

Third Session - Thirty-Eighth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Eighth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
AGLUGUB, Cris	The Maples	N.D.P.
ALLAN, Nancy, Hon.	St. Vital	N.D.P.
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	N.D.P.
BRICK, Marilyn	St. Norbert	N.D.P.
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CULLEN, Cliff	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
CUMMINGS, Glen	Ste. Rose	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard	Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary, Hon.	Concordia	N.D.P.
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	P.C.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	P.C.
HAWRANIK, Gerald	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
HICKES, George, Hon.	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LATHLIN, Oscar, Hon.	The Pas	N.D.P.
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	La Verendrye	N.D.P.
LOEWEN, John	Fort Whyte	P.C.
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MAGUIRE, Larry	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	N.D.P.
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McGIFFORD, Diane, Hon.	Lord Roberts	N.D.P.
MELNICK, Christine, Hon.	Riel	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	P.C.
MURRAY, Stuart	Kirkfield Park	P.C.
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	N.D.P.
OSWALD, Theresa, Hon.	Seine River	N.D.P.
PENNER, Jack	Emerson	P.C.
REID, Daryl	Transcona	N.D.P.
REIMER, Jack	Southdale	P.C.
ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Rupertsland	N.D.P.
ROCAN, Denis	Carman	P.C.
RONDEAU, Jim, Hon.	Assiniboia	N.D.P.
ROWAT, Leanne	Minnedosa	P.C.
SALE, Tim, Hon.	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
SANTOS, Conrad	Wellington	N.D.P.
SCHELLENBERG, Harry	Rossmere	N.D.P.
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield	P.C.
SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	N.D.P.
SMITH, Scott, Hon.	Brandon West	N.D.P.
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	P.C.
STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon.	Dauphin-Roblin	N.D.P.
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	N.D.P.
TAILLIEU, Mavis	Morris	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 17, 2005

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

Highway 200

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

Highway 200 is paved from Winnipeg to the Canada-U.S. border except for approximately a 10-kilometre section between highways 205 and 305 which remains unpaved. School buses, farm equipment, emergency vehicles and local traffic must travel on Highway 200 which is dangerous, if not completely impassable, during wet spring conditions and other times of heavy rainfall.

Due to unsafe conditions, many drivers look to alternate routes around this section when possible and time permits. The condition of the gravel road can cause serious damage to all vehicles.

Insufficient traffic counts are not truly reflective of the traffic volumes because users tend to find another route to avoid this section. Traffic counts done after spring seeding, during wet weather or during school recess are not indicative of traffic flows.

Maintenance costs for unpaved highways are high and ongoing. It would be cost-effective to pave this section.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Lemieux) consider paving Highway 200 between highways 205 and 305 to ensure a smooth, safe and uninterrupted use of Highway 200.

Signed by Roger Saurette, Rick Krahn, Andrew Toews and others.

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

Riverdale Health Centre

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for the petition:

The Riverdale Health Centre services a population of approximately 2000 people, including the town of Rivers and the R.M. of Daly, as well as the Sioux Valley First Nation and the local Hutterite colonies.

The need for renovation or repair of the Riverdale Health Centre was identified in 1999 by the Marquette Regional Health Authority (RHA) and was the No. 1 priority listed in the RHA's 2002-2003 Operational Plan.

To date, the community has raised over \$460,000 towards the renovation or repair of the health centre.

On June 1, 2003, the Premier made a commitment to the community of Rivers that he would not close or downgrade the services available at the Riverdale Health Centre.

Due to the physician shortages, the Riverdale Health Centre has been closed to acute care and emergency services for long periods since December 2003, forcing community members to travel to Brandon or elsewhere for health care services.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Premier to consider ensuring that acute care and emergency services are available to the residents of Rivers and surrounding areas in their local hospital and to live up to his promise to not close the Rivers.

To request that the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) consider developing a long-term solution to the chronic shortages of front-line health care professionals in rural Manitoba.

This petition has been signed by Regine Gamper, B. Gamper, Stan Runions and others.

* (13:35)

Minimum Sitting Days for Manitoba Legislature

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

The Manitoba Legislature sat for only 35 days in 2003.

In 2004, there were 55 sitting days.

The number of sitting days has a direct impact on the issue of public accountability.

The Legislative Assembly provides the best forum for all MLAs to debate and ask questions of the government, and it is critical that all MLAs be provided the time needed in order for them to cover constituent and party duties.

Establishing a minimum number of sitting days could prevent the government of the day from limiting the rights of opposition members from being able to ask questions.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba to consider recognizing the need to sit for a minimum of 80 days in any given calendar year.

Signed by Ralph San Juan, Albelardo Cabrera and Ronaldo Tiodin.

Westman Area Physician Shortage

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

The Westman region serving Brandon and the surrounding area has been, and will continue to be, periodically without the services of an on-call pediatrician.

As a result of the severe shortage of pediatricians to serve the Westman area, Brandon and area women with high-risk pregnancies as well as critically ill children are being forced, at even greater risk, to travel to Winnipeg for urgent medical attention.

The chiefs of the departments of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Family Practice and Anesthesia at the Brandon Regional Health Centre have publicly voiced their concern regarding the potentially disastrous consequences of the shortage.

Brandon physicians were shocked and angered by the lack of communication and foresight on the part of the government related to the retention of a local pediatrician.

The Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) has stated that Brandon has to put its best foot forward and recruit its own doctors.

Doctors have warned that if the current situation is prolonged, it may result in further loss of services or the departure of other specialists who find the situation unmanageable.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To strongly urge the Minister of Health to consider taking charge and ensuring that he will improve long-term planning efforts to develop a lasting solution to the chronic problem of pediatrician and other specialist shortages in Brandon.

To strongly urge the Minister of Health to treat this as the crisis that it is and consider consulting with front-line workers, particularly doctors, to find solutions.

To strongly urge the Minister of Health and the Premier of Manitoba to consider ending highway medicine now.

Signed by Andrew Smith, Donna Knight, Garry Sliziak and others.

* (13:40)

Ambulance Service

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

In May 2004, 46-year-old Peter Krahn suffered a heart attack while exercising in East St. Paul and was pronounced dead just under an hour later after being transported to the Concordia Hospital in Winnipeg. Reports show that it took nearly 18 minutes for an ambulance to arrive for Mr. Krahn.

The Interlake Regional Health Authority claims that 21 minutes is an acceptable emergency response time, whereas the City of Winnipeg uses a benchmark of 4 minutes.

Ambulance coverage for East St. Paul is provided from Selkirk, which is almost 25 kilometres away.

The municipalities of East St. Paul and West St. Paul combined have over 12 000 residents.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the provincial government to consider providing East St. Paul with local ambulance service which would service both East and West St. Paul.

To request the provincial government to consider improving the way that ambulance service is supplied to all Manitobans by utilizing technologies such as GPS in conjunction with a Medical Transportation Co-ordination Centre (MTCC) which will ensure that patients receive the nearest ambulance in the least amount of time.

To request the provincial government to consider ensuring that appropriate funding is provided to maintain superior response times and sustainable services.

Signed by Ruben Sawatzky, Anna Sawatzky, Kordelia Sawatzky and many others.

Supported Living Program

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba. These are the reasons for this petition:

The provincial government's Supported Living Program provides a range of supports to assist adults with a mental disability to live in the community in their residential option of choice, including a family home. There is a lack of group homes available and this means special needs dependants must remain in the family home.

The provincial government's Community Living Division helps support adults living with a mental disability to live safely in the community in the residential setting of their choice.

Families with special needs dependants make lifelong commitments to their care and well-being, and many families choose to care for these individuals in their homes as long as circumstances allow.

The cost to support families who care for their special needs dependants at home is far less than the cost of alternate care arrangements such as institutions or group and foster home situations.

The value of the quality of life experienced by special needs dependants raised at home in a loving family environment is immeasurable.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Family Services and Housing (Ms. Melnick) consider changes to the departmental policy that pays family members a reduced amount of money for room and board when they care for their special needs dependants at home versus the amount paid to a non-parental care provider outside the family home.

To request that the Minister of Family Services and Housing consider examining on a case-by-case basis the merits of paying family members to care for special needs dependants at home versus paying to institutionalize them.

This is signed by Ruby Reimer, Kim Klassen, Susan Becenko, Ryan Becenko, Gord Becenko and others.

* (13:45)

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 23—The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act (Needles in Medical Workplaces)

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale), that Bill 23, The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act (Needles in Medical Workplaces); Loi modifiant la Loi sur la sécurité et l'hygiène du travail, be now read a first time.

Mr. Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Labour and Immigration, seconded by the honourable Minister of Health, that Bill 23, The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act (Needles in Medical Workplaces), be now read a first time.

Ms. Allan: Mr. Speaker, for purposes of enhancing safety and health in medical workplaces, the provision of this bill will require the use of safety engineered needles in medical workplaces where hollow-bore or intravenous needles are used by workers.

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

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the loge to my left where we have with us Mr. Harry Enns, who is a former Member for Lakeside.

Also in the public gallery we have from Louis Riel School Division, Arts & Technology Centre, 27 students under the direction of Mrs. Lucille Miller. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Rural Hospitals Closures

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, today we are voting

against the budget introduced by the NDP government for a number of reasons. Despite unprecedented revenue from the federal government, this Premier still insists on bringing in sneaky user fees.

Despite unprecedented revenues, Mr. Speaker, they did not fully eliminate the education tax off residential property and farmland. They continue to make Manitoba the last have-not province in western Canada, and this budget is slashing health care services by closing the Victoria Hospital maternity ward.

Prior to the election, this Premier gave his word that he would not close the maternity ward at the Victoria Hospital, Mr. Speaker. He flip-flopped and he has now slashed health care services in south Winnipeg.

Prior to the last election, this NDP Premier gave his word that he would not close a single rural hospital, Mr. Speaker. It would not be closed or converted. My question to the Premier is simply this. Does he stand by his word or is he going to flip-flop on that one, too?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, there are a number of issues raised in the question raised by the member opposite. Members opposite, the would-have, could-have, should-have party raised farmland taxation. They raised the portioning on farmland. They talk a great game in the coffee shops in rural Manitoba, but when they had a chance to be in government they raised the portioning which raised taxes on farmland. This budget lowers education tax on farmland by 50 percent. That is real progress.

Mr. Speaker, the member opposite mentions the whole issue of health care. The health care budget in Winnipeg and across Manitoba, the funding increases are 5.2 percent. That is not a slashing of budgets. That was in the old Tory days where budgets were slashed, when a thousand nurses were laid off. This money invests in health care.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, on October 27, I wrote to the Premier and I quote from the letter, "While we have raised the issue with you before and have received your assurance that 'not a single hospital will be closed or converted,' due to the increased concern in our rural communities, I am simply writing to ask if you are standing by your earlier

commitment or if you are, in fact, considering the closure or conversion of any rural hospital."

This Premier responded on November 8, with absolutely no assurance that he was going to keep his word, and so, Mr. Speaker, Manitobans have a right to know. I just want to ask a very simple question to this Premier. Will this NDP Premier stand by his promise, his word, not to close or convert a single rural hospital, or will he continue on his plan to slash health care services in Manitoba?

* (13:50)

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, we convert rural hospitals every day. We convert them every day. We put a MRI machine in the new Brandon general hospital. That is a conversion. We took a hospital that was closed in Gladstone and converted it to an open hospital. That was a conversion. We took Steinbach and increased the operating rooms and operating space and put a CAT scan in the Steinbach hospital. That is a conversion. We put more nurses on to the hospital floors and put more primary health care nurses across Manitoba. We put in a new palliative care unit in the Deloraine hospital. That is a conversion. We put a CAT scan in Thompson. That is a conversion. We put a CAT scan in The Pas. That is a conversion. We put a CAT scan machine in Selkirk. We continue to innovate every day.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, Manitobans know full well that in this budget they did nothing to address waiting lists. They did nothing to address the doctor shortage. In fact, under this NDP government, not only do we have hallway medicine, we now have highway medicine.

Mr. Speaker, on top of that, this budget slashes health care services to Manitobans. Where does this Premier stand on his election promise not to close or convert a single rural hospital? Does he stand by his word, or are the NDP going to vote in favour of a budget that slashes health care services in Manitoba?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite probably wants people to forget that in the 2003 election they committed themselves to 1% and 2% annual increases in health care.

Mr. Speaker, if you were to look at the numbers from 2003 to this budget, that would be a cut of \$300 million, a \$300-million reduction in health care

investment. That would lead us back to the old days where a thousand nurses were laid off. We had less supply of doctors and we had less diagnostic equipment.

Mr. Speaker, we are putting 5.2 percent more into Winnipeg regional hospitals. We have reduced the waiting lists for cancer care treatment. We have reduced the waiting list for cardiac care. We have reduced the waiting list and increased the options for neural surgery. We have increased the number of surgeries for children's dental programs. We still have more work to do on hips and knees. We have announced a thousand more procedures. There are more procedures going on in rural Manitoba today than in 1999, and there is more diagnostic equipment in almost every community in rural Manitoba. That is the record, and those are the facts.

Obstetrical Services Rural Manitoba

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, Dauphin and surrounding areas will be losing their only obstetrician-gynaecologist this week. Yet another example of how this NDP government is forcing women to travel to Winnipeg in order to access services that should be available in their own community. The Minister of Health said, and I quote, "We want a community option for women with respect to maternity." Where is the community option for pregnant women in Dauphin and in surrounding areas?

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I am informed that the capacity of the Dauphin Regional Health Centre to continue to provide quality service to women in that community is unimpaired and that the work is being done with Parkland to continue to recruit physicians as they successfully have done in the last year. I am confident that the care of women in the Dauphin general hospital will continue to be high quality care for the women and children of that region.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, despite the Minister of Health's empty promises to provide community options for women with respect to maternity, women from Brandon, women from the Westman area and now women from Dauphin and surrounding communities are being forced to travel to Winnipeg to deliver their babies.

Will the Minister of Health admit that he has failed on his promise to provide a community option for women with respect to maternity, not only in south Winnipeg, but in all of these other communities as well?

Mr. Sale: No women have come from Brandon to have their babies since Christmastime, Mr. Speaker. Over the years, women have always had to come from rural Manitoba for high-risk births to Winnipeg. That is the case today and will continue to be the case.

That is why we have tertiary care and neonatology units in St. Boniface and Health Sciences Centre, because women from the North and women from all parts of Manitoba, including Winnipeg, occasionally need very high-risk services. No women have been left having to come from Brandon in the last couple of months. Every shift has been covered and is being covered with pediatricians in Brandon. They are coping with a difficult problem, but it is not a situation where there was 18 months without a pediatrician in Brandon as happened in the 1990s.

* (13:55)

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Health gave his guarantee to the women of south Winnipeg that, and I quote, "No woman will be put at risk because of a capacity issue." Will the Minister of Health offer the same guarantee to all women in Manitoba who are being forced out of their communities to have their babies?

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, every day babies are born in Churchill. They are born in Thompson; they are born in The Pas; they are born in Brandon; they are born in Portage; they are born in Boundary Trails; they are born in Steinbach; they are born in Winnipeg.

Every day ordinary births take place all over this province, but we have a very, very fine neonatal mortality and morbidity outcome in this province. That is because we have intensive and tertiary care for people who are higher risk. That will continue to be the practice. Community births will continue to be the rule. The exception will be coming to Winnipeg where there is high risk. I do not believe that is forcing women to do anything. They want good care for themselves and for their newborns. Their doctors want good care. We will continue to provide that care.

Safe Schools Legislation Codes of Conduct

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, Safe Schools legislation was passed almost a year ago saying that every school must establish a code of conduct which includes a statement that bullying is unacceptable.

I would like to ask the Minister of Education if he could tell us if all of the schools in Manitoba have since submitted their codes of conduct to him.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): Mr. Speaker, bullying is indeed unacceptable, and we will stop the bullying. The Safe Schools legislation came out in June of last year, as the member opposite should know, and we have been engaged in the consultation process as members opposite have repeatedly asked us to do. We have engaged in the consultation process to bring forward the regulations around the Safe Schools legislation. The process is ongoing, and I look forward to the regulations being developed and brought forward very soon.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, I am quite concerned by the minister's response right now because this legislation was passed almost a year ago. Bullying is an incredibly serious issue in our schools. I am very troubled by the minister dragging his heels on this issue and not having a higher expectation that schools would get these codes of conduct together to him on time. It is his leadership that needs to demand that.

I would like to ask the minister again how many schools have forwarded their codes of conduct to him and what is his deadline. What is his expectation as to when he should receive them?

Mr. Bjornson: Mr. Speaker, as part of the process around the Safe Schools legislation, the regulations were to be developed by consultation, and they are being developed by consultation with the stakeholders as we promised to do. When those regulations are developed and brought forward, then we will have the code of conduct submitted by the schools.

We have been doing a lot of other things as a government to address the issue of bullying, including the Ministry of Healthy Living introducing

the Roots of Empathy program which facilitates appropriate child development and understanding of interpersonal relationships so children at an early age have an understanding of how their behaviour affects others. For the last three years, we have had Dr. Mary Hall working for Safe Schools Manitoba who has been doing a lot of workshops throughout the province to address issues such as bullying and to help communities deal with this very important issue.

Mrs. Driedger: I am not sure why the minister is waiting for the regulations to be developed. The codes of conduct could easily be developed and sent forward. I do not believe he needs regulations in order to do that. What is lacking is his expectation and his leadership on this issue.

The Minister of Education completely left it up to the schools to identify disciplinary consequences for bullying. He basically dumped this issue into the laps of the teachers and the school divisions. I would like to ask this Minister of Education why his government did not take a leadership role and outline appropriate and consistent consequences of bullying in this province.

Mr. Bjornson: Mr. Speaker, that is what we are doing right now. We are working with teachers to outline a code of conduct, a very specific code of conduct that addresses the issue of bullying, and we are working with teachers and all of our stakeholders to address appropriate circumstances. We work with our stakeholders to address appropriate circumstances.

It would be naive to think that all of the schools had all the mechanisms in place as the Safe Schools Charter has requested. It was only 13 years ago that I worked on a drug and alcohol policy for Evergreen School Division because there was no drug and alcohol policy only 13 years ago. So we have in place a bill, The Safe Schools Charter, that is going to cover all facets of safety in the school. Those regulations are forthcoming, as well as a number of other initiatives to engage students and teachers in the dialogue around a very important issue. We are going to address bullying, Mr. Speaker.

Police Services Resources

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, reports indicate there could be up to 70 City of

Winnipeg police officers retiring before this summer. All jurisdictions are competing for officers. Last year, the City of Toronto lost 900 officers to retirement, and they were offering bonuses of \$7,300 just to keep them in the force.

* (14:00)

In this environment, can the Minister of Justice guarantee Winnipeggers that there will be more officers on the street this summer and not just unfilled positions, or was his announcement just political manoeuvring?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to again reaffirm that in the budget, which goes to a vote today, this government has made a further commitment to public safety by investing in 54 new officer positions across Manitoba over the next two years.

Mr. Goertzen: What the minister gave us was 11 officers for Winnipeg and there are 70 retirements expected by this summer. One in four Canadian police is eligible to retire in the next few years. Mr. Speaker, the RCMP training centre in Regina graduates about 1250 officers a year, but there are 1650 retiring. Rural Manitoba was offered 14 officers for this year.

Has the minister ensured that a real recruitment strategy is in place and that there will be more officers in rural Manitoba this summer, not unfilled positions that there were last summer, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Mackintosh: I know that the City of Winnipeg, the Chief of Police and indeed, Winnipeg Police Service, I think, would be very concerned with where this member is telling the Province to go, which is to take over the management and responsibility of the Winnipeg Police Service.

Mr. Speaker, the Winnipeg Police Service is an excellent organization. It is well managed. It is responsible, of course, for the recruitment and training of its officers. The responsibility of this government is to help the City address issues of public safety, and we have done that by signing 23 new officer positions over the next two years for the city of Winnipeg.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, I am interested to hear the minister's comments about the City of Winnipeg

police because on Tuesday, in response to a media question about why he has been so unsuccessful in getting crime down in the last six years, he said it was not his fault. It was up to the police.

Is this now the new recruitment strategy in Manitoba for police to say come to Manitoba and the Minister of Justice will blame it on you? I want the Minister of Justice to now offer an apology to those police who are working so hard in our province, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, of course, no such thing was said. We have in this country the role of the federal laws. We have the role of police forces, often municipal. We have the roles of decisions of judges, but this Province, this government has looked to see how it can do more within that environment through prosecutions, through corrections, through crime prevention, trying and working with our partners including law enforcement, the federal government and others, particularly community agencies.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is known to everyone that the Winnipeg Police Service does an excellent job. We have worked with the City of Winnipeg to ensure that 23 new officer positions will be available to the City of Winnipeg over the next two years. Now, given that commitment has been made in the budget, I expect members opposite to vote for the budget today.

Budget Competitive Tax Structure

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, every day the Minister of Finance asks us to vote for the budget. I ask the Minister of Finance how can he expect us to vote for the budget when in spite of record-high revenues he lost the opportunity to offer meaningful tax relief to Manitobans and, as a result, Manitoba is not competitive.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, since we have come to office, there has been a half billion dollars of tax relief in this province, higher than any amount ever offered in tax reductions in the history of the province. Manitoba remains one of the most affordable places in the country to live.

When we brought in our tax reform package in our first year, we increased the non-refundable tax

credit by 39 percent. We brought in a family tax reduction that cut by 50 percent the amount of clawback the previous government had done on low-income families. We rolled back and provided for low-income families the National Child Benefit. This year's budget has \$149 million in tax relief. The members opposite are going to vote against it when it is more than they ever did in the 11 years that they occupied the government benches.

Victoria Hospital Maternity Ward Closure

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, the Finance Minister forgets to mention that also since coming to office we have \$3 billion more in debt now than we had in 1999. How can the Minister of Finance expect us to vote for the budget when a vote for the budget is a vote to close the maternity ward at the Victoria General Hospital? How can the Minister of Finance expect us to vote for the budget when his own members from St. Norbert, Riel, Fort Garry and Seine River, they should not be voting for the budget?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the amount of money we put in the budget for health care is up 5.2 percent in Winnipeg, and the kinds of services we are providing to families, including young families, with our Healthy Child program, \$25 million in this budget. When we came into office, the amount was in single digits for the members opposite. The kind of support we are providing in day care, a 64% improvement since we have come into office. When members were in office, they actually reduced the number of day care spots available.

The kind of support we provide to young families so children can go to school, we have the lowest tuition fees for community colleges, the third-lowest tuition fees for universities. We brought back a bursary program. The kind of supports we provide for families are resulting in young people moving back to Manitoba, newcomers coming to this province, and the Manitoba advantage now is stronger than it has ever been. Members opposite should vote for the budget.

Financial Statements Deficit Reporting

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General has stated that the

Finance Minister has misled Manitobans concerning Manitoba's finances. The Finance Minister asked us to vote for the budget, yet there is every reason to believe that he has cooked the books of the Province again this year.

I ask the Minister of Finance this. How could we vote for the budget? Indeed, how can members opposite vote for the budget when likely the Finance Minister has cooked the books?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, if the member has a specific allegation, he should make it. He is giving a hypothetical example. We have balanced the budget—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Selinger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We balanced the budget under the legislation they brought in, which the Auditor General now says that the balanced budget legislation is inadequate. That was their legislation. They knew it was inadequate at the time, but they insisted on passing it into law. We follow the laws of the Province of Manitoba. The members opposite break it when they break the election laws. We now follow the summary budget requirement for the Province. The members opposite refuse to do that. In addition, we do not use balanced budget legislation as an excuse to slash health care or education. We are reinvesting in Manitobans, and that is why you should vote for the budget.

City of Winnipeg Funding

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): Mr. Speaker, what this Finance Minister is doing is misleading Manitobans. The Auditor has told us the financial statements he presented were misleading. Now we are seeing the budget is just smoke and mirrors. The City of Winnipeg left this building on budget day expecting to be told that they were going to get an \$11-million increase in funding. They have crunched the numbers and it turns out it may only be \$4 million in new funds.

I would ask the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs to stand in this House today and confirm to the City of Winnipeg, in fact, guarantee to the City of Winnipeg, that this budget is going to provide them with \$11 million in new funding this year.

Hon. Scott Smith (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Trade): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to stand in this House and speak to the Building Manitoba Fund that has been developed through this government. We have moved away from the flat tax type of system with new revenues going into the City of Winnipeg, not only the City of Winnipeg but in fact all of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, last year the City of Winnipeg received \$139.9 million. This year the City of Winnipeg will receive over \$150 million from this government. It is a \$10.7-million increase to the City of Winnipeg, 8 percent, one of the largest ones in a decade.

* (14:10)

We are proud of our efforts. We are proud of the fact that we have listened to Manitobans. We have listened to the people in Winnipeg, both rural and in the city of Winnipeg. It is a great budget increase which is probably why the mayor of the City of Winnipeg is coming out with statements saying he likes the efforts of the Province of Manitoba. We are doing a good job and he recognizes it. Too bad the members opposite do not.

City of Brandon Funding

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): Mr. Speaker, in fact the mayor of Winnipeg says the budget is not everything it appears to be. That was a long-winded way of saying no. The member's city, the City of Brandon, is also very concerned about the amount of money that is in the budget. They were expecting an 8% increase. They have crunched the numbers and it looks to them as if their budget increase is closer to 4 percent or 5 percent.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs this. Will he stand up in the House and in one simple statement advise the City of Brandon, in fact, guarantee the City of Brandon, that they are going to receive 11% increase?

Hon. Scott Smith (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Trade): Mr. Speaker, this government is proud of the fact that we have increased the budgets for both rural Manitoba and the City of Winnipeg. When you take the raw numbers from the

City of Winnipeg, members opposite like to play a shell game. The reality is \$140 million last year to the City of Winnipeg. This year there is over \$150 million, \$150.8 million going to the City of Winnipeg.

Mr. Speaker, 40 new police officers, and in fact, again, up to 54 police officers. The City of Brandon will be receiving two new police officers from this government plus the increases. I can tell you, as the members opposite sit here and talk about increases, a 15% increase to transit in the City of Brandon. We are supporting the communities. We are supporting transit, and we are supporting communities.

Waverley West Referral to Municipal Board

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): Mr. Speaker, the problem is that they are not giving them as much as they told them they were going to give them. I would ask the minister if he would simply explain to both those cities because they do not see the numbers.

Mr. Speaker, I would also ask the minister if he would stand in this House today and confirm that the amendment they have to Plan Winnipeg, the by-law from the City of Winnipeg that may end up in the creation of Waverley West which has lots of people objecting to it; I would ask the minister if he would stand up today and confirm to those out there who do have a legitimate expectation that this by-law will be referred to the Municipal Board.

I would ask the minister today if he will confirm that this by-law will in fact be going to the Municipal Board before it is acted on.

Hon. Scott Smith (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Trade): Mr. Speaker, as this government builds throughout Manitoba with the Red River campus in downtown Winnipeg, as it continues to build at the arena, I know the member opposite was opposed to the arena. I am not sure where his stand is today.

Mr. Speaker, it appears that he is opposed to a development in Waverley West, but what I can tell you is, in fact, certainly it is under review and it is under consideration. The member asked a number of questions, many questions. The simple fact is this government takes action on putting dollars back into municipalities throughout all of Manitoba, not a select few municipalities in Manitoba; largely

investing in the City of Winnipeg, Brandon and Thompson for transit systems and certainly up in the northern communities.

Mr. Speaker, the member opposite wants to play around and shuffle around with numbers. The clear fact is in the budget, \$140 million to Winnipeg last year, \$150 million this year. His shell games do not work with Manitobans.

Victoria Hospital Maternity Ward Closure

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I support the concept of community hospitals. In fact, when cutbacks were being threatened against the Seven Oaks Hospital a number of years ago, I stood side by side with today's Premier (Mr. Doer) and the member from Kildonan and protested very loudly and clearly to thousands of Manitobans that we support community hospitals and we opposed the cutbacks.

Mr. Speaker, I look to the advocates, I look to the members from Fort Garry, Seine River, Riel and St. Norbert, to advocate on behalf of those constituents which they claim to represent. More specifically, I ask the Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Oswald), who happens to represent an area, in terms of whether or not she believes in community hospitals, and if so, can she indicate whether or not she or her department has had any dialogue with the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) or the Minister of Health.

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of the record of Seven Oaks General Hospital, which is in the area that is represented by the honourable member opposite. They recently won in the Top 100 Employers in Canada, and we would like to congratulate them on that record.

Furthermore, we believe in investing in community hospitals, and in the Victoria community hospital. In my area of the city, we have increased funding by 20 percent since we came into office, supporting their very good programs, the renewal of their emergency area, the increase in their surgery centre, which is an excellent day surgery, a NFA surgery centre. We believe in community hospitals, Mr. Speaker. I am glad the member opposite does too.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed in the way in which this government wants to gag, silence individuals who would oppose. I do not understand why the Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Oswald) would not take this opportunity to say a few words in regard to the Victoria Hospital.

When the current minister was the critic, he stated back in August of '96, "Winnipeg today has lost any kind of community input in the direction and control of their health care system." The NDP's acting Health critic questioned how there can be any kind of community involvement in, say, Victoria General Hospital, when each of the clinical programs is managed offsite, somewhere else in the city.

The question is actually fairly easy and straightforward to the Minister of Health. If you believe in community hospitals, how can you justify making the political decision? If the issue is safety, then fix the safety issues. Why close obstetrics at Victoria Hospital? It cannot be argued with any validity whatsoever unless you oppose community hospitals.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, so far as I know, the member opposite is not a doctor and is not a planner in the health care system. When we receive advice from three separate bodies, the community board of Victoria General Hospital, the medical committee of Victoria General Hospital, the medical committee of the WRHA, all saying that we have a crisis emerging which has safety implications and where the phrase "dire consequences" is used, I am bound as a minister of this government to take that advice seriously and to respect the decision they have made. I do not like it. I am not happy, but I am bound to take medical advice and to say we have to protect the safety of women and their babies. We have to provide quality care, and we can do that in Health Sciences and St. Boniface Hospital.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, that is absolute and total garbage. You know, those sorts of arguments were being presented back in 1996, '97, when they wanted to close down the emergency services over at Seven Oaks Hospital. There is an obligation of this government to state whether or not it truly believes in community hospitals. If the decision is that you believe in them, there is no reason why we cannot be providing obstetrics.

Why are you choosing to believe this select group of bureaucrats? If you want to say it is strictly

safety, then fix the safety issues. You do not have to close down the obstetrics. Because you have silenced your opponents, it does not mean that it is right. There is no reason why obstetric services cannot be continued at Victoria Hospital, and we ask this minister to do what is right, to do what he would have been asking for if he was in opposition and ensure that Victoria continues to deliver babies well into the future. Will he do the right thing today?

Mr. Sale: Back in 1998, Victoria Hospital was funded on the basis of 116 births per bed per year. That is a reasonable number. This year we funded Victoria Hospital on the assumption of only 94 births per funded bed this year. It is more richly funded for obstetrics now, but women and doctors have been telling us with their behaviours that they wish, increasingly, to have their babies in HSC or in St. Boniface Hospital. Mr. Speaker, 2100 births in '98 in Victoria Hospital, about 740 this year, a 66% decline. In spite of the fact that the south end of the city has grown very quickly with young families, those young families are having their babies at HSC and St. Boniface Hospital. We are concerned about patient safety, and we will respect it.

*(14:20)

Provincial Nominee Program Business Investment

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): I understand that this government has been actively promoting business immigration to Manitoba through the Provincial Nominee Program for Business Immigration. Can the Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines inform the House as to the results of those efforts?

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to report to the House that this is a very successful program that was begun in November 2000. Since the beginning of the program, more than 500 immigrant investors have been approved to the program. So far 72 have started businesses which have brought in an excess of \$35 million to this province. Not only that, if those 500 come with over \$300,000 investment each, it will bring over \$183 million to the province.

These are people who have specific skills. They bring wonderful skills in manufacturing, small

business investment. These are good people who will help us grow our business economy and employ new people. I am proud of this program. I am proud that we could create theoretically almost 1400 jobs in the very near future. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Child Care Government Initiatives

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, this NDP government continues to disappoint Manitoba families. Manitoba families who delivered cards personally asking for a child care plan were disappointed. There is no made-in-Manitoba plan as this government stated in their budget. The NDP have no plan except to wait for Ottawa for the money.

I want to ask the minister this. Where is the plan for sustainable child care in this province now and five years from now?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, I must thank the critic for the question, sincerely thank her. I would be very happy to bring a copy of the plan to table. She could check on our Web site. This plan was developed with the input of over 24 000 Manitobans between 1999 and early 2000. The plan talks about recruitment, training, retaining professional ECEs, the development of space. We are in fact the only jurisdiction in Canada with a plan.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Taillieu: Mr. Speaker, a spokesperson for the minister recently said the Province has had—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Taillieu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A spokesperson for the minister recently said the Province has long had a problem with Ottawa providing start-up funding for a project and then leaving the Province on the hook for the bills in the long term.

Mr. Speaker, she is the minister; she is responsible. Where is her plan when she is left on the hook five years from now?

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Speaker, I again honestly thank the member for the question. This is a government that has been investing in the community. We have been investing in our child care system, an increase of over 64 percent. I encourage members opposite, rather than playing partisan politics with the children of Manitoba, to encourage the federal government to flow the money so that we can create a truly national child care system for the children of Manitoba and Canada for this generation and all generations to come.

Letellier Bridge Closure

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, I would just like to ask the minister of highways why he is closing the bridge on 75 highway and why he is not going to build a new bridge at Highway 201.

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Transportation and Government Services): Mr. Speaker, we are not closing the Letellier Bridge. In fact, what we are doing is just reducing the traffic flow on the bridge. There are some concerns with regard to the bridge. We are going to be addressing those.

Mr. Speaker, I really want to thank the member for asking a question on transportation. Today we made a \$227-million announcement on transportation. Also, since we became government, we put in over \$1 billion in transportation in Manitoba.

Mr. Penner: Mr. Speaker, in 1998, there was an open house at Letellier that indicated clearly that the bridge on Highway 201, crossing the Red River, would fall into the river within 10 years. Eight years is up and it has a two-year lifespan left. When will the minister tell this House that he is going to build a new bridge crossing the Red River at Highway 201? When are you going to build it?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, thank you very much. The member essentially confirmed that they ran our transportation infrastructure system into the ground when they were in government in the 1990s. Eleven years of nothing is really what it amounted to.

I just want to comment that we are taking a serious look, our engineers are looking at that particular structure. We understand that there are some challenges related to that structure. We understand that we are going to be limiting the

amount of tonnes that go across that bridge. There is a plan in place to ensure the safety. It is a safety issue that we have to address this bridge. We understand that and the department understands it. We are going to be addressing it this summer.

Mr. Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

Speaker's Ruling

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have a ruling for the House.

During Members' Statements on December 2, 2004, the honourable Member for Carman (Mr. Rocan) rose on a point of order regarding comments spoken by the honourable Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) in speaking to a point of order that had just been raised previously. The honourable Member for Carman asserted that the comments spoken by the honourable Member for Inkster amounted to what could be viewed as a bribe towards a particular minister of the Executive Council in order to extract a favour. The Member for Carman further noted *Beauchesne* Citation 100, indicating that it is forbidden to offer money or any other advantage to a member. The honourable Member for Inkster and the honourable Official Opposition House Leader (Mr. Derkach) spoke to the same point of order. I took the matter under advisement in order to peruse Hansard and in order to consult the procedural authorities.

I thank all honourable members for their advice to the Chair on this matter.

I have had the opportunity to review Hansard and to read the remarks of the honourable Member for Inkster. In first reading the remarks, I can understand why some members might have misconstrued his comments and perhaps thought that the honourable member was offering a favour to the honourable Minister of Justice (Mr. Mackintosh). However, after rereading the remarks and hearing the explanation of the honourable Member for Inkster, I am satisfied that this was not an attempt to bribe another member, and would therefore rule that there is no point of order.

* (14:30)

I would, however, like to address a matter with the House. During this short session, we have seen quite a number of matters of privilege and points of order raised, far more than we usually see. I am

bringing this to the attention of all members and would like members to think about this, because I fear we are heading into a situation where matters of privilege and points of order may end up becoming trivialized. As the Speaker, I have the obligation to treat matters of privilege and points of order as serious matters, and I believe that all members of the House would want these procedural items to be treated as serious matters.

I am not saying that matters of privilege and points of order should not be raised, because indeed they should be as a protection of the privileges of members and in order to point out a breach of the rules and a departure from usual practices. What I would kindly urge members to think about are the situations where points of order are being used to rebut or to debate an argument or are used to attempt to seek the floor in order to carry out another action. I fear we are in danger of losing something vital and very important if we continue to go down that road.

Point of Order

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, on a new point of order.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on a point of order.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, as a result of yesterday's incident in this House, as a result of the Premier (Mr. Doer) not wanting to take any action as a result of that incident, as a result of the fact that this side of the House does not have any confidence in the Deputy Speaker assuming the Chair in this House, I would request that in your absence from the Chair, the Deputy Speaker not be called to the Chair but that the Acting Deputy Speaker would be called to the Chair to preside over this House.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, on the same point of order?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Same point of order. We have made this point in the House yesterday, I think a couple of times, but in our view, the matter has been dealt with fully, Mr. Speaker. It was dealt with by way of a motion even at the end of the proceedings yesterday. Unfortunately, not only I would suggest the point of order is late, but even if you accept it for discussion, there must not be, according to the rules as I understand them, any reflection on an officer of this Chamber, whether it is the office of Speaker or the

office of Deputy Speaker, as has just taken place. There are ways for members to deal with those issues but that is not the appropriate way, in our view.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for River Heights, on the same point of order?

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, Mr. Speaker. Just very briefly, with the situation which arose yesterday, we accept the apology of the Deputy Speaker, but we feel in the Liberal Party that the Deputy Speaker would have been very wise to have stepped down from his position as Deputy Speaker because, in fact, a Deputy Speaker has to have the confidence of all the members of the House. Where we have a situation that, at least for a short while, a Deputy Speaker no longer has the sort of confidence as a result of actions in this Chamber, then it is a concern, and it is a concern to Liberals, as it is to the Conservatives. I think we do not need to belabour the point. I think that it is the situation that the Deputy Speaker is in, and it would have been smart for the Deputy Speaker to have resigned his position for at least a period. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: The point of order raised by the honourable Official Opposition House Leader, before I make the ruling on the point of order I just want to explain a little something here.

Yesterday, the issue was brought up as a non-confidence motion on the Deputy Speaker. The House dealt with it. The House voted on it, and the motion was lost. If you look into our Manitoba rule book, it is very clear in the rule book, 13(5) if members wish to look it up, if the Speaker is absent from the meeting of the House, the Deputy Speaker must, it does not say, may be or whatever, it says must act in his or her place. If the Deputy Speaker is absent, one of the deputy chairpersons may act in his or her place. That is in our Manitoba rules. If members are not satisfied with our rules, we have a rules committee where it could be raised. There are avenues for that. So I must respectfully inform the House that the honourable member of the official opposition does not have a point of order.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Crocus Plains Plainsmen Hockey Team

Mr. Drew Caldwell (Brandon East): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in the Manitoba Legislature today to honour the Crocus Plains

Plainsmen hockey team who this week won the Manitoba Provincial AAAA High School Hockey Championship. This is a tremendous achievement. It is the first time Brandon has won the AAAA hockey title since the inception of these championships in 1991-92.

I, along with my colleague from Brandon West, and all citizens of Brandon are very proud of the Crocus Plains Plainsmen hockey team. They are a great team who have demonstrated strong character both on and off the ice. In recognition of their accomplishment, I will now read their names into the historical record of the Manitoba Legislature.

The members of the Crocus Plains Plainsmen are: Chris MacDermid, Stephan Lajoie, Matt Gulas, Josh Timmer, Adam Sefton, Sheldon Lee, Devin Bourdeau D'Hui, Aaron Steven, Braden MacKay, Kyle Grier, Josh Kindrat, Eric Truscott, Kelsey Connor, Matt Minshull, David Waldie, Joey Timmer, Bryan Therien and Melissa Kunzelman.

The Plainsmen are coached by Jim Ferguson, Bryce Birch and Shawn Baker and assisted by their manager Glenda Zelmer.

Congratulations, you have done your city and your school proud.

Crime Watch Forum

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Mr. Speaker, this week I had the privilege of co-hosting a Crime Watch Forum in northeast Winnipeg with Joy Smith, the Member of Parliament for Kildonan-St. Paul. Short presentations were made by Vic Toews, the federal Conservative Justice critic; Kelvin Goertzen, the Member for Steinbach, our provincial PC Justice critic; Bob Ashuk, Community Resource Co-ordinator and Rick Joyal, retired police officer.

After the presentations, the floor was opened to comments from those who attended. A common theme was total frustration with the justice system and lack of consequences for offenders. Concerned citizens were asking for changes, Mr. Speaker, and we were listening.

Major concerns were raised about vandalism, the drug trade and car theft. It was loud and clear that we need more police resources. They wanted more officers on the streets and quicker response times.

There was strong criticism of the federal Youth Criminal Justice Act and inappropriate sentencing. Although there was a major focus on youth crime, comments were also raised about skyrocketing crime rates across the board.

Many participants felt that a community-wide petition would ensure that people's voices are heard, calling for stronger laws and to hold criminals accountable for their offences. Joy Smith and I both agreed to support and help their efforts.

Mr. Speaker, we also committed to work with our community police office, local schools and community groups who might be interested in developing Neighbourhood Watch programs. Participants strongly encouraged us to take their concerns and suggestions forward to both the provincial Legislature and the federal Parliament and to speak loudly for reforms that would protect victims, not criminals.

Mr. Speaker, we need to be proactive, not reactive when it comes to crime. We need effective justice policy that will protect citizens and give appropriate punishment.

Forums such as these are an important first step in engaging the community, forming partnerships and developing an effective justice system.

I would like to express my gratitude to the panellists and all community members who attended and shared their views. Thank you.

Dalhousie School Breakfast Program

Ms. Marilyn Brick (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, I wish to draw your attention to a very important initiative that is happening in my constituency of St. Norbert. The Dalhousie School breakfast program is a very important initiative that happens every morning. It allows children from the school to enjoy a healthy meal before they begin their classes. An important part of this initiative is the fact that this program is open to all students from kindergarten to Grade six at Dalhousie School. This makes the program truly a benefit for all students.

As the vice-chair for the Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures Task Force, I and my fellow colleagues have heard many presentations on the importance of nutrition and, particularly, that of eating breakfast

before going to class. The majority of volunteers for the program are students from Fort Richmond Collegiate and the University of Manitoba. I want to commend them on their willingness to get up early in the morning to help children have a good start to their day. The breakfast program receives funding from the Manitoba Council on Child Nutrition's Breakfast for Learning Initiative and from donations from the United Way and various community groups.

Mr. Speaker, I had the good opportunity to spend time with the staff and students at Dalhousie at one of their fundraising events called Breakfast with Frosty, which occurred last December. From the looks on the children's faces, I can attest to the importance of this program.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Dalhousie School breakfast program for inviting me to the Breakfast with Frosty fundraiser. I would also like to thank Ms. Trudy Clark and the major donors of the program. Ms. Clark is the co-ordinator of the breakfast program, and she works hard to promote the program and to find local fundraisers. I wish the Dalhousie School breakfast program continued success, and I urge my fellow colleagues to support similar programs that are happening in other schools in Manitoba. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

* (14:40)

Manitoba Trucking Association

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday morning of this week I had the opportunity to attend the 73rd annual general meeting of the Manitoba Trucking Association along with many of my colleagues. As the invited Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Lemieux) declined to be able to be there, it was a great opportunity for our leader, the Member for Kirkfield Park (Mr. Murray), to accept their invitation and to address their meeting and for our caucus to listen to their president's address from Vic Switzer of the Portage Cartage and Storage and liaise with the general manager, Mr. Bob Dolyniuk.

Mr. Speaker, it was obvious that the Manitoba Trucking Association is very proud of its drivers' record, and I would briefly like to commend the drivers-of-the-month recipients for 2004. In January, Ronald Friesen of La Broquerie, who drives for

Penner International Incorporated, was awarded. The February recipient was Dennis Schmidt of Winnipeg, who drives for Reimer Express Lines Limited. Ron Gawiuk of Elphinstone, driving for RTM Transport Limited, was the March recipient. In April, it was Eldon Morris of Winnipeg, driving with Canada Safeway Limited. May '04 was Richard Brown of Rivers of Redline Transport. June was Lorne Winnicki of Beausejour, who has been employed with Naaykens Transport since July of '76. Mr. Brad Peskey of Selkirk has 20 years driving experience, the last 10 with the Winnipeg Motor Express, won the July award. The August recipient was Mr. Vern Brown of Winnipeg driving for Reimer Express Lines Limited. September was Farley Fries of Steinbach with 27 years of driving experience, 20 with Big Freight Systems. October, Jim Muller from Winnipeg, has 25 years driving experience, the last nine with Winnipeg Motor Express. November was Ralph Boles of Winnipeg, having driven with Bison Transport since March of '74, 34 years. In December was Emile Lafreniere, with 38 years, who lives in Winnipeg and drives for Reimer Express.

Mr. Speaker, these drivers have too many awards for me to list them all, but collectively there are over 25 million accident-free miles.

Arthur A. Leach School

Ms. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, as the MLA for Fort Garry, I want to inform the House about an important event that happened yesterday at Arthur A. Leach School, a middle school in my constituency. Last evening, the staff and students of Arthur A. Leach hosted an Empty Bowls evening which consisted of community members purchasing ceramic bowls, soup and bread for \$10. The proceeds of \$1,630 from the sales of the Empty Bowls goes directly to Winnipeg Harvest to help stop hunger. The bowls which are to sit empty in their new homes will provide a constant reminder that hunger and poverty is still a reality for many Canadians today.

I attended this event, Mr. Speaker, and was moved to see our youth involved in such an important cause. The Empty Bowls was an educational experience for students at Arthur A. Leach. Each ceramic bowl was handmade by Grade 7 students, who also researched the issues of poverty and hunger in our community and world. The Grade 8 students made the soup that was served to the

students and parents. The Grade 9 students from the school's digital film and broadcasting classes also documented this event. Student representatives from the school will also be volunteering at Winnipeg Harvest. The lessons in poverty and hunger that these children are experiencing is invaluable, especially since many of those going hungry are children. Local businesses also supported this event such as Peak of the Market, Safeway, Casey's Food and the Sounding Stone.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Kim Marinelli, principal Lisa Boles and all the staff and students at Arthur A. Leach School for hosting the Empty Bowls evening. I urge my fellow colleagues to support such events in their constituency. Ending poverty and hunger should be a priority for all of us. No one deserves to go hungry and no one chooses to live in poverty. Thank you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

ADJOURNED DEBATE (Eighth Day of Debate)

Mr. Speaker: Resume debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), that this House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government, and the proposed motion of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Murray), and the proposed motion of the honourable Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), in amendment thereto, and the debate is standing open.

Mr. Cris Aglugub (The Maples): I really appreciate the opportunity to be able to participate in this debate over the budget that is before us.

Mr. Harry Schellenberg, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

Before I want to go into my remarks, I would like to express my confidence in the Deputy Speaker (Mr. Santos). We know that we have—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Cris Aglugub (The Maples): I think the members from the opposite side want to hang him to dry. Yesterday, he had already expressed his sincere apology over the incident. Today, they want to bring

back that issue. We voted on it yesterday, and I think it is a very unfortunate incident that should have been handled quietly.

As the MLA representing the constituency of The Maples, Budget 2005 gives me much optimism and hope. As many of you know, The Maples is a very diverse community, ethnically and demographically. It is a constituency that embraces members from different social classes, family types, ethnic, religious and cultural groups. My constituents have many diverse interests, opportunities and challenges that are facing them. In talking to my constituents, I know that there are many areas that concern them greatly. This includes health and education, improving the opportunities for new immigrants, making sure our children grow up healthy and in safe communities, addressing the housing needs of families and addressing poverty, taxation and the environment. I am very happy to say that Budget 2005 addresses all of these issues.

This budget contains the details on what this government plans to do in the next fiscal year, and it is all about balancing priorities, building opportunities and investing in tomorrow. This budget is balanced under both the balanced budget legislation passed by the previous government and under the summary financial statement.

The budget is also balanced in another way. It is firmly rooted on four pillars of fiscal responsibility: paying down debt, making strategic investments, reducing taxes and saving for the future. Budget 2005 is the second straight budget that is projected to balance and to pay down debt with no withdrawal from the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. This is a first in the 10-year history of balanced budget legislation.

Budget 2005 continues to pay down our debt and pension liabilities by increasing this year's payment to \$110 million, bringing the total to \$594 million in reductions since 1999. Moreover, this budget continues to make a strategic investment in Manitoba's priorities including health care, education, infrastructure and clean water. Furthermore, it continues to keep our promises on tax reduction by eliminating another \$80 million in property and personal income taxes, as well as an additional \$54 million in business taxes.

Finally, Budget 2005 invests in our future with \$340 million deposited into the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. This is the second largest deposit ever made

into the fund, and it was achieved without selling off a Crown corporation.

Immigration has always been a driver of economic growth in our province, and Manitoba has, once again, become a destination of choice for skilled immigrants and people looking for rewarding opportunities. Immigrants build communities. Some 30 percent of immigrants arriving in Manitoba are settling in centres outside Winnipeg, supporting growth and economic development in rural communities such as Winkler, Steinbach, Brandon, Morden, Arborg and Thompson. Immigrants provide new and much needed skills and ideas and strengthen our ability to innovate locally and in the global marketplace.

* (14:50)

In 2004, we welcomed 7400 immigrants, the highest level of immigration in more than 25 years. Manitoba is well on its way to achieving the provincial target of 10 000 immigrants per year by 2006. The successful Provincial Nominee Program accounts for 50 percent of Manitoba's newcomers. Manitoba is the leader in attracting immigrants through the Provincial Nominee Program.

At the Canadian embassy in Manila, I am told, 98 percent of the Provincial Nominee applicants processed at the embassy are destined for Manitoba, and the staff at the embassy are working very hard to facilitate and expedite the issuance of immigrant visas.

Part of this commitment to attracting new immigrants to Manitoba involves making sure that the skill and education of new Manitobans can be effectively used. By better recognizing the foreign credentials of immigrants, we can continue to build our province's key industries in these areas and ensure our province remains economically competitive, both nationally and internationally.

Our commitment to recognizing the foreign qualifications of new Manitobans is both innovative and timely. In December 2004, our government, through the Minister of Labour and Immigration (Ms. Allan), posted a one-day foreign qualification summit. This summit brought together representatives from different licensing bodies, educational institutions and employers to discuss

how to improve the recognition of foreign-gained credentials in our workplace.

It is important to put into context how Budget 2005 will affect the city of Winnipeg and, more specifically, The Maples. I am happy to say that from all early indications, Budget 2005 will be very positive for both the city and for my constituency.

Let us now look at some of these positive aspects. Strategic investment in our capital city is evident in Budget 2005. Funding for the City of Winnipeg will increase by 8 percent through the new Building Manitoba Fund. In addition, Winnipeg Transit will receive a transit operating fund increase of \$2.5 million. This is the largest transit increase that Winnipeg has seen in the last decade.

Budget 2005 also presents a solid and sustainable funding relationship between the City of Winnipeg and the Province of Manitoba. Our government has committed to a six-year plan that will see a \$500-million reinvestment to renew Winnipeg's infrastructure. We are also committed to tripartite programs to fund key infrastructure projects like the upgrading of Winnipeg's waste water treatment plant and the building of the Kenaston underpass. Furthermore, we will also be dedicating funds toward the twinning of the northeast section of Winnipeg's Perimeter Highway. All these investments are protected with \$56 million for the expansion of the Red River Floodway, the largest infrastructure project in Winnipeg's history.

These announcements are great news for Winnipeggers and for residents of The Maples. This commitment means that Winnipeggers and residents of The Maples will drive on safer streets. It means that Winnipeggers and residents of The Maples can travel on a quicker and a more efficient transit system. It means that Winnipeggers and residents of The Maples will see their city invest in new buildings and in new or improved municipal services and facilities. It means that Winnipeggers do not have to worry every spring about widespread flooding that disrupts the economic, social and cultural life of the capital city.

Our commitments to the city of Winnipeg and Manitoba do not stop there. As we all know, there are individuals in our society who are involved in

illicit and illegal activities, activities that the majority of us frown upon and discourage. Unfortunately, violent crimes and criminal activities occur in every community.

Our government, however, is committed to making our streets and neighbourhoods safer. Just this past Tuesday, the Attorney General for Manitoba announced the largest increase in funds for policing in Manitoba's history, \$9.5 million in new funds will be added on to our current contribution for this year. This makes our contribution to policing \$81 million in total for this year alone. This will allow us to fund 54 new police officers in Winnipeg, Brandon and in our rural and northern communities over the next two years, actually, 14 more than we were promised in the Speech from the Throne given in November 2004.

Our budget increases our commitment to young people in Manitoba. Thanks to Budget 2005, we will be able to open up four more Lighthouse locations in our province. This will bring our total number of Lighthouse locations to 38 since we established the program in 2005. This program is significant since it keeps the doors of our schools, communities and friendship centres open in the evening and on weekends. Lighthouses provide recreational, educational and social activities for our young people. They run programs such as leadership, life-skills and budgeting courses, and their staff offers mentorship programs, cultural teachings and drug- and alcohol-awareness sessions.

Personal income taxes will be reduced again this year, saving Manitobans \$30 million. In total, Manitobans will save \$249 million annually as a result of personal income tax cuts implemented since 1999.

Since we have taken office, we have also increased the provincial minimum wage by 21 percent. With Budget 2005, we will increase the minimum wage to \$7.25 per hour. This increase will take effect in April 2005.

We are taking great strides in helping all Manitobans enjoy a fuller and better quality of life, but improving the quality of life for all Manitobans also means taking steps to improving our provincial health care system. Budget 2005 is committed to this, as well as enhancing our current healthy living initiatives: \$3.6 million has been promised for

healthy living initiatives, an additional \$9.7 million in home care funding is forthcoming. This combines with our sustained attempt to make health care more accessible by increasing medical school spaces and funnelling new resources into hip and knee surgeries.

Budget 2005 also strives to keep the door of opportunity open for our young people once they finish high school. It does this by maintaining the 10% tuition freeze for the fifth year in a row. This ensures that quality education is more accessible for our youth who are interested in pursuing a post-secondary education. Indeed, enrolment is up 33 percent over the last five years. Furthermore, an additional \$750,000 is promised in order to expand the student loan and bursary programs. As well, Budget 2005 ensures that accessibility to university education is complemented by greater access to technical and vocational training and apprenticeship programs.

I would like to summarize my remarks by pointing out that this budget managed to pay down debt without withdrawing from the Fiscal Stabilization Fund while simultaneously making a host of strategic investments that continue to build upon our past successes by a continued revitalization of Manitoba's infrastructure, persistent activity to ensure a clean and healthy environment and a host of initiatives designed to put people first and to enhance the quality of life for all Manitoba.

I am proud to announce that Budget 2005 continues to pay down debt, makes vast strategic investment and continues to implement tax savings for Manitoba. Moreover, this sound fiscal planning is accompanied by \$314 million into the Fiscal Stabilization Fund.

I am proud to stand in support of this budget and I look forward to receiving the support of all members opposite. I invite them to join us in voting for the priorities and sound fiscal planning that are reflected in Budget 2005.

*(15:00)

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Before I begin my comments, I would like to just say hello to my oldest daughter who is going to be taking an extended stay at Hotel Children's Hospital. She had to be admitted

on Tuesday night, and I was fortunate enough to spend last night sitting in a chair sleeping at Hotel Children's Hospital. She is doing very well. However, we did get notification today that it looks like her stay is going to be extended.

I did get a note earlier on today that she did watch Question Period to see what Dad was up to, so in case she is listening, I would like to say we are very proud of her. She is brave, and the staff in Children's Hospital, of course, are just tremendous. Anybody who has had a child staying there knows the kind of programming they do is just amazing. I would like to thank all the staff at Children's Hospital for a job well done.

It is a serious matter that has brought her to the hospital, and just for the members of the House, it started as an eye infection and, unfortunately, instead of coming out, the infection started to move backwards and that is very serious. But she is in good care and very good spirits. On behalf of all members, I wish Brigitta all the best, and we look forward to her coming home again.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Schuler: I thank members for that.

I would like to now proceed to the matters of the province and that being the budget. That having been said, before I do begin, I like to begin every speech by thanking those individuals who are, by and large, nameless, faceless, who are behind the scenes, who really do all the work for us as members.

I know that every member in this Chamber has individuals, whether they are paid employees or whether they are volunteers, who make democracy work. In fact, I think it is just a bewilderment for those who come from a budding democracy or those who come from a nation where they did not have a strong democracy, at the kind of volunteerism and the kind of excitement that there is for members by individuals.

I would like to begin with my long-standing employee, Gayle Dowler, who works out in Springfield. I cannot speak of how highly I regard her. She has been just an amazing individual. Gayle, I just love you dearly. You are an amazing

constituency assistant. I hope you stay for many, many years to come. You are the bedrock of Springfield, and I thank you very much.

To Matthew Pruse, who toils away in the office downstairs churning out those letters that I know government ministers just love to receive. In fact, he is one of these bright young individuals who, and I know the members opposite will appreciate this, every three to six months he collects all the letters that we have received no response from, tabulates them all in the letter and sends them back to the minister's office. I just imagine that someone opens these letters and goes, "Oh, my goodness, when are they ever going to quit with all these letters?"

Matthew, you are doing a tremendous job on behalf of those Manitobans who need access to the government, and we all understand that in this Chamber individuals need certain lobbying done or certain something or another. Anyway, Matthew, I appreciate very much your work on my behalf.

Gladys Hayward Williams, thank you for all your volunteerism; Karen Carey from Hazelridge, Manitoba; Lucas Golebioski, who, besides studying, works so hard on my behalf, I would like to thank him; Derek Williams, or, as we know him, "Two 'N' Glenn"; Conor Lloyd—to all of you, thank you so much for all of your efforts and work on behalf of the people of Springfield and, for that matter, the people of Manitoba.

We have before us a budget. I have had the opportunity to represent Springfield and bring comments forward on behalf of the voters of Springfield since 1999. I thought perhaps after the windfall, the unbelievable windfall this province got from the federal government from years of neglect from the federal Liberal government, years of slashing cutbacks—if you go back into the books and you look at the kind of slashing the federal government did to Manitoba, this would have been the year Manitoba would have had a windfall and could have made its mark on Manitoba. I thought perhaps this would be the year I could actually vote for a budget.

What a disappointment. What a disappointment this has been. I come from a very conservative tradition, very fiscally responsible in the household, immigrant parents who—my family lost everything

twice due to no fault of their own. Decisions that were made by, yes, politicians that had gone wrong and came to this country with nothing. We understood that you turned every penny over once, twice, three times, maybe ten times before you spent it. Money was hard earned. You paid down debt and you moved ahead very cautiously. You did not spend beyond your means.

Unfortunately we have a budget today that leaves me with great unease. It leaves me with great discomfort that what we have done is moved the mortgage, that is a legacy, one of the legacies we leave behind as politicians. The mortgage of Manitoba has gone up by some \$3 billion for most Manitobans. In fact, there is Josh at Springfield Colony, who, when I go and I talk to him about these things, says, "Anything more than \$20 in my wallet, I do not understand. You got to make it a little easier." I say to him, "Josh, we are literally mortgaging generations and generations to come with the kind of spending we are doing."

Let me give you a comparison. With four million people, Alberta felt a \$23-billion mortgage was too high and paid it off. Manitoba, with one million people, has a mortgage of \$20 billion and sees it as no problem. It leaves me with great unease that now at a time when we are having a lot of federal government monies coming to Manitoba, we are spending recklessly. One of the things that concerns me in all this is, for instance, the pushing and driving hard of the Crown corporations to get more money into government coffers. We know that all the revenues are up. The government is going after Lotteries in a far more severe way than need be. In fact, now would be the time to put the brakes on those kinds of things.

If the federal government were ever to cut Manitoba back by \$1 billion in transfer payments, my question to members opposite is how do you cut \$1 billion out of an \$8-billion budget, how do you make up for that difference. I do not think that this was a prudent move on behalf of this NDP government.

We have seen the NDP take this budget's yearly expenditures from a bit over \$6 billion to well over \$8 billion. That is far too fast of a growth in the budget that is not sustainable. When we are in public

life, people entrust their tax dollars to us that we be good stewards of their money. That is what they would like us to be. I have heard it and it is with horror that I hear individuals say, "Oh, but it is only \$100 million."

If there was \$50 there on the step, I do not think there is member in this Chamber who would not bend down and pick it up, and yet you hear governments talk about \$10 million, "Oh, it is only \$10 million." We hear the Gomery inquiry. They talk about, "Well, out of a budget, what is \$100 million?" That is an enormous amount of money. We should never be callous about the dollars and the pennies while we are spending \$8 billion. That is an enormous amount of money.

* (15:10)

Are we being good stewards of that money? Are we? That history will judge. From what we can see, after spending \$8 billion we are closing the maternity ward of one of our very important hospitals on the south side of the city where they are talking about building an addition to the city the size of Brandon. Now, if we would go into Brandon and say close all the maternity wards, there would be an outcry. Well, that is exactly what is happening. There is an outcry, and no matter how you try and spin this, no matter how the government tries to cover this up, it is very unfortunate that, after getting such an enormous amount of money, the money is not being dealt with as good stewards in a proper fashion in services like maternity wards.

Years ago we built a new church and they felt that the cost was a little too high, so instead of adding an education wing on we put a basement in because it saved us like \$40,000. Today it is with regret that we did that, because what did we do? We put our future, the Sunday school rooms, in the basement. It was a mistake.

I say to this government to cut maternity wards where our future is. I know the maternity ward was just being renovated when Tanya and I were just starting our family, beautiful birthing rooms. That is not the place to be cutting when we are spending money all over the place recklessly. It is not being good stewards of our money. I would say what concerns Manitobans and what will concern Manitobans in the future is not just that we are leaving a legacy of an enormous mortgage for young

people in the gallery who will be forced to pay that or they will be forced to leave. The mortgage payments must be made.

If that is going to be one of the legacies we leave, what is unfortunate is, with so much more spending, we are actually getting less services. There are not the quantifiable results for the amount of money we are spending.

It has often been said less is never more. In other words, less spending you can never get more. This NDP government has proven that more spending is also not more. With more spending we are getting less services. That is not prudent stewardship of the public's money.

We understand that roads and hospitals, having spent a considerable amount of time in a hospital lately, they have to be supported with taxpayers' dollars, and people are fine with that. But be good stewards of that money. Give proper care. Give proper services.

The other thing I want to talk about is how do we make ourselves attractive as a province to attract young families, to attract young people, to attract professional people, to attract jobs, to encourage people to grow their businesses. We are not giving that environment to individuals as a benefit to coming to Manitoba. Our taxes are far too high. There is a need for taxes. We have to build our roads. We have to keep our infrastructure up. We have to defend our nation. We want to educate our young people. We want to educate them well. That is very important. But with the kind of revenue this government has seen, there was no reason why this province could not have become more competitive. So I have grave concerns in where this New Democratic Party government is going with expenditures.

I want to finish off. I am concerned about the ambulance service. I know the government has committed itself over the years to improving things and has not. East St. Paul and West St. Paul, the Member for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson) has yet to get up and speak to the issue of proper ambulance service in West St. Paul. I encourage him. He is a minister, sits at the Cabinet table. It is important to have that there.

I also want to just talk about the silence on the other side. I went into Hansard and the former

Member for Fort Garry, Joy Smith, took a lot of interest in Victoria Hospital, lots of interest. What have we heard from the current member? Nothing. Marcel Laurendeau, former Member for St. Norbert, I have Hansard here June 13, 2002, very serious questions to the government on Victoria Hospital. What has the current member from St. Norbert raised as far as issues? Nothing. And then Seine River, I want into Hansard May 10, 2001. These are mere, small examples of many, many questions that were asked. Louise Dacquay from Seine River, very concerned about Victoria Hospital. What about the current member from Seine River? Nothing. What about the member from St. Vital? Nothing. What we have is an enormous expenditure, an enormous mortgage being foisted on our young people and services being cut.

I want to close by saying I thought this was the year we would see a NDP government do the right thing with an enormous amount of money, provide the kind of services, provide the kind of stewardship of the money, give the kind of relief we need in this province that is so necessary, lift up, give a hand up to people and not push people down. This, unfortunately, is not a budget that I can support. It is not a budget that I will be voting for, because it is such a disappointment. It will be seen in history. University students in history will look back at this budget, and they will say it was the budget of what could have been. It is a budget of lost opportunities, of missed opportunities. It is most unfortunate that this government, that these politicians, did not seize the day, *carpe diem*, do something for this province, leave a proper legacy other than a mortgage that will hamper, that will restrict future generations of politicians from actually being able to do something in this province.

The mortgage and the inability to deal with competitive issues point to a budget that does not deserve the confidence of this House and I appreciate the opportunity to put a few comments on the record. Thank you very much.

Ms. Marilyn Brick (St. Norbert): I am proud to stand up today and express my thoughts as they relate to Budget 2005.

When my 16-year-old daughter, Janelle, recently took her driver's test, I reminded her to bring her birth certificate for ID and to be careful not to misplace it as it is time-consuming and expensive to

replace. She looked at it and sniffed it and said, "Well, it is probably no good anyways; it does not have an expiry date."

This got me to thinking about the value of a driver's licence and the value of our youth. I am thrilled to be on this side of the House, where we know parents dearly love their children and want to see the best for them. The success of our graduated driver's licence system attests to the value we place on young people. We know they are our shining stars. We want to protect them, love them and ensure they have a bright and happy future. It is this kind of thinking that makes it so easy for me to support our budget. It is this budget that has increased capital spending for public schools by 135 million additional dollars over the next three years. This money will ensure that there are gymnasiums, music rooms and classroom space for students.

February is "I Love to Read Month." I had the pleasure of reading books to the students at La Barrière Crossings School, École Saint-Avila, Saint-Norbert immersion school and the before- and after-school programs at Dalhousie School and Ryerson school. I must tell you that there is no greater joy for me than to be able to watch children's faces as you read them a fractured fairy tale or a book about the beauty of our Manitoba landscape.

* (15:20)

Our government knows the value of education. That is why we have been funding education at a level above the rate of growth for the province, and, you know, the beneficiaries of this are undoubtedly our children. I would be remiss if I did not mention post-secondary education and the huge success our government has had in increasing the affordability and the accessibility of post-secondary education for people in Manitoba.

I am very proud to be an alumnus of the University of Manitoba and to represent many of the people who attend university and teach at this great facility. For the fifth year in a row, our government has placed the hopes and dreams of young people first by maintaining the 10% tuition reduction we implemented in 1999. We have also made sure there are more resources for bursaries, scholarships and student loans.

Just recently I received a very interesting book in the mail titled *Graduate Satisfaction and*

Employment Report 2003-2004 for Red River College. In Creative Communications, a two-year diploma course of the college, the students rated that 90.6 percent of them would recommend the program to other people, and 81.3 percent of them were satisfied or very satisfied with the program. This can be directly attributed to our increased funding for technical and vocational training and apprenticeship programs. Red River College has a beautiful, new downtown campus that has helped to revitalize the core of Winnipeg.

Our government has placed young people first by ensuring that they are provided with a high quality, affordable post-secondary education. The opposition likes to paint Manitoba as a province that is facing doom and gloom. This is just not true. Yesterday's *Winnipeg Free Press* ran a story titled "Things looking up for Winnipeg job seekers." To quote from the story, "The employment prospects for Winnipeg job seekers will take a substantial turn for the better in the second quarter of the year, according to the latest employment outlook survey by Manpower Inc." The story continues to say: "The international employment services specialist said yesterday that 28 per cent of Winnipeg-area employers which participated in its latest outlook survey said they plan to hire more workers in the second quarter."

I ask you why they would want to hire more workers. If the position is correct and our province is sliding into a black hole, I can only conclude that our government's approach of fiscal management and economic growth is encouraging a strong economy. In our six years in office, we have seen the following private-sector investments in Manitoba: Boeing Winnipeg plant named as a key supplier of composite components for the new Boeing 7E7 aircraft; the opening of a new \$150-million potato processing plant by Simplot in Portage; a \$150-million expansion of the Winpak plant in Winnipeg; and consolidation of CanWest Global communications staff to Winnipeg, resulting in 1200 jobs.

Our government has been encouraging business development and growth by lowering for corporations the cost they pay for taxes to 14.5 percent in 2006. Small business rates will drop to 4.5 percent in 2006 from a high of 9 percent in 1999. During our term in government, we have experienced two credit rating increases from Moody's from an AA3 to an

AA2. Their decision has been based on solid economic growth, balanced budgetary performance and reduced debt burden.

On Tuesday night, I was thrilled to be the guest of the Minister for Culture, Tourism and Heritage (Mr. Robinson) at the unveiling of *Welcome to Turtle Island*. The night was filled with hilariously funny stand-up comedy. Although I am Caucasian, I really felt welcomed there by everyone I met, and I can truly say that this is the exact same feeling I experience in working with the Behavioural Health Foundation in St. Norbert. This excellent facility helps individuals who struggle with addictions overcome their dependence.

This last fall, I had the opportunity to experience a sweat lodge for the first time. I know the grandmothers are watching my path as I travel it each and every day. I know that our immigration policy has also helped to build stronger communities all through Winnipeg, Winkler and Steinbach, among many other communities. I was especially pleased to be a key driving force, along with the Immigrant and Refugee Settlement facilitator for Fort Richmond and the Yellow River Chinese Association, in hosting an International Mother's Day ceremony last year. At this event, I heard participants who came from all across the world speak of their satisfaction with our government in helping them create a new home here in Manitoba.

Today's newspaper story talking about immigration and the fact that immigrants are boosting the economy just shows how well our government is doing. By approving 56 applications for immigrants who are coming here, we can say that there will be \$18 million additional being acquired in terms of starting businesses. The success of attracting immigrants is attributed directly to the business component of the Nominee Program. Wow, immigration. Wow, what a great thought for here in Manitoba to grow our population.

For the residents of St. Norbert, the security and safety of their homes is a key issue. In this budget, we see that the floodway will be receiving \$56 million to support it in terms of floodway protection.

I would like to say that it is my pleasure to represent St. Norbert, and I really want to commend our government on the excellent job they are doing and on this budget.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): It is a pleasure to rise today to speak to the budget presented by this NDP government in the Legislature last week.

Members opposite speak of the shining stars and of our youth, and I would like to speak of two little people that are important in my life, Mackenzie Rowat, who is nine years old, and Cameron Rowat, who is ten. These are my two children whom I think the world of and will do anything for, and partly to that commitment is why I ran and why I am here representing my constituency today is for the future of the young people within my constituency in rural Manitoba as well as all Manitoba young people who, I feel, are being short-changed by this government.

First, I would like to thank the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Murray) for his comments shared earlier this week or at the end of the last week, and I certainly agree that his comments and support that he has provided and the positions and the support that I give on the same issues. I would also like to put on record my support of the comments and positions presented by my caucus colleagues over the past week.

I will start by saying in recent discussions with Harold Gilleshammer, the former MLA for Minnedosa, he shared his many experiences in speaking to past budgets. He shared his thoughts on the importance of a budget. Based on the fact that he once held the position of Finance Minister, I believe his advice is worth taking.

Mr. Gilleshammer shared three important points that a budget should include. First, the budget is a document that should outline the policies of government. Second, the budget should outline the direction of the government. Third, the budget should outline what the government is going to fund.

On Tuesday, March 8, 2005, the NDP government presented Manitobans a budget that boasts a revenue increase of \$525 million, but, in a disturbing trend, the government continues to spend almost every dollar it takes in while increasing the level of debt. As the Leader of the Opposition stated in his response in the budget, and as many of my colleagues have indicated before me, this government's budget did not continue a vision or direction on where it is going to with their policies in the coming year.

How did the NDP government manage to accumulate over \$3 million in new debt since 1999 without anything, really, to show for it? If the NDP government was concerned about the growing problems with gangs, guns, grow ops and auto thefts, why did it only add \$7.5 million to the annual policing budget this year? What is the Minister of Justice (Mr. Mackintosh) going to do about the 50-plus police officers in Winnipeg who all will be retiring in six months? These are very serious questions that this government has failed to answer. A press release with no action would be a slap in the face of law enforcement to families throughout Manitoba, and they deserve better.

I believe the Doer government has a golden opportunity to use this financial windfall to deliver meaningful tax cuts to Manitobans and to provide Manitobans with a long-term economic strategy. Instead, this government chooses to continue to spend more money and add to our growing deficit, a disappointing choice that all Manitobans will have to pay for in years to come. Cameron and Mackenzie Rowat will have to pay for in years to come.

I think most people who studied the budget found it very much lacking in terms of a vision for the province. Programs were re-announced. New programs were vague in terms of timelines and implementation. This budget does nothing to inspire our young people, nothing to encourage our agriculture sector, nothing to entice or excite our business community and if not for the federal windfall for health care, nothing would have been addressed in health care crises facing rural Manitoba and the critical issues in urban health facilities.

* (15:30)

What I learned most from this budget was that, despite telling Manitobans he was not elected to raise taxes, this Premier also believes, based on the budget contents, that he was also not elected to reduce taxes either. This NDP government created a low expectation for tax relief. The Finance Minister kept referencing no increases in different areas but he should have gone the other way, decreasing or eliminating the fees. Accounting and legal fees have hurt many Manitobans, especially the non-profit groups such as women's shelters, food kitchens and others that need to make sure that every dollar counts in helping people less fortunate than us. To help lower-income earners they should have moved

toward personal exemptions. The fine print in the NDP budget shows most benefits will not be seen until 2006. The fine print is what we really should be looking at.

For Manitobans, this year's budget represents a lost opportunity, a missed chance for this government to use its financial windfall to completely eliminate education taxes from residential properties. Instead, this government chose to spend over \$500 million of this new money while allowing Manitoba's total debt obligation to climb by another \$526 million to over \$20 billion.

The NDP government continues to neglect our universities and colleges and deny them the funding and freedom to develop as quality institutions of higher learning. They forget that there is more to providing a quality of education for Manitoba students than simply controlling their tuition fees.

Members opposite spoke of Red River College. Yes, I have toured the Princess Street Campus and it is beautiful, an initiative under the previous government, Filmon's government. As far as the tour went, I did not get a chance to go to the Notre Dame site or the other site, and I believe, based on talking to people that are connected to that facility, it is because it is not something that you want to showcase at this point. That is the ramification of this government. Ask the University of Manitoba and the University of Winnipeg how this government has inadequately funded their operational grants. You will then see more to the story.

To make matters worse, the budget announced on March 8 was a disappointment in regard to provincial funding for post-secondary education. The NDP government has used the issue of tuition freeze as a political tool and has not provided adequate funding to supplement the losses universities and colleges have been absorbing since the tuition freeze was introduced. Bottom line, our educational institutions need to have a vision and basic goals for the future, and this is impossible to do when their resources are restricted and the funding from the province is unpredictable on a long-term basis.

While some have argued that the tuition freeze be maintained, they have failed to address what happens when the province does not provide universities and colleges with sufficient funding to maintain their infrastructure and programs. What

costs are the students really paying for under the tuition freeze? I would question if it is a price they or the university can really afford.

Colleges and universities must have a fiscal flexibility when it comes to providing high-quality education and a reputation that can compete with other provinces. Presently Brandon University is experiencing an estimated \$2-million shortfall in its annual budget of \$30 million. Addressing the deficit poses a threat to the quality of the education at Brandon University and has led to the school departments and faculties being pitted against each other in a battle for adequate funding and survival. This is not exactly a climate conducive to higher education or learning.

ACC is also experiencing the snub of the NDP government. A \$3-million culinary arts program is nowhere to be seen which, if not addressed, could possibly affect the accreditation of this award-winning program.

The reputation of Brandon University and the ACC college depends on the availability of strong academic programs and also the retention of programs such as at Brandon University, the athletics program, which has brought the school and the area a great deal of national recognition. Not only will this recognition evaporate if the programs are cut, but it will also affect the quality of student life on campus and will help in the demise of it. Currently, Brandon University cannot afford to fill vacant professor positions or plan for infrastructure upgrades and is facing the possibility of losing their athletics program.

Can the university really attract students and faculty in the years to come if this government does provide better funding? To maintain the quality of education, it is essential that the Province increase operating grants or look at the tuition freeze and determine long-term decisions that can be made to slowly eliminate it, while providing a manageable and predictable future for both colleges and universities and the student population. Post-secondary education cannot maintain quality in the present fiscal environment. Long-term planning is necessary to ensure that this does not happen.

To make matters worse, the NDP government's budget speech created the false impression that it had deposited \$314 million into the rainy day fund for future unforeseen events. In fact, \$155 million is

federal government funding for future health care spending, while \$150 million is a repayment of money temporarily borrowed from the fund that was supposed to be put back in almost three years ago. In other words, this NDP government only deposited \$9 million in new money into the rainy day fund.

This budget has no vision to grow the economy or decrease personal income taxes, and very little support and confidence was shared by this NDP government for the agricultural and rural economy.

In this budget, the NDP did nothing to make Manitoba competitive. They had an opportunity to enhance our competitive advantage by reducing our payroll tax or other tax-before-profit items. This did not happen.

The Manitoba Bureau of Statistics estimated that lower farm cash receipts for both livestock and crops in 2003 reduced net cash income by over 40 percent, and this has only gotten worse, but the Minister of Finance's (Mr. Selinger) speech failed agriculture by short-changing any types of meaningful supports. As KAP president David Rolfe indicated in a press release, "Where is agriculture? Everywhere but the budget." Considering it is an industry that touches the lives of every Manitoban, where farm income declines, all Manitoba feels the effects.

The BSE crisis continues to be ignored, and despite the impact it is happening on our farm families, my children's friends, my neighbours, all the rural communities within my area, within Manitoba, this Minister of Agriculture and Food (Ms. Wowchuk), who is also the Minister responsible for Rural Initiatives, refuses to provide a much-needed cash advance, and where are the slaughter capacity plants? Where are the plants? No new investments were announced from within the farm gate and, most importantly, the budget failed to decrease farmers' costs. Last year, the Brandon Chamber of Commerce passed a resolution that called on the NDP government to introduce an aggressive program of tax credits or incentives to encourage investment in value-added processing facilities. Press releases occurred. Only words.

Obviously, this government has no interest in their electoral partners. While farmers welcomed the news of a 50% reduction on the special levy paid on farm land, they are very concerned about

how this is structured. Typical NDP government announcements.

This past year, the government department faced a restructuring. This was very concerning to the communities that have Agriculture Department people working in their communities. The Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings) has lost his agriculture rep in his community and has worked hard to get that position retained or reinstated and has had no luck from this minister to reinstate that individual in that position. These people within the community are our livelihood. They provide the resources and the supports to the farmers and to the families within the community. They are part of our chambers of commerce. They are part of our economic development groups. They are part of the initiatives to bring economic development to the communities. When you take them and remove them out of the communities you help in dismantling and destroying our rural communities.

* (15:40)

This minister, this Premier (Mr. Doer) put Ag Department families into a crisis because often a lot of these people that are working in these Ag Department positions have family members that are in the agriculture sector. By putting these individuals into more stress and more risk of losing everything that they care about, you destroy the spirit of rural Manitoba.

I know this NDP government has gone on about the importance of ethanol to our province and to the Kyoto accord. I sort of smile at the Speaker because I have been waiting, as the community leaders within this province, within my constituency have been waiting for some time, for this government to take action. I understand that community leaders were in yesterday meeting with government people. I encourage them to move forward and move quickly on this initiative as they have put in a lot of time and effort into getting this project expanded. The ethanol project in Minnedosa provides employment for several dozen individuals, and this project is very important to move forward.

On the other side of this, this government has also made promises to other communities on ethanol projects. I feel sadness and despair that this government would lead communities on and let them put hundreds of thousands of dollars into

feasibility projects and initiatives in trying to get these projects and get these companies interested in their communities to no avail. I am very disappointed with this government for again misleading the province, misleading these communities, giving them false hope and then walking away.

Hopefully, the NDP government will announce their ethanol strategy for the community of Minnedosa. The residents of the Minnedosa constituency can see the rewards of Husky's planned expansion, and the community can continue to enjoy the economic benefits of such a successful business partner as Husky.

Child care. This NDP government has missed an opportunity to address the serious staffing shortages. Recruitment and retention of staff for child care centres is critical for the sustainability of several communities. I am not talking just about rural Manitoba, but I am also talking about urban Manitoba. If you do not provide a service such as child care, instead of providing a universal child care program, what you are doing is actually dismantling the system that we have in place. The made-in-Manitoba solution is in Manitoba right now, and by this minister providing false hope to families and to people that have children or work in this system is disgraceful.

The Minister of Family Services (Ms. Melnick) is failing families by her arrogance and non-interest in dealing with this crisis. Centres are closing around her and she continues to speak of how moving forward this government is on this issue. I find that very discouraging, and I will quote Deanna Way, who is the director of the Souris co-operative day care. She has written to the government and has stated, and I quote, "The government needs to address staffing shortages, not spaces, and needs to help maintain and increase and improve Manitoba's child care system before it fails drastically." As parents in Souris at a recent brainstorming meeting have indicated, and I quote, "What does the increase in government money do for us? It does nothing for us if we do not have the trained, qualified, quality caregivers to provide programs and services to our community." A universal child care system must be sustainable for years to come. At this point there are no guarantees.

The way the minister is responding to questions in this House and in the community, I seriously

wonder if she really knows and understands and can appreciate the crisis that is out there in regard to the child care crisis. How can this government crow about their accomplishments while the system is falling apart around them? Address the issue. Address the issue. Universal child care must include all options, must include profit, not-for-profit, and the option of the parent to remain home and be provided a tax credit. This is what a universal child care system would entail, and I am embarrassed that this government cannot address this in a serious manner.

This government has introduced millions in new taxes and fees for families and seniors on low income and fixed incomes. Insufficient notice, lack of proper consultation, this is becoming a common thread within this government's efforts to push legislation that is often flawed and not reflective of the stakeholders' interests. This government has just created another means to grab more fees from the taxpayer.

Despite increases to the health care budget, over \$1 million in the last four years, this government has decided to take more money from those who can least give, another 5 percent in this budget. The increase will only work as a short-term solution to the rising costs of health care. I find it troubling that this decision to raise Pharmacare deductibles is on the heels of another NDP policy, taking Alzheimer's patients off their medication.

Why has the wait list for hip and knee surgeries increased over time when this government has put almost \$200 million in new federal money to health care? Rather than make use of it, it appears that Minister Sale is out of touch with the electorate. If he actually spoke to the many people waiting for care, he would respond differently and most definitely act quicker.

We have rural hospitals being closed, despite a Premier (Mr. Doer) and a Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) continually saying, "It is not our policy to close hospitals." The fact is, closing our hospitals is the wrong way to go and it does not save money. Who do you believe will work in our best interests, of our communities? An election promise made by a Premier or the RHA? Yet, over and over again, we see rural hospitals losing their services. We are seeing the emergence of highway medicine in this province.

When a patient is at a hospital at a significant distance from home, there is a tendency to keep the patient in the hospital longer as the patient cannot get back as quickly or as easily if complications develop. The greater distances also make home care more expensive and less available. Patients will not stop getting sick if the hospital is farther away. If adequately staffed and equipped, smaller hospitals can generate better outcomes.

The NDP record on mental health is nothing to be proud of. Budget numbers show a decrease in commitment. It is difficult to understand how the system can be working when you learn of stories that share how Manitobans suffering with mental illness, along with their friends and families, encounter obstacle after obstacle in the mental health system. I believe it is important that a person with personal challenges has a proper personal safety in a place when moving toward independent living. I look forward to the inquiry into Sharon Horn's death. A review is necessary to determine if any mistakes were made in allowing Mrs. Horn to live on her own. We need to ensure that incidents like this can be prevented.

What is this government doing to ensure that the necessary supports are in place for persons who suffer with mental illness? That is a question I ask this government. Vision from this government is building casinos, dikes and debt.

The bottom line is this government is forcing Manitoba deeper into debt, which makes more of our tax dollars go toward paying interest on the debt instead of going into health care and education. Even worse than that, government is mortgaging the future of the next generation. The money the NDP is borrowing today has to be repaid at some point, and it is our kids who will have to be stuck with the bill, and I find this reprehensible. I will certainly be voting against this budget.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Great endorsement of the government. This is the second one today. The Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu) asked the Minister of Family Services (Ms. Melnick) when she is Minister of Family Services five years from now, will we be able to guarantee that the child care money is still in place? When you members opposite read Hansard, they will notice the members opposite are throwing in the white flag. They are already

surrendering, because this budget is so good for Manitobans.

Certainly, the economy is doing well. There are certainly challenges in the farm economy, with trade and other measures, with the commodity prices. But to hear the pathetic comments of members opposite that BSE is not "mentioned in the budget." Let me read back the comments, because we do not think BSE is the problem. Members opposite may think that BSE is a problem. We do not think it is the problem, because every case has been inspected, detected, and rejected. The problem is not BSE. The problem is the Americans are keeping the border closed.

* (15:50)

They are giving aid and comfort to the Americans. The first question for the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Murray) is BSE. Our statement is that the livestock industry strategy is very, very important. We recognize the setback cattle and ruminant producers are experiencing following the recent court decision to keep the American border closed. That is the problem.

There is not a problem of BSE because we always reject it here in Canada, and I am surprised the Leader of the Opposition would sound like Senator Conrad or Senator Dorgan from North Dakota, instead of sounding like a Canadian supporting the people and the cattle producers here in Manitoba.

I am proud of the fact that this budget builds on four pillars. The Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings) never had a budget built on one pillar, let alone four pillars. He never had one budget built on four pillars. They go to the Chicken Shack and they go to the Chicken Chef and they go to the coffee shops and they swagger in there and, you know, NDP, we care more about farmers. They raised the tax on farmers. We are lowering the tax on farmers.

This budget builds on four pillars: debt reduction, it builds on investments in priorities, it invests in maintaining the tax reduction promises we had promised in the election campaign and more, and it further builds upon saving for the future. Four pillars. Name us one budget the Tories ever produced that had two of those four pillars. You cannot find

one of them. We have a budget here with four pillars to build for the future of Manitoba.

Members opposite are looking for little weasel words to vote against it, pointing fingers here, pointing fingers there like a little weather vane going around, swinging around in the breeze. It used to be the Liberals that were the weather vane in Manitoba. We have flotsam and jetsam over there, the two Liberals, flotsam and jetsam. Now we have the weather vane, the old mighty Conservative Party that just blows in the wind, spending, tax increases, oh, blow, blow, blow. The finger keeps pointing in all different directions.

The first pillar is paying down debt. The members opposite did not even pay one quarter, one nickel, one penny to the pension liability for the civil service here in Manitoba. The Conservative Party of Manitoba got rid of the pension payments from the employer's side. How many dollars did members opposite pay to the jail guards at Headingley, for the Manitoba Development Centre staff, to the staff clearing the highways, to the agriculture inspectors? They put nothing to the public health nurses. They did zip. They tried to bury the problem and the pension liability went from \$1.8 billion to \$2.9 billion when we got elected. We are starting to pay down the pension liability. When members opposite talk about working people and their pensions, they are a bunch of phoney. They did nothing on pension liabilities in Manitoba.

We have also invested in terms of pension debt reduction in direct debt. Our debt payment now has gone up from \$96 million to \$110 million. When we came into office, it was \$75 million. It has gone to \$96 million; it has gone to \$110 million. That basic debt payment is not coming out of the rainy day fund.

The last debt payment the Tories made was \$75 million, and the rainy day fund had an extraction of \$185 million in '98 and another \$185 million in '99. That is why Norm Cameron, who was on their fair tax commission said, and I quote, "You are running a deficit because your rainy day money is greater than your debt payment."

Our debt to GDP has been reduced dramatically here in Manitoba, and our credit rating is better today than it was when we came into office. Then, of

course, the finger-pointing weather vane said 18 months ago, "Oh, you have got to balance, you have got to pledge." Remember November of 2004, he said, "Oh, you have got to balance under balanced budget legislation. Will you stand up, yes or no, and balance under balanced budget legislation?" and we said yes. We balanced under balanced budget legislation, the finger swung around again and then they said, "Will you balance under GAAP?" and we are going to be the first government in Canada to balance under GAAP.

I do not know, maybe we will get a third accounting measure. We are balanced under the Filmon balanced budget legislation; we now have a \$400-million current budget surplus under GAAP; and we have another \$195-million surplus. You know what? Members opposite are going to vote against it, and shame on them. They will be accountable.

The second pillar in this budget is investing in the future of Manitoba. It starts with municipalities. The member opposite only had one municipal priority for five years. It was build the underpass. We are building the underpass and he is voting against it. I think I have got to put a great big billboard out in his riding. Phone John Loewen, he is voting against the underpass in this budget. Here is his cell phone number, all phone him. Get a hold of him. The honourable member responsible for the Fort Whyte underpass.

Secondly, the members opposite are voting against the floodway. Ed Schreyer moved an amendment to deal with market gardens, but then he voted for the floodway. Ed Schreyer is smarter than members opposite because he did not want to be on the record voting against the floodway. The Liberals voted against the floodway, and they will never, ever form government in Manitoba, even when they have two positions. They still have flotsam and jetsam, still have two positions on the floodway. They have one in Selkirk; they have one in Winnipeg. They stand for nothing, they represent nothing, they are nothing when it comes to the future of this province.

Members opposite are voting against an 8% increase for municipalities. They are voting against 54 new police officers. They are voting against it, and they are voting for a new transit agreement that increases transit grants to Brandon, Winnipeg, Flin Flon and Thompson by 15 percent. That is what they are voting against. But then they say that the health

care money is hacked and slashed. It is slashed. It is hacked. It is slashed again. It is 5.2 percent. God forbid if the public had voted for the extreme, mean party across the way, we would have had \$300 million less in the health budget today than what we had put in the health care budget under an NDP government.

Those numbers are absolutely irrefutable, because 1 percent in one year and 2 percent the next year produces a certain amount of money over the budget, and that is \$300 million less, so you are not only closing Victoria hospital, that is \$54 million, you are closing Seven Oaks, you are closing Brandon general hospital, you are closing the Gladstone hospital that we reopened, you are closing Concordia Hospital. That is what you would do, and you cannot vote for a 5% increase for health care for the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority? Shame on you.

We are also investing in education, public education. You know, there was a little article the other day comparing the 1996 budget and this year's budget. What they failed to mention, there was a 2% cut, \$15 million. Fifteen million dollars was cut out of education in 1996, resulting in a major increase in property taxes and a major reduction in services. That is why people do not believe you. They know that taxes went up 68 percent under your mean regime of the past. They know that taxes went up. You are going to see when you read your tax bill, from your property tax bill, this year the education portion has gone from being higher than the municipal tax when we came into office, then lower than the municipal tax when we came into office. Five years later, we are chipping away on it. The public knows your record, and they know our record.

* (16:00)

In terms of education and training, what is their policy on education and training? They went from a leaky roof at the University of Manitoba engineering faculty. They are the party in favour of raising tuition fees. Well, we are the party that has lowered tuition fees by 10 percent, and we are proud of the fact that for five years running students in Manitoba have lower tuition. Any student who votes for the Tories is like chickens voting for Colonel Sanders. That is why young people know where their hopes, where their dreams are and where their future is.

We are also building the capital. Red River College promised, done. University of Manitoba capital, \$50 million matched by 150 million from the private sector, done. The University College of the North, and I think it is shameful, in 19 communities where Aboriginal people and First Nations people will get college courses and credit courses closer to their own community, what is the only thing the weather vanes across the way can single out in a mean, extreme way to cut if they have to implement their education promise? The only thing they put out as an option is to cut the University College of the North. I think it is an absolute disgrace.

I would remind people to go out of this building and look which way the Golden Boy faces. It faces north with the future of this province, and members opposite do not understand that. We have now Red River College, university campuses, University College of the North, and we will be coming forward with concrete proposals for Assiniboine Community College in the future. Again, we will produce a plan that will work for students and student expansion, and we are the only party that can be trusted with college enrolment and college expansion.

Mr. Acting Speaker, \$80 million in clean-up of water across Manitoba. Again, we are very proud of that. We are also very proud of the fact that in the investment area, we are putting people first. The clawback on poor children. How can anybody sleep at night when they claw back the children's benefits and poverty benefits? You know, they talk about the federal government. The federal government gave them—*[interjection]*

Well, you joined the Conservative Party. You joined a party that cut the nutrition for babies, and you also joined the political party that clawed back a Liberal child poverty benefit. I think it is shameful.

We have increased the child care spaces. We have increased the number of people in training for child care. I am very proud of the fact that we have introduced BabyFirst, 5000 babies now; our mothers are getting investment, many of them in First Nations communities, because we believe in reducing the number of underweight babies and increasing the amount of babies that are born in good health who can have a life of dignity. Again, a program—*[interjection]*

The member from Steinbach, in his Darwinian voice, speaks against this program, but we know that this is better early childhood development. He could stick his hand on the horn and continue to be mean and extreme, but I am proud of the fact that we are bringing a program that puts babies first.

You know the member opposite complains about labour laws. Putting workers first has resulted in a 60% reduction in the number of people with days lost, strike and lockout and the health and safety laws that we brought in that were opposed by that shining light of benevolence, the member from Springfield, has resulted in a 19% decrease in injuries at the workplace.

I could go on all day long about inclusion of people. I could go on and on. When you look at that bench and when you look at this bench, you will see people from all walks of life, from all parts of Manitoba and from all the various parts of the rainbow that make Manitoba a great province. That is also what we believe in.

Our third pillar is tax reductions. I remember that the member from Fort Whyte did what they do all the time, he brought a billion dollars in tax reductions in, but he did not tell us where he was going to get them. Some of those tax reductions were the same ones that the Tories promised in 1988, promised again in 1990 and promised again in 1995. They were going to eliminate the payroll tax in three years. They just did not tell us which three years, 2020, 2021, or 2022. They did not tell us which one, what year. It may be 2026 before the extreme, mean group, God forbid, get back in office. I actually do not even think there will be a Conservative Party by then. Your numbers are shrinking because you are appealing to a narrower and narrower and meaner, extreme base. Most Manitobans are very civil people. They are good citizens. They are fair-minded people. Your appeal is to the narrowest and it is continuing to get narrower as you go along.

Every tax reduction we have made is consistent with our election promise. We promised to reduce the middle-income tax bracket. We now have gone up to a 19% reduction in taxes. We promised to lower corporate taxes. We now have lowered the corporate tax from 17 percent to 14 percent in this budget, and you are going to vote against it.

You never lowered any corporate taxes. We are generating more corporate income, more corporate profits. The reduction has led to positive results in the corporate sector. We have new provisions for the manufacturing tax. Unlike members opposite who raised property taxes by 68 percent in the 1990s, we promised to increase the property tax credit from \$250 to \$400, done. We promised to start phasing out the second education tax on home-owners and residences, and it is now two thirds gone with this budget, saving people \$125 a year on their property tax bill. Again, a promise made and a promise kept.

We did more than that, because the agricultural sector was in a lot of difficulty, we are lowering beyond our election promise the education tax on farmland. Members opposite can squirm, they can wiggle, they can try to do something about it, but, you know what, they are voting against the largest tax reduction for education tax on farmland in the history of Manitoba. Shame on them.

Finally, we are saving money. I remember the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Murray) saying, "Oh, you know, they should balance under BBL." Then a couple of months later, "Oh, they should balance under whatever." Then whatever the Auditor said they said something else. He also said we should put money into the rainy day fund. When we came into office, the rainy day fund was \$240 million. Today it is close to \$390 million. Some of the equalization—
[interjection]

The member opposite talks about three more years, but the member from Morris talked about five years later. I want to thank her for those very generous comments.

We now have \$390 million in the rainy day fund. We did not take some of the negotiated money, which by the way as a percentage of revenue is lower than the equalization money in the 1999 year. We did not take that money and squander it. We put it all away in the rainy day fund.

* (16:10)

We do not exactly know what is going on with the U.S. economy. We do not know what is going on, totally, with the U.S. dollar, but we think this budget saves money and that is a prudent thing to do.

We think that we have accomplished a lot by saving money.

Now here we have a budget that pays down debt, puts money into the investments that are priorities for Manitobans, keeps the tax promises we made to people, lowers taxes. It lowers taxes more in one year than members opposite did in 11 years. It also saves money. We go up to \$390 million, the money we negotiated, which is not larger as a percentage of the budget than 1999 equalization. We did not spend it. We saved it.

Here you have saving, debt reduction, tax reduction and you have investments in health care, post-secondary education, community colleges, water, floodway and farming. You have BSE investments and slaughter house investments, transit investments.

So I want to give members some unsolicited advice. In 1999 when the former government actually brought a budget in, well, '89 they brought a budget in that was exactly out of our election promises, and we voted for it. We voted for it.

In 1999 they started to put more money into health care and a little bit of investment in areas that we thought were important after 10 years of neglect. We voted for the budget. Do you know why? Because the public does not like opposition parties acting like Pavlov's dog. They want opposition parties that do not just bark when something happens, do not just wail at the moon. The public wants opposition parties that are governments-in-waiting and are thoughtful and are beyond partisan politics.

We had editorial writers criticizing us. I had editorial writers say, "You voted for the budget. You have nothing." you know, blah, blah, blah. Well you know what? The public is sick and tired of barking opposition parties. You have a choice today to vote for something, to vote for tax reduction for farmers, to vote for education and training, to vote five percent more money in health care. You have a choice to vote for something or continue to bark in the wilderness. I would recommend you vote for it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Schellenberg): Please be informed—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Schellenberg): Order. I just want to advise the House, please be informed that we will be giving the Leaders unlimited speaking time on the budget debate to the Member for Lac du Bonnet. This is given by the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Murray).

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): On behalf of myself, my family, and the constituents in Lac du Bonnet, I would like to extend my condolences to the family and friends of the four RCMP officers who lost their lives in Alberta last week while in the line of duty. Those who protect us are in obvious need of protection from us as well, and residents of Lac du Bonnet stand firmly behind the police. We need to support them.

Having had the benefit or detriment of listening to the Premier (Mr. Doer) talk about the budget today, I can tell you that, having heard what he said, all I can say is that he obviously confuses volume with accuracy, and that is just like the Finance Minister of this province, it is just like other members opposite as well. He uses the excuse that the BSE problem is there solely because the border has closed. In reality, the problem is this Premier, the problem is this Minister of Finance, and the problem is the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk). The problem is the NDP. That is the problem, and their lack of action.

I heard the Premier say that the NDP will build the floodway. Well, I have news for the Premier. The floodway has already been built. It has been built by the Conservative Party of Manitoba. That is who built the floodway. He talks about that we have narrowed our appeal in Manitoba. My comment to that is that the only people who the NDP will appeal to are the union buddies who will benefit from the work on the floodway. Those are the only people who the NDP will appeal to.

I have listened to some of the comments by members opposite, some of the ministers in this budget debate, and I have read some of them in Hansard, and I can tell you that I am somewhat dismayed by the comments made by the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) and the Minister of Finance, particularly, when they tell me that government cannot have both meaningful tax cuts in this province and responsible spending. Unlike members opposite, I can tell you that on this side of the House we can chew and walk at the same time. We can chew gum and walk at the same time.

The Member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway), in his comments made just a few days ago, said that there were a number of projects done in the Lac du Bonnet constituency over the last six years and those projects, when I calculated the value of those projects, they come to about \$20 million. There has been \$525 million in new revenues in this province. There is more than enough for inflationary increases to program spending. There is more than enough for meaningful tax relief. I make no apologies for representing members of the Lac du Bonnet constituency, and I challenge the member from Elmwood to tell my constituents that. Bring out the true facts. I represent the members of the Lac du Bonnet constituency. I represent the constituency well, and, because of my representation, I brought those improvements to the Lac du Bonnet constituency. That is who did it, and if he wants to tell members of the Lac du Bonnet constituency that, I will, in fact, pay for the ad. I make no apologies for that, and I make no apologies for asking this government to reduce debt. I make no apologies for asking them to live within their means. I challenge him to tell my constituents that, because I will certainly support that.

When the NDP came into power in 1999, they inherited a province that had recently weathered a crippling recession, experienced hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts in federal transfer payments. They battled the flood of the century and had a \$380-million surplus in this rainy day fund. Six years later, the NDP benefits from a rejuvenated provincial economy as well as fully restored and increased federal transfer payments, significant changes that have helped drive the annual provincial revenues up each year, to the point where Manitoba will collect almost \$2 billion more in revenues this year than it did back in 1999. So why is it that Manitobans are not seeing more from this financial windfall? The simple answer is that the NDP has been spending much more money than it has been taking in. It is the reason why the NDP forced Manitoba Hydro to pay \$203 million in a dividend to the Province a few years ago. It is the reason why the provincial rainy day fund has been raided to the tune of \$300 million over the past few years, and it is a reason why the Province's deficit balloons to \$604 million in the 2003-2004 financial year.

What makes this troubling situation worse is the fact that the NDP government has resorted to misleading Manitobans about the province's true

financial status, a point that the provincial auditor made when he criticized the NDP for their made-in-Manitoba accounting practices. It seems that a recent government report of a \$13-million surplus was in truth a \$604-million loss. So today's NDP cannot live within its means. It has raided the province's savings account and is now running up the province's credit card debt to make ends meet. The question is why, and what happens when there is a downturn in the provincial economy. If the province's financial house is not in order, all Manitobans can expect to experience the consequences of this government's mismanagement practices.

* (16:20)

We have repeatedly pressed this NDP government for its long-term economic strategy and so far they have refused to reveal any economic strategy or vision for the province, probably because it does not have one. There is no plan to reduce or eliminate education taxes from residential property tax bills. There is no plan to significantly reduce personal income taxes for low- and middle-income earners. Of course, the NDP government has already acknowledged it has no grand scheme for health care.

We believe that the NDP government needs a clear economic strategy for this province, a strategy that will deal with the pressing issues, such as rising education taxes, escalating health costs and provincial debt repayments. We believe that it is imperative that we selectively and strategically cut taxes to put more money in Manitoban's pockets, money that you can invest to increase the standard of living for both you and your family, and in turn your investment will generate new economic activity and new jobs for all of Manitoba.

The NDP's lack of an economic vision and aversion to tax reduction has made Manitoba one of the poorer provinces in western Canada. We will soon become the last have-not province in western Canada. Clearly, Manitobans should not be satisfied with just doing okay. We should not aspire for mediocrity. Manitobans deserve better and they expect better.

The Finance Minister runs the business of government. It is a foreign concept among members opposite. Is there a business member among them, I ask you? No there is not. Is there anyone of them that

has any experience in business? No. Does the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) have business experience? Does the Premier (Mr. Doer) have business experience? Does the Justice Minister? Does the Minister of Energy, Science and Technology (Mr. Chomiak)? Does the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Lathlin)? Does the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers)? Does the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson)? Does the Minister of Family Services (Ms. Melnick)? Does the Minister of Advanced Education (Ms. McGifford)? Does the Minister of Water Stewardship (Mr. Ashton)? Does the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk)? How about the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs (Mr. Smith)? How about the Minister of Transportation (Mr. Lemieux)? How about the Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism (Mr. Robinson)?

It is amazing, not one of them has an ounce of business experience. They have no experience. More than an \$8-billion budget, no business experience on that side of the House. That is scary. Manitobans should be concerned. No wonder this budget cannot be trusted. There is absolutely no doubt that half of them, in fact I would guess that probably half of them could not balance their own chequebooks, and we are trusting them with \$8.1 billion in the budget.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Schellenberg): Order, please. It is getting a bit too loud. I cannot hear the speaker, so just quiet it down a bit. Thank you.

Mr. Hawranik: Let me give you an illustration about members opposite and their ability to actually understand finances. I was speaking to one of the members opposite about a year ago, and it was with regard to the VLTs in terms of the expansion of VLTs in the province and the fact that it would cost \$100 million to replace some of the existing VLTs with more addictive VLTs to ensure that government revenues were on track.

When I was speaking to them, I questioned them. That \$100 million, is it really worth it? Should we really be spending \$100 million of taxpayers' money to buy more VLTs? The reply I got from one of the members opposite, and they gave me this reply with a straight face, they said, "Taxpayers are not paying for those VLTs. We borrowed the money." That is the mentality of members opposite.

That is a good illustration of their inability to understand the finances of this province. They do not realize that borrowing the money, it has to be paid back. It has to be paid back with interest, and who is going to be paying back that debt? Our children and our grandchildren will be saddled with that debt.

Members opposite live in fantasyland when it comes time to the budget and with respect to the finances of this province. I have listened to some of the debates on this budget, and I can tell you that the numbers that have been given by members opposite in terms of what the debt is, what the deficit is, is all inconsistent. They cannot even get their message straight, because they do not know what their numbers are.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Schellenberg): Order. There is too much chatting going on. If you wish to chat, please go to the loge and let the speaker speak.

Mr. Hawranik: When we talked about fact and fantasy, as I mentioned before, just in case they did not get it, members opposite are living in fantasyland when it comes time to the budget, when it comes time for the finances of this province.

Let me give you some examples. They say that the debt has been paid down. I heard the Premier (Mr. Doer) say that just before I stood up to speak on the budget. He said the debt was paid down. That is absolute nonsense, they never paid down the debt. They only paid money toward the debt. The debt has increased in this province.

I heard other members opposite quote numbers from the budget papers, the Manitoba Budget 2005. They turned to page B30 of the budget papers, and they quoted only the General Purpose Debt. That is only part of the debt of the Province. There is the General Purpose Debt. There is a Manitoba Hydro Debt. There is Other Debt. There is Health Facilities. There is Government Enterprises. There is Capital Investments. There is pension investments. There is Pension Liability. There is Pension Assets. There is Net Pension Liability. There is Health Debt. They forget all those numbers. All they want to do is quote the General Purpose Debt.

When Manitoba taxpayers report their debt to, when they are talking to bank managers, or loans officers, they do not just count their mortgage. They

do not just count their credit card debt. They do not just count their personal loans. They do not just count their overdraft. They count the whole ball of wax. They count all of the debt, but they do not like to quote that because it is not convenient for them. It does not look good for them.

I heard numbers from members opposite that, in fact, the debt has decreased. That is absolutely incorrect. The debt of the Province since 1999 has increased. The overall debt of the Province has increased by \$3.462 billion since '99 under the watch of this Premier. In fact, in this budget alone, all they have to do is subtract the numbers. In this budget alone, the overall debt of the Province increased by \$526 million. In this budget alone. That is \$6,000 an hour. By the time I conclude my address to this budget, the debt of this province would have increased by another \$6,000.

The total debt of the Province is over \$20 billion.

Howard Pawley, I have mentioned this before in this House, would be proud of this NDP, because they are no different than yesterday's NDP.

I have heard comments by members opposite that they say the cost of servicing the debt is down. To a certain extent it is, but not to the credit of the NDP. It has nothing to do with what the NDP did. They increased the debt of this province by \$3.5 billion since 1999. The only thing that decreased the cost of servicing the debt is the economic environment that we are in, and globally. In fact, the only thing that really has made an impact on the cost of servicing the debt is the decreased interest rates that we have experienced over the last five or six years.

*(16:30)

My concern is what happens if the rate of interest we are paying by this province goes up by one percent? With a debt of \$20 billion, if the rate of interest goes up by one percent alone, that would be an extra \$200 million taxpayers would have to fork out. That is not good news for the future. A \$200-million increase would be more than the budget for the Department of Agriculture alone.

Another indication that members opposite are in fact living in fantasyland, when it comes time

for the budget and when it comes time for the financial statements of the province, is that they believe the province has been spending taxpayers' dollars responsibly and that it is sustainable. The fact is that with a 6.6% increase in spending alone in this budget, how could that be sustainable when the rate of inflation is 1.8 percent and the real GDP increased by 2.9 percent? It is not possible to sustain that kind of spending, and in fact over the last six years, since 1999, the NDP has increased spending on an average of 5 percent a year. That is simply not sustainable.

Since 1999, the NDP has had an annual increase in expenditure in six years of over \$2 billion. Over \$2 billion on an annual basis of increased spending included with \$3.462-billion increases in debt mean there is uncontrolled spending in this province. This province under this Premier and under this Finance Minister has a spending addiction. This year, the spending increase will be \$506 million. That is one of the greatest single increases in spending in one year, plus the debt went up by \$526 million.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Schellenberg): Order. There is too much conversation going on. It makes it very difficult for the speaker to speak.

Mr. Hawranik: Thank you very much. This government is addicted to spending. They had an increase in this year's budget of \$506 million in terms of spending, but that does not end it. We have to also look at how much the debt is going to be increased as a result of this budget as well. When we look at the increase in debt as a result of this budget, it is \$526 million. Total new spending, we are looking at the total operations of government, the total new spending will be over \$1 billion. When I tell that to Manitobans, I think they would agree that we really need to send the Finance Minister, the Premier (Mr. Doer), and all of his Cabinet to the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba. They need help. The Addictions Foundation can obviously help them by trying to control their spending, and sooner rather than later.

Another indication that the government is living in fantasyland is that they believe the economy grew, and they believe this government is responsible for the increase in revenues. The fact is that the federal transfers are \$393 million above '03-04 levels. Transfer payments have come in at unprecedented

levels into this province. We are continuing to be a have-not province. We should be trying to grow our economy rather than going cap in hand every year to the federal Finance Minister to ask for more and more money. We need to grow our economy. We do not need to increase our dependence on federal government revenues.

I remember in one answer to one of my questions in Question Period, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) flippantly threw out the number that there has been a \$10-billion increase in Manitoba's GDP since 1999.

Again, the Finance Minister has been called by the Auditor General as misleading by omission, and I call him today misleading by omission by that statement. What he refuses to tell us is that Saskatchewan's economy grew by \$11 billion. It has nothing to do with how we have done since 1999. It is how we have done comparatively. We just are not competitive, and that is the history of this government and that is the history of this Finance Minister, misleading by omission, not only when it comes to the finances of this province but also when it comes time to bringing numbers forward in Question Period and bringing numbers forward to the people of Manitoba.

We do not have a long-term economic vision in this province, and that is something that members opposite ought to look at and ought to consider before continuing to spend recklessly the money that Manitobans have worked so hard to earn. Another example of the fantasyland that the NDP are living in is they believe that they replenished the rainy day fund. The fact remains is that the NDP is not responsible really for replenishing the rainy day fund; it had to do with the federal transfer payments. I heard some numbers thrown out by the Premier (Mr. Doer) earlier in his speech on the budget, and I can tell you I would like to correct the record. The balance in the fund in '96-97 when there was a Conservative government was \$577 million. Because of the 1997 flood of the century, solely due to that, we had to withdraw \$150 million from the rainy day fund, but we had an excuse. It was a disaster in the province, and we had to support Manitobans. We had to stand behind Manitobans who were affected by that flood of the century.

On March 31, 1999, there was \$427 million left in the rainy day fund, not the number that the Premier put forward on the record, but it was \$427

million in '99, when they took power in '99. Since that date, in '99-2000, the NDP withdrew \$162 million; in 2001-2002, they withdrew another \$73 million; in 2002-2003, they withdrew another \$12 million; and in 2003-2004 they took out another \$156 million. They took out a total of \$348 million in five years. Those are not my numbers; those are not mine. They are the Auditor General's numbers. That is where that comes from, and \$348 million in five years without any natural disasters, simply to try to balance the budget, simply to try to balance the books of this province. It has nothing to do with disasters like we had in '97 with the flood of the century, and in '03-04, all we were left with is \$79 million in that fund. They raided it down to \$79 million.

Then this year, because of the increased federal transfer payments, because of the windfall from the federal government, they put in \$314 million. In reality, they did not put \$314 million of their money into the rainy day fund. They put \$150 million back, which they said they would repay in the year 2002. It took them three years to repay that \$150 million and only because of the federal transfer payments, the windfall from the federal government that came into this province, only then did they replace the \$150 million that they said they were going to replace in 2002.

They also took \$155 million that was paid to the province for health care, an advanced health care payment, \$155 million for health care in this province that came through federal transfer payments, so in reality—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Schellenberg): Order. It makes it difficult for the speaker to speak if we are in conversation.

* (16:40)

Mr. Hawranik: The reality is that the province only put in \$9 million out of its own revenues into the rainy day fund. The \$150 million that they promised to pay back in 2002 was simply a repayment of what they took out of the rainy day fund just to try to balance the budget.

Members opposite are living in a fantasy. I will give you another example. The NDP say that they

have been balancing the budget every year since 1999. That is what they say. They are living in never-never land. They are living in fantasyland. Let us tell the truth. I am only quoting from numbers given to me by the Auditor General. It is only political spin. That is all it is. The fact is, they are wrong. The fact is, they are dead wrong. I invite them to read the Auditor General's report. Obviously they have not. Read the Auditor General's report. You will get the full facts.

The fact is, in 2001-2002, they ran a \$10-million deficit. The fact is, in 2002-2003, they ran a \$184-million deficit. The fact is, in 2003-2004, they ran a \$604-million deficit, all the while maintaining that they balanced the budget. If these were balanced budgets, my question is why has the total debt of the province increased by \$3.462 billion since 1999 and the net debt of the province increased by over \$3 billion since 1999.

I have heard the comment that they are proud of the fact that the debt-to-GDP ratio is going down. Well, I did some research. We are fifth-best among the provinces. That is all we are. We are not the best. We are not even above the Canadian average. The Finance Minister uses this as his benchmark to determine whether we can pay back the debt.

I was at a breakfast a couple of days ago with the Auditor General, when he was speaking at the Manitoba Chamber of Commerce breakfast—

An Honourable Member: Who was there?

Mr. Hawranik: There were not any NDP members there, not one. They are afraid to hear what the Auditor General had to say. That is what they are afraid of. They cannot defend their record. The Auditor General said that our debt-to-GDP ratio has actually been rising in the last two years. It has not been increasing. It has not been falling as the Finance Minister said, it has been rising. How can we trust this Finance Minister? I trust the Auditor General. The Auditor General is the watchdog for the province. He is independent of all political parties.

We cannot trust this Finance Minister. All he is doing is trying to give his own political spin to a bad situation. He has fudged the 2004-2005 health care numbers. He presented a budget in this House for 2004-2005 indicating that the health expenditure numbers under the budget, he presented this budget

as being truthful and honest. We found out from the Health Minister that, in fact, those were not the correct numbers. How can we trust this Finance Minister's numbers? He fudged the numbers in the health budget and he fudged the numbers at least once. Who is to say that he will not do it again? I believe that he has done it again. We have no assurances that those numbers are correct in the budget for 2005-2006.

Another example of the fantasyland that members opposite are living in. I refer to page 24 of the budget papers, the *Manitoba Advantage*, where they feel that it costs less to live here than anywhere across Canada. They have always put the information on the record here that we are the cheapest place to live across Canada. The fact is that a two-earner family of four has slipped to third place now. It is little publicized. They bury it in the budget papers. Compared to last year, they buried those numbers. Québec and Saskatchewan are cheaper places to live.

They use categories such as mortgage costs. Well, we have cheaper housing in Manitoba. They use categories such as auto insurance. Well, the PCs put in place the foundation for low premiums and they are the beneficiary of all of these, that we introduced before 1999.

There are some things that they do not put in the categories. What about food costs? When will they put that in the *Manitoba Advantage* papers? The reason why they will not, especially up North, is that milk is at \$5 a litre. They will not put food costs as a category within the *Manitoba Advantage* because they know it is not to their advantage. What about the cost of goods in this province? They do not include the cost of goods as one of the costs in this province. What about personal debt? Personal debt has increased in this province, and it has increased largely because of the outrageous personal income taxes charged by this government. They have had to pay increased deductibles under the Pharmacare program. They have had to pay increased hydro bills because of the hikes that have occurred under this government and increased under this government. Those are the realities in this province, and I present that for you for your consideration.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Mr. Speaker, I will give you another example about the fantasyland that this government is living in. They state that we have got low personal income tax rates, and that their reductions to taxes are substantial. That is their spin. The fact is eight provinces have yet to report their provincial budgets to their legislatures, and these income tax reductions that are proposed under this budget are not for this year. They are for 2006. Middle-income earners are the highest taxed west of New Brunswick. Their total savings for 2006, let me give you an example of that minuscule amount of taxes that Manitobans will actually—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable First Minister, on a point of order.

Mr. Doer: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I believe that it is convention, at least was when we were in opposition, to allow the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) and the Premier to speak. I spoke for only 24 minutes. The member is over 32 now. The Minister of Finance is due. Normally, we have done this with some dignity. We tried to do it in opposition. I would expect equal courtesy.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on the same point of order.

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I would like to, as the Deputy Speaker indicated, say that the critic of Finance does have a leader's latitude, and I also think that in fairness, and the minister will have time, he will have time, but we also know that the minister was the one who introduced the budget. He had full time to introduce the budget. We have heard from it, so I know that the members opposite have difficulty with the member from Lac du Bonnet bringing some truth and forthrightness to this debate. I know they do not want to hear that, and that is why they are concerned about it. He will ensure that the Minister of Finance has ample time and he is about to wind up.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, this is the First Minister trying to intervene, take up more time. I know the member from Lac du Bonnet was ready to wrap up. He was making some very salient points about why debt is going up in this province, and why this province has a spending habit with this. That is why he does not have a point of order, and clearly the member from Lac du Bonnet was just concluding his remarks.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. On the point of order raised by the honourable First Minister, under our rules, we have designated speaking times. We have designated rules. Whatever arrangements are made by the parties, it is through a gentlemen's agreement.

According to our rules, when leaders designate their unlimited speaking time, that is what we in the House, and whatever arrangements the House makes, that is up to them. But our rules govern me, that the honourable member was given the leader's latitude, and the honourable member has unlimited speaking time. So the honourable member does not have a point of order. It is a dispute over the facts.

* * *

* (16:50)

Mr. Hawranik: I want to point out at least one more example about how members opposite are living in fantasyland. They believe that the elimination of the maternity ward at the Victoria General Hospital is a safety issue. The fact is that if performing only 700 deliveries is a safety issue there are babies being delivered in hospitals in rural Manitoba with less deliveries, far less deliveries are taking place. How can that be a safety issue within Victoria General Hospital?

The NDP have intentionally unravelled the maternity ward. They only funded 800 deliveries under their watch. We will hold, I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, some of the members accountable across the way for the way they are going to vote on the budget. We are going to hold the members from Fort Garry, Riel, Seine River and St. Norbert. We are going to check how they vote and we are going to make sure they are accountable to their constituents.

The question remains, Mr. Speaker, can the budget numbers be believed, and that is where we

have problems. We cannot believe the budget numbers that have been presented by this minister. How can we trust the books that have been presented by the Finance Minister? They have a history of cooking the books.

Vic Schroeder in 1984, when he was Finance Minister, the provincial auditor, Bill Ziprick, and I will give you the exact quote, stated, "The NDP cooked the books." He said it right in the newspaper. He said they understated the deficit by \$263 million. The auditor did not even sign off on the books. It is comforting to know that Vic Schroeder is now the chair of Manitoba Hydro. Is that not comforting?

Now, fast-forward to 2004. The expenses of the health budget were understated so that the '04-05 budget balances. How can we trust the budget numbers? We obviously cannot trust the budget numbers that are presented by this Finance Minister.

The '03-04 audit, Mr. Speaker, the Finance Minister insists on a \$13-million surplus when the Auditor General has stated that there was a \$604-million deficit. How can we trust this minister, a \$13-million surplus, how does he arrive at that? He counts revenue that is not really revenue. He does not count expenses that are really expenses. It is easy to balance the books then. It takes no magic to do that, just do not count the expenses.

Can we support this budget? I say no. We do not know the real numbers, and we have lost an opportunity forever for the residents of the province of Manitoba. We do not know the numbers. We have no confidence in the numbers that have been given to us by the Finance Minister, and therefore, Mr. Speaker, I urge all members opposite to vote against this budget.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): The good news is we do not need the amount of time they take to tell the truth to the people of Manitoba. The members opposite are the party of yowlers, growlers and howlers, but they do not tell anything that makes any sense to the people of Manitoba.

We have an economic plan for this province, Mr. Speaker, and because it is focussed and clear, we are going to put it on the record before we vote in seven minutes.

The first point in that plan is putting education first. Members opposite know nothing about that. We

have had a 10% reduction in tuition fees. People have voted against it across the way every single year that they have been over there. We have increased college enrolment 31 percent. They are in denial about that. We have increased college and university funding by 30 percent. They voted against it. We put bursaries back in place in this province. These people cut the bursary program for young people in this province. We brought it back. It is up over \$17.6 million on an annual basis in this province. We put in place a 10% co-op education tax credit. They voted against it. We have more young people in this province and staying in this province than ever before. We built the University College of the North; they voted against it. Half these people have not even been in the North. They do not even know where the North is. For them, the North is driving to the Legislature.

When it comes to building through research and innovation, we have a plan. Ernst & Young said, "Manitoba has the fastest-growing biotechnology industry in Canada." There has been a dramatic increase in research and innovation in this province. We have over \$440 million in annual revenue being generated by our research and development sector in this province. Our biotechnology sector employs over 2300 people. We became the centre for the International Centre for Infectious Diseases. This government brought that centre to Manitoba, in co-operation with the federal government. It is all written down here. The members opposite just have to take two minutes to read it, but they do not have the civility to do that.

Now, that is our second plank. We have got a centre for commercialization of biomedical technology, which we are expanding. We have got the Asper centre for research that is expanding research in this province. We have a nutraceutical centre that is being expanded, that is being built in this province. These members vote against every one of these initiatives, which lays a long-term foundation for innovation in this province.

Now, three: we have raised and retained investment through venture capital in this province. These members vote against all those initiatives. We have a \$5-million partnership with several private investors for the \$25-million CentreStone Ventures Fund. Members opposite are going to vote against it. We have a \$187 million for the St. Leon wind power project, the first windmill project in Manitoba, the

largest project in Canada, a perfect complement to Manitoba, a public-private partnership. Members opposite cannot find it in their hearts to support it.

We have put in place a community enterprise development tax credit. Members opposite vote against it, as they always continue to do.

Then we come to affordable government. Second-lowest per capita services in the country. Members opposite, they cannot accept that. They do not understand efficiency. Their concept of good government is to privatize everything. That is how they would like to do it. We have a higher credit rating than when these members were in office, but can they accept that? No, they cannot.

Finally, growing through immigration. We have a very diverse province. We have over 8000 newcomers coming to this province. We are retaining more young people. We are going to go to 10 000 immigrants in this province. We are going to help Manitoba be a province that grows in population, but will the members opposite accept that? No, they will not.

Then our sixth point: building on our clean energy advantage. These folks did nothing in the nineties to expand our energy advantage in this province. They have done nothing on geothermal. They have done nothing on wind power. They did not build one additional kilowatt of hydro-electricity through the nineties. We are going to build it. We are going to put it in place. We are going to do it in co-operation with our northern Aboriginal partners, and we are going to make sure that everybody benefits from that as we go forward.

Finally, building our communities. Under these guys opposite, downtown Winnipeg was falling apart. We are reinvesting in downtown Winnipeg. Members opposite could not get an arena built during the nineties. That arena is built, and it is operating right now. People are going to it, and they know this government made it happen.

An Honourable Member: Keep going, Greg.

Mr. Selinger: Got more time? All right. Excellent. There is going to be a new Canadian Museum for Human Rights in this province. There is going to be a new Winnipeg Airports Authority. There is going to be an expanded floodway built in this province. These people are going to vote against all of those initiatives.

There is going to be a Kenaston underpass. The Member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Loewen) is going to vote against it.

There is going to be waste water treatment upgrades in this province. We are going to restore Lake Winnipeg. Members let Lake Winnipeg start to slowly die under their watch. We are going to restore Lake Winnipeg.

We brought the centre for sustainable development to this province, and once again, members will vote against the resources to support that.

* (17:00)

What about our neighbourhoods, Mr. Speaker? In the nineties, the members opposite presided over a decline in assessment values in north Winnipeg of 35 to 60 percent. We have seen those values come back under our Neighbourhoods Alive! program. We have seen those values come back under the Affordable Housing Initiative. We are going to put the North End Wellness Centre in place. We have an Affordable Housing Initiative which has rebuilt over 2300 homes in the community, and these guys are going to vote against it. They are also going to vote against the Winnipeg Partnership Agreement.

Northern Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, was totally neglected when these folks were government. We have a University College of the North. We have more people going to school in the North than they have ever gone before. We have—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hour being 5 p.m., pursuant to Rule 36(6), I am interrupting the proceedings to put the questions necessary to dispose of the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) that this House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government and all amendments to that motion.

Therefore, the question before the House is the proposed sub-amendment of the honourable Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard). Do members wish to have this sub-amendment read?

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Yes? Okay.

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

And further regrets that this Budget also ignores present and future needs of Manitobans by:

- (r) Failing to provide an effective plan to improve health and prevent sickness; and
- (s) Failing to provide an effective strategy to deal with child poverty; and
- (t) Failing to provide Manitobans with the approach needed to decrease childhood obesity and diabetics; and
- (u) Failing to provide Manitobans with the legal right to timely, quality health care; and
- (v) Failing to do any better than the previous Tory government in improving the dental health of Manitoba children and decreasing the incidence of early childhood tooth decay.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the sub-amendment?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Voice Vote

Mr. Speaker: All those in favour of the sub-amendment, say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Mr. Speaker: All those opposed to the sub-amendment, say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

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

* * *

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): A recorded vote, please.

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member have support?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Are there any members to support? You need four members to have a recorded vote. The members that support the recorded vote, please stand.

There is no support.

Therefore, the question before the House is the proposed amendment of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The proposed amendment moved by the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Murray) to the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger)

THAT this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

Do members wish to have the amendment read?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Yes. Okay.

THAT the motion be amended by deleting all the words after "House" and substituting the following:

therefore regrets this Budget ignores the present and future needs of Manitobans by:

- (a) Failing to offer any vision and to reflect the priorities of Manitoba; and
- (b) Failing to provide a long-term economic strategy and tax reduction strategy that addresses the fact that Manitobans are now, under the Doer NDP government, the highest taxed west of New Brunswick, and make Manitoba a "have" province; and
- (c) Failing to address the debt of Manitoba which has grown under the Doer NDP government, thereby mortgaging our children's future; and
- (d) Failing to eliminate education taxes off of residential property and farmland; and
- (e) Failing to offer a "New Deal" which will meet the needs of Manitoba's municipalities; and

(f) Failing to provide adequate funding for post-secondary institutions; and

(g) Failing to provide relief for Manitoba's livestock producers and failing to provide for sufficient slaughter capacity; and

(h) Failing to provide for a meaningful review of the operation and administration of Manitoba's Regional Health Authorities; and

(i) Failing to provide a long-term plan for the reduction of health care waiting lists; and

(j) Failing to provide an opportunity for publicly funded health care services in privately managed clinics; and

(k) Failing to provide child care options for parents by failing to support for-profit child care centres as well as not-for-profit centres, and failing to provide a tax credit for stay-at-home parents; and

(l) Failing Manitoba's sick and elderly by increasing Pharmacare deductibles by 20 percent over the past four years; and

(m) Failing to support Manitoba's environment by failing to provide for the long-term sustainability of Manitoba's recycling and product stewardship programs; and

(n) Failing to deal with record numbers of auto thefts and record numbers of murders; and

(o) Failing to provide a plan or strategy to break up existing gangs and prevent new gangs from coming to Manitoba; and

(p) Failing to deal with the high number of grow-ops and labs manufacturing illegal drugs and the proliferation of drugs; and

(q) Failing to acknowledge their raid on Manitoba Hydro contributed to a 10% increase in Hydro rates.

As a consequence, the government has thereby lost the confidence of the House and the people of Manitoba.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Voice Vote

Mr. Speaker: All those in favour of the amendment, say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Mr. Speaker: All those opposed to the amendment, say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

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

Formal Vote

Mr. Murray: It is such a good amendment I think we should all vote on it.

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

The question before the House is the proposed amendment moved by the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Murray) to the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger)

THAT this House approves the general budgetary policy of the government.

Do members wish to have the amendment reread?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Division

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

Yeas

Cullen, Cummings, Derkach, Driedger, Dyck, Eichler, Goertzen, Hawranik, Loewen, Maguire, Mitchelson, Murray, Penner, Reimer, Rowat, Schuler, Stefanson, Taillieu.

Nays

Aglugub, Allan, Altemeyer, Ashton, Bjornson, Brick, Caldwell, Chomiak, Dewar, Doer, Gerrard, Irvin-Ross, Jennissen, Jha, Korzeniowski, Lamoureux, Lathlin, Lemieux, Mackintosh, Maloway, Martindale, McGifford, Melnick, Nevakshonoff, Oswald, Reid, Robinson, Rondeau, Sale, Santos, Schellenberg, Selinger, Smith, Struthers, Swan, Wowchuk.

Madam Clerk (Patricia Chaychuk): Yeas 18, Nays 36.

Mr. Speaker: I declare the amendment lost.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House is the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance

THAT this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Voice Vote

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

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Mr. Speaker: All those opposed to the motion, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Speaker: In my opinion, the Yeas have it.

Formal Vote

Mr. Murray: Yeas and Nays, Mr. Speaker.

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

The question before the House is the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger)

THAT this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

Division

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

Yeas

Aglugub, Allan, Altemeyer, Ashton, Bjornson, Brick, Caldwell, Chomiak, Dewar, Doer, Irvin-Ross, Jennissen, Jha, Korzeniowski, Lathlin, Lemieux, Mackintosh, Maloway, Martindale, McGifford, Melnick, Nevakshonoff, Oswald, Reid, Robinson, Rondeau, Sale, Santos, Schellenberg, Selinger, Smith, Struthers, Swan, Wowchuk.

Nays

Cullen, Cummings, Derkach, Driedger, Dyck, Eichler, Gerrard, Goertzen, Hawranik, Lamoureux, Loewen, Maguire, Mitchelson, Murray, Penner, Reimer, Rowat, Schuler, Stefanson, Taillieu.

Madam Clerk: Yeas 34, Nays 20.

Mr. Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

* * *

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table the Estimates order, and just give notice that on Monday we will be calling, under Orders of the Day, Interim Supply.

Mr. Speaker, 5:30?

Mr. Speaker: Is it the will of the House to call it 5:30? *[Agreed]*

The hour being 5:30, this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 17, 2005

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