, it's be called, it's called fiscal management and, of course, when you borrow money you should set up a plan to repay it.

Instead, this government is saying, well, we're gonna just borrow more into oblivion and put all the future debt costs on, on future generations in this province, Madam Deputy Speaker, and they don't grasp the concept that if you can reduce debt today somewhat, that you can increase spending on future generations. You will have those dollars to spend for future generations of health and education in this province, and that is an extremely sound principle that—but, it's not one that I think the member from Burrows has grasped today in this House.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I wanna say as well that this government has also padded their position in today's society in this province even though they've increased the debt tremendously by going back into the 2002, '03, '04 range or '02, '03, '04, '05 range, in that area, when they raided \$203 million over a three-year period from Manit-toba Hydro in a bill that they actually passed to allow them to take 75 percent of the profits of Manitoba Hydro for three consecutive years. And Manitobans need to know that it, it was held at 203 only because there was no profits in Manitoba Hydro in the third year, and so 75 percent of nothing is still nothing.

* (11:20)

They took 150 million in the first year, 53 million in the second year and, and for—unfort—

fortunately, zero, the third year, and unfortunately for Manitoba, it was a dry year, and there wasn't any surplus in their, in their, in that year, Madam Deputy Speaker.

So, we will not be voting for this bill because the government has not balanced the books for 10 consecutive budgets, going back as early as, as the third budget or even the first budget that this government brought down, and, and we certainly will not be voting for it because, of course, we didn't vote for the budget that they had earlier, Mr.—Madam Deputy Speaker, in the spring because it just certainly is smoke and mirrors and not balanced either. And I've made several comments as to the reasons why it wasn't balanced, you know, and it's, it's a, it's a situation wraps up like this that Manitoba—how many Manitobans can increase their debt by over 15 percent, decrease debt payments by more than 80 percent and deplete their savings account by 20 percent and still call their household budgets balanced? Well, I would submit that this is completely delusional and the member from Burrows is trying to mislead Manitobans into thinking that they're actually balancing the books at a time when he's using all of these other funds. I, I would say that there's a loss of funds—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. The member's time has expired.

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Elmwood): The honourable member who, who just spoke said he was just getting going, and that's what we were afraid of. No, the—but fortunately, we were—the honourable member spoke of being delusional, and it seems to me that Mr. Speaker or Madam Speaker, that it's the opposition, the official opposition in the Chamber here that's delusional. Certainly, if you go by the numbers, that is to say if you go by—no one else is accusing the Manitoba government of being delusional in respect of whether or not it says it has a deficit or it doesn't. Well, all manner of third-party validators have come forward and said that the, that the budget is balanced. The, the balanced budget has been praised, as I say, by all kinds of third-party validators.

It's only, it's only the Conservative Party of Manitoba and perhaps the Liberals—I can't remember what they said—who, you know who's, who have this opposing or perhaps, Madam Speaker, delusional opinion about what's really happening here in terms of, of Manitoba. But one of the things—the other thing, of course, is that their federal counterparts have been part and parcel of so many of the

announcements that have gone—that have been part of this stimulus package, I wonder whether they're, they're complaining about, about the actions of their federal counterparts in this regard.

So, again, Mr. Speaker—or Madam Speaker, a curious kind of a critique of the government. But one of the things that I wanted to deal with today, because I've heard a lot of it since I entered this Chamber on April the 6th of this year, is the critique that constantly comes from people like the member from Brandon West, and we just heard it from the Member for Arthur-Virden. We've heard it from others, this constant critique of the equalization principle that's part and parcel of, I think, of—and many others do as well—what it means to be a Canadian. I would remind—I, I would remind the—

An Honourable Member: The socialists in Alberta have their hands out.

Mr. Blaikie: I would remind the honourable member from Brandon West that equalization payments were brought in, initially, by a Progressive Conservative government, by John Diefenbaker, that this is a, this is a—was a development in Canadian federalism that was heralded by the Progressive Conservative Party at that time, by Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, and then it was something that was enshrined in the Constitution in 1982. So it was a—it was a—it's a principle of our Constitution, Madam Speaker, and I would remind the honourable members or caution the honourable members not to start a fire that they might want eventually to put out.

I mean, fortunately, nobody's listening to them, but if people were listening to them, if people were listening to them—there's people in this country who would like to see the equalization program fall into disrepute and eventually disappear. And I think the language that I've heard over the last few months in this Chamber has been very, very dangerous indeed. As I say, fortunately, nobody's listening. But if people were listening, they could certainly take the things that the member from Brandon West and Member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire) and others have said and start a debate about whether or not we want to continue to have the equalization in this country. So I would say, Madam Speaker, that the honourable members ought to be cautioned in that regard. The other thing I'd like to bring to their attention is it's not the other provinces that are contributing to equalization. It's Canadians who contribute to the federal government, who then, according to a formula, provide transfer payments to

the provinces. So, again, it's quite misleading to say that it's the other provinces.

It's Canadians in general who contribute to the federal Treasury and then equalization payments. You know, you would think, Madam Speaker, that—I get the feeling that maybe the member from Brandon West and Arthur-Virden, they'll be happy next year when equalization payments go down. You know, this is their idea of a good time. You know, that Manitoba's going to have less money from equalization, not because our relative economic status is necessarily changed, but because the federal government, because their federal counterparts have decided to put an arbitrary cap on equalization that will take effect next year.

Are they complaining about that? If they were really interested in the welfare of Manitoba, that's what they would be doing. They would be saying to their federal counterparts, no arbitrary cap on equalization; the formula is the formula. But no, they'd rather come in here and complain in this sort of petty sort of way about the fact that part of the budget of the government comes from equalization.

So I just want to say, Madam Speaker, that I think this is a very dangerous game that the official opposition are playing. It's both dangerous and misleading, and I would caution them against it. Now, as for the resolution which resolves that the Legislative Assembly support the provincial government in its plan to stimulate the economy, well, the honourable member from Burrows, and I'm sure others, will have plenty of opportunity to speak at some length, providing the clock permits, as to what all these investments are.

And I have—you know, some have been already put on the record, Mr. Speaker, but I don't—I'd like to know from the honourable members opposite what is it in the list of things that the government has invested in as part of its stimulus package that they're against. Maybe the next Progressive Conservative speaker—are they Progressive Conservatives or are they just Conservatives? I'm not sure exactly what the status is here. I know, philosophically, it's a little iffy as people with kind of mixed political histories over there—some people who used to be reformers and things like that.

But the fact of the matter is, Madam Speaker, that it would be—I wouldn't say that about the honourable member from Brandon West. He has an honourable history in that regard, and he never had any truck or trade with that sort of wild-eyed,

right-wing populism, not for him, not the Member for Brandon West, but others with whom he now associates had that sort of history. So I just say, perhaps the next speaker from the official opposition could get up and say what it is in the stimulus package that they would like the government not to spend money on. What projects is it that they would like to see cancelled? They're trying to have it both ways.

The honourable Member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire), on the one hand, was complaining about the fact that not enough money's being put down on the debt, and then, on the other hand, he barely got another breath before he was saying that the government wasn't spending as much money on something as he was alleging the government was trying to make it appear they were spending, so he was actually encouraging the government to spend more money on that particular file while, at the same time, criticizing it for not, you know, for not having more money available to put down on the debt.

So, it seems to me, Madam Speaker, that the official opposition here is way out of whack with the consensus about the Manitoba budget, the consensus about what is required in this particular economic context, the consensus that their federal counterparts are a part of, somewhat reluctantly, I'm sure, but, having said that, I would certainly want to encourage the members opposite to think twice about the way in which they're speaking about equalization.

* (11:30)

We all look forward to the day when Manitoba will not be an equalization-receiving province. We share that goal, but the honourable members opposite seem to have a way of both criticizing the fact that Manitoba is still receiving equalization, not criticizing their federal counterparts who are planning to cap that equalization and therefore put Manitoba in a very difficult situation as, as we go forward, and at the same time criticizing the equalization reality, the reality of equalization, the principle of that equalization, 'cause—I, I've heard it referred to as welfare and all kinds of things, Mis—Madam Speaker, which is—this is not the original vision I'm sure that John Diefenbaker had or anybody else has ever had when they talked about equalization.

It's something that many other federalist countries—it's a principle that many other federalist countries would like to, to have, rather than having every state or province sink or swim on its own

without the kind of federal assistance and sharing across the country among citizens, not amongst provinces, but among citizens that equalization represents.

So I hope that we'll, we'll hear more saner and more reflective thoughts about the equalization program in the future, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): I was listening, listening with rapt attention to the member from Elmwood. A member who has obviously experienced a number of, of his years in the House of Commons, and also the member from, from Burrows, who—I don't think either one of them have really had much experience in the private sector, or for that matter have had any experience in making sure that payrolls are met, or making sure that sales are increased and bottom line is increased so that they can employ people. I, I, I take it that that experience is somewhat, is not, is not something that either one of the two members have experienced, which is un—unfortunate because really it's necessary, it's necessary to understand fiscal responsibility, Madam Deputy Speaker, more so than just simply fiscal irresponsibility that this government has demonstrated over the past 10 years.

We're not opposed, this, this opposition party is not opposed to investments. Not at all. We're not imposed to investments in hospitals, and we're not imposed to investments in schools, and we're not opposed to investments in highways and bridges. In fact, those are what's necessary to lay the foundation for, not only Manitoba, but other provinces and communities. What we're opposed to, Madam Deputy Speaker, is mismanagement. And, when you look at the NDP and what they've done over the last 10 years in this province, it's mismanaged our fiscal opportunities.

Over the last nine years, Madam Deputy Speaker, the country has experienced the largest economic growth in the history of the country. In the last nine years we have been blessed in this country to have an economic engine that was driving forward constantly, and what happened with other jurisdictions is that they took that economic activity and they used it properly. They reduced their debt over the last nine years, and I have examples of Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Alberta, New Brunswick, who have taken debt and had debt, and there's good debt make no mistake about it, but what they did in the good years is they reduced that

debt. What they also did is they took any surpluses that they did generate, and there were surpluses because the economic growth and the economic engine was churning, and they took those surpluses and they put them in bank accounts for a later date.

But our government, this government, this NDP government did none of that. As a matter of fact, the member from Burrows probably could understand a biblical lesson, 'cause I do know that he does have a biblical background, and a biblical lesson goes back to Joseph and the Pharaoh with the seven years of plenty and the seven years of famine. And I think he could have learned—he could have learned from that lesson, when you have the plenty you save for the famine, and that's exactly what they should have done and they didn't, Madam Deputy Speaker, quite the opposite. They waste, they wasted the good years of plenty and now they're putting us into an horrendous load of debt; debt that we'll probably never be able to dig ourself out of.

We talk about investment. Well, the federal government has been mentioned on a few occasions and the federal government certainly did, just recently, invest in General Motors. They took a 10 percent ownership stake in General Motors. Now, whether I agree or disagree, it's not my choice as to which way the federal government was going to go, but I hope the members opposite realize the federal government has a 40 percent ownership in Manitoba. Ten percent in GM, 40 percent ownership in Manitoba, and the ownership percentage in Manitoba from the federal government is going up, not down.

Our equalization and transfer payments have been increasing at a phenomenal rate, and what did this government do? They simply put out their hands, Madam Deputy Speaker, and say, more please, more. Member from Elmwood stood up and said, the members in the opposition are going to be happy when the equalization payments are being reduced. No, we're not. But why didn't they plan for it? Why didn't they say over the last nine years, there is a real danger of being so dependent on the federal government? Why didn't they set an economic strategy for this province that was going to allow us to be self-sufficient? When I was growing up, my father said to me, on numbers of occasions, be responsible for yourself, don't be responsible to anyone else. If it's your life, you're the one who's going to be responsible. You make sure that you put a plan in place that's going to allow you—that you're going to be allowed to develop you and your family.

But no. This government decided not to be responsible. It's much easier—by the way, there is, there is a difference between our, our philosophical beliefs, socialist belief that others should continue to pay for their lifestyle. A fiscal Conservative believes that we, in fact, should be responsible for our own lifestyles. We should be responsible, Madam Deputy Speaker. They would like to be held accountable to the federal government and ask for more.

We talk about investment projects. Minister of industry and Trans—or of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) sent out a press release about his wonderful infrastructure projects. I went through it in Brandon, and all of the projects have been announced at least a half a dozen times each. I didn't see any new projects. I saw announcement of announcement of announcement. So they can, they can announce all of these wonderful infrastructure projects as many times as they want. But they can announce, but it doesn't seem they can accomplish. It doesn't seem they can complete anything that—

An Honourable Member: Like the Brandon general hospital.

Mr. Borotsik: Well, Brandon general hospital was announced prior to this government, completed. We've announced the CancerCare, probably a dozen times and there's not a shovel in the ground. We've announced—as a matter of fact, Len Evans announced the eastern access back in 1985, and it was announced just again, a couple of days ago, by the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. They've announced, they've announced the Westman Lab. Oh, I can—I can—I can't even remember the numbers of times that they've announced the Westman Lab, but it's got to be at least a dozen times, but there's not a shovel in the ground. But, boy, all these wonderful infrastructure projects are going to be completed under their watch.

Balanced budget, actually, I find it fairly ironic. The resolution that's listed in the Order Paper, right underneath that, there's my resolution where Manitoba would like to be a have province. While there's a difference between the member from Burrows and my resolution—and I have talked about that already, Madam Deputy Speaker, where I believe that we should be self-reliant, we should stand on our own two feet, we should have managed better and we should waste less.

Waste: \$650 million going to be wasted on a west-side Bipole III. We talked \$13 million on the

enhanced ID card. We talked about Spirited Energy. The list goes on and on and on, whereas those dollars could have been taken and put into not only infrastructure projects, but you can pay for infrastructure projects. You don't have to borrow money for the infrastructure projects. You can pay for it out of cash flow. You've got 40 percent of your total budget coming from the feds. Use some of that money to pay for infrastructure. Don't go out and borrow it.

The \$1.63 billion that you're talking about, most of that, if not all of it is borrowed money, more debt. Debt went from \$5 billion in 1999 to \$11 billion net debt right now. Total debt in the province of Manitoba today is \$21 billion. Saskatchewan reduced their debt. Alberta reduced their debt to zero. B.C. reduced their debt. We increased debt during the nine good years, and now we're increasing it at a phenomenal rate in the bad years. It's wrong business practice. It's bad management. We're going in the same direction as GM. Feds only own 10 percent of them. They own 40 percent of us. Maybe they'll own 60 percent of us in the not too distant future if the government continues to do what it's doing right now.

* (11:40)

Balanced budget: laughable, absolutely laughable; \$88 million in the core operating this year and a deficit, but they call it a surplus because now they've changed the rules on budgets. We now have a summary budget. We can now have a four-year rolling average where we don't have to show a deficit. We can bring in Crown corporation net revenues on an annual basis so we don't have to show a deficit. If there's a rainstorm or a flood or a snowstorm, they don't have to balance the budget because they have a clause in there that says if there's a natural disaster, they don't have to balance the budget.

And the member from Elmwood is bang on. He's bang on when he says there's going to be a reduction in equalization payments. He's bang on. And this government should know that. But you know what they did? In their clause, in their budget-balanced budget or not-so-balanced budget legislation, they've got a clause in there. If there's a reduction in revenue coming from another level of government, they don't have to balance their budget.

So the \$2.063 billion in equalization that this province gets every year, if it's reduced to \$2.062 billion, you don't have to balance your

budget. And, by the way, back in 2003, you didn't balance your budget. You took \$203 million from Manitoba Hydro, actual cash from Manitoba Hydro to balance your budget.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. Order, please. The member's time has expired.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): First of all, Mr. Speaker, I want to say on the record, following the Member for Brandon West, that—you know what, there's a lot of difficult roles in this House, but over the last 10 years, I think that probably the toughest role of any of us is being the Tory Finance critic. You know, imagine this: for 10 years in a row you have a government that's balanced its budget. Now, across Canada, we have a federal government that is running a \$50 billion deficit. A lot of the member opposite's friends are part of that government. I believe, right now, there's maybe one other province in the country that is, has a balanced budget.

But you know, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Brandon West has the responsibility as a critic—and you know, I respect that; I've been in opposition—to get up day-in and day-out and attack an NDP government that for 10 years has balanced the budget and is stimulating the economy. You know what? That's a tough job and I realize the Member for Brandon West is only just getting warmed up in his speech. I look forward to him having many more opportunities to get up and show us how creative he can be because, you know, he flailed around, not just physically, but certainly in terms of the politics here.

But you know, I love the Member for Brandon West because he also, you know, and I realize in Brandon a lot of people are asking where the Member for Brandon West is, but he got up and he managed to sort of imply along the way as he attacked us for running a balanced budget, you know, to try and suggest that we weren't doing enough in Brandon. You know, 'cause this is what I love with members opposite. The member opposite, you know, is absolutely the first to do this. They never get up and say, well, we want you to, you know, to cut this in Brandon or cut that in Winnipeg or cut that—well, okay, up north they do suggest they cut things, Mr. Speaker, but you know, what they do is they have days, and the Member for Brandon West has days, I think, is it Monday is, is a you're, you're, you're-spending-too-much day; he criticized for that. But by Tuesday he's there arguing, and by the time

he gets home on Brandon, you know, on the weekend, he's the first one to go to the ribbon cuttings, to go around shaking things up and say, well, we should be doing more in Brandon.

Well, we are doing lots in Brandon, Mr. Speaker, and we're doing lots across the province, and that's the unique part. We have a federal government that's running a huge deficit and is, yes, stimulating the economy. But because of the sound footing of our finances in this province, we are both stimulating the economy and we have a balanced budget.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it didn't just happen. In the 1999 elections, the 2003 election, the 2007 election, let's look at what the Tory vision was. If we had followed their vision for the province, we would have had reckless tax cuts that would have left us in a deficit today. You know, if you look at what's happening in Ottawa, that same kind of theory led to a situation where even Stephen Harper and the Conservatives had to stimulate the economy, but because of their actions, their choices, they are now having one of the largest deficits in Canadian history. We rejected that because, you know, in the, in the 2003 and the 2007 elections they ran on unsustainable, reckless tax cuts.

Could you imagine if we followed through on that, Mr. Speaker, because the big thing we were able to do in this province is because of the fact that we didn't go the lowest common denominator the members opposite did in those elections. We didn't promise things you couldn't deliver. What we have now is we have the fiscal room to bring in a stimulus package, and I just note from the resolution a \$625-million increase in capital investments in budget 2009 over 2008.

So, Mr. Speaker, you know what, I think it's oppositions that like to have it both ways or a government that's having it both ways, fiscal stimulus and a balanced budget. That is why it's a tough role being the minister—the, the Finance critic for members opposite. But, you know, I also want to put on the record how exciting it is in Manitoba today because of our forward-thinking approach. I was absolutely thrilled on Friday to attend the signing with four First Nations, three of whom I represent in this Legislature of the joint Keeyask development agreement.

That is the kind of thing that's happening, and I want to say to members opposite because they attack debt. Well, Mr. Speaker, we know that they're

attacking development of Hydro when they attack debt because when you build a hydro dam, like Wuskwatim, when you build a hydro dam like Keeyask, it creates jobs. It creates spin-offs from those jobs, and it creates wealth and income for Manitoba in the future. Dare I say that Limestone, the last dime-dam that was constructed is the best example. And by the way, just in case people wonder about what the Tory vision was for Limestone, well, the Liberals called it lemonstone. That wasn't the Tories. They actually didn't want to build Limestone. They wanted to buy power from the U.S. 'cause it was cheaper and there would be no debt.

Can you imagine, Mr. Speaker, if today we were buying hydro from the U.S. because the Conservative vision had been implemented in the 1980s. Instead, we invested in Limestone and today I'm proud to say it was a billion dollars under budget and it's produced close to a billion dollars in revenue.

So, Mr. Speaker, you know what? That approach works. It works in terms of hydro. It also works in terms of other infrastructure investments. You know, I love members opposite on highways because, you know, I remember when I had the opportunity to become Minister of Highways in 1999 after 11 years of Conservative government. Let me tell you the legacy they left.

Their annual construction budget was less than a hundred million dollars. By the way, every cent under accounting treatment was treated as operating. They had no long-term vision, no long-term amortization. Yeah, no debt, but no highway construction either, Mr. Speaker. When they got money from the federal government, you know what they did? They didn't add it to the highways budget, they pocketed it. The cut the highways budget.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Now I won't get into the fact that in northern Manitoba they spent less than 5 percent of the highways budget on the—of the capital program in northern Manitoba. But you know what? When we got in, we not only improved the highways in northern—but across the province and what we did is we invested. We developed part B capital. We actually have a 10-year highway program. Came out of Vision 2020, a process that brought together Manitobans, a 10-year, \$4-billion investment and people at the time thought that was a large amount of money.

Well, you know what, Mr. Speaker? Because of our fiscal strength, we've now exceeded that. Last year, the year before, and in fact we have record investments into highways and transportation in this province. Now you members opposite were concerned about the public finance. I want you to, you name one project other than if it's in northern Manitoba that members opposite have ever said they oppose.

Do they oppose Highway 1? Do they oppose—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Ashton: —Highway 59?

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Order. Order. There's no sense yelling. Any member that wishes to have a, a turn to debate this will have their turn so just be patience. The—order. Order. Order.

The member that has the floor has the—order. Order.

The member that has the floor has the right to be heard. You might not have to—you don't have to agree but the member has the right to be heard.

The honourable minister has the floor.

Mr. Ashton: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm almost tempted to withdraw my comments about the Brandon West, the member from Brandon West having the toughest job in the, in the Chamber, but I think he's making the point, the points he obviously couldn't make in his speech he's trying to make from his seat, but I'll run through the list of it.

* (11:50)

You name me whether they oppose the investment in Highway 1—did they? No. Did they oppose the investment of Highway 75? No. Highway 6, Highway 10, you name it, they don't get up in the House and say, in the interests of fiscal management, we want, you know, this project cancelled in my constituency.

In fact, you know what? I mean, you know, the Member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire)—I mean, I've never heard him once get up in the Chamber and say, cut this, don't do that, slow this down. You know, I love our Minister of Transportation because he captures that sense of members opposite, who do go and swagger into coffee shops all over rural Manitoba. And I bet you they have, as they're pouring coffee, Mr. Speaker, it's all—that government, they're spending too much money. But

you know what? They come back in this House and they hammer away for more expenditures.

Well, Mr. Speaker, you know what? That's the Tory version of having it both ways, arguing that we're spending too much and then arguing that we should spend more.

I'll tell you what. This NDP government is probably the only government in the country that's proven that governments can have it both ways, too. It's called a balanced budget and economic stimulus, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): I really want to thank the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) for bringing out this resolution this morning and to the Member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton). I really sincerely do thank them because we need a little levity in this House, and I realize it's been a rather tough session on the NDP with photo radar, Elections Manitoba, ID cards, et cetera, et cetera, but to bring out a resolution like this, which is pretty laughable through most of it—and I'll try to touch on it in my few minutes of comments on here.

But where it starts out as: balanced 10 consecutive budgets including budget 2009—wrong, not there, \$88-million deficit and that was before—that was when they were only going to repay zero in debt repayment. Now they've grudgingly agreed to pay \$20 million. They should be paying \$110 million. So do the math yourself. We're well over—we're not even close to being in a def—and this is what, two months into the new fiscal year when they had to already bring in Bill 30 because, because Bill 30, they couldn't even balance it with Bill 38 using the Crown corporations.

They're going to drain the rainy day fund dry. It's going to be drier than a well in a drought by, by the end of this fiscal year, given that, of the way—their ability to spend. So we know what's happened in the last 10 years. The 10 consecutive budgets is a farce because if they truly balanced the budget on a yearly basis, our debt would not have increased. But our debt, our provincial debt has gone from \$5 billion to \$12 billion, and that's only the operating debt. That's not the capital debt, and as they make mention in here, all the capital projects that they're spending, there's going to be more capital debt in here, but we're just talking operating debt. So it really is creative financing, how they can call this 10 consecutive balanced budgets.

And a debt management strategy: So the debt management strategy would be, oh, yes, we're going to raise the debt every year. That's the debt management strategy, and it's working. It's working. The debt is rising. So their management strategy is working not very well. In these uncertain times governments are—how does this go here? They're making a priority, across the globe, making a priority to invest in infrastructure.

Look at Britain. Britain is a classic case; European Union, another classic case. Britain is in such terrible shape because they've had socialist governments there for the last 10 years. Their pound is devalued to the point where it's—it's gone so low that now they're printing money because that's the only way they get out. It's the Mexican peso of the European Union right now, and plus they have high unemployment in Britain. So how they can say, well, that would—is that an example that this government wants to use, and perhaps it is. We're in real trouble here in Manitoba if that's what they're going to do.

And they talk about capital investments, and it always brings back the, the—when we were in committee here a few weeks ago the Liquor Control Commission, Manitoba Liquor Control Commission, talking about capital investment, it came out of cash flow. They didn't borrow the money. What a, what a novel idea to do this out of cash flow because what they realized, what the Crown corporation actually realized, is that they had, first of all, they have the cash to do it, and secondly, you don't always have to borrow money to do this.

But as the Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie) was talking about equalization payments, and it reminds me of David Dingwall, that rather esteemed federal Cabinet, ex-Cabinet minister and his entitle, he's entitled to his entitlements. And it's more please, more please, from the federal government. There's, there's just never enough money for this provincial government from the feds. It's more and we're entitled to our entitlements. There is no such thing as pride on this, in this provincial government to try and, and balance their budgets in a true sense, balancing their budget, not increasing debt, paying down debt. They have, this government has absolutely no idea how to do that.

The last WHEREAS in this is funding economic stimulus while still maintaining a balanced budget. You know, in Nova Scotia, there's an election campaign going on right now. The NDP, a minority government—

An Honourable Member: NDP is at 44 percent.

Mr. Pedersen: And the NDP, the reason that they're in a provincial government right now is because the NDP brought down the government because they were, the government had proposed to not pay any debt repayment.

Now, it will be interesting to see what this—and of course, members opposite are hoping for an NDP government in Nova Scotia so that then when they're defeated in Manitoba, they'll have a home somewhere to go in Canada 'cause they have to have a, they have to have a nest to fly to somewhere when the socialists are kicked out of Manitoba.

But there's so many things that this—This government has been in power for so long they just feel they can say anything and do anything and not, and not feel any responsibility for it.

I was in Notre Dame last week, and I thank the minister for Competitiveness, Training and Trade for the heads up that this BizPal announcement was happening in Notre Dame. Good announcement, but, and, and the minister is giving me a hard time as I was sitting in the audience that I couldn't take him to task on anything he was saying, and then I didn't. I was polite that day.

But the minister, the minister told those people in the audience that Manitoba has the lowest personal income taxes in Canada. Now, it was so hard not to jump up and say, that's not true because we actually have the highest personal income tax west of Québec in Canada. I'm sure it was a slip—I'm sure it was a slip up on his point. In fact, in fact, Saskatchewan, and we don't like to use Saskatchewan as the example because it really hurts this government when there is fiscal management to the west of us, Saskatchewan raised their personal income tax, their personal, basic personal exemption, up \$4,000 to \$13,600. Ours remains stuck in the trench at \$8,100.

When Saskatchewan raised their basic personal exemption \$4,000, they took 80,000 people off the tax rolls. Can you—but that's not, that's not right because the member from Elmwood say, pardon me, the member from Thompson says, you should not return taxes. You should only collect taxes. You should never lower tax rates. You should always, always, always collect more. More, more, more, please, more please. That's the philosophy that this government comes from because they cannot get enough money to spend so there's no way they will

ever return any money to taxpayers. They, they just always want to continue to rob from the people instead of having to be fiscally responsible.

There is, there is no way that this, this government knows how to have anything in debt management, and I just—I had a little note passed to me from one of my colleagues, and it was, it was about, it was about socialists so we should, we should, we should try to get this one in. There,

Margaret Thatcher once said something like, socialists do very well till they run out of people—

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable—order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have one minute remaining.

The hour being 12 noon, we will recess and reconvene at 1:30 p.m.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, June 2, 2009

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