



Fifth Session- Thirty-Sixth Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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Speaker*



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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Sixth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ASHTON, Steve	Thompson	N.D.P.
BARRETT, Becky	Wellington	N.D.P.
CERILLI, Marianne	Radisson	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CUMMINGS, Glen, Hon.	Ste. Rose	P.C.
DACQUAY, Louise, Hon.	Seine River	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard, Hon.	Roblin-Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary	Concordia	N.D.P.
DOWNEY, James	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
DRIEDGER, Albert	Steinbach	P.C.
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
ENNS, Harry, Hon.	Lakeside	P.C.
EVANS, Clif	Interlake	N.D.P.
EVANS, Leonard S.	Brandon East	N.D.P.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
FILMON, Gary, Hon.	Tuxedo	P.C.
FINDLAY, Glen	Springfield	P.C.
FRIESEN, Jean	Wolseley	N.D.P.
GILLESHAMMER, Harold, Hon.	Minnedosa	P.C.
HELWER, Edward	Gimli	P.C.
HICKES, George	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
KOWALSKI, Gary	The Maples	Lib.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LATHLIN, Oscar	The Pas	N.D.P.
LAURENDEAU, Marcel	St. Norbert	P.C.
MACKINTOSH, Gord	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	N.D.P.
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McALPINE, Gerry	Sturgeon Creek	P.C.
McCRAE, James, Hon.	Brandon West	P.C.
McGIFFORD, Diane	Osborne	N.D.P.
McINTOSH, Linda, Hon.	Assiniboia	P.C.
MIHYCHUK, MaryAnn	St. James	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie, Hon.	River East	P.C.
NEWMAN, David, Hon.	Riel	P.C.
PENNER, Jack	Emerson	P.C.
PITURA, Frank, Hon.	Morris	P.C.
PRAZNIK, Darren, Hon.	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
RADCLIFFE, Mike, Hon.	River Heights	P.C.
REID, Daryl	Transcona	N.D.P.
REIMER, Jack, Hon.	Niakwa	P.C.
RENDER, Shirley, Hon.	St. Vital	P.C.
ROBINSON, Eric	Rupertsland	N.D.P.
ROCAN, Denis	Gladstone	P.C.
SALE, Tim	Crescentwood	N.D.P.
SANTOS, Conrad	Broadway	N.D.P.
STEFANSON, Eric, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	P.C.
STRUTHERS, Stan	Dauphin	N.D.P.
SVEINSON, Ben	La Verendrye	P.C.
TOEWS, Vic, Hon.	Rossmere	P.C.
TWEED, Mervin, Hon.	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
VODREY, Rosemary, Hon.	Fort Garry	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann	Swan River	N.D.P.
<i>Vacant</i>	St. Boniface	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, May 7, 1999

The House met at 10 a.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

**Bill 22—The Statute Law Amendment
(Taxation) Act, 1999**

Hon. Harold Gilleshammer (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Toews), that leave be given to introduce Bill 22, The Statute Law Amendment (Taxation) Act, 1999 (Loi de 1999 modifiant diverses dispositions législatives en matière de fiscalité), and that the same be now received and read a first time.

His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, having been advised of the contents of this bill, recommends it to the House, and I am tabling his message.

Motion agreed to.

Bill 23—The Order of Manitoba Act

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Health (Mr. Stefanson), that leave be given to introduce Bill 23, The Order of Manitoba Act; Loi sur l'Ordre du Manitoba, and that the same be now received and read a first time.

His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, having been advised of the contents of this bill, recommends it to the House. I am pleased to table the message from His Honour with this.

Motion agreed to.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

**Maintenance Enforcement
Collection Rate**

Ms. Diane McGifford (Osborne): When parents default on maintenance payments, their children become their victims; hence, Manitoba

has a Maintenance Enforcement office intended to enforce collection and protect our children. Yet, sadly, this provincial Maintenance Enforcement office is failing to deliver support and protection to our children.

I would like to ask the Minister of Justice today then to explain how he can justify to Manitobans a whopping total of \$40.2 million in maintenance arrears from 1991 to 1997 or a miserable 51.8 percent collection rate. Manitoba children are—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The question has been put.

* (1005)

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Madam Speaker, I certainly am aware of the efforts of my staff to assist people who have maintenance orders to collect those orders. We, as a government, over the past number of years have brought in consistently more programs and enforcement mechanisms to ensure that if money is available, those monies will be secured to the deserving spouse. If the member has any specific issue on any specific case where she feels that the staff has not been utilizing the full legislative tools available to them, I would certainly be pleased to discuss each and every one of those cases.

Ms. McGifford: Madam Speaker, my concern, of course, is with the policy of this government.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member, with a supplementary question, please.

Ms. McGifford: Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister of Justice to justify and explain to us an 86 percent increase in arrears from '91 to '96 as opposed to a 63 percent increase in collections, and this is despite the so-called tough '95 legislation.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The question was put.

Mr. Toews: Madam Speaker, I know that on a regular and consistent basis our staff has asked for additional resources and also legislative tools to assist in the collection of these outstanding payments. As you know, the issue of collecting funds from some spouses is extremely difficult, and that is why the maintenance enforcement system was strengthened by this government on a number of cases in order to ensure that, where money is available and where people are deliberately avoiding their legal responsibilities, our staff have the tools to ensure that they can collect it. If there is no money available or if people are deliberately hiding assets, that does make it much more difficult to fulfill the responsibilities that my staff have. But, as indicated, if there is a specific issue with a specific case, I am prepared to address that.

Ms. McGifford: I would like to ask this minister why his government is not able to achieve the 75 percent collection rate that has been achieved in B.C. Where is the leadership; where is the policy? What is going on?

Mr. Toews: Madam Speaker, without accepting any of the preamble by the member, I do want to—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Toews: Madam Speaker, I think the member for Wolseley (Ms. Friesen) has a question to ask me.

Maintenance Enforcement Collection Rate

Mr. Gord Mackintosh (St. Johns): I have a question for him, Madam Speaker. Would this minister who believes—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. One person at a time to pose a question, please. The honourable member for St. Johns was recognized to pose a question, and I am having difficulty hearing him.

* (1010)

Mr. Mackintosh: This government, Madam Speaker, is failing to collect about half of what is

owing to children. Its arrears have doubled almost since 1991, and a record amount, now I understand about \$40 million, is owing. So families are often forced into poverty, onto welfare, and then only to deal with the infamous brick wall of this government's maintenance enforcement office.

I ask the minister: how can the government and he be so callous and negligent as to be content with a program where you can rarely get through by phone; when you do, you cannot speak to your worker and then will not return phone calls for weeks upon weeks?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Madam Speaker, it has been this government that has been a leader in terms of the establishment of a Maintenance Enforcement Program and bringing in new mechanisms to ensure that people pay their maintenance enforcement.

We will continue to enhance that program and to ensure that the appropriate resources are there. But, as indicated in my answer to the other member from the opposition, where there are cases where there are no monies to be had, it is difficult to obtain those monies. We do in fact make every effort, through a variety of mechanisms, to ensure that where monies are available, those monies are in fact collected by the government on behalf of the individuals who have an order in their favour.

Mr. Mackintosh: Would the minister explain to the desperate single mothers who call day after day and who talk about how they are unable to pay utilities or their rent—a woman last week unable to pay for her daughter's bus tickets—why he is content with this program that even when you do talk to your worker, there are very serious enforcement delays? Would he explain that to them, please?

Mr. Toews: I do know that, from time to time, the member for St. Johns writes to me in respect of specific cases. I pass those letters on to the specific enforcement workers to ensure that all appropriate steps are taken in order to address these concerns. If there is a specific case where the member feels that this has not been done, I would appreciate him bringing this to my

attention. Again, as indicated, our government has been a leader in terms of the enhancement of resources, of bringing in programs to enforce maintenance orders.

We are very concerned that people carry out their legal obligations to their spouses on the termination of the marriage, or otherwise, to ensure that both the spouse and the children receive the monies that they are entitled to.

Crown Lands Usage Policy—Violations

Mr. Clif Evans (Interlake): Madam Speaker, in 1994, concerns were raised with the Minister of Agriculture and subsequently brought to the attention of the Ombudsman that there were violations regarding Crown lands lease policy use by an Interlake leaseholder. The minister assured the complainant by letter—and I would like to table the letter—that the leaseholder would be held accountable.

Will the minister explain why his department did nothing when the leaseholder continued to violate the policy for two years further after the complaint and after the minister's assurance to the complainant?

Hon. Harry Enns (Minister of Agriculture): The issue of the leasing of Crown lands from time to time has a number of situations develop that call into question judgment calls by the advisory board that deals with Crown land leases. There are a number of occasions where disputes arise with respect to the usage of Crown lands. The department tries and accepts a fair amount of leniency in the interpretation of the rules because situations do change. Farmers, cattle people, have from time to time not always a sufficient number of cattle on their Crown lands that they occupy, but these situations are looked at by the Crown Lands board.

* (1015)

Mr. C. Evans: I want to ask the minister: given that an investigation by the Ombudsman showed that the leaseholder was in violation of the Crown lands policy, a policy that the minister himself signed, when it comes to cattle being used, why did he take no action and in fact allowed the leaseholder to then buy and sell the

land for his own benefit two years after saying that the leaseholder will continue to do what is necessary? Why?

Mr. Enns: A policy that I am very proud of, that my colleague the former Minister of Industry and Trade is very proud of, introduced in the Sterling Lyon government, that enabled Manitobans to own land in the North and throughout Manitoba. It is an active policy of my government because we believe in private land ownership, and this particular lessor, now that there has been a bit more detail, who had cleared a lot of his land, spent a lot of sweat equity, cleared, spent days, months of clearing stones off his land, was allowed to purchase his land, Madam Speaker.

Mr. C. Evans: Madam Speaker, when the Ombudsman's findings shown in his letter to the complainant that there were violations regarding the lease, and given cabinet approved the sale, how can the minister justify his decision against the Ombudsman's charge that, and I quote, the sale "on the basis that the applicant was eligible under Agriculture Crown Land policy was wrong"? How can he justify the sale? I will table the Ombudsman's letter.

Mr. Enns: Madam Speaker, my Department of Agriculture, as I am sure most departments of government, in most instances accept or try to correct or review their policies when so advised by the Ombudsman. Certainly, the Department of Agriculture, if reviewed over a longer period of time its track record, we, in many instances, accept an Ombudsman's report, but not in all instances.

I have many instances where farmers, who have a dispute with Manitoba Crop Insurance Corporation because of an assessment of crop damage, are not happy with the assessment, will go to the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman from time to time makes a ruling, but we do not accept the Ombudsman's ruling in every instance, not at all.

Crown Lands Purchase Cubby Barrett

Mr. Steve Ashton (Thompson): Madam Speaker, it is interesting because this matter

involves guess who? You know that rogue Tory that members opposite do not seem to know, all except for the Minister of Agriculture who vacations with him, the person who was involved in getting the Cross Lake liquor licence that is now in court and one of the people cited as violating our election laws and one of the liars in the Monnin report. It is Cubby Barrett who ended up buying the land six months after it was flipped.

I want to ask the Minister of Agriculture, who is indeed a close personal friend of Mr. Barrett, if he can explain why he allowed the original leaseholder to purchase the land when the Ombudsman's report indicated that he was in violation of his lease. Is it just a coincidence that Mr. Barrett purchased the land within six months, Madam Speaker, after that land was flipped?

* (1020)

Hon. Harry Enns (Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, it has been a long-standing policy of this government to allow users of Crown lands to purchase the same Crown lands. In reviewing the situation of the original lessee of these Crown lands, in my judgment and the judgment of my department officials, he qualified for such a purchase.

Mr. Ashton: Well, I would like to ask the Premier (Mr. Filmon), Madam Speaker, who by the way signed the Order-in-Council which transferred the land, whether the Premier will explain whether it was indeed just a coincidence that Mr. Barrett ended up purchasing this land within months after the individual who had the lease was in violation of the lease according to the Ombudsman. Will he indicate that once again this is another example of Mr. Barrett receiving favouritism and treatment from this government that no other Manitoban would get, that he only got because of his Tory connections?

Mr. Enns: Madam Speaker, the land was not sold to Mr. Barrett. The government sold the Crown land to a lessor who had held that Crown land for some 25 years, 30 years, who had put a lot of sweat equity into developing that land, removed rocks and stones and built fences

around that land. That is the person that the land was sold to. Subsequent action on the owner of that land surely cannot be held accountable by anybody in this government.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Ashton: My final supplementary: once again, it is the Premier (Mr. Filmon), who signed this Order-in-Council, and I want to ask the Premier if Mr. Barrett used his political connections, that whether the Premier even—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Point of Order

Hon. Darren Praznik (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, as we have been listening to the exchanges back and forth, the members opposite are trying to imply that there is an Order-in-Council in which Crown land was sold to a Mr. Cubby Barrett. We have heard the Minister of Agriculture clearly indicate that that is not the case. Surely, to misrepresent the facts in such a way, to twist them, to imply to members of the media and the public that there was a sale of Crown land to an individual that did not in fact occur, surely to goodness must offend the rules of this House.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I did not hear what the honourable government House leader's point of order was. I heard an explanation regarding same. For clarification, I wonder if I might ask that the honourable government—

Mr. Praznik: Madam Speaker, the member is coming to this House with information and making the implication by the questions that he is asking that there was an Order-in-Council issued by this government in selling land to Mr. Cubby Barrett. I would ask him to please provide the name of the person who has actually received the land, because it is not Mr. Cubby Barrett. By implication, the member I believe is misleading this House.

Mr. Ashton: On the same point of order. It is obvious that the government House leader was not listening, because if he would have cared to

listen to the questions that we put forth, Mr. Malkowich received the land that was flipped within months to Mr. Barrett.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Ashton: The purchase of the land was not, Madam Speaker—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Ashton: Further on the point, Madam Speaker—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

* (1025)

Madam Speaker: Order, please. On a new point of order?

Mr. Ashton: Further, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: No. Each member is allowed to speak once to a single point of order. I have not dealt with the initial point of order.

On the point of order raised by the honourable government House leader, with the greatest respect, there was no point of order. It was clearly a dispute over the facts.

* * *

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Thompson, to pose his final supplementary question.

Mr. Ashton: My final supplementary, once again to the Premier. Given the clear fact, Madam Speaker, this was not an appropriate purchase to begin with, I would like to ask the Premier (Mr. Filmon) what investigation he did of the Minister of Agriculture's, I would say, direct conflict of interest with a personal friend, who within months—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The question has been put.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I would like to remind—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I would like to remind the honourable member for Thompson that a supplementary question is to consist of a single sentence framing a question. This is not a time for debate.

Mr. Enns: Madam Speaker, shades of Joe McCarthy.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Enns: Shades of Joe McCarthy.

Madam Speaker, as I indicated in my first answer, there is often a competition and a dispute surrounding the acquisition and the use of Crown lands; that is why we have a Crown Lands advisory board.

The former NDP Minister of Agriculture's friend, Mr. Bill Uruski's neighbour, wanted, coveted this particular piece of land that this Mr. Malkowich had as a lessor for some 25 to 30 years. He came to me on one occasion and asked to be able to have the permission to purchase the land, and I allowed that and recommended that it should happen.

I did not deal with Mr. Barrett. I did not know of Mr. Barrett's interest in this land at the time.

Lower Tax Commission Property Taxes

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Speaker, over the past 10 years, we have seen a growing reliance of funding public education on our property tax. The government has assisted greatly in seeing property tax increases over the years. Then they formed the Lower Tax Commission in which already it is somewhat biased in the sense you have the former Minister of Finance, Clayton Manness, now outright

virtually indicating that property tax is not necessarily a high priority.

My question to the Minister of Finance is: can we give this new tax reduction committee any credibility towards reducing or providing any form of property tax relief in the future?

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Madam Speaker, given that the member opposite has put a number of things on the record that are not accurate—I was at the news conference and heard the various comments made; he was not, so he might be perhaps misled by just taking things out of context.

I firstly make the point that we as a government for the past 11 years have not added to the property tax load in terms of the ESL. It has not increased, unlike the days when the New Democrats were in office and they increased the ESL, the Education Support Levy, massively during their period of time. We have not increased that portion of the property tax.

I would also say that Mr. Manness is one of three individuals on the commission. He has a responsibility to include as part of their deliberations all the various forms of taxation in which the province is involved, and that is clearly stated out in his terms of reference. He indicated that although he had a bias towards tax credits. The fact of the matter is that the commission would look at all of those issues. That is part of their mandate in bringing a report back to government.

* (1030)

Education System Funding—Property Taxes

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): I wonder how the Premier can justify—and the question to the Premier is: how can, on one hand, the Premier say that he is not responsible for property tax increases when in fact they clawed back the property tax, and, in fact, they have been freezing and decreasing the funding to public education? Does he not realize that did have an impact on the property tax people are paying today?

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): The member opposite should know this, that in terms of the

proportion of support for education financing that comes from general revenues, there has been very little change.

In the time that the New Democrats were in government, it went from 54 percent to 52 percent over a period of just about seven years, and since then it has gone from 52 percent to 49 percent. So it remains approximately 50 percent coming from general revenues. That has not changed dramatically during the period of time that we have been in office.

Mr. Lamoureux: I ask the Premier: what has changed since the days when he was in opposition and his party argued that the funding of public education should be coming through general revenues, up to 80 percent? Why do we see no movement toward alleviating the property tax issues onto general revenues for financing of public education?

Mr. Filmon: Actually the commitment was provincial revenues which included ESL. As I indicated earlier, the way in which the New Democrats dealt with it was that they increased the ESL substantially, massively, over the period of time they were in office. So they in fact implemented greater reliance on property taxes.

That is not the issue. We are talking about the difference between the money that comes out of general revenues. As I said, over a period of the last 18 years or so it has changed not a great deal from 54 percent to 49 percent. But the one thing that the member opposite should be aware of, along with his party, as they develop their proposals, is that the money has to come from somewhere to support education. The real issue is that if you are going to say that you are going to take it off certain areas such as the property tax then you have to say where you are going to put it on because the money has to come from somewhere.

So if it is the Liberal position that you are going to increase the sales tax or increase personal income taxes or so on, then tell us that. Do not just try and create the impression that you are going to somehow magically create a better situation by taking it off the property tax. You know that you have to put it somewhere else because otherwise tell the people in

education that you are going to cut their funding, because that is precisely what you are leading towards.

Brandon General Hospital Funding

Mr. Leonard Evans (Brandon East): I have a question for the Minister of Health, and advise him I was studying the accounts in the Brandon General Hospital and noted that the base funding for the Brandon General Hospital was around approximately \$45 million back in 1990-91, in the early period of this government. Today it is about a million dollars less in current dollars. But when we take inflation into account, the hospital today should be receiving at least \$54 million, or \$9 million more than it did back around 1990-91 just to maintain the level of services.

My question to the minister is: how can the Brandon General Hospital possibly offer the same level, the same quality of services today as it did nine years ago when it is short at least \$9 million, maybe \$10 million of what it was at that time?

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Health): First of all, without necessarily accepting any of the numbers from the member for Brandon East, he will note that this year we have significantly increased funding for all of the regional health authorities. An announcement was made a couple of months ago, and certainly part of that was the Brandon Hospital, Brandon Regional Health Authority. I have had contact with the board, with the management there, and they are certainly very pleased with the increase in operating funds being provided to them to meet their needs, as well as the significant capital commitments that have been made to Brandon, and particularly the Brandon General Hospital, in the many millions of dollars to improve those facilities.

Certainly we made a very significant commitment in terms of the operating dollars for the Brandon Hospital, the Brandon Regional Health Authority and for their capital dollars.

Mr. L. Evans: Thank goodness for elections, Madam Speaker.

Will this minister acknowledge that, because of the steady cut in funding year by year over this past decade, the number of beds have been reduced, the number of nurses? The nursing staff has been cut to the point where the level of quality care has deteriorated in spite of the best efforts of the staff, including nurses who have been overworked and underpaid.

Mr. Stefanson: I will acknowledge no such thing, Madam Speaker. In fact, the feedback I get is that Manitobans are certainly satisfied with the quality of care they get in our hospitals, they get in our health care facilities. That is very much a compliment to the people that provide those services in our health care facilities: our nurses, our doctors, our health care supporters, and so on. So, certainly, we have a lot to be proud of in Manitoba in terms of our quality of care. Certainly, Canada as a nation has a lot to be proud of in terms of the overall health care system that we have in place in our country.

Mr. L. Evans: Madam Speaker, he should sit down with some of the senior people—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member for Brandon East, to pose a final supplementary question.

Mr. L. Evans: How is the Brandon General Hospital, which is called a regional health facility, expected to fulfill its role as a true regional hospital when it has been starved of funds for nearly a decade, when it has experienced staff layoffs, a shortage of specialist doctors, had to cope with inadequate equipment and a physical structure that has been allowed to deteriorate? How is that facility supposed to be able to be an important and effective regional health centre when it has been denied adequate funding for the past 10 years?

Mr. Stefanson: Well, Madam Speaker, I encourage the member for Brandon East to look at some of the information that has been provided over the last few months relative to the Brandon regional health centre. He will see that operating funding has been enhanced, has been increased to allow them to continue to provide more services. If he looks right across our health care system, he will see that we are doing more and more services for the public in all

kinds of areas in terms of the services that are being provided.

When he talks about the capital side of the facility, Madam Speaker, the Brandon regional health centre is receiving almost \$15 million for the redevelopment of their energy centre. The Brandon regional health centre is receiving \$38 million for the whole clinical services and building services that are being redeveloped. The Brandon regional health centre is receiving \$5 million for a whole number of changes relative to obstetrics and other neonatal intensive services. That alone, right there, is some \$60 million in capital improvements for the Brandon regional health centre being made by this government. That shows our commitment to that very important facility.

Take Back the Streets Initiative Funding

Ms. Becky Barrett (Wellington): Madam Speaker, in the throne speech, in the Budget Address, in press releases and in Question Period, the government has talked about the Take Back the Streets Initiative which will create neighbourhood renewal committees. I would like to ask the Minister of Urban Affairs today: where are the financial resources, where is the line in either the Urban Affairs budget or any other government department that puts financial resources into the Take Back the Streets Initiative?

Hon. Jack Reimer (Minister of Urban Affairs): Madam Speaker, one of the things that my honourable colleague across the way always asks regarding the finances is where funding is always going to come from. One of the things that we have indicated in the throne speech with the Take Back the Streets program is not only our commitment to try to get a better understanding of where we can make changes within the city of Winnipeg, working in co-operation with the City of Winnipeg but also looking at the tremendous assets that are within the communities there for the groups and the organizations that we can work with.

These are some of the plans that we are in the process of developing and working with the city, working with the groups that possibly have

the wherewithal, the knowledge and the experience that we can tap into, and the availability of looking at the possible catalyst funds or supplementary funding to build upon these resources out in the community. It is not necessarily that it is going to be totally a government direction because we feel that working within the community, working with the community, that is where the results come about. That is where the tangible changes come up. That is where people take the sense of community, get involved and make changes.

Ms. Barrett: Madam Speaker, I would like the minister to confirm then that what we have suspected and the people in the city of Winnipeg have suspected all along is that there are no financial resources for this initiative, that it is an announcement, a reannouncement and another reannouncement of another empty statement by this provincial government. There is no money to help the city of Winnipeg in this Take Back the Streets Initiative. Is that not correct?

Mr. Reimer: Madam Speaker, it is absolutely astounding how the member across the way can say that we do not have a financial commitment to the City of Winnipeg, working with the City of Winnipeg in trying to resolve not only some of their infrastructure problems but the social problems—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Point of Order

Ms. Barrett: Yes, Madam Speaker, Beauchesne 417 states that the minister must answer the question that was posed. The question was posed: is there a financial resource allocation for the Take Back the Streets Initiative? Simple.

* (1040)

Madam Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable member for Wellington, I would remind the honourable minister to respond to the question asked.

* * *

Mr. Reimer: Madam Speaker, in trying to answer the question from the member for Wellington, her questions are so preambled and

in various areas that I feel that it is worth trying to address in totality the amount of questions that she has, because a lot of times they are all over. I would like to zero in on where she is asking questions.

Madam Speaker, there are tremendous resources, like we say, that I have mentioned before in the community: the assets, the groups that are there that we will be working with and looking at and assessing. The funding that will flow from those comes through the consultation with the groups.

Madam Speaker, the member there would like to see us put a dollar amount on it, and then say well, that was not spent or we should be spending more in certain areas. We feel that we can get results best by looking at the asset, working with the community, find out where there is need for possible funding and where the allocation should come from. We are talking about a program that we feel can work very, very successfully in the cities and the various communities, but it would require their input coming back to the government, and we will be working with them.

Mining Board Review

Ms. MaryAnn Mihychuk (St. James): Madam Speaker, this week the Mining Board convened a hearing to deal with claims of claim jumping and other breaches of The Mining Act when related to claim staking.

I ask the Minister of Energy and Mines if he will conduct a review of the mining review board process, including the investigative process and who takes the lead in that process. Costs: who incurs the costs of bringing in witnesses with the view of making the process fairer and comparable to other government review boards?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I remind the honourable member for St. James that it is to be a single question, not a multiple-part question.

Hon. David Newman (Minister of Energy and Mines): Madam Speaker, I have not yet received the reasons for decision of the Mining Board in that particular case. I will, of course, review it with interest, and if there is anything arising out of that decision which would suggest the changes should be made to better the work of the departmental staff, we will of course honour those kinds of suggestions. That is the purpose of that hearing process.

Department of Energy and Mines Claims Inspectors

Ms. MaryAnn Mihychuk (St. James): Madam Speaker, will the minister commit now to making it a high priority to immediately hire claims inspectors who will supervise and check claims, both in the eastern part of Manitoba and in northern Manitoba? Manitoba still has no claims inspectors.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The question has been put.

Hon. David Newman (Minister of Energy and Mines): Madam Speaker, I will not take that as a job application from the honourable member for St. James. However, the—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Newman: The fact is, Madam Speaker, as I responded earlier to questions by the honourable member for St. James, there is a process of hiring of people to fill those positions. In the meantime, there is a contract for services that has been entered into with a well-known and experienced person in the mining industry who is performing inspector functions for the department.

McPhillips Street Station Waste Disposal Policy

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister charged with the administration of the Manitoba Lotteries Corporation Act): Madam Speaker, yesterday I indicated, in response to a question from the

member for St. James, that I would take it as notice and get back to the House. The question she brought to this Chamber was regarding the removal of trees.

I report today to the House that 24 Schubert chokecherry trees were removed from the boulevard at McPhillips Street Station casino. These trees had been killed by the excessive salt put on the roads by the City of Winnipeg during the winter, necessitating their removal. The lights on the trees were removed and are currently stored at McPhillips Street Station until such time as the contractor, Forester Landscaping, has planted the replacement trees. There will be 24 green ash trees planted to replace the Schubert chokecherry trees. I am sure the member could have discovered this herself with a phone call over to the corporation.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member for St. James, on a point of order.

Ms. MaryAnn Mihychuk (St. James): Pardon me, Madam Speaker, I will go for a question, please.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member for St. James, with a new question.

Ms. Mihychuk: Will the minister examine the tree specimens that we have in our possession that are still fully dressed with the outdoor lights, and in fact the neighbours in that area—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I believe the honourable member had asked her question.

Ms. Mihychuk: I would like to ask the minister why he is trying to mislead the House when the evidence has it exactly opposite.

Mr. Praznik: Madam Speaker, I am shocked, shocked. Has the member opposite taken, without right, lights from the Manitoba Lotteries trees? Is this what she is admitting to the House now, that members of their caucus are taking,

without right, lights that belong to a public body? This sounds like it may require investigation.

Madam Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Question Period has expired. We are going to move on.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

* (1050)

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. We received leave to revert to ministerial statements.

Flood Conditions

Hon. Glen Cummings (Minister of Natural Resources): Madam Speaker, natural events have caused us to reverse our strategy from fighting fires to once again fighting floods in this province. We have had a major spring storm that just ended which brought about 100 millimetres or in excess of four inches of rain to most portions of the Souris River watershed.

The heaviest rain was concentrated in areas from Minot downstream to near Souris, Manitoba. Unofficial rain totals in some areas are as high as six inches. Such a storm is unusual for this time of year and for any normal time in the balance of the year. The Souris River is expected to rise back to the elevations of the crest that we saw several weeks ago. In other words, it is returning to flood stage, and those people who were taking down their sandbags will now have to re-erect them.

The forecast is not yet firm, but it appears that new crests will be about a foot lower than those in April. So far, there has been little rise in the river, but winds are affecting the levels. Crests on the river resulting from this storm will probably occur in up to about 10 days. Localized flooding is underway, and flows are overloading the drains. I wish to add that there are several other areas in the province where we

are watching the impact of locally heavy rainfalls, including the areas close to the Riding Mountain and in the Swan River Valley.

I bring this information to the House only to indicate that we will be deploying resources in those areas.

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): I would like to take this opportunity to thank the minister for providing us with the information as to what is happening in the Souris Valley.

Indeed, we do live in a very diverse province where all in one week we can be thinking about getting firefighters out to one part of the province, and now we are looking at how we are going to be diking rivers and protecting homes from flooding.

We hope that the rain is over in those parts of the province that have had the high rainfall. As the minister has indicated, it is in the Souris Valley that there was up to four inches of rain. In the area of the Duck Mountain and Riding Mountain, there has been as well up to four inches of rain. In fact, in my home community yesterday, the Natural Resources people and the Highways department were out cleaning out log jams in rivers to avoid a further flooding of land, but there has been some flooding in the Cowan area and also high waters in the Swan River area.

We appreciate the minister keeping us updated and hope that the necessary people will be put in place to protect people who will suffer from this flooding, no matter which part of the province they are in.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Lower Tax Commission

Mr. Gerry McAlpine (Sturgeon Creek): Yesterday, our government announced an important initiative, the formation of a Lower Tax Commission. Its goals are to make the provincial tax system fairer, simpler and more competitive. The three-person commission will consult with Manitobans through public hearings and submissions to gather input on how Manitoba's tax system can be improved.

Former Manitoba Finance minister Clayton Manness will chair the commission. Tax expert Evelyn Jacks and the University of Manitoba economist Dr. Norman Cameron will be the other members of the commission, which will begin work immediately and report by year's end.

The commission will have three main issues to consider, Madam Speaker: (1) the tax competitiveness, including how Manitoba remains competitive with other provinces and jurisdictions; (2) tax mix, such as whether the existing mix of taxes in Manitoba, including the amount paid for personal income tax, sales tax and business tax, is the right balance; and (3) tax on income, including how Manitoba should deal with the province's ability to levy personal income tax directly on taxable income rather than on basic federal tax.

The commission will also look at key tax issues currently being discussed in Manitoba and elsewhere in Canada, such as the property taxes, proposals for a flat tax, and the tax treatment of parents who choose to stay at home with their children. Our government knows that tax cuts are a key to creating jobs and growth, and we look forward to advice from the commission as to which taxes should be adjusted to have the most beneficial impact on Manitobans.

Our government has taken many steps to make Manitoba an attractive place for businesses, including balanced budgets, debt repayment, and increased spending on priority areas. Madam Speaker, we know that tax policies play an important role in determining the competitiveness of any economy, and we look forward to the important input the Lower Tax Commission will provide. Thank you.

Income Assistance Caseload

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Madam Speaker, the government likes to brag about selective numbers which make them look good. However, if one looks at the welfare caseloads as recorded in the annual reports of the Department of Family Services, there were 7,000 more social assistance cases in 1998 than there were when the NDP left office in 1988. If one looks at the total of provincial-and

municipal-assistance clients, there were 12,000 more people on social assistance in 1998 than there were in 1988.

The federal government has been working with two provincial governments, B.C. and New Brunswick, on a project to get people off social assistance and into paid work called the Self-Sufficiency Project. I hope the Minister of Family Services or someone in her department will look at this very interesting report, analyzing the results to see if there is anything that could be replicated here in Manitoba.

The findings make for interesting reading. For example, recipients were asked what factors kept them from participating in the income supplement program. Most said that it was the inability to find a job or to get enough hours of work, followed by family responsibilities and then health problems or disabilities.

We know that assisting people to find work pays off. At least, that was the conclusion of the City of Winnipeg when they employed staff to work more intensively with clients on job searching. Next, it is not enough for people to get part-time employment since only full-time employment will take them off assistance entirely. For many parents, it is the availability of good-quality, affordable and accessible child care which is the ticket to getting into the workforce.

The major findings of the Self-Sufficiency Project were: that it doubled the full-time employment rate of the program group; reduced income assistance by 13 to 14 percentage points; every dollar the government spent on additional transfer of payments bought more than \$2 of increased earnings and led to more than \$3 of additional income for participants; had a substantial antipoverty effect by reducing the number of families below the low-income threshold by 12 percent; and most significantly, helped working poor families to meet their basic needs.

In fact, their increased income from the Self-Sufficiency Project was used partly to increase spending on three necessities: food, children's clothing and housing. The percentage of families using food banks was reduced. There

need to be long-term studies to see if the people stay in the workforce.

* (1100)

Weetamah Corps Youth Initiative

Mr. Ben Sveinson (La Verendrye): Madam Speaker, as all members of this House are aware, justice is a top priority of this government. Our comprehensive commitment to this area includes cracking down on criminal activity; responding to the needs of victims, and also spearheading and supporting initiatives that prevent people from turning to a life of crime.

To that end, we are proud to be able to support programs such as the Salvation Army's Weetamah Corps Youth Initiative, which recently received \$64,000 in provincial funding. This award-winning program offers young Manitobans alternatives to negative lifestyle choices, including membership in street gangs. This funding represents a contribution to an endowment fund that will provide stable resources for the long-term viability of the youth initiatives program.

The youth initiatives program, housed in the Salvation Army Weetamah Corps building at 324 Logan Avenue makes contact with 14,000 inner city children and families on a yearly basis. We are pleased to be able to offer our support to such a worthy organization that provides successful intervention programs to our young people.

These programs include Kids Zone and Kids Club which provide after-school activities and education for young people between the ages of six and 13; four o'clock youth groups which offer children ages 11 to 14 athletic programs, special outings and leisure activities; Midnight Challenge which focuses on diverting children away from street gang activity; the Gang Support Group which helps families affected by gang activity; and the Red Berets, a team of college- and career-aged youth that patrol inner city streets helping those in need or at risk.

Madam Speaker, all Manitobans will benefit from a preventative approach to crime. This government will continue to support programs

that offer such a positive influence and create alternatives for our youth. Thank you.

Manitoba Metis Firefighters

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): Madam Speaker, last year when we had fires in other parts of the country, Metis firefighters from my constituency and in other communities tried to go out of province to fight the fires. They were told that they were not qualified, so they could not go. To upgrade themselves, they took the necessary training to ensure that they had the skills that were needed when a fire started. But last week, when the fires started in the eastern part of the province, these crews applied to go to work and were shocked to learn that firefighters were being brought in from other provinces— from Saskatchewan, Alberta, and in fact, I understand from the United States, and Manitoba firefighters were not included in it.

I want to say that I understand that we want to do everything possible to keep the effects of the fire to a minimum, but our concern is that many of the provincially certified Metis firefighters have been overlooked. These firefighters have taken the proper training according to the standards set by the Manitoba government, and over the week I have been contacted by these people who feel that they are being overlooked, even though they had the training. These are people from a community of very high unemployment, people who are trying to help themselves, people who have taken the training, as has been directed by the province, and now, when there is an opportunity to work, they are overlooked.

Certainly, we hope that there are not going to be any more fires in this province, that we are not going to have to call up firefighters, but what we have to look at is to ensure, when there are fires in the vicinity, that we look at local people who have taken the initiative on their own to ensure that they have the skills. As I say, Madam Speaker, many of these people live in my constituency. In fact, there are five fire crews in the Duck Bay community who are willing to go to work. It is our hope that there are not any more fires, but we would urge the government to recognize the skills of these crews and, when there is a need, that they are

called upon to have the opportunity to work in the area where they have taken training.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET DEBATE (Seventh Day of Debate)

Madam Speaker: To resume adjourned debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Gilleshammer) and the proposed motion of the honourable member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) in amendment thereto, standing in the name of the honourable member for Emerson (Mr. Penner) who has 22 minutes remaining. Is there leave to permit the—

An Honourable Member: No.

Madam Speaker: No? Leave has been denied.

Ms. Becky Barrett (Wellington): Madam Speaker, I have some prepared notes to deal with the budget, and I hope to have time to get to them later today, but I must comment on some of the situation that I think indirectly reflects Manitobans' response to the budget, actually four questions that were asked in Question Period today.

I think the answers to these four questions show why the current government in this budget and in most of the announcements that they have made recently have lost the single most important attribute that any government can have if it is going to be an effective voice for the citizenry of this province, and that attribute, Madam Speaker, is the attribute of trust.

As politicians, as people who are in public service, we come to this Chamber from a wide variety of backgrounds. Most of us—I do not think there is a single person in this Chamber with maybe one or two exceptions—had any idea at the beginning of their adult life that they would be here today in this Chamber acting as members of the Legislature and, in some cases, as ministers of the Crown. We look at our lives at the beginning of our adult careers and say, well, this is what I want to do or I am going to be a doctor or a lawyer, or I am going to be a small-business person or a farmer, a social worker, teacher, a number of things, but we did

not expect necessarily to be here in the Legislature.

Madam Speaker, because we come from such a wide range of backgrounds, because there is not a test, if you will, an accreditation process for legislators other than the elective process, we really do rely on the trust of those who have elected us. As individual MLAs, we have a responsibility to the people who elected us in our constituencies. As members of the Chamber, as a whole, we have a responsibility to look seriously and effectively and in great detail at all of the duties that we undertake as members of the Legislature. That means for the opposition benches to scrutinize with a microscope everything that the government proposes and everything that the government disposes. That is our job as opposition members.

The job of government is to bring forward legislation and plans. The two parts of that that we have been debating have been the Speech from the Throne, which is the overall plan of the government, and the budget, which is a much more detailed financial plan for the revenue and expenditures for the province as a whole and for each of the departments for which the government is responsible. So the government has an enormous responsibility to undertake those plans and Estimates.

We all then have the trust of the people as the basis for our authority to operate in the Legislature, and if a government loses the trust of the people of the province, the government will not be re-elected. I think that one of the reasons why this government has not had the kind of response, I would suggest, that they would have liked to the current budget is because the people of the province of Manitoba have lost trust in the government's willingness to follow through on their pledges.

Whether they are pledges made in the Speech from the Throne, pledges made in the budget, pledges made in speeches, pledges made in public announcements, pledges made in constituencies, there have been 11 years of those pledges and 11 years of, to one degree or another, broken promises. When a government has that kind of history that seems to be more and more prevalent, that government spends its

trust, and when the trust is gone, ultimately so will the government be gone.

Madam Speaker, four questions were asked today that I think show specifically why this government is way over budget in its trust account, and that is why the public does not believe this government and its budget, as well.

I will take these questions in order. The first question I would like to address that shows reasons for the lack of trust that people have in this government were questions that were placed to the Minister of Justice (Mr. Toews) on the issue of maintenance enforcement, where the opposition critics showed statistics that said almost half of the ordered maintenance enforcement amounts were not collected in this province. The Minister of Justice never once said that those figures were inaccurate. He never called into question the figures themselves.

What the minister did, in five questions that were asked of him, was continue to talk about how the Province of Manitoba is a leader in the Maintenance Enforcement Program when he never called into question the fact that almost 50 percent of the amount of money owing to the children of the province of Manitoba was not being collected, \$40 million. The answer the minister said was that in effect you cannot get blood from a stone. If people do not have money, it is hard to get it. That is true, but if you carry that answer to its logical conclusion, then it flies in the face of one of the basic statements that this government is making all throughout its Budget Debate, and that is that the people of the province of Manitoba have never been in better financial health. Well, if they have never been in better financial health, why are half of them unable to pay their maintenance enforcement? It is again a trust issue. You cannot trust what the answers are that the Minister of Justice gives on this issue.

* (1110)

Then another area of trust that the Minister of Justice (Mr. Toews) showed us today, he—as he has repeatedly in questions of policy that are raised by the critics—responded with: if you have a specific example, show me. Bring it to me, and I will deal with it.

Madam Speaker, these are policy issues. Half of the children in the province of Manitoba are not getting the money to which they are entitled. That is not a situation that can be dealt with by a case-by-case response. That is a classic, conservative response. The Minister of Justice says: bring me a case and we will deal with that. That does not take into account the other thousands of cases of families and children who are not getting the money to which they are entitled, to say nothing of the many women who have given up.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member for Wellington was recognized to debate.

Ms. Barrett: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My basic point on the maintenance enforcement response is that the minister, while not taking exception to any of the figures that were raised, refused to accept the fact that this kind of inability of an overworked, underresourced Maintenance Enforcement Branch has led to \$40 million not being accessed by the children and the parents that are, by the courts, eligible and supposed to have access to those funds.

He says: we are a leader. Well, how can the people of Manitoba trust this government in their budget when the answer of the Minister of Justice (Mr. Toews), flying in the face of a 50 percent collection rate, says we are a leader in maintenance enforcement when, as the member has reported, the Province of British Columbia has a 75 percent collection rate? There is something wrong, and the people in the province of Manitoba realize that if for nothing else than by the response of the Minister of Justice today.

A second issue were a series of questions raised about a land deal to the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Enns). I am paraphrasing the Minister of Agriculture's response, but he said that he, the Minister of Agriculture, did not know about Cubby Barrett's interest in the land that Mr. Barrett bought six months after which the Ombudsman said was an inappropriate if not illegal sale of Crown lands to an individual. Why do the people not believe the Minister of Agriculture's response? Why does the Minister

of Agriculture's response in this question show a degree of arrogance that is breathtaking?

Well, Madam Speaker, because the Minister of Agriculture has to have known Mr. Barrett has been given a lifelong membership in the Conservative Party. Mr. Barrett comes from the same area of the province as the Minister of Agriculture. Mr. Barrett spent his holiday, spent two weeks with the Minister of Agriculture in Cuba. It flies in the face of any kind of realistic assessment for the Minister of Agriculture to say he did not know about Mr. Barrett's interest in the land deal in the context of his personal connection that goes back years and years and years. This is the kind of lack of trust that the people of Manitoba have in this government, and why they do not believe this government's pledges that are made in the budget.

The third question was again questions as there are every day to the Minister of Health (Mr. Stefanson), and this question came from the member for Brandon East (Mr. L. Evans) who has raised issues many times dealing with the concerns that the people of Brandon and the whole Westman region of the province have over the level of health care support they have in their regional hospital. The Minister of Health responded in one answer that Manitobans are satisfied with the health care services they receive. I could not believe my ears, Madam Speaker.

How can the Minister of Health stand in his place and say that Manitobans are satisfied with the health care services that they receive, when they know when they go out on the street and talk to their constituents and throughout the province that the No. 1 issue for Manitobans is concern over their health care, when they know what their government's record in health care is, when they know that 11 years of promises and cuts and promises and cuts and then a little bit added on just before an election is what people know and believe about this government?

They know—if they have done any walking around their communities—that there is not a single person in this province, I would venture to say, extrapolating from my local community and from reports we have had from throughout the province, there is not a single Manitoban who

says that the health care system is just fine, that they are satisfied with it.

What people are saying is we know that nurses are run off their feet. We do not blame the nurses. We do not blame the aides. We do not blame the people who are working for Urban Shared Services Corporation producing frozen food. We do not blame the doctors. We do not blame the workers in the health care system. We give full marks and full responsibility to the provincial government that has made those health care decisions over 11 years.

For the Minister of Health (Mr. Stefanson) to stand in his spot today just prior to a probable election call and say that Manitobans are satisfied with their health care services is just again breathtaking and again another example of how this government has lost the trust of the people of Manitoba and why they do not trust anything that is in this budget that we are debating here today.

Finally, I come to my own critic area, the area of Urban Affairs. I asked what I thought was a straightforward question of the Minister of Urban Affairs (Mr. Reimer) and compared to the Minister of Urban Affairs' answers in this House, it was a straightforward question. It may have been a complex sentence, but it was not pretzelized. I asked a specific question. The government has made announcement after announcement after announcement of the Take Back the Streets initiative. It is virtually the only new thing they are talking about in the Speech from the Throne, and it is also words in the budget document, words in the budget document.

The simple question that I asked the minister today was: where is the money? Where is the line in the Urban Affairs budget or the Health care budget or the Education budget or any budget, the Justice budget? Where are the resources necessary to implement this program?

The minister refused to answer. No, he did not refuse to answer, Madam Speaker. He did get up, and he did provide an answer, but it was an answer that again goes to the basic problem for this government, that they have lost the trust and confidence of the people of Manitoba,

because the minister talked about co-operation and working with and talking with local community groups. Those are vital and necessary things that should already have been happening and are not happening under this government.

Madam Speaker, anyone who knows anything about working with community groups, particularly community groups that already have virtually no money to operate with, knows that these are community grassroots organizations that are largely made up of community volunteers or are virtually all made up of community volunteers, people who are concerned about their local neighbourhoods, who want to do something, who have banded together in the absence of any effective provincial working with them. They have filled the vacuum, and they are doing wonderful work, but this government tries to piggyback on that.

* (1120)

They say: we are going to work with local community groups. They say: this is the way to go. We are going to put in neighbourhood renewal committees, but, Madam Speaker, when you are working with volunteers, especially when you are working with volunteers who are trying to deal with almost intractable problems in some cases, you have to have resources there. I mean, many people on the government benches must have been involved with local volunteer organizations or local nonprofit organizations.

An Honourable Member: You think so?

Ms. Barrett: I am sure. We all know local nonprofit charitable organizations like the Canadian Diabetes Association or the Heart Foundation or multiple sclerosis or any kinds of those organizations, if they have any resources at all, they hire a volunteer co-ordinator.

Why do they do that, Madam Speaker? Because they know that you have to put some resources into working with, training, sending out your volunteers, or you are not going to get the job done. You need to have that little bit of resource there that provides the seed money, the seed staffing support, and then you can get the job done.

So, again, Madam Speaker, this is another case where there are a lot of words, but there is nothing behind the words. It is, to coin that phrase, empty rhetoric. That is why the people of the province of Manitoba are actually paying comparatively little attention to this budget, because they know why it is here. It is a pre-election budget. They know—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I am experiencing difficulty hearing the honourable member for Wellington.

Ms. Barrett: Madam Speaker, the people of Manitoba know that this budget is—[interjection] Excuse me, I am not at a loss for words. I have a sore throat that I am attempting to work with, so that I can continue my remarks, and no, I am not prepared to sit down. My comments may be uncomfortable for some people in this Chamber, and I am sure some people in this Chamber have been out in their own constituencies and are finding the going just a little rougher than they might have thought otherwise earlier on.

An Honourable Member: Like St. Vital?

Ms. Barrett: I am not mentioning any constituencies, but, yes, several constituencies represented by members of the government today are—their residents are very unhappy with their level of government support.

Madam Speaker, specifically dealing with the budget very briefly, the budget this year promises a great deal of money, additional money in health care, but when we look at it, the 10 percent spending increase in the budget is really only a 4 percent spending increase, because the government conveniently forgot the \$110 million that they added by special warrant during the last fiscal year. So even in the presentation of this budget, the government is not coming clean with the people of Manitoba. So you can have no quarrel with the fact that there is additional money in there for health care, but you can still say, well, they are fudging the figures even as we speak because it is not a 10 percent increase, it is a 4 percent increase, a slightly over 4 percent increase.

Madam Speaker, in the last term of this government since the 1995 election, they have laid off 1,100 nurses, and now they are saying they are going to hire 600 or 650 back. Even if we and the people of Manitoba said, yes, this is a good thing to be doing, this is a good thing to be promising, the trust is missing, so that the people of Manitoba—do you know what? I think it is the people of Manitoba who do not trust this government to implement this budget. That is the problem. They are not complaining about additional funding for health care, additional funding for education, although it is too little too late and much of it is tied to specifics so that it cannot be going directly to reducing class sizes and dealing with hiring more phys ed teachers, music teachers and guidance counsellors, but the real problem with this budget is that it is going to be implemented by this government if they get re-elected. That is the problem.

Madam Speaker, I want to restate the last phrase of that statement, particularly for the member for River Heights (Mr. Radcliffe), and that was if they are re-elected. The member for River Heights knows how difficult, if not impossible, that job is going to be because he is going to challenge to maintain his own seat.

Madam Speaker, I want other members of the House to have a chance to speak on the budget, and I know that we are going to have, I assume, if we follow the standard operating procedure, a vote on the budget in the next couple of days so we do not have unlimited time to speak.

I would like to talk about a situation that I have raised on numerous occasions in this House that deals with an issue of a health concern in the constituency of Wellington, soon to be the constituency of Minto. That is the Betel home project, and it is an example of what happened just prior to the 1995 election. It is an example of why the people of Manitoba do not trust this government to implement any budget because they have not implemented really any of the budgets that they have brought down. They have virtually all the time underestimated the revenues and overestimated the expenditures. Even the Auditor complains about their auditing procedures, and I think they are just now finally

promising that they will make it better next time—really, really, we will.

I would like to talk just briefly about the Betel home project in the old constituency of Wellington, the new constituency of Minto. That is a project that was put together by the Betel Foundation headquartered in Gimli, a foundation that has a long and storied history as a group of committed people who have done wonderful work in the Icelandic community in putting together several personal care homes and health care facilities in the Gimli area.

There is a wonderful seniors complex at the corner of Sargent and Wall. Betelstadur is its name, and it is a seniors complex. It is a beautiful complex that was put up by the Betel Foundation. They bought a parcel of land just north of the seniors complex. They did the architectural drawings. They worked with the government. They did years and years of work to ensure that this 100-bed personal care home would follow all the guidelines and would be a positive factor in the community.

In June of 1994, there was an official sod-turning attended by the then Minister of Finance, the member of the Icelandic community, was attended by the Minister of Health, was attended by a number of dignitaries, and I was honoured as the MLA for that area to be invited to attend. Madam Speaker, it was a wonderful day. The people of the Betel Foundation and the people of the community were so pleased that their years of hard work and labour, both financial and organizational, were going to pay off, because there was the official ground-turning in June of 1994.

Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, the trust of that community has been I think irreparably damaged by the actions of this government in the next three and a half to four years. In the 1995 provincial election campaign, there was a promise made by the Premier (Mr. Filmon) of \$600 million in capital projects for health care, among which was the Betel personal care home. Right after the provincial election, the provincial government said, oh, oh, cannot do that; have to put a hold on all of this money, and we are blaming the big, bad federal government for a cut of \$240 million to \$260 million.

* (1130)

Well, Madam Speaker, the trust issue comes in here again, because the provincial government knew months before the provincial election that there was going to be this reduction in support from the federal government. Now, we on this side of the House do not agree with that reduction in support and never have. The issue here is that this government knew before the election that that money was not going to be there. They knew that they were going to have to deal with that reduction, but did they reflect that in their promises in the election campaign? They did not. They blithely went ahead and promised \$600 million in health care capital funding, knowing full well that should they be re-elected, they would have to break that promise.

Madam Speaker, they did that. They broke that promise to the people of Manitoba in general and to the people of the Betel Foundation and my community in particular.

Not only that, Madam Speaker, they went another step. They changed the rules of the game in midstream. When the people of the Betel Foundation and their community put together the land, the architectural plans and all of the information that was necessary to actually start construction on the personal care home, that was their responsibility and the sum total of their responsibility. Then the government, right after the last provincial election, within the first year, made changes and added a 10 or 20 percent "community contribution."

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

This was a surtax. This was a charge. This was something that communities which had begun planning had no knowledge of as an additional requirement. What I found really reprehensible, Mr. Deputy Speaker, was the fact that the then Minister of Health touted this additional charge of 10 percent or 20 percent as making sure that communities actually got what they really needed. What bizarre kind of rationale is that for another grab of money from the community?

So the end result, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that the Betel Foundation could not afford to put in place that project. The ground has now actually been broken for that project, and it was four and a half years late—four and a half years late. How many people in the last four and a half years who have spent days if not weeks lying in hallways of overcrowded hospitals would have found a bed in a hospital if those hundred beds at Betel Home had been built when they were promised to have been built? I venture to say in the hundreds if not the thousands.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am going to close my comments now. I just wanted to put on the record why the people in the province of Manitoba do not believe this government's budget. They do not necessarily oppose the budget, but they know that this government, the current government, will not be trusted to implement these statements in this budget, because it is not the budget itself, it is the people who propose the budget.

The people of Manitoba do not trust this government and very shortly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they are going to turf this government out on its well-deserved ear. Thank you.

Mr. Denis Rocan (Gladstone): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today and speak in response to my government's 1999-2000 budget. It will bring many benefits to the people of the Gladstone and indeed the new Carman constituencies and all Manitobans. We are a government with vision and foresight. We have articulated clear and definite goals for this province, and we have accomplished what we have set out to do. This budget will help us as we continue the progress we have made and prepare Manitobans to enter the 21st Century.

My government has a proven leadership ability and the continued energy to achieve great things for this province, and this budget sets out the framework for how we intend to do this. This budget reflects the priorities of Manitobans. We met with the people from all parts of the province and asked them what they felt was important. People from Dauphin to Russell to Ste. Agathe told us that in addition to health care and education, they valued financial

responsibility and sound management. This budget proves that we can provide all of these things to them.

Yet we are not merely contributing funds to important spending areas like health and education, we are going beyond this by spending strategically and continually improving our social programs so that they continue to provide high levels of service. Perhaps no better area illustrates this philosophy than our commitment to health care. We are proud of our constantly increasing commitment to this area. We devote more than 35 percent of our provincial resources to this area, and since we took office we have increased health care spending by an impressive 60 percent.

This year alone, we are adding \$194 million to the health care system, yet we know that it is not enough to pour money into the system. We know that we have to spend in a way that will help us achieve the best results for the health of all Manitobans. My government has a plan in place to ensure that this happens. The health care system is facing a much different reality than it did when the system was introduced some 40 years ago. We must contend with an aging population that is putting certain strains on the system at the same time as we try to introduce costly diagnostic equipment.

To address these new challenges, we had to change our approach and use resources in the wisest way possible. We have set up regional health authorities in rural and northern Manitoba which help us reduce duplication and overlap in service delivery and consolidate important health care resources between communities. RHAs are helping us ensure the logical use and local control of health care resources. This was a bold and important step we took, but it is definitely paying off.

We are also seeing impressive results in our attempts to provide care for an aging population. These people do require specific care, but they do not require hospitalization. Since we formed government, over 900 personal care home beds have been added to the system, and this budget sees the provision of an additional \$20.5 million for home care, bringing our total commitment for this program to \$147 million. We can be

proud of our home care system. It allows us to provide high-quality services for Manitobans in comfortable surroundings while they maintain independence.

For those who do require prolonged hospital care, we will spend an additional \$15 million on long-term care services. The combination of these initiatives helps us reserve hospital beds for people who need them. To further improve access to services and care, we are directing \$5 million in additional funding for the purchase of new medical equipment such as CT scanners. This will increase access to diagnostic procedures and help reduce waiting lists. This goal will also be facilitated by the \$62 million we are adding to funds for acute care procedures. Hospitals will see their surgical capabilities greatly enhanced. Every day we are treating more and more Manitobans, whether it be for mammograms, dialysis or hip and knee replacements. We are achieving great results in health care and our work has only just begun.

We will continue to devote the necessary funds to health care while looking at the system with a long-term perspective. Maintaining the integrity of health care buildings and upgrading facilities is something else this government has committed itself to and something we are carrying out.

As a component of our 1999-2000 health capital project, my government announced that it will study the costs to replace the Notre Dame health centre. I, along with my constituents, were extremely pleased to learn that a new health care facility will be built in Carberry. This new health care centre will replace the existing Carberry Hospital. This building served our community well in its time, but it is no longer adequate to meet our needs. Our new facility will house 10 beds for a variety of needs, six beds for personal care, an emergency room, diagnostic and imaging services, plus kitchen and laundry.

* (1140)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the people in Carberry were thrilled to hear this announcement and are already putting plans in place for the tender of this project. I want to publicly thank Joe

Nicholson for all his support in helping this project to become a reality.

I have to admit that I am very disappointed in listening to the members opposite saying that we are not following through on our health care commitment. My government has made promises to the people of this province, and we are following through on them. Huge capital investments of this type require extensive planning and consultation and cannot be rushed into. The shovels are hitting the ground, folks, and we are seeing impressive results.

Personally, I do not think health care should be turned into a political football as some of the members opposite are trying to do. This breeds an irrational and unjust fear amongst the public. My government is making wise and necessary investments in the health care system for the sake of the public good. These are not cynical pre-election ploys, they are part of a forward-looking plan for health care.

Our ability to look beyond the present has brought innumerable benefits to the good people of rural Manitoba. We know that the strength of rural economy fortifies the province as a whole, and we are devoted to helping our small towns flourish. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government, as well as community leaders in rural Manitoba, recognize the need to revitalize our small towns in order for them to meet with success in the future.

We do not want to see young Manitobans forced to leave their home communities for lack of options. Accordingly, this budget sees continued support for the Rural Economic Development Initiative. Since it was first introduced in 1992, it has led to phenomenal levels of investments in rural Manitoba and put them on the path for continued growth and diversification. I am proud to see \$21 million in this year's budget for the continuation of the REDI program. These funds will help facilitate growth in business development, infrastructure development and tourism.

My government also upheld a commitment to bring benefits to rural Manitobans through the decentralization of government offices. The decentralization initiative has improved access to

public sector services for residents in rural communities. Since 1990, some 669 positions have been relocated to 61 different rural communities and has provided direct payroll transfer of \$26 million to rural Manitoba. More than 15 positions have been transferred to my constituency under this initiative, the most recent being four positions in the new conservation district offices in Gladstone.

To help attain similar success for the agricultural community, this budget offers support for agriculture research and projects which promote sustainability. The agricultural sector in this province has benefited tremendously by this government's efforts to modernize this sector. As I have said before, agriculture is a bedrock of this province, and we want to do all we can to ensure its continued success.

The Minister of Finance (Mr. Gilleshammer) announced that the Diversification Loan Guarantee Program will be extended until March 31, 2001. This will help producers secure loans so that they can diversify and thereby strengthen their operations.

Manitoba farmers will also profit from our contributions to the Agri-food Research and Development Initiative which will enhance value-added production in this province. Agriculture is no different in any other sector. The progress of time demands that we continue to evolve in order to stay competitive. This budget earmarks \$200,000 for on-farm demonstrations on how to diversify operations and increase incomes. The farm economy will be strengthened by each nontraditional crop we introduce.

Canola receipts rose by almost 40 percent over the past year. Returns for edible beans were up by \$9.6 million. We will continue to assist farmers grow and harvest new and diverse crops for the direct economic benefits. I spent many years as a farmer myself, and I know the challenges and hardships these people face everyday. This past year brought some exceptional obstacles to Manitoba producers.

My government is committing \$25 million in loans under the Manitoba Producers'

Recovery Program and will provide support to the Agricultural Income Disaster Assistance for those who were affected by the downturn in wheat and hog prices. We are providing the full 40 percent contribution to the AIDA program. This, coupled with our directives to the Manitoba Agricultural Credit Corp. to postpone loan payment collections, demonstrates our sensitivity to the special challenges faced by producers.

Our efforts gave producers the assurance they needed to start seeding for this year. They are now out in the fields, and I am sure they are welcoming the rain we have received lately, some two inches as of today. In addition to helping them out in times of exceptional crisis, farmers need assurances each and every day that they will be protected from factors beyond their control, namely, weather. Fifty-three million dollars will be spent on support for crop insurance in this budget. It is absolutely devastating to see an entire year's worth of crops wiped out by a single hailstorm.

Those who do not rely on the land for their livelihood cannot conceive of this. Our producers also need to know that their government is making the necessary investments to maintain our infrastructure system. The abolition of the Crow rate has meant that local producers rely even more heavily on the roads and highways to transport their goods to market.

People in my constituency stated, in no uncertain terms, their desire for a reliable and safe highway system. In fact, a solid infrastructure system benefits all Manitobans by enhancing safety and attracting investments to our province. The recognition of these factors led my government to contribute \$10 million more to the 1999-2000 Highway Construction Program. This announcement will allow for many highways and infrastructure improvement programs in my constituency.

For instance, improvements will be undertaken on the intersection at Midwest Foods and the ADM Plant on PTH 5, south of Carberry. Several stretches of highway will receive pavement covering and sealcoat finishing to improve safety conditions. The efforts of our government in regard to highway infrastructure

are commendable, but I would again call on the federal government to make a fair contribution to our roads. They are certainly not opposed to collecting huge amounts of revenue in gasoline revenues, but they seem highly reluctant to reinvest any of these funds in our province. This to me is a great injustice to all Manitobans.

I think all of these accomplishments and spending commitments bear testament to the strength and endurance of this government. I think we should take the greatest amount of pride in the way we have turned this province's finances around, as this has enabled us to make all of these important investments in the people of Manitoba.

This is our fifth consecutive balanced budget, with a surplus of \$21 million. We are making significant progress in paying down a debt which was placing a slow and steady chokehold on our financial options. Our progress in restoring order to our finances has been recognized by an upgrading of our credit levels, as well as widespread praise from various financial institutions.

We have seen a substantial increase in investor confidence, and this brings direct and long-lasting benefits to all Manitobans. As we repaired our financial capabilities, we witnessed spectacular improvements to the quality of life in Manitoba. Manitoba now boasts the lowest unemployment rate in Canada, the lowest we have seen in 20 years, and our youth employment rate is considerably higher than the Canadian average.

In the past two years, employment in Manitoba rose by 24,700 jobs, and family incomes have witnessed a considerable increase. We are branching out into new and exciting sectors of the economy, and we are now a leader in many sectors of manufacturing. All of these attainments are improving the quality of life for Manitoba families. These are indeed impressive accomplishments, but this government has never been content to rest on its laurels. We will continue to aggressively pursue new opportunities and maintain Manitoba's reputation as a great location to do business.

*(1150)

The tax reductions we introduced in this budget will benefit Manitoba families by leaving more money in their pockets and enhancing the overall economic situation of the province. We have to remain competitive in order to attract businesses to our province. We are lowering personal income taxes by 3 percent over the course of the next eight months. This amounts to considerable savings, particularly for Manitoba families and seniors. The provincial retail sales tax exemption limit will be raised from \$100 to \$150 in further consideration of families' finances.

This government recognizes the increasingly significant contributions that small businesses are making to the provincial economy. Accordingly, we are lowering the small business income tax rate from 9 percent to 5 percent by the year 2002. Five percent will be the lowest small business tax rate in the country, yet another example of how Manitoba leads the way. This will encourage job creation and growth for Manitoba small businesses and will help them become an even greater force in the economy. We will continue to study the issue of taxation and to contemplate ways to make our provincial tax scheme more competitive and attractive under the framework of the Lower Tax Commission we are establishing.

I ask you and all members of the House, do these initiatives sound like the work of a tired government? I do not think so. We are primed and ready to meet the challenges and opportunities presented by evolution and change. It takes vision and experience to lead, and this government has both. We have carefully considered plans for the future viability of health care and education which brings me to my most important point. I could speak for days about the accomplishments of this government and our plans for the future, but what we need to focus on is the rationale behind these plans. Why are we making these investment decisions in health care, education, justice and economic stimulation? What motivates this government? It is simple. It is all about kids.

The future of this province depends on the opportunities we create for our children. Not only do we need to prepare our kids for the

future, we need to make sure Manitoba is a place they can call home. We need a health care system that is the best in the country. We need safe streets for our kids to play in. When our young people graduate from college, we need to do everything in our power to provide them with more jobs, with better jobs.

This budget, this government, is about building the infrastructure for the new economy. It is about tax cuts that ensure we remain competitive. It is about giving our children the tools they need to compete in the new economy. It is about providing safe streets, a safe environment and freedom from fear. It is about a health care system that is there when you need it the most. But most of all, this government is about the future, a vision for the future.

All of these successes would be hollow victories, indeed, if our children were leaving, but they are not, not anymore. Our children are not just staying here to work and raise their families, they are coming home in droves, and that is what this budget is all about, the future. Our children see it, our province sees it, and this government has the vision to see it, too. That is why I am proud to stand here today and voice my support for this visionary budget. There has never been a better time to live in this province, and I am proud to be a part of it.

I want to take a few moments to thank the people in the Gladstone constituency who have elected me in 1990 and again in 1995. I had two elections in Gladstone and also two elections, one in 1986 and 1988, in Turtle Mountain. So I have had two in Turtle Mountain; I have had two in Gladstone. I have had great constituents to represent. A mega thank you to all the workers and the executive members that I have had the pleasure and the opportunity to work with over the years.

Now, as we enter into the new millennium, I have the good fortune of being the Conservative candidate for the newly formed Carman constituency. Anita and myself and our team of supporters look forward to the opportunity to meet people in the new community that we will have such as Kane, Myrtle, Roland, Jordan, Rosebank, Miami, Deerwood, Homewood, Carman, Graysville, Roseisle, Fannystelle,

Culross, Elm Creek, Haywood, St. Claude, Layland, Long Plain and Dakota Plains. These will join my base of Cardinal, Notre Dame, Altamont, St. Leon, Somerset, Rathwell, Treherne, Swan Lake, Bruxelles, St. Alphonse, Mariapolis, Cypress River and Holland.

I want to close with a quote from Abraham Lincoln. The quote is: "You cannot bring about prosperity by discouraging thrift. You cannot strengthen the weak by weakening the strong. You cannot help the wage earner by pulling down the wage payer. You cannot further the brotherhood of man by encouraging class hatred. You cannot help the poor by destroying the rich. You cannot keep out of trouble by spending more than you earn. You cannot build character and courage by taking away man's initiative and independence. You cannot help men permanently by doing for them what they could and should do for themselves." That is a quote by Abraham Lincoln.

I thank you very much for giving me those few moments.

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise once again and add my comments about the 1999-2000 Manitoba budget, this government's latest budget, and hopefully last. I have looked through this budget document and I have comments about a number of issues involving budgetary matters.

This week, I had the opportunity to attend the Concordia Hospital Foundation annual fundraising dinner and listened to the speakers that were there and were receiving some honourable mention by the foundation for their good works. I listened to the guest speaker, Mr. Roy Bonisteel, who I will talk about in a moment.

First, I want to mention Bill Norrie, who was the former mayor for the City of Winnipeg, who was recognized for his long-standing contribution to the welfare of our people of our fine city and for his many years in serving as mayor. It was interesting to note that Mr. Norrie, during his comments upon receiving his award, mentioned his stay in the hospital not too long ago, and, of course, some difficulties he

encountered as he was lying on a hospital stretcher in a hallway for a period of time, and how he found it quite interesting that when the Concordia Hospital Foundation called him he was quite worried that he would have to spend more time in the hospital hallway again. He was quite worried about that prospect, but he did make comment about the crisis that we are facing in our health care system in this province.

It was also interesting to note, to listen to Mr. Roy Bonisteel during his comments, too, when he was talking about changes in our society. If you want to learn about technological changes, of course, you go to your child and ask your child when you are operating the remote control how you program the VCR, for example, or how you operate the computer. Of course, his son asked him—because he was worried about blocking out unsuitable programming for his grandchildren—why he would not just go the button marked PC on his remote control, and he recoiled in terror, saying that the last thing he wanted to do in his lifetime was go near anything that was marked PC.

So it was quite interesting to note that Mr. Bonisteel himself as the speaker before what I would imagine would have been a large number of people that were perhaps past supporters of the PC Party, that Mr. Bonisteel and Mr. Norrie both would make comments of this. But I did note that during their comments they were talking about the involvement of health care and the effects that the PC Party have had upon the population of this province.

It is interesting to note, too, that this government, in addition to their budget that they brought forward this year, have just appointed a Lower Tax Commission and have asked Mr. Manness, who is the former MLA in this House, to head up that commission. Now, you would have thought that you would have brought in other people to have a balance or an array of opinions for that.

* (1200)

I look back to the time when Mr. Manness was in this House, and we like to refer to him as Dr. Deficit for the number of deficit budgets that he brought to this House. In fact, I think the

budget record, the annual record deficit for this province at \$768 million, was brought in by Dr. Deficit, Mr. Manness, and now you have him as the head of your Lower Tax Commission. So it is going to be quite interesting to see how you balance those two with Mr. Manness in that capacity. We look forward to involvement. It will be quite interesting to see how you are going to handle that.

I have had the opportunity to talk to several accountants in this province. Your government has been talking about the prospect of a flat tax. Even your Conservative accountants whom I have talked to—and they quite openly admit that they have been Conservatives for a number of years—have indicated that if you follow the practice that Alberta is now contemplating with the 11 percent flat tax, that this is going to mean more tax for low income people than it is going to have any balance or restoration of fairness in the taxation system.

An Honourable Member: Well, they do not care.

Mr. Reid: Perhaps they do not care. Perhaps they do not care about how that is going to affect low income people, but it is your accountants that I have been talking to that say that that 11 percent flat tax that Alberta is proposing will not work because it is going to reduce the tax burden for the high income people, and it is going to increase the tax burden for the low and middle income people. So I am not sure, perhaps that is your goal, to reduce the tax burden for the high income people of this province, not worrying about the low income people. But we will be interested to see how the Lower Tax Commission goes about their business.

When we talk about taxation in this province, I do note there was one part in there that is a modest change, that you have increased the children's clothing allowance in this budget from \$100 per item to \$150 per item, where those families will not have to pay provincial sales tax for anything less than \$150 per item. Now, I think that will help families, particularly young, struggling families, as I have many of them in my community who, as they purchase clothing for their children, will be able to have this as an opportunity for them. This is one item

in your budget that I see that can assist families, and it is something that I can see would be an advantage to the community that I represent.

I have been canvassing through my community for a number of weeks since the 1995 election, whenever opportunity permits, and what I have encountered on the doorstep in my community is that when we talk about the level of taxation, the various forms of taxes that we have, personal income tax, the sales tax and property taxes, that property taxes stand out the most in the minds of the people whom I represent. Those are the comments that they are giving to me on the doorstep, that property taxes are the major issue. They get that bill, which is going to be coming out very soon—in fact, I would expect before the end of this month that those tax notices are going to be into the homes, into the mailboxes of the homes of the people that we, all 57 of us, represent in this province.

That is one issue that they have mentioned to me, and that is that property taxes are uppermost on their minds. When I ask them, well, what about the lowering of the personal income tax, they are ambivalent about it; yes, it is a move in the right direction perhaps, but it is not a big deal.

I have gone and I have talked to people from all walks of life. I am not talking about New Democrat supporters; I am talking about people that I play hockey with even. They tell me—because they raise the issue about the budget and I ask them what their thoughts are—it is not a big deal. It is a non-event as far as they are concerned. I am not saying those are my words; those are their words. That is the way they have described your latest budget. So I pass that on to you.

It is interesting to note, too, that you have taken the sale of MTS and the revenue that you obtained from that, rolled that into the Fiscal Stabilization Fund and now have laundered that money through for using that money into the operating programs that we have in this province.

Now, the people whom I talked to when you were trying to sell MTS and were going through the process of eliminating—[interjection] Yes,

well, that is the exact question that my constituents ask. Why did you not take the money from the sale of MTS and put it against the debt of the province? Well, why did you not put it against the debt? That is the outstanding question that my constituents ask. Now you have taken the money and you put it into the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, and you have laundered that money through now to use for your operating plan.

It is interesting to note, too—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Could I ask honourable members to give the member for Transcona the same courtesy that we should all receive when we are delivering our debate. Thank you. The honourable member for Transcona, to continue.

Mr. Reid: Mr. Deputy Speaker, perhaps the members opposite are not comfortable with what we are saying, but nevertheless these are the comments that I bring back to this House to share with members of this Assembly that the people of Transcona are telling me when I talk to them on the doorstep. So I am relating to you what those comments have been to me. If you want, I know members opposite, they are welcome to come to Transcona and talk to the people of Transcona anytime you would like. You can go door to door just as well as I can, and you can hear their comments that I am relating to you here today.

It is quite interesting to note, too, that your Fiscal Stabilization Fund—and I think back to the 1995 pre-election period when we were debating in this House the balanced budget legislation and that you said at that time that you were going to keep 5 percent of revenues as a hedge against any unexpected expenditures or against an unexpected or downturn in the provincial economy.

Well, I guess the question asked now, if these are the standards that you have set: is that the standard that you are going to expect from future governments that are going to come in here, that you can say that anything is fair game now and that you do not have to have an

expectation to have it at the 5 percent level of expenditures in the reserve fund in case there is a downturn in the economy?

Every one of us in this House should know that the provincial economy is cyclical in nature and that we move through periods of time where we have growth in this province, and we have periods of time where we have some stagnation. In that case, you would think looking back to the balanced budget legislation that you had in this province that you would have some common sense—at least from what you were saying in 1995 if we are to believe your words from those times—you would keep the Fiscal Stabilization Fund at the level that you had set, the 5 percent target.

But perhaps the member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Downey) was right when he said to us one day in this building that the Conservative government is going to deplete all of the Fiscal Stabilization Fund and not leave the NDP one cent when they come to office as government of this province. So perhaps the member for Arthur-Virden was right when he said that, and your intent is to swindle—not to swindle—but to remove all of the money that is in that fund or deplete it as much as possible before the election is held.

I guess the other question that bears asking, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that in your balanced budget legislation you said that if you run a deficit in this province, you would have to take a 20 percent cut in your pay. So if you are now running a deficit in this province of \$83 million because you have taken that 131 rollover and drawn on the Fiscal Stabilization, you are running a deficit this year. Why are you not taking a penalty, a 20 percent penalty in your pay?

I guess that is the question that I have in my mind. Why are you not taking that penalty? Those are not my words about the deficit. You have drawn down the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. You have rolled three years of federal transfers into one. If you are lucky enough to be back in government—

An Honourable Member: That is why they do not have to worry about it.

Mr. Reid: Maybe that is what you are not worried about. You are not worried about what the future holds for you. You are not worried about it.

So maybe the member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Downey) is right. You are not worried about what is going to happen next year, because you are not going to be here. Is that what you are saying to us? That is why you are drawing all the Fiscal Stabilization money down, and that is why you are rolling three years of federal transfers into one.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Reid: You are running a deficit in this province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Could I ask the honourable member for Transcona (Mr. Reid) to not go on a fishing expedition. That does make it a little bit more difficult for me to maintain the decorum. The honourable member for Transcona, to continue.

* (1210)

Mr. Reid: Mr. Deputy Speaker, yes, sometimes hooks are thrown, and sometimes we attempt to reel in members opposite, and sometimes they rise to the bait, just like that bass swimming through the weeds. I think that this government is trying to hide in the weeds with this budget and that they are not going to be successful because we have seen through what your plan is here, and that is to deplete the resources, the financial resources available from the Fiscal Stabilization Fund.

You have taken all of those federal transfers and rolled them into one year, which means you are going to be short on your funds—whoever the government is going to be will be short on funds for successive years of budget operations, unless your intent is to sell Manitoba Hydro and to once again roll those revenues into the operating finances of this province.

That I think is your plan, and that is the plan that we will be talking to the members of my constituency about if you have the nerve to call the election next week.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. You know, I am getting tired of getting on my feet. I was enjoying sitting down. Could I ask the honourable members to not bite on the bait then? Thank you.

Mr. Reid: Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is interesting to note that you have taken the revenues from the MTS sale and rolled them into the operating finances of this province, laundering that money through the Fiscal Stabilization Fund and allowing that transfer of those monies last year and this year to draw down that fund.

Thinking back to when I first came to this building in 1990 and the shell game that you have used that fund, I might add every single year that you have brought forward your budgets, I think shows that you are not really serious about what the original intent of the fund was for and that it is more—[interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hate to interrupt the honourable member, but can I just have a minute. [interjection] Order, please. Could I ask the honourable minister if she wants to have a discussion to do so in the loge with whomever it is she is going to have that discussion. Thank you, honourable minister.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, once again. I continue my comments with respect to this latest budget.

It is interesting to note, too, as I continue, that the government has taken the revenue from the sale of MTS and laundered it through the Fiscal Stabilization Fund and that when that fund was first set up in 1989, I believe it was, that you have taken the revenues that were available—and the Auditor has said in this province that the surplus that the Pawley government left you was a little bit over \$58 million in surplus in this province. Yet you took the money in that year and you converted that by establishing the Fiscal Stabilization Fund into a \$141-million deficit in your first budget.

So to skew the numbers, you have taken a surplus in your very first budget and turned it into a deficit and then you, through your Dr.

Deficit financing, ran successive deficits in this province. It is only just recently you had a conversion where you have gone to balanced budgets, and now you are not even honouring your own balanced budget legislation that you brought forward in this province. So it is going to be quite interesting to see how you react in the future on this and that you do have an \$83-million deficit now this year, and you are not taking a penalty.

Madam Speaker in the Chair

I guess the question that we have is that I look back to the promises that this government made, the Filmon government made in 1995, when you promised to spend some \$600 million in health capital—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I know it is Friday, but there is only 15 minutes left. I would appreciate the co-operation of all honourable members.

Mr. Reid: Madam Speaker, perhaps they are going to have the courage of their convictions to call the election on Tuesday. They are starting to appear a little bit feisty over there. So maybe you will have the nerve to call the election on Tuesday, and we will not have to bring out the buckets of chicken soup for you. So I do hope you call the election on Tuesday, because we are quite looking forward to that.

Getting back to my comments about your health capital plans that you had in 1995, when you had at that time promised over \$600 million in health capital spending in this province, and then immediately after the election, after you kind of hoodwinked the public of Manitoba about your plans with the Jets and your plans with health care—trust us, I remember the Premier (Mr. Filmon) saying, walking along the beach hand in hand with his wife, saying: trust us, we will not let them take health care away from you. Then after the election freezing the health capital plans of this province.

I only look to the plans that were announced by this government as part of their \$600 million in capital spending in 1995 prior to the election,

and then immediately after the election you froze those capital spending plans in health care as hard as the earth on a cold January day in this province. You have not changed.

I look to a letter that was received from the Manitoba Cancer Treatment and Research Foundation in response to the Manitoba Health announcement regarding capital programs. It says in here, that notification was received from then Health minister, the Honourable James McCrae, Minister of Health, that effective immediately all planning and construction of health care facilities, including renovations, upgrades and expansions are suspended. The Manitoba Cancer Treatment and Research Foundation facility had been underway since 1989 in its planning, and yet this government, immediately after the '95 election, froze that project. It was only just recently in the pre-election period for this coming provincial election that you have allowed that project to go ahead, putting at risk further the cancer patients of this province and creating untold stress for those families that are living with other family members that have cancer.

It goes on to say in this announcement that the abrupt interruption will have serious implications for the ability of the cancer foundation to provide radiation therapy and chemotherapy treatments to patients. There is an increasing incidence of cancer generally in our province, and yet you froze the plans for the expansion of the Manitoba Cancer Treatment and Research Foundation in 1995, immediately after the election when you had announced it in the election. You announced it at least twice before that, that that project was going to go ahead. You are so cynical in your plans with regard to health capital spending that no one believes you anymore that you are going to go ahead.

I can only look to the Springfield constituency wherein you had, going back quite a number of years, well prior to the 1995 election, put up a sign in the constituency of Springfield dealing with the Springfield personal care home. You had that nice sign you had up there. You had a thermometer bulb showing on there, and the level of funding that the community is going to have to raise, because

you had a change of heart after the '95 election saying: the community is going to have to raise 20 percent of the funding for that project.

Well, where is that sign today? Perhaps it is in the wood lot chopped up, ready for someone's fireplace, but it is no longer standing in that empty lot. The only thing that we see going through that lot now are tumbleweeds blowing across it, because there is no construction of that personal care home.

I think that is the bottleneck in our health care system, is that you have reneged on your commitment to build the personal care homes in this province, backing up patients in our acute care facilities, the long-term care patients in our acute care facilities, taking beds that are critically needed. You only need to look at the number of people lying on hospital stretchers in our hallways of those hospitals waiting for treatment and waiting for rooms to allow them to progress in their recovery.

In this pre-election period, you have taken the money from the Fiscal Stabilization Fund when we have been saying to you since before 1995, if you have got money in the fund, we are having a rainy period now in health care. You should be using some of that money to build the health care facilities to provide a reduction in the waiting lists, to provide services for nurses and doctors, and not just building up a nest egg that you can use in the 1999 provincial general election.

* (1220)

So you have cynically put at risk the people in our communities who have been waiting for health care services, and you have used the Fiscal Stabilization Fund for your own political gain. I really believe that you do not care about the public. You would rather see that fund built up and using it for your own purposes instead of—

An Honourable Member: It is not true.

Mr. Reid: If it is not true, then why did you not use some of that money last year or the year before to reduce the waiting lists and to make sure that the patients—[interjection]

I will talk to you about a patient who lives in my community. I was over visiting the family yesterday. They called me in great distress. I know the member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) will know this family. I will not use the name, but it is people in my community that have called me. They were indicating that on March 25 of this year—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Reid: Madam Speaker, this is a serious case that I raise. It involves the Ministry of Health. Perhaps the member for Assiniboia (Mrs. McIntosh) is not interested in what happened to this individual family. This individual went to the Concordia Hospital on, I believe it was, March 25. This individual went into the hospital with a sore knee. This individual suffered with diabetes, and this individual went to the hospital looking for some treatment with the pain that he was having with his knee.

Well, the end result of this is the individual left the hospital in a box and is now buried in the local community cemetery. This individual, when he went into hospital, had difficulties with the balance of his blood sugars. The family believes that because of the hospital staff shortages that were occurring and are occurring in the Concordia Hospital that the nurses were unable to attend to the needs that this individual had in living with diabetes while he was there for his other ailment.

The blood sugar levels plummeted to a level that were quite low. In fact, there was an ongoing administering of medication, the insulin medication, to the individual causing, the family believes, his blood sugar levels to drop and causing this individual to go into, what they believe, was a coma. When the family begged and pleaded with the hospital staff and when the individual, before he fell asleep or passed out, begged and pleaded for some attention be paid to his diabetic condition.

This individual never did recover. In addition to the problems that he was having with diabetes, he also had a heart problem. It was

supposed to have been dealt with at the Health Sciences Centre, but there was a problem with the communication between the two hospitals, and there was a communication problem between the doctors that were involved. This individual, when he finally was transferred to the Health Sciences Centre, many, many days later, the comment that was made by the doctor at that time—and I am talking about the doctor that was going to perform the changing of the heart pacemaker—the doctor said and I quote, "a little too late."

An Honourable Member: It is never too late.

Mr. Reid: Well, it is too late for this individual, and is now under six feet of earth, and this individual did not survive to come back to his family. I say that we have a serious problem in our health care system when this man from my community can go into the hospital with a knee ailment and come back out to the community in a pine box.

That tells me that we have a serious problem in our health care system in the way we handle the serious concerns that the patients have and that the shortage of staff to be able to continually monitor.

An Honourable Member: Conrad does not believe that.

Mr. Reid: I know you do not care about this family, and I asked the family if they wished me to—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Reid: Well, Madam Speaker, this is a serious matter. I am not for a moment suggesting that there were not problems when Howard Pawley was in government. There are problems that need to be dealt with, and they should be dealt with in a serious way, but I can tell you in the Howard Pawley government, we did not fire over 1,000 nurses in this province. We did not close 1,400 acute care beds in this province. We did not close a hospital in this province like you have done in your government. That is what you think about the

health care system in this province and the patients and the families that make use of that system.

We did not cut the Pharmacare program in this province like your government has done, putting untold financial pressure on the families having to pick up those additional costs now. In our time, we did not have the extent of the waiting lists for those surgical procedures that you have in this province now, the longest waiting list in the history of the province of Manitoba and of any province in Canada.

You have the longest waiting lists, and in a cynical effort in a pre-election period, you have taken some of that money from the Fiscal Stabilization Fund for your own re-election purposes and not put it into the health care system at the time when the people of Manitoba need it.

It is interesting to note, too, that as a good Christian I would hope that the member for Assiniboia (Mrs. McIntosh) would have recognized that you have a responsibility and pay attention to what is happening to the people of this province and not just use this for your own re-election purposes. When you can take—what are you saying now?—nearly a hundred million dollars for the expansion of the two casinos, Club Regent and McPhillips Street Station in this province and immediately bring plans forward for those two projects.

You cannot even bring forward expansion plans for Concordia Hospital. You made an announcement in this province for Concordia Hospital. You did not even have the artist's concept drawings; in fact, you had no plan other than your announcement for Concordia Hospital. We know you had no plans.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Reid: It is interesting to note if you are so successful in your health care plan, why are two-thirds of our doctors who are graduating from our universities here in the province of Manitoba leaving our province? If you are so successful in your plan, why are they leaving Manitoba and

going somewhere else to work? I guess you have no answer.

An Honourable Member: When we try to answer, you tell us we are heckling.

Mr. Reid: I am not worried about heckling, I have got a thick skin. I have been here a long time.

Why are two-thirds of the doctors graduating from our province's university leaving Manitoba? Why can you find \$100 million to expand the casinos of this province, but you could not find \$100 million for personal care home building in this province? Why could you find an additional \$75 million to pay for a further debt reduction last year, but you could not use that same \$75 million to reduce the waiting lists in our hospital hallways? Simple questions, and those are the questions that the people are asking me when I go to the doorsteps of this province.

It is interesting, that there was money for the government's re-election benefit, there is money for your debt reduction, additional debt reduction beyond what the balanced budget legislation calls for, and you do not have money to reduce the waiting lists for people who are lying in hospital hallways on stretchers 24 hours a day, day after day after day. Those are the questions that people are asking me.

Why are you going to this frozen food system when there is no money to be saved? You are even admitting now, in addition, that when you were going to have between \$5 million and \$7 million of savings, now you are going to have a loss of \$2.5 million on your Filmon frozen food experiment.

So those are the questions that people are asking me in my constituency, Madam Speaker, and I would hope that this government would listen to the concerns that people are raising because I am sure they are hearing them in their own communities.

I will continue my comments, Madam Speaker, when next we sit on this. I have much more that I would like to share with members opposite with respect to health care.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Transcona (Mr. Reid) will have six minutes remaining.

The hour being 12:30 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. Monday next.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, May 7 , 1999

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