

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
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.
BLADY, Sharon	Kirkfield Park	N.D.P.
BLAIKIE, Bill, Hon.	Elmwood	N.D.P.
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BRIESE, Stuart	Ste. Rose	P.C.
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CULLEN, Cliff	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
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DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary, Hon.	Concordia	N.D.P.
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DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	P.C.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
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GRAYDON, Cliff	Emerson	P.C.
HAWRANIK, Gerald	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
HICKES, George, Hon.	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
HOWARD, Jennifer	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
JENNISSSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, April 7, 2009

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYER

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 13—The Medical Amendment Act

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I move, seconded by the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth (Mr. Bjornson), that Bill 13, The Medical Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi médicale, now be read a first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Oswald: Bill 13 will amend The Medical Act to allow the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Manitoba to register students enrolled in the University of Manitoba Physician Assistant Education Program, at the Faculty of Medicine. Once these students graduate, the college will register them as physician assistants. Part 1 of the current clinical assistant register will be replaced with an educational register for medical students and physician assistant students. A new physician assistant register will be created for graduate physician assistants. Part 2 of the current clinical assistant register is not changed by the amendments.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba is the first Canadian jurisdiction to implement a graduate level physician assistant education program. There are currently 12 students in the two-year program and they are expected to graduate in 2010. They will be able to provide a wide range of procedures including conducting patient exams, ordering diagnostic tests, undertaking minor procedures and prescribing needed medications and treatments. I'm very pleased to present this bill to the Legislature and I urge all members to support it.

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

PETITIONS

Paved Shoulders for Trans-Canada Highway

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to read the following petition and these are the reasons for the petition:

The lack of paved shoulders on the Manitoba portions of the Trans-Canada Highway poses a serious safety risk to motorists, cyclists and pedestrians alike.

This risk was borne out again with the tragic June 2008 deaths of two cyclists travelling east of Virden on the Trans-Canada Highway and injuries sustained by two other cyclists.

Subsequently, the Government of Manitoba has indicated it will pave the shoulders on the Trans-Canada Highway but has not provided a time frame for doing so.

Manitoba's Assistant Deputy Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation told a Winnipeg radio station on October 16, 2007, that when it comes to highways projects, the provincial government has a "flexible response program."

In the interests of protecting public safety, it is critical that the paving of the shoulders on the Trans-Canada Highway in Manitoba be completed as soon as possible.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) to consider making the completion of the paving of the shoulders on the Trans-Canada Highway an urgent provincial government priority.

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to clearly articulate a time frame for paving the shoulders on the Trans-Canada Highway in Manitoba

This petition is signed by Richard Kristjanson, Wayne Unger, Carol Anne Trowell and many, many others.

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

Long-Term Care Facility—Morden

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background for this petition is as follows:

Tabor Home Incorporated is a time-expired personal care home in Morden with safety, environmental and space deficiencies.

The seniors of Manitoba are valuable members of the community with increasing health-care needs requiring long-term care.

The community of Morden and the surrounding area are experiencing substantial population growth.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) to strongly consider giving priority for funding to develop and staff a new 100-bed long-term care facility so that clients are not exposed to unsafe conditions and so that Boundary Trails Health Centre beds remain available for acute-care patients instead of waiting placement clients.

This is signed by Gil Wiebe, John Wiens and Jocelyn Peters and many, many others. Thank you.

Seven Oaks Hospital—Emergency Services

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 current Premier (Mr. Doer) and the NDP government are reducing emergency services at the Seven Oaks Hospital.

On October 6, 1995, the NDP introduced a matter of urgent public importance that stated that "the ordinary business of the House to be set aside to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely the threat to the health-care system posed by this government's plans to limit emergency services in the city of Winnipeg community hospitals."

On December 6, 1995, when the then-PC government suggested it was going to reduce emergency services at the Seven Oaks Hospital, the NDP leader then asked Premier Gary Filmon to "reverse the horrible decisions of his government and his Minister of Health and reopen our community-based emergency wards."

The NDP gave Manitobans the impression that they supported Seven Oaks Hospital having full emergency services seven days a week, 24 hours a day

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Premier of Manitoba consider how important it is to have the Seven Oaks Hospital provide full emergency services seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

This is signed by C. Sveinson, C. Johns and K. Pilcher and many, many other fine Manitobans. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ring Dike Road—Ste. Rose du Lac

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

The Ring Dike Road is a well-used gravel road that is used as a secondary road in and out of the community of Ste. Rose du Lac.

Given this heavy pattern of use, there is strong interest in the community in seeing the Ring Dike Road upgraded to a paved provincial road.

It would be most cost-effective to upgrade the Ring Dike Road to a provincial road at the same time that upgrades are being undertaken at the junction of Highway 68 and Highway 5.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) to consider upgrading the Ring Dike Road at Ste. Rose du Lac into a provincial road; and

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to consider upgrading the Ring Dike Road at the same time that work is being done at the junction of Highway 68 and Highway 5.

This petition is signed by Jason Waitson, Emile Paradis and Robert Turko and many, many others.

* (13:40)

Pharmacare Deductibles

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition:

The NDP government has increased Pharmacare deductibles by 5 percent each year for the past seven years, with the curious exception of the 2007 election year.

As a result of the cumulative 34 percent hike in Pharmacare deductibles by the NDP government,

some Manitobans are forced to choose between milk and medicine.

Seniors, fixed and low-income-earning Manitobans are the most negatively affected by these increases.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Premier (Mr. Doer) of Manitoba to consider reversing his decision to increase Pharmacare deductibles by 5 percent in budget 2008.

To request the Premier of Manitoba to consider reducing health-care bureaucracy, as previously promised, and to consider directing those savings into sustaining Pharmacare and improving patient care.

These petitions are signed by Carol Kilfoyle, Joyce Elder, Rosella Grift and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Traffic Signal Installation— PTH 15 and Highway 206

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

In August 2008, the Minister of Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) stated that traffic volumes at the intersection of PTH 15 and Highway 206 in Dugald exceeded those needed to warrant the installation of traffic lights.

Every school day, up to a thousand students travel through this intersection in Dugald where the lack of traffic signals puts their safety at risk.

Thousands of vehicles travel daily through this intersection in Dugald where the lack of traffic signals puts at risk the safety of these citizens.

In 2008, there was a 300 percent increase in accidents at this intersection.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Transportation consider the immediate installation of traffic signals at the intersection of PTH 15 and Highway 206 in Dugald.

To request that the Minister of Transportation recognize the value of the lives and well-being of the students and citizens of Manitoba.

This is signed by John Toews, Lou-Ann Pichette, Steve Kennedy and many, many other Manitobans.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Earthquake in Italy

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I have a statement for the House.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my condolences to the people of Italy and the victims of the deadly earthquake in central Italy. We know that this situation affects many families and friends in Manitoba's Italian community and our thoughts and prayers are with them also.

The 6.3 magnitude earthquake has devastated the mountainous region of Abruzzo. The Italian government has declared a state of emergency and has reported more than 200 fatalities, 1,500 injuries and thousands of people left homeless in this earthquake situation.

As Manitobans, we understand the impact of natural disasters and what they have on communities. In times of crisis, communities come together and work to overcome these horrific events. I understand that Manitoba's Italian community is already working with the Red Cross to provide support and assistance as needed.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to all those affected by the earthquakes and those working to save lives.

Following remarks by other members, I would ask that this House join in a moment of silence in memory of the victims. Thank you.

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): I thank the Premier for the statement today, and we support his suggestion that we have a moment of silence in recognition of those victims.

Early Monday morning, this devastating earthquake struck the Abruzzo region of Italy and left, as the Premier said, at least 200 dead, 1,500 people homeless. We're hearing through media accounts of the hardship to the many thousands of people who have been impacted, injuries to people in the region, destruction of homes and businesses, a lack of natural gas and water and other basic amenities that are necessary for life.

So we extend our sympathy to those who have been impacted. We thank and acknowledge those members of the Italian community here in Manitoba

who are working, as the Premier indicated, to provide relief to those who have been hurt by this devastating natural disaster. We extend our sympathy and concern to all involved and certainly support the efforts of relief agencies, the government of Italy and local residents of the Abruzzo region as they do what they can to mitigate these losses. Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I ask leave to speak to the Premier's statement.

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member have leave? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I join other members today in recognizing the tragic earthquake that's happened in Abruzzo, Italy, in reaching out to members of the Italian community who have friends or family or relatives in the area and who are working so hard with people in Italy to try and do what can be done to help those who have been so much affected.

We extend, with the others here, our sympathy and compassion and our wishes too. If there is anything that we can do as a Chamber, as MLAs, to help this situation, we are ready to do that.

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement for a moment of silence. *[Agreed]*

A moment of silence was observed.

Provincial Ice Jams and Flooding

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): I have a ministerial statement.

We are dealing with extraordinary flood circumstances this year because of cold temperatures, strong ice cover still in place on the Red River and culverts that are frozen solid with ice. It has been a challenge to adjust to rapidly changing conditions as they have arisen. One such example is the unexpected ice jam which occurred last night in St. Andrews where two homes were flooded.

Our flood-fighting efforts are focussed on three fronts. We're dealing with rising water on the Red River as water is coming towards Manitoba from the U.S. We're dealing with the unusual circumstance of having solid ice cover on the Red River with such high flows. We expect to be facing overland flooding as the warmer weather sets in this weekend.

Our government has also deployed 37 steamers. In fact, 25 of these steamers are working in areas north and south of Winnipeg and throughout the Red

River Valley. Today, travel restrictions will be implemented on Highway 75. The stretch of Highway 75 from Winnipeg city limits to Provincial Road 205 will be closed, allowing only local traffic. Provincial Road 205 to Morris will be closed. Highway 75 from Morris to Provincial Trunk Highway 14 will be closed, allowing only local traffic.

* (13:50)

The Department of Water Stewardship officials have informed me that the crest is expected to reach Emerson this Thursday and will reach Winnipeg, it's projected currently, on April 16. Since yesterday, the river level in downtown Winnipeg has risen slightly to 17.39 feet as of 9 a.m. The threat of ice jamming in the city remains considerable due to the large number of bridges and the above average ice strength. Both Amphibex icebreakers are on standby inside the city of Winnipeg. One is near the Redwood Bridge; another is located near the south Perimeter bridge. As well, heavy equipment has also been positioned close to the St. Mary's bridge to help mitigate ice jams within the city.

We will be making disaster financial assistance available and announced that earlier, and we will continue to work with Manitobans to deal with this flood.

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): I would like to thank the minister for his flood update, his daily flood update. There are a number of things happening that are a little unpredictable at the present time. As he stated, the ice conditions are different than we've seen in other years, and we can only hope that we're in position to address any of the concerns that arise out of that. We certainly are supporting any efforts that are taken to mitigate any of the problems that might arise. We understand, as the update has said, that there have been some highway and road closures. There will be more I'm sure, and we do appreciate the updates.

I understand that the leaders are inspecting some of the flood areas tomorrow morning, the leaders of the parties in this House, and we'll wait for further reports. Thank you very much.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I ask leave to speak to the minister's statement.

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member have leave? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the minister for his update on the flood situation, the road closures situation with the ice jams, with which we all continue to be concerned.

I also want to thank the Premier for leading the flood tour about 10 days ago and the one tomorrow which I will be participating in. Clearly, it's a major concern to all Manitobans at the moment. We are hoping against hope that the ice jams don't cause more severe problems than they already have.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I would like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us Marcie Hawranik who is the daughter of the honourable Member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik).

Also in the public gallery we have from the University of Winnipeg seven Environmental Studies students under the direction of Ms. Maria Healy. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for Wolseley (Mr. Altemeyer).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Political Parties Public Financing

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): In October, as markets were crashing and many Manitobans were seeing their pensions decline, the government brought into law Bill 37, which contained within it a vote tax provision that paid political parties at the expense of Manitoba taxpayers.

Mr. Speaker, in the current environment with rising economic stress, concerns about job losses and many who are suffering reduced pensions, we see, in addition to that, a budget which contains rising debt, an \$88-million deficit and concerns about the sustainability of Manitoba's financial position.

I want to ask the Premier, in light of these circumstances, whether he has reconsidered his party's position in collecting the vote tax money and, if so, if he could update the House on what their intention is.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): No, we haven't, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) indicated at committee that it was the intention of the party to not apply for vote money in this year.

I just want to ask the Premier whether the Member for Kildonan was correct on that and whether it's his party's position that they will not be accepting taxpayer grants this year and what their position is on a go-forward basis.

Mr. Doer: The Member for Kildonan is always right.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, while some might take issue with the statement, we certainly don't disagree with the fact that he may be right on this issue. For that, we congratulate him. We want to just indicate our support for their decision to not take the money.

But I wonder if the Premier can go one step further and support our bill to repeal the vote tax so that that option isn't on the table for future parties at future times to take taxpayer dollars at a time when taxpayers in Manitoba are suffering.

Can he get the Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie) onside to reverse their party's position on this bill?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, we will have legislation that will deal with all matters, not just narrow matters, including the partisan mailings that are being paid for by taxpayers all over the province, thousands and thousands of pieces of mail mailed out with taxpayer support. Stay tuned. We'll be bringing legislation.

Economic Downturn Fiscal Strategy

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, I know we didn't get an answer on the vote tax. Maybe we can get another answer from the Finance Minister.

I met an individual the other day who was the primary wage earner of his family, and he thinks his job is in jeopardy. But, still, he decides to go out and buy a big screen TV, take a second mortgage on his house and withdraw 15 percent of his RRSPs just to cover household expenses; so, reduced income, more expenses and more debt in a time of uncertainty.

Would the Finance Minister consider this sound financial planning?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I wish the member opposite would not

discuss his personal finances in the House. I think that's very unfortunate that he did that. But I am aware of financial counselling services in this province, and, if the member seriously feels that himself or any other individual needs financial counselling resources, we will make those available to him.

Net Debt Provincial Comparisons

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): It's obvious, Mr. Speaker, that the Finance Minister can't make a connection between his budget and this fictitious individual. I am glad, I am glad that the minister is not my financial planner, because I can't afford his advice, nor can Manitobans.

It seems the Finance Minister likes to balance his not so balanced budget with debts and welfare payments. It seems his vision for Manitoba is debtors' prison. Manitobans' net debt now exceeds—and listen to this—now exceeds the total net debt of B.C., Alberta and Saskatchewan combined. That's right. We have more net debt than the rest of western Canada.

Is that Finance Minister happy with achieving that goal for Manitoba?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I know the member spends a lot of time speaking to fictional Manitobans. Perhaps, if he spent more time in Manitoba, then he would speak to more real Manitobans.

Manitobans have told us that they want us to do things that invest in the economy while maintaining and expanding employment. They have told us they wanted to do that in a balanced budget environment.

The member references other jurisdictions to the west of us that have run deficits this year, are running significant deficits. We are not doing that. We are investing in Manitoba in order to build the kind of infrastructure that will allow us to economically prosper: sewer, water, highways, the knowledge economy, university facilities, college facilities, those kinds of investments—including social housing—which will make a difference in Manitobans' lives.

The member opposite, I guarantee, will vote against every one of those initiatives.

* (14:00)

Mr. Borotsik: Mr. Speaker, at least those other jurisdictions have real budgets, not fictitious surpluses like this minister has put forward.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's important that you listen to this. British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan, combined, have \$11 billion in net debt. Manitoba alone has \$11.8 billion in net debt this budget year. British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan have nine million people. Manitoba combined has 1.2 million people.

Western Canada: \$11-billion debt, nine million people. Manitoba: \$11.8 billion, 1.2. Equalization in western Canada: zero. Equalization in Manitoba: \$2 billion.

Mr. Speaker, to the Finance Minister: Is it any wonder that he doesn't get invited to any of their meetings anymore?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, our net debt since coming into office has declined from 32 percent as a proportion of the economy, which is where the members opposite—that was the best they were able to do after 11 years in office. Our net debt is now [*inaudible*] percent. It has declined by more than a quarter.

It will go up by about 2 percent this year as we do our part, along with all of the other governments around the world, to stimulate the economy to avoid and to mitigate a recession caused by the philosophy of the members opposite, the philosophy of the reckless "financialization" of the economy, reckless "deregulization" of the economy, reckless privatization of the economy. All of those policies have brought home a—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I've been standing for quite some time here. I remind members that when the Speaker is standing, all members should be seated and that the Speaker should be heard in silence. It's not going to help decorum when we're getting shouting back and forth, back and forth here. Let's have some decorum. We have guests in the gallery and we have the viewing public. Let's have a little bit of decorum here.

The honourable minister has concluded?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Next question.

**Personal Income Tax
Five-Year Reduction Strategy**

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, this minister is responsible for reckless increases in debt. He forgot that one. In the 2007 and 2008 budgets, the Finance Minister included a five-year income tax reduction plan extending all the way through 2011. That's the personal income tax reduction plan. Even though the plan was modest at best, there was at least a plan. This year's budget conveniently omits that five-year personal income tax reduction plan. In fact, there's no plan at all.

So I ask the Minister of Finance: Will he be implementing the five-year plan, or is he planning to break his tax reduction promise?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, if the member would have taken a little time to read the budget, he would have noticed that we have kept Manitobans in the top three or four of affordability compared to all the provinces east and west of us. That includes \$110 million of tax savings in this budget and a further \$50 million next year. That's the top three.

Now, if you want to go to another comparator, Saskatchewan did a comparison of affordability across Canada. Because Saskatchewan has a government that believes in honest reporting, they showed who was No. 1 for affordability in Canada, according to their analysis, and it wasn't Saskatchewan. It was Manitoba that was No. 1 in affordability, by Saskatchewan's own analysis. Will the member accept those facts?

Mr. Hawranik: Mr. Speaker, the Finance Minister's five-year personal income tax reduction plan has vanished from his budget. There's no indication in the budget that he has any intention to reduce personal income tax rates or increase personal income tax thresholds.

I ask the Minister of Finance: Why has he broken his promise to reduce personal income tax rates and to increase income tax thresholds in 2010 and 2011? Why has he done that?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, we have reduced taxes, both for business and for families and individuals in Manitoba by approximately 900 to \$1 billion in the last 10 budgets. In every one of those budgets, the members opposite, including the Member for Lac du Bonnet, have voted against that. Now they want more tax cuts to vote against.

We have made a commitment to keep Manitoba in the top three for affordability. We have done that 10 times in a row, and other jurisdictions have recognized that, including Saskatchewan, by putting us in the No. 1 position.

Manitobans know this is the best place to live. Manitobans know this is the most affordable place to live, and only the members opposite have to get on board and vote for the budget so we can keep it that way.

Mr. Hawranik: Mr. Speaker, what we want of this Finance Minister is for him to keep his promise. That's all we want him to do. A typical Manitoba family, a two-earner family of four earning \$60,000 a year, will pay more in this province than almost anywhere else in Canada. This typical Manitoba family is the highest taxed in the country except for Québec.

So I ask this Minister of Finance: Why is he overtaxing these families? Is he happy about that?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, if the member looks at the appendices starting at E14, he will see that Manitobans of all different family types and arrangements are in either the first or the second position for all the affordability costs of living in this province. That includes their taxes, that includes their energy costs, their Autopac costs, their day-care costs, their costs of housing. All things included, Manitoba remains in the top three for affordability in this country.

The members opposite have resisted that and have voted against those measures in every single budget. We have every intention of keeping Manitoba one of the best places to live for quality of life and for affordability. I guarantee you that the Member for Lac du Bonnet, surrounded by all his cackling colleagues, will once again vote against the budget.

**Teachers' Retirement Allowances Fund
Performance Report**

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, given the recent downturn in the financial markets, Manitobans are concerned about the value of their pension plans. Now, one such fund that teachers and retired teachers have their eye on is the Teachers' Retirement Allowances Fund. Last December, the minister reported, and I quote, the fund was underperforming.

Would the minister provide an update on the current valuation of the Teachers' Retirement Fund?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, it comes as no surprise to anybody in this Legislature that pension funds everywhere in the world have had a very difficult last year, and we know that all pension funds have seen a decline in their values.

One thing we do know is the Teachers' Retirement Fund has performed in the top quartile, if not the top decile, for all funds of a similar category across the country. What that means, Mr. Speaker, is their losses have been less than all funds in the peer group by which they are compared. They have done relatively well just like Manitoba.

Civil Service Superannuation Fund Performance Report

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Well, Mr. Speaker, for the minister's information, in January of this year, officials from TRAF informed us that the fund was down 15 percent in value at that time. Additionally, the Civil Service Superannuation Fund was down 13 percent to 17 percent, somewhere in the area of \$350 million to \$550 million at that time. We are simply trying to get a picture of where we're at and where these funds are at today.

Would the minister please provide a current valuation of the civil service pension fund?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Both of these funds will report through their annual reports as required by legislation. We have made it clear that both funds have sustained losses. Relative to their peers, they've done reasonably well. They know that. They've reported on that. They will give the precise numbers when they come due.

I point out that this is the second budget since 1961 where the full cost of the employers' pension contributions for both teachers and civil servants are fully funded in this budget, something members opposite never did. They never made one nickel of contribution for the employers' responsibility for those pension funds. They are fully funded in this budget and the member will vote against that.

Mr. Cullen: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is understandable that these funds have lost value over the last few months, but those Manitobans who rely on those funds for income need clarification on the integrity and sustainability of these funds.

Now, a recent newsletter from the civil service pension board indicated the actuary recommended a 2 percent increase in contributions from employees' salaries.

I ask the minister: What are his plans to deal with the civil service pension and the teachers' pension fund?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the first thing we did to increase the viability of these funds was every new civil servant hired and every teacher hired, we started paying the employers' contribution fund. That had never been done before by the members opposite.

The second measure we took is that we took a portion of our debt repayment and we put a portion of our debt and pension liability, we put that into funding the teachers' and civil servants' pension fund.

The third measure we took was we moved to a situation where we actually increased the employers' contribution to the teachers' fund up to 8 percent. That had never been done before. That was an increase of about 14 percent, and we put additional resources into that. Now we fund all the employers' contributions for both teachers' and civil servants' employers' obligations, and we will look at further measures in the future to solidify those funds so that—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

* (14:10)

Highway 75 Flooding Concerns

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, Highway 75 closed at Morris today. The last time it was closed was 2006, the last major flood event. Since then municipal leaders have lobbied the Province to develop a plan to keep this important highway open and dry in the future. Well, it's three years later, it is the future, and here we are again today.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister tell this House why we are dealing with the same issue of the closure of Highway 75 three years after municipal leaders have lobbied this government to take action?

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Water, water everywhere, and not a drop of Quik.

I can tell the member there is a flood happening and the water is going over the highway. Since '06, we have built up portions that we've invested money into by approximately \$70 million or so. We've

raised the highway in portions and we'll continue to work towards improving Highway 75. Indeed, working with the federal government, we said that we would be investing in Highway 75 even further and will continue to do so.

We've also invested in Highway 59 and many other highways, Highway 2, Highway 3, many highways in southern Manitoba that have been put in our 10-year capital plan, a \$4-billion plan that we've invested in.

Working with the federal government, we'll continue to invest in Highway 75, as we have pointed out on many, many occasions.

Mrs. Taillieu: The fact remains that, again, the highway is closed three years later.

Highway 75 is not only the main thoroughfare for the town of Morris, but it is the major transportation route from the United States to Winnipeg and beyond, and it will be a key trucking route for goods to and from a potential inland port.

Towns like Morris need an update on the plans to upgrade Highway 75. It has a tremendous economic impact on them.

Mr. Speaker, what plans does the minister have in regard to future upgrades to Highway 75? Will it go through Morris or will it go around Morris?

Mr. Lemieux: Many people that live in the town of Morris have asked the MLA that exact question. Where does she stand on it? Does she want a bypass going around which is very, very expensive, and also the improvements through Morris are very, very expensive.

Raising the highway on Highway 75, Mr. Speaker, also can create some hydraulic impacts, for example, communities on the east side like the Roseau community.

So we're being very, very careful and taking steps in a very prudent way, Mr. Speaker, working with the engineers to determine the hydraulics related to increasing the highway and what height should that be.

I guess as the opposition you can ask it both ways and every which way. But where does she stand? Does she want the bypass around Morris like she suggested?

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the minister is asking what I would do, I'd be very happy to take over his job if he'd like to stand aside.

Mr. Speaker, the crossing at Emerson is the major—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I can't hear a thing. The honourable member is trying to ask a question, and to get a response you have to be able to hear the question. Let's have a little bit of decorum here.

Mrs. Taillieu: The crossing at Emerson is the major border crossing in Manitoba, and Highway 75 literally sees hundreds of vehicles pass through Morris daily heading to Winnipeg and other destinations, but nothing has been done in the last three years to address the challenges of the road closures whenever the waters rise.

Nothing has been done to date to surface the highway through the town of Morris. Mr. Speaker, what assurances can the minister give that he will finally take some action on this important issue? Is there a plan, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's put on the record that the member opposite votes against our budgets every single year that we're putting money into transportation. Secondly, if she wants to cross the floor, come on over. There's no guarantee, though, she'll be a minister.

You know, Mr. Speaker, we are working with the community of Morris on a lot of these issues. As I said before, we're going to be very prudent in all the changes that we're going to be making to improve Highway 75.

I shouldn't let the member opposite mislead people in some way that the border at Emerson will be totally closed for long periods of time. Mr. Speaker, I-29, there's a detour going around on I-29 south in the U.S., as well, and the flood waters do have this effect, but we're working on all the improvements on Highway 75 into the future, and we'll do it in a very prudent way to ensure that it proposes benefits for all people in the south.

CentrePort Canada Infrastructure Project Time Lines

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Last session, all parties supported the concept of CentrePort Canada as a major economic engine that could have a huge impact on this province. I know the project is of particular interest to the constituency of Lakeside as the R.M. of Rosser has a large portion of that.

Mr. Speaker, my question is to the minister responsible: Could we get an update on the status of CentrePort and the time lines associated with that particular project?

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to hear the members opposite talking about CentrePort. CentrePort, indeed, in the history of every province along comes an initiative that has the potential to create many, many, many jobs well into the future.

CentrePort is one of these investments that I believe that all members on all sides of the House are very supportive of. Indeed, the private sector, including many, many people in the business community as well as organized labour—you have many large companies, including trucking companies, railway companies—are very, very supportive, including the Winnipeg Airports Authority, in supporting the inland port, Mr. Speaker.

We see this going into the future as one of the most important projects that would come along in a long, long time.

Mr. Eichler: The question was when and what the time lines are. Mr. Speaker, most members are aware of the CentrePort project, Highway 221, which was supposed to be partly twinned and a new cloverleaf built at the Perimeter Highway, along with the underpass of the railway line on this particular route.

Can the minister of highways and infrastructure provide an update for the plan on Highway 221, the underpass? When can we expect this to be completed? We want time lines.

Mr. Lemieux: The member opposite and the opposition want a lot of things, but they'll have to stay tuned, Mr. Speaker. I know that members opposite don't believe in engineering and planning anything, but we're working with the engineers to ensure that we do the project in a proper way. We're looking at not only the highways but possible environmental issues, also issues related to hydro lines, telephone lines, all that kind of infrastructure that goes into place.

I mentioned to the member, stay tuned, because it does take some work to put these things into place, Mr. Speaker. Members opposite, indeed, say on the one side of it that they're in favour of it but continue to nitpick at a lot of the projects that are being put forward.

Mr. Eichler: Highway 221 was announced last February. Are they trying to tell us they don't have a plan? They announced it without a plan? Good golly, Mr. Speaker. The completion of CentrePort projects will have a positive impact on this province. One of the key components of getting CentrePort off the ground is infrastructure like railroads, rail lines, attract businesses here in Manitoba.

What assurances can the minister responsible provide stakeholders that infrastructure needs will be ready in a timely fashion to move CentrePort forward in a timely manner? That's what we're after, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Lemieux: Good golly, Miss Molly, we're ready. I can tell you that we have engineering companies that are working on this project. It's a large project. You know, we're talking about a massive project. You know, the member opposite just wants to slap down asphalt anywhere without a plan. We have a plan.

We're also working with the Winnipeg Airports Authority. We're working with the business community. We're working with the labour leaders in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, the community as a whole is behind this project, and we want to make sure we get it right. Indeed, we would like to work with other levels of government, including Rosser, the City of Winnipeg, the federal government. There are a lot of things in place and we are doing the best job we—*[interjection]* Pardon me? *[interjection]* The member opposite is heckling from his seat but, yet, he doesn't take the opportunity to ask an Ag question.

But I am pleased to answer a highways and transportation question that will indeed be important for his constituency as for the rest of Manitoba. Thank you.

* (14:20)

Gail Glesby Death Investigation

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, Manitobans have been shocked recently to learn of the appalling facts surrounding the death of Gail Glesby.

Ms. Glesby was seen at the Health Sciences Centre emergency room in 2004 when she became ill after a gastroscopy procedure, and while there, as I understand it, she developed an intracerebral hemorrhage, likely from a fall in the emergency

room washroom. The diagnosis was delayed and, as a result, she died.

Now, the recent death of Natasha Richardson has emphasized the need to make a rapid diagnosis when somebody falls and has a head injury, but unlike Natasha Richardson, Gail Glesby fell in an emergency room.

I ask the minister whether she is prepared to meet with Gail's daughter, Ashley, to talk to her, to offer her an apology, to ensure that this incident is very thoroughly investigated, reported on and that changes are made to correct the problems.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I can say to the member, as he knows all members of this House understand, that the loss of a loved one is a tragic and serious thing. When there are circumstances surrounding the loss of that loved one that are not clear to the family, that can really compound any sorrow that is felt.

I can assure the member that at the time of this individual's death, reviews were conducted. There have been some questions subsequent to that concerning the circumstances surrounding the death. It was some years ago. Those records are being pulled from the archives at the WRHA. We'll meet with the family, and, indeed, any family that wants to meet with me is welcome to, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that critical incident reports are to go to the minister. So I would ask the minister: When knowing that there have been quite a number of critical incidents in Winnipeg's emergency rooms—I think more than 50 over the last little while—can the minister tell this Chamber, was this particular death of Gail Glesby considered a critical incident?

An investigation, we are told, of some sort was done. Did the minister receive a report of the investigation, and can the minister tell us what changes were made as the result of the report?

Ms. Oswald: I can inform this House that in the situation of this particular case, the death was investigated as a critical clinical occurrence, which, indeed, was the type of investigation that predated a critical incident. The legislation was not in place at that time.

An investigation did occur at that time, but, of course, as Manitobans have learned recently, there are concerns by this family that perhaps not all of the information came forward. So the Winnipeg

Regional Health Authority has agreed to re-review the situation, to speak with the family to learn if there were any details at all that didn't come forward during that investigation, so that they could come forward now.

Records are being retrieved from the archives, Mr. Speaker. We want this family to have peace, and that comes from knowing the details. We're going to work with this family to ensure that that happens.

Seven Oaks Hospital Government Response to Critical Incident

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, this government's Minister of Health made a bad decision in terms of cutting back emergency services at Seven Oaks Hospital.

The other day I had posed a question to the Minister of Health in regard to an individual who, for all intents and purposes, probably should have died in emergency at Seven Oaks, but because of luck, pure chance, the individual survived, only because of luck, not because of any actions of this minister.

Then I get a letter from the minister asking me to provide some of the details of the individual. I was surprised, Mr. Speaker. An incident of this nature was never brought to the Minister of Health's attention? Does someone have to die in emergency in order to be deemed as a critical incident and reported to the Minister of Health?

Why did the Minister of Health not know that her cutback to the Seven Oaks Hospital ultimately led to someone dying, and only by chance, Mr. Speaker, that the person is still alive today?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Just in the name of clarifying some facts, we know that the general surgery consolidation move in the WRHA was a decision that was made by medical doctors. I would not substitute the judgment of a politician for medical professionals.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, any individual in this Chamber that raises an anonymous issue or does not make reference to specifics in a case, of course I'm going to inquire to that individual to ensure that any details and all details are factually matched.

I would expect all members to rely on anyone in this House to get the facts of information and, in particular, when this member raises issues, I really need to check the facts.

Interlake Flooding Victims Government Programs

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Mr. Speaker, it seems that issues of agriculture have once again failed to resonate with the Tory opposition. As their critic, the Member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) appears to be asleep at the switch.

Allow me to put a question. The heavy rainfall and subsequent flooding in the Interlake region last year led to significant hardship for members of the farming community.

I would like to ask the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, who is responsible for the Emergency Measures Organization: What help is available to our producers in distress in this troubled area through the Disaster Financial Assistance program?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased this morning in Arborg, in the heart of the Interlake, to announce that we indeed have provided \$3 million for a provincial Disaster Financial Assistance program to help people of the Interlake. I want to put on the record that I thank the Member for Interlake for not only advocating for his constituency but all of the Interlake and for the entire agricultural community.

Mr. Speaker, while we deal this year with the Red River Valley, while we deal with the city of Winnipeg and municipalities north of the city of Winnipeg and flood situations developing throughout the province, I want to say very clearly on the record, as we did in the Interlake today, we will be there for all Manitobans.

This disaster announcement today, we'll back it up this year whatever comes our way in 2009, a government for all Manitobans.

Oil Industry Transportation Concerns

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, loaded oil tankers in Manitoba are forced to travel over 40 kilometres extra on the dusty gravel Provincial Road 255 to avoid spring road restrictions on PR 256. There is an opportunity for the government to do much more to provide better safety opportunities for truckers of oil.

A prime example would be allowing empty oil tankers to return south from the Cromer substation on Highway 256 instead of going east facing full oil

tankers on PR 255, a dusty gravel road. At the very least, a collision on this dust-laden PR 255 is an environmental spill waiting to happen. At worst, fatalities will occur, Mr. Speaker.

Will the minister alleviate this potential life-threatening and environmental disaster by either upgrading Highway 256 or permit empty tankers to travel between the Cromer substation and Highway 2 on PR 256?

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): First of all, Mr. Speaker, I'll be certainly pleased to watch how the member opposite votes when the budget comes forward to ensure he's voting for our tremendous budget that we put forward with regard to infrastructure projects, including highways.

Mr. Speaker, this particular item that the member refers to, I'd be pleased to speak to him, certainly, outside the Chamber if he wishes, on the specifics, but we have met with some members of the oil industry. The oil industry is certainly booming in this province. I don't have the most recent results, but there's certainly a huge influx of interest in oil in Manitoba.

We understand that. The province of Manitoba is booming. We understand that. Infrastructure is part of it. We want to make sure that transportation is an economic enabler. So I look forward to working with the MLA on this particular item.

* (14:30)

Mr. Maguire: Well, Mr. Speaker, Highway 256 isn't in the government's 10-year plan. So I'd like to ask the minister again: The oil industry representatives met with his transportation officials in Virden about a month ago, in early March, making requests of the Minister of Transportation for greater safety and permits to move heavy equipment.

With all of Canada trying to keep people employed during this economic recession, will the minister consider, at least for this spring, re-establishing his former permit system to allow for at least single-entity development, like the building of an oil battery in the region, to keep Manitobans employed during this recession?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me just point out that this government has indeed been flexible with regard to the conditions we put on road restrictions. I'll give you the example of working with the agricultural community, the agribusiness in

the province of Manitoba. With regard to floodwaters, we've certainly been flexible with regard to the weights that are carried on our roads.

The member opposite knows that a lot of the highways that are restricted are certainly receiving some attention, but on the other side of that is that we don't want our highways beaten up to the point where they're impassable.

Mr. Speaker, we're fixing many, many highways in our province, not too unlike health care, for example. It takes a long time to fix things that weren't taken care of in the 1990s.

Mr. Speaker, we've got 19,000 kilometres worth of highway in Manitoba. We're making a great deal of progress. I look forward to working with the oil company and the member, the MLA for the area, to ensure that we take a closer look at this issue.

Health-Care Services Out-of-Province Treatment

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, Adrien Fouillard, a 15-year-old boy in my constituency, is suffering from a rare vascular disorder that has disfigured his leg and put him in a wheelchair. His specialist at the Health Sciences Centre applied to Manitoba Health in October to have Adrien treated at the Mayo Clinic. The letter he wrote which I will table and I quote: The expertise does not exist in Winnipeg. If Adrien does not get that treatment, he will lose his leg.

Can the Minister of Health explain why her department is dragging its heels on this important issue?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I've spoken to the member opposite about this very complex case. I've corresponded directly with the family about their concerns. I can say generally on these issues that patients and families who are seeking out-of-province treatment are able to achieve that. They need to have a doctor to demonstrate that this is, of course, required and have a specialist referral.

We know that in cases like these we have sent individuals to other places in Canada to have assessments done and, indeed, the Province funds those as well, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Speaker, we have written numerous letters to the minister about Adrien and I have approached her personally. Yet, almost six months after Adrien's doctor made his application to

have this procedure approved, the family is still waiting for a reply.

The minister and her department should be taking every possible action to make sure that this 15-year-old boy doesn't lose his leg needlessly. Instead the minister is dragging her heels. Adrien's doctor here in Manitoba says that he needs to go to the Mayo Clinic now.

Can the minister explain why she's risking Adrien's health with this bureaucratic holdup?

Ms. Oswald: Again, I have discussed this case with the member opposite. The department has been in communications with the family. It wouldn't be appropriate for me to speak in detail about an individual's personal health.

But I can say for the record, Mr. Speaker, that the member opposite who's speaking liberally about the details of this case is indeed also leaving other facts out. I think that having the whole story together with the family is a relevant point, and we're going to continue to work with this family to ensure that this individual gets the very best care that they need.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Mary Elizabeth Burrows

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the extraordinary life of one of my constituents, Mary Elizabeth Burrows. Ms. Burrows passed away at the end of October after 102 years of active citizenship and community life; however, her legacy will live on for generations to come.

Ms. Burrows was born in 1906 and came to Canada from England in 1911. In 1931, Ms. Burrows and her husband Wilf moved to Flin Flon where she became actively involved in organizing clubs and events that helped to build the community.

From a young age, Mary Burrows was a role model. In 1966, she created the Toastmistress Club which helped women to voice their opinions and ideas. At the age of 100, she was given the YMCA-YWCA Woman of Distinction Award in 2006 for her many contributions to our community.

Mary Burrows is also an accomplished writer. She has published numerous human interest stories in media sources, including the *Winnipeg Free Press* and *Chatelaine* magazine. The Canadian Authors

Association has awarded Ms. Burrows with the Kathleen Strange Award for her contributions.

Mary Burrows was the founder of the Manitoba Association of Parliamentarians. She'd often talked about how much she enjoyed making it fun for her students to learn about parliamentary procedure, and how important it was for students to have this knowledge.

I'd like to extend my deepest condolences to the friends and family of Mary Burrows. Her countless contributions to this province were appreciated and she will be missed. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

North Kildonan Cobras

Ms. Erna Braun (Rossmere): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the North Kildonan Cobras 11 and 12 girls' basketball team from the North Kildonan Community Club on winning the *Winnipeg Free Press* Community Classic tournament this past December.

The Community Classic is a four-day tournament made up of community club teams from the Winnipeg Minor Basketball Association involving youngsters aged 11 to 14. Teams get to experience playing in the big gym at the Duckworth Centre, as well as the thrill of being covered by the press. It's a great opportunity for them to play in the spotlight of a positive sports environment.

The Community Classic Basketball tournament is a reminder that sports are all about teamwork and having fun. This tournament allows each player to feel like a star, while reinforcing positive sports attitudes for future years of athletic participation. It is quite an accomplishment for the North Kildonan Cobras to win the championship. With a community of support behind them at the North Kildonan Community Club and the leadership of Coach Karl Schroeder, these girls proved that they have what it takes to be champs.

A special congratulation goes out to Emily Janzen of the Cobras, who was named one of the tournaments most valuable players.

Once again, my praise goes out to all the players of the North Kildonan Cobras for their excellent ball-handling, passing and shooting, but most of all for their teamwork. I know these young ladies will remember their achievement in the years to come and that it will be a positive influence on their participation in sports and lifelong active living.

I ask all members to join me in congratulating the North Kildonan Cobras girls' basketball team for their championship win. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Susan Schmidt

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I rise today to congratulate Susan Schmidt, principal of Beaumont School in Charleswood, on being selected as one of the top 30 principals across Canada in the annual Canada's Outstanding Principals program, organized by the Learning Partnership.

After being selected as an outstanding principal, she was then invited to attend an executive leadership training program. The four-day program is designed to foster executive leadership in education. It was held February 22 to 29, 2009, at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management. During the leadership conference, award winners discussed their experiences with leaders from the private and public sectors, from the education, social, cultural and business communities. Winners also have the chance to meet and share ideas with academics scholars from the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management.

This unique forum focusses on how principals can make a profound difference in changing the context in which teachers and students learn. It also invigorates discussion about new ideas for reforming and bringing innovative change to the current school system.

Over the years, I have been amazed at Susan's energy and commitment to providing the best educational experience for students, first at Westgrove and now at Beaumont School. Her students, their families and the community have all benefited from her extraordinary leadership.

Susan was responsible for launching the Healthful Happenings program at Westgrove elementary school in April 2002. Along with teacher Janis Wheeler, Susan started work on instituting a universal snack program at Westgrove School to meet the nutritional needs of the children. The school evaluated the program by collecting data and documenting changes in behaviour and learning during the pilot period. They found amazing results, including fewer behaviour problems and a drastic decline in lates and absences. This snack program at Westgrove School is only part of the whole strategy that is used in that school. The program is based on the philosophy used by Sandra Dean, who brought business, community and educators together to solve

the enormous problem she faced in an inner city school in a low-income area of Oshawa, Ontario.

Together We Light the Way is a program built on four pillars: respect, academics, teamwork and leadership.

I congratulate Susan on this tremendous honour and want to acknowledge her unwavering dedication to our youth. Her commitment to excellence in education and new ideas for bringing innovative change to the current school system are very much appreciated by our community.

* (14:40)

Cranberry Portage Spring Festival

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to speak about the Cranberry Portage Spring Festival which took place this year from March 20 to March 22.

Cranberry Portage's long tradition of holding a winter festival, unfortunately, was discontinued in the 1990s. Under the initiative of a few key people, the festival was resurrected as the 2009 Cranberry Portage Spring Festival. Clara Brightnose, Jenny Chastellaine and Myrna Marcellais, three mothers at the Cranberry Portage Child and Family Resource Centre, remembered the festival that used to be celebrated in their community. They, along with the executive director of the centre, Debbie McLauchlan, decided to form a committee which brought back the festival they loved, so that all the families and children could enjoy it once again.

The festival was a great success. It included a host of activities, to name a few: snow sculpture contests, moose and goose calling, leg wrestling, an ice fishing derby and a beard growing contest. There was a feast at the FCI gymnasium which included entertainment by a wonderful drum group and the very capable Frontier Fiddlers. Tribute was also paid to the north's greatest King Trapper, Roger Carriere Sr. I enjoyed participating in the spring festival. Besides handing out hot dogs and hot chocolate, I had a chance to go for a dogsled ride. Thank you, Anne Marie Rochford.

Mr. Speaker, I would to extend a big thank you to the many volunteers who participated in the festival. As an MLA from northern Manitoba, it is so gratifying to see events that celebrate our unique community experience. The spring festival is a way for friends and families to come together, share good food and have fun. While our communities may be

small, they are made up of people with big hearts. Congratulations to the citizens of Cranberry Portage on a wonderful spring festival. Thank you.

General (Ret'd) R.R. Henault

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate one of my constituents, General (Ret'd) R.R. Henault, on receiving this year's Birchall Leadership Award at the annual Yellow Ribbon Gala this past February.

Yellow ribbons were adopted by Canadians to act as a visual symbol of the sacrifice made by Canadian Forces members and their families. It also signifies hope for the safe return of a loved one. The Yellow Ribbon Gala is one of the highly anticipated annual events hosted by the Winnipeg Military Family Resource Centre, whose mission is to enrich the quality of life for those who share in the military lifestyle by providing programs and services to promote health, education and the social well-being of the community.

I was honoured to attend the Yellow Ribbon Gala this year and proud to see General Henault recognized for his dedicated service to our great country. After joining the Canadian Forces in 1968, General Henault spent his early career as a pilot and flight instructor before beginning a series of jobs at National Defence Headquarters. In June of 2001, General Henault was promoted and appointed Chief of the Defence Staff and was heavily involved in the response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11. He also provided Canadian leadership in United Nations missions on a global level and served as chairman of the NATO Military Committee from 2005 to 2008. In this capacity, General Henault represented all NATO chiefs of defence at NATO headquarters and served as military spokesperson and senior military adviser to the North Atlantic Council.

After retiring in 2008, General Henault was appointed chairman of the Strategic Advisory Board, a professional systems engineering consulting firm, Mr. Speaker, which continues to support the Canadian and international defence security and space communities.

The Birchall Leadership Award is presented to a worthy recipient by the Royal Military Colleges Club of Canada and celebrates exceptional leadership in someone who has persevered in the face of difficulty. In receiving this award, Mr. Speaker, General Henault has been acknowledged for having demonstrated extraordinary leadership qualities,

integrity, responsibility and moral courage through his distinguished career. Thank you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY
GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

BUDGET DEBATE
(Third Day of Debate)

Mr. Speaker: Resume adjourned debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government, and the proposed motion of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) in amendment thereto, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Carman, who has 13 minutes remaining, and also standing in the name of the honourable Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross).

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): I would certainly like to—based on the answers that we got out of question period today on the budget, or lack of answers, however you want to call it, the Finance Minister is even unwilling to accept the fact that Manitoba has more debt than the other three western provinces combined. I also noted that the Finance Minister also was very unwilling to inform Manitobans about the pension fund losses, or perceived losses. We have no idea where they are. It would be nice to know, but I guess that's a closely guarded secret right now, not wanting Manitobans to know about this.

The other one that came out of question period was on infrastructure and the closure of Highway 75 at Morris which, for those who have to get out their map, will actually push a lot of that traffic through my constituency, and for the constituency from Pembina, down highways 2, 3, 13 and 14. It certainly is an added strain on those highways. It would be nice to see if the Minister of Infrastructure (Mr. Lemieux) would at least put forward some sort of plan so that the communities could then discuss it and decide whether this is what should be. But, with no plan being put forward, nothing happens, and we continue to beat up our highways by the lack of action by this minister and this government. So steady and steady as she goes, I guess, which means don't do anything. Let things fall down, and it's really unfortunate.

But I just want to go back to last night. I was at a reception, a number of us were at a reception for the Manitoba Pork—

An Honourable Member: Except for the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk).

Mr. Pedersen: Well, there were people that weren't there, but there were a number of us who were. The Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade (Mr. Swan) brought greetings from the government. I will certainly say that those pork producers and those directors that were there certainly show a lot of patience and a lot of dignity when faced by this government. I was waiting with bated breath to hear the Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade stand up there and say that the moratorium was going to end, but, alas, I was not to hear that. He did talk about having a tour of Maple Leaf's processing plant in Brandon. I know that from Karl Kynoch, who also spoke at the meeting, the chair of Manitoba Pork, who has extended the invitation, once again, for particularly members of the government side because many of us on this side of the House are familiar with it. But he's extended the invitation again to actually tour inside the hog barns and to see what actually happens within the hog barns.

I urge the government members and backbenchers, who have been very silent on this whole issue, to get out there and understand an industry that is tremendously important to this province, contributes a lot of tax input into this government's coffers and yet has not only just been ignored, but has been beaten down by this government with a moratorium that was not based on science and only based on politics. So I look forward tonight; they're having their dinner tonight at Manitoba Pork and it will be good to see a number of the government members there to interact with the hog producers of Manitoba.

I was looking at this budget and reading through this budget, and I was looking to see where it would affect my constituency, and, on that same theme, as it happened, I talked to a small hog producer, or small ex-hog producer, in my constituency. The regulations are forcing him out of business. He has depopulated his barn because he won't be able to meet the unscientific regulations being brought in by this government.

In my constituency, I have heard a lot back from municipalities and from landowners about proposed waste-water regulations, how they're going to devalue properties. We're all in favour of a cleaner environment, but we always, always ask, where's the science in this? Once again, with these proposed waste-water regulations, there's no science applied to

this. By putting these regulations in, tell us where this will, indeed, help the environment, and that's all municipalities. I attended one meeting last week of municipalities meeting with the department, and that's all the municipalities are asking for: Where's the science in this? Apparently, there is none.

* (14:50)

In this budget, of course, with all Manitobans, there's no relief on personal income taxes. The Member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik) was asking in question period again about the failure to commit again to reducing personal income taxes. We remain only behind Québec, the highest personal income taxes in Canada. It seems strange that this government so likes to be last, or close to last.

In my constituency, the payroll tax is still an issue. I have businesses who start out small, did not have to pay the payroll tax until they became successful and grew, and now they're being taxed for their success. *[interjection]* Tell me where else there's a payroll tax that is on constituents in order to—*[interjection]* You've had 10 years. You've had 10 years of good income to fix this, and, instead, you've done nothing but spend money and run the deficit and the debt up in Manitoba. So all you've done is run the debt up. *[interjection]* Again, tell me I'm wrong, that we have more debt than the three western provinces combined. Tell me that I'm wrong. *[interjection]* We're talking about 2009. We're not talking about history.

There was no mention in this budget of the cattle and the hog sectors except for more inspections, more regulations coming down on them. The riparian tax credit is the one thing I saw in there that was good, but where is the funding for this? Where is the funding to the conservation districts? The conservation districts are needing more funds in order to do this. So, on one side you're saying this, but you're not funding it on the other side.

Again, there's no effective science based on these actions. It's all for politics.

An Honourable Member: You're wrong.

Mr. Pedersen: Well, you know, we could ask the question, but we just finished question period, and we ask questions and we ask legitimate questions. We don't get any answers, so we bring up our concerns about this, but apparently it falls on deaf ears.

In my constituency, again, we have hospitals that are closed. Not closed, they're not accepting emergency services. Maybe it doesn't matter when you're in Winnipeg when you're five minutes away, other than perhaps if you have to go to Seven Oaks, but when you're 45 minutes to an hour away from emergency services, that can mean the difference between life and death. Because you're in rural Manitoba, you have to factor in weather and road conditions. This is a serious matter for us.

Pharmacare deductibles for seniors, they're still not going down. They're going up again. There is talk in the budget about funding congregate meals, and that one is one program that I'm very familiar with. You can talk all you want about funding it, but are you actually doing it? We will be watching to see if you come through on this to actually provide the funds, because when I talk to our rural health authority, they tell us that this is fine to have this, but the funding actually doesn't come through.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think I've brought out a few of the concerns that I have, and, having business experience, contrary to many members opposite, when you run the debt to the extent that this government is, we're facing some serious financial issues in the years to come. We're seeing it already. We're going to see our financial condition downgrade severely, quickly. Your credit card is maxed out. You're reducing your debt repayment and your income is going down. You set yourself up for a financial disaster. Perhaps the most amazing part about it is that many members opposite don't understand this. They're going by what they've been told by their leader and by their spin doctors, but they're not able to comprehend the real situation that we're in.

If the government was serious about doing some financial management, they would be addressing the debt situation that we have right now. They wouldn't be continuing to run up our debt, no plans, no long-term plans. They're going to face some severe shortcomings in the coming years, and I certainly look forward to taking this message out. I'm hearing it already from my constituents and I will oppose this budget. It's a bad deal for Manitoba.

I'll support the amendment because it would at least put us on the right footing if the government would see it that way and for that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude now and say it's time that Manitoba had a real plan and not the political plan that this government keeps bringing through. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The bill is also standing in the name of the honourable Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross).

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if we might have leave to have the bill remain standing in the name of the Minister of Healthy Living.

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement for the debate to remain standing in the name of the honourable Minister of Healthy Living? *[Agreed]*

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, it's my privilege to rise today to speak in favour of budget 2009, the 10th balanced budget in a row for the province of Manitoba.

Before making some specific comments about this budget, I, of course, want to acknowledge that it continues to be an honour to represent the constituents of Seine River who have bestowed their trust upon me to be their representative.

I also want to acknowledge the constituents of Seine River who, like so very many Manitobans in the past days, have shown no hesitation in standing alongside their friends and their neighbours with vulnerable situations and properties and getting very tired arms and very dirty in doing sandbagging. It was inspiring to witness, to be part of.

We know that we may have partisan times, Mr. Speaker, within this Chamber, today being no exception, but when we all stand together in the fight of a common foe, the flood waters, it reminds us how lucky we are to be citizens of the province of Manitoba regardless of political stripe. I want to acknowledge the kindness and the generosity of the citizens of Seine River in the work that they've done in the past days and will do in the coming days.

I'm also delighted to welcome the newest members to the Assembly, the Member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead) and the Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie) who inspired us yesterday with their initial speeches. I was touched deeply by the speech from the new Member for The Pas as he acknowledged his predecessor, our dear friend Oscar Lathlin, whom I know we all miss and cherish. He paid such a loving tribute to him as well as his father. It was very inspiring to learn more about him.

I also was delighted to hear the speech of the Member for Elmwood who—it was predictably terrific, historical and witty. I know that the fabric of this Legislature has taken on a new texture,

Mr. Speaker. I think that that's a terrific thing for all of us and for all the members of the Legislature. So I welcome the both of you and I know that you will serve your constituents in good stead.

Mr. Speaker, there are many reasons I stand in support of this budget, a budget that demonstrates sound and steady fiscal management during very uncertain economic times all around the world. This budget shows steady progress on things that are very, very important to the citizens of the Seine River constituency, and I'd like to talk about a few of those things.

We know that this kind of steady fiscal management during uncertain times is very important to the citizens of Seine River. I know that they'll be very pleased to be reminded that this government has tripled the Fiscal Stabilization account over the past 10 years to \$634 million, which includes a \$110-million draw to support vital services. We know that this is not the first time that Manitoba has been in challenging economic times, but what we know is that this government is making decisions that are decidedly different than the decisions that were made a little over a decade ago. These decisions are those that are going to help move us forward and help us be steady and concerned about the things that are most important to our citizens.

* (15:00)

We know that government is making these decisions by managing government so that about one third of the departments are going to hold the line on their spending as government does its part to modernize and adapt its operations while managing staff vacancies and overhead costs.

We know that, even in these times, we're providing \$20 million in debt payment, which is important, of course, to all citizens of Manitoba.

Another very important issue for our citizens concerns continued investment in infrastructure which, of course, results in an economic stimulus and results in growth in Manitoba.

We know that increasing our capital investment to \$1.6 billion, which is an increase of \$625 million, is going to be the kind of investment that will help to create jobs.

We know that investing in over \$160 million in social housing as part of the largest-ever single investment for such an enterprise is very important to

all families, all families who live in social housing environments, who volunteer in organizations to support the further development of social housing. These are very important investments indeed.

A new, multimillion-dollar, four-year capital program to construct new schools and renovate existing facilities is an idea that will be of great importance to the citizens of the Seine River constituency and, indeed, will be the investment of post-secondary capital improvements. We know what happened during the last time of recession—a crumbling infrastructure in our educational institutions—and these were very bad decisions indeed. But our government, in this very organized and thoughtful way, will be going forward to make these investments, including investments in building and improving highways, with a total of \$535 million dedicated for that, Mr. Speaker.

I know the constituents of Seine River are also equally concerned about tax savings during these times, and implementing 2009 tax commitments to maintain the purchasing power of families will be very important to citizens and businesses.

We know increasing the education property tax credit by \$50—up now to \$650, saving homeowners and renters an additional \$16 million this year—is very timely.

We know that working together with the families in Manitoba, making it easier for caregivers to people with disabilities to access the primary caregiver tax credit will be a very, very important and significant investment for those families in the days ahead.

We know that eliminating the small-business income tax, as of December 2010, is a really important move for small-business owners in Manitoba, a move never made by our opponents, Mr. Speaker, but even during these tough economic times, we know that it's an important move to make.

The citizens of Seine River will continue to be very inspired by this budget as we go forward with education and skills development preparing for future growth. Providing a 6 percent overall increase in base operating grants and strategic program investments for our universities and colleges will be a very important step and a building block for families to ensure that they can continue to send their children to high-quality institutions, providing a \$5.25-million increase or a \$53-million increase investment for public schools, the largest ever

investment in public schools funding. This is a very important point to the families, the teachers, the principals, the instructional assistants, educational assistants living in my constituency.

I remember, Mr. Speaker, on a personal note, what those dark days were like during the last recession in Manitoba. I remember what it was like to be a teacher and watch the lifeblood being drained out of the education system. It was just one in a series of horrendous decisions made by the Conservative government, and I'm delighted that we continue to invest in those things that are the most important for Manitobans and for the citizens of Seine River.

Introducing additional training seats for apprenticeship training, introducing new bursary funds, introducing financial incentives to encourage youth to pursue careers in skilled trades, these are very important investments in an intellectual resource in our community.

We also know that the constituents of Seine River, like the constituents across Manitoba, care deeply about building strong families and having opportunities for their families. I was delighted to see in this budget, Mr. Speaker, that we'll be eliminating entrance fees at our provincial parks for the next two years to help support those recreation opportunities close to home.

I was glad to see the funding of additional child-care spaces and the increasing of wages for child-care centre staff. These are issues that are of great importance to the families in Seine River and I'm delighted that these increases are going to occur. New school-based family resource centres are a critical piece of the continuum of learning in Manitoba, and we're glad that these kinds of investments continue to be made.

We know that community safety is a topic that's very important to Manitobans, and I'm glad that this budget, once again, comes forward with support for the hiring of more police officers for the province of Manitoba.

It's particularly timely that more investment will be made on expanding flood forecasting resources and ice-jam mitigation efforts. Probably no part of the budget is more of mind than that these days.

My constituents will also be delighted to see the investments that continue in promoting a green Manitoba. I've heard nothing but continued praise for investments that we've made in providing funding to

the e-waste initiative for old electronics, Mr. Speaker, and I'm glad to see we will be increasing funding for that initiative.

Upgrading our existing parks and campground infrastructure will be a very important component to having that free access, as well, to these parks.

It's a very good package and a very good budget, Mr. Speaker, and I am very pleased to stand in support of it.

Like most Manitobans, the people of Seine River are deeply concerned about the health of their loved ones. I note with particular interest that each and every one of them want to see continued investments, steady progress in providing health human resources and capital infrastructure, Mr. Speaker.

We don't deny that these are very challenging economic times across the globe, and governments need to make complex and often tough decisions. The last time Manitoba experienced a recession, Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives made very wrong-headed decisions, indeed, and I've referenced some of those when it comes to education—painful, painful decisions, devastating decisions in some cases. But it's arguable that there were no worse decisions made during that time than those decisions that were made concerning health care. Certainly, we know that we're still feeling the effects of those decisions today. It's important to remember that we contrast the decisions that were made in the past and the decisions that we're making today. We know during the last recession that one of the most foolhardy decisions that was made at that time was the cutting of medical school spaces. We know that we went down from 85 seats at our medical school down to 70 seats. We still feel the pain of that today.

We know that at that time decisions were made to just let health human resources go—a thousand nurses at that time. Of course, at the same time that these human decisions were being made, devastating human decisions were being made. There were choices to freeze capital expenditure on health facilities and our health facilities were left crumbling in the wake of those Conservative decisions.

We know, though, that our decisions come in sharp contrast to that. We know that our decisions to continue to provide funding to recruit and retain physicians, especially in rural and northern Manitoba, that these decisions will be very important for all Manitobans. Supporting training for advanced

intensive care nurses, a critical piece of the building blocks of health care; providing funding to hire more emergency room staff and to add new ambulances to the provincial fleet—these are important investments indeed. Expanding the successful midwifery baccalaureate program to students in southern Manitoba will be a very important investment; continuing to expand the successful Advanced Access initiative; helping physician clinics to reduce any wait times and providing more funding, Mr. Speaker, for capital investments across Manitoba; focussing, in particular, on addictions and mental health-care services; focussing on emergency rooms and focussing on being innovative in our system to attract more of those health human resources that are growing short across the nation, indeed, across North America.

*(15:10)

We're going to continue to invest in prevention programs, Mr. Speaker, addressing chronic diseases such as diabetes by continuing to raise awareness. So we're going to go forward, in stark contrast to decisions that were made a decade ago. We're not cutting the spaces to medical school. We reversed that decision, as people well know, but I don't mind describing it to them yet again. We restored those 15 seats that were cut. We went back to 85. We went up to 100 seats and now we have the largest first-year medical school class in Manitoba's history at 110 seats. We're going to continue to build on this progress as we recruit doctors.

We're not firing 1,000 nurses, Mr. Speaker. We're continuing to educate nurses. Nearly 3,000 nurses in flight right now and we're going to continue with professional development opportunities for those nurses that have already been educated. We've brought over 1,800 nurses to the work force since 1999, and we're not planning to slow down any time soon. We're not going to freeze our health capital, we're going to invest in health-care facilities.

Members were reminded yesterday by the new Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie) that the politics matters, that the political vision that you support matters. I couldn't agree more. Honour, truth, dignity, respect and hard work matter. It's tempting, I suppose, sometimes, to go for instant gratification, cheap, immature political shots, but telling the truth, taking responsibility for what we say and, even more importantly, what we do and how we do it with dignity and respect.

Manitobans expect much from us, and so they should. That's why I stand here today in strong favour of these choices, in strong favour of this budget and in favour of this government. It is, indeed, my privilege to do so. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Indeed, it is an honour and a privilege to once again stand before Manitobans in this budget debate and indicate my, and I'm sure this will come as a massive shock to members opposite, but my disapproval for what I see in front of me. *[interjection]* I know, I know, the Member for Riel (Ms. Melnick) is in a state of shock right now, but it is, in fact, true, Mr. Speaker.

But, before I get into talking about the budget debate today, I want to, first of all, welcome the two new members to the Manitoba Legislature, the Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie), as well as the Member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead). I know that at times we can be somewhat partisan in here, which I know comes as a shock to the Member for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson) and others in the House today. But there are times when we are all in the same boat here together. We represent our communities to the best of our abilities. I want to welcome, sincerely, both of you to the Manitoba Legislature and wish you all the best in your career here in the Manitoba Legislature.

But, as for the rest of you, and not on my side—no, I'm just kidding, just kidding. Welcome back to the rest of you, too. I hope, sincerely, that you look at this budget on an individual basis and what is in the best interest to the people within your communities and find it in your heart to do the right thing and vote against this budget.

Mr. Speaker, I think if we look at what is in this budget, or what is not in this budget, certainly, what we see is that—and I know the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) brought forward a very interesting fact today that I think members opposite should seriously listen to and take into consideration when they stand in either support or against this budget when they have that opportunity.

I think it's important to note that the debt in Manitoba is higher than the combined operating debt of the three other western Canadian provinces, being Saskatchewan, Alberta, and B.C. together. Our operating budget, the core operating budget of the government, Mr. Speaker, is \$11.8 billion and, all combined, the three western provinces have an operating debt of \$11 billion in their operating budget. I think this is very unfortunate to Manitobans

because the three other western provinces combined represent about nine million people in Canada, and we as a province, as a lonely province in the middle of our country here, represent 1.2 million people.

Ms. Marilyn Brick, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

So the amount of debt that we take on is not only larger than those three provinces combined, but we also have fewer people to pay off that debt over the long term. So what happens, Madam Acting Speaker, is that we are essentially mortgaging the future of our children and grandchildren in this province. That is the direction this NDP government has taken us in, and I think it's extremely unfortunate for our children and our grandchildren that they will be forced to pay for the follies of this NDP government. Really, what is not just the follies of the NDP government, but, certainly, the fact that they have an extreme spending problem.

I think we only need to look at where we're at in terms of the core operating budget today as compared to when this NDP government took office. Back in 1999, when they took office, it was around \$6 billion, give or take a little, and now we're over \$10 billion as a core operating budget of government.

Madam Acting Speaker, more government, much more government and less service really is what we're seeing because, today, we have longer wait lists in health care. We've got an education system in peril. We've got children who are falling through the cracks in our child welfare system, and the list goes on and on and on.

I think it's unfortunate that this spend more, get less, NDP government is their way of looking at doing things, and it's certainly not our way, which is why we have brought forward amendments to this budget which I hope members opposite will take into serious consideration when they look at whether or not they're going to vote in favour of this budget, because there are many things within this budget that are of grave concern to Manitobans all across the province.

I think, certainly, Madam Acting Speaker, one thing to take note and that has been consistent throughout the budgets that have been brought forward by this Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), and, indeed, this NDP government, that we continue to have among the highest personal income tax rates in Canada. I think that is very unfortunate when we want to be a province that attracts people here, to

work here, to live here, to raise their families here, to enjoy the wonderful things we have in our province, the wonderful parks, the wonderful lakes that we have. What's unfortunate is that we tax people so significantly here that they overlook us for other provinces in western Canada like Saskatchewan, like Alberta, and like B.C.

* (15:20)

It's unfortunate that we've got this. When people are coming across to western Canada and they're looking for places to settle and to raise their families, they leapfrog over Manitoba in favour of going to places like Saskatchewan and Alberta. It's unfortunate for the future of our province. I know members opposite will crow and say what they want to say about this, Madam Acting Speaker, but what the important thing here is, it is unfortunate. This will prevent us from being able to attract people here to this province to live and raise their families. Members opposite, you know, we do have a net interprovincial out-migration rate. I think that that is an important point to bring forward here. More people move to other provinces outside of Manitoba. More people leave this province than we gain to this province.

Members opposite, again they like to rant and rave about what it is that they do. Well, I think what they need to do is look at the facts. The facts that come—and these are their own numbers—state that we have a net interprovincial out-migration rate, and that is just a fact. So I would suggest before they crow from their seats that they look at the facts that are there, and these are the government's own numbers from their own analysis.

I think, unfortunately, that there are so many things to do with this budget. One of the things, certainly, is that it's not a balanced budget; the government claims that it is and they're, in fact, dishonest when they say this. The simple fact is that this government is spending \$88 million more than it's taking in and, for all intents and purposes, that is the definition of a deficit. I think, if we also look at this budget, I know that it's going to be difficult for members opposite. I mean, in fact, they're now forced, in order to pass this legislation, to bring in—or to pass this budget—to bring in new legislation in order to pass the budget. In fact, they're breaking their own law within this budget by not reducing the debt to the amount that they're supposed to. So they're going to have to bring in new legislation to

make changes in order to do that. I think that that is extremely unfortunate.

I know we all have cases in our constituencies where many of our constituents have had significant difficulties and troubles when dealing with our health-care system. But I think one of the most unfortunate situations happened that could have been avoided; the situation that happened to one Brian Sinclair. Certainly, my heart goes out to his family members. I think it's unfortunate. I think all members in this Chamber sincerely regret what has transpired with respect to that. We never like to see a death in our province. I think what is unfortunate here is that information wasn't brought forward when the minister found out at the time, and there are many questions around this. I think what's unfortunate is that this could've been prevented. This death could've been prevented. There are many facts that still need to come out with respect to this situation and this issue.

I think what's unfortunate is that the minister and the Premier (Mr. Doer) withheld information at the time. I think that they were—I'm not sure and I wouldn't want to accuse anybody of anything in this forum—but what's unfortunate is that we know that they received the information and it wasn't until the media became aware of the situation that it came forward into the public forum. We believe, on this side of the House, that when the minister is aware of certain information that is pertinent and should be made public, it should be made public at the time of receiving it, as opposed to later on when it becomes, oh, oh, you know, the media's got it now, we're forced to respond to it. I think that that is not the best way to manage a department.

I want to talk about—and I know, again, members opposite will be shocked about me saying this—but the budget does contain some positives related to provincial parks, such as campground upgrades and a commitment to provide Manitobans with free access to our parks for two years. I want to commend them on that. I think it's wonderful if we can come up with ways for more people in Manitoba to have the opportunity to go and frequent our provincial parks and have that opportunity. These steps should encourage more Manitobans to visit our parks and to experience all that they have to offer. But—and that's a very important word, Madam Acting Speaker—it would have been interesting to see some measures aimed at, perhaps, encouraging people from outside Manitoba to visit our parks as well.

Unfortunately, competition for tourism dollars will become increasingly fierce, especially during this recession that, you know, Manitoba has not necessarily felt yet, but we need to prepare for it. Certainly, I think it would have been incumbent upon this government to come up with incentives in ways to encourage other people from outside the province to come and experience our incredible provincial parks as well as our incredible lakes and all of the beautiful areas that we have in our province and to become recreation destinations.

I want to go back to just talking about the recession and, certainly, how, you know, it really hasn't hit our province yet. I don't think that the average person has necessarily felt yet that we're in a recession. But the important thing to do in these times when we know what's going on all around us, all over the world, when we know that other people are suffering as a result of a very serious situation, a very serious worldwide economic recession, the most important thing for us to do as a province, Madam Acting Speaker, is to prepare, to prepare for what could be coming in the future. Rest assured, if it has gone everywhere else, it will come here at some point.

I think members opposite are fooling themselves if they think—and they sit and crow from their seats about how wonderful everything is in Manitoba and how great everything is and how we're somehow different from the rest of the world and we're isolated in where we are, that this will never hit us. Quite frankly, we have heard from members opposite who continue to crow about how wonderful everything is, but what they should be doing is talking about how they are preparing Manitobans for the inevitable and what will come in the months and years ahead. Because we will be affected by this, we cannot afford to sit here in isolation and pretend that we are isolated from the rest of the world.

What happens elsewhere will eventually come to Manitoba. Maybe, you know, we don't know how hard it will hit us, but we know that it's there, and I think, by increasing the spending—I think the ratio from tax cuts to spending was one to 13, I believe, in this budget. I think that this is a time for us to start pulling in the reins on the spending. I think what's unfortunate about members opposite is that they have such a problem over the years with spending and spending and spending more. There isn't a balance there when it comes to spending versus giving money back to hard-earned Manitobans.

It's much more heavily weighted on the side of spending and a government who believes very wholeheartedly in the fact that they know best how to spend Manitobans' money that's much better than the individuals and Manitobans themselves. I think that that's the unfortunate part about what kind of a situation this government has left us in and has us in today, is that not only have we gone from a \$6-billion to an over \$10-billion operating budget within this province and spent most of it on the way, but over 40 percent of our budget is dependent on federal government transfer payments. Those are equalization payments where other provinces around this country, across this country, are running deficits today to be able to pay us so we can, you know, so-called balance our budget. Well, I'll tell you right now, Madam Acting Speaker, that there is no way that that is sustainable. If this Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) thinks that it is, he is sadly, sadly mistaken, and I would strongly suggest that he gets his head out of the sand sooner than later to realize that we cannot and should not continue to depend on these federal transfer payments. Everybody around us is affected by this.

* (15:30)

I don't know how long he feels he's going to pull the wool over his own eyes, his caucus's eyes, Manitobans' eyes, but this is not going to last that long. People will realize that we will come on tough times, and, if we are depending on other provinces across our country to pay for the spending habits of this Province and of this minister, this NDP Minister of Finance, I think they're sadly mistaken.

Other provinces will stand up and they will say, hey, wait a minute here, we've got to take care of our own province. Why are we paying for Manitoba's spending problem? Those guys need to rein it in; they're not doing so. What we'll be faced with in the end is a bunch of cutbacks in areas that it's going to be extremely unfortunate. If we had to cut back, yes, 40 percent of the budget overnight, that's a very difficult thing to have to do, and you know what? Unfortunately, Conservative governments have been faced by this in the past where we've been left a legacy of debt-trodden community in the past. We've gone about it in a very responsible fashion in the past, tried to reduce the debt and not doing it overnight because you can't do that overnight, but what this government does is continues year after year after year to depend further and more and more on other provinces and the federal government to bail us out, and those were the good times.

I mean, again we haven't felt the effects of a recession yet in our province. You know, those were the good times, and we became more and more dependent on other provinces in the good times. So where does that leave us in the more difficult times that are inevitable to come ahead? Where does that leave us? Oh, we're going to depend more and more on those transfer payments. Well they won't be there, so I think what you need to do is recognize, and members opposite, Madam Acting Speaker, they need to recognize, that we are in a very serious situation that is happening around us everywhere. This government needs to get its head out of the sand and realize that we need to start taking measures to reduce our dependency on the federal government, to reduce our dependency on other provinces to pay for this NDP government's spending problem.

They need to cut back in the spending areas. They need to start doing that—cut back in, sorry, in the dependency on these transfer payments. They need to start looking at this is how much money we're bringing in with respect to revenues in this province. Let's set aside the revenue from the federal government in the way of transfer payments and let's just look at core government revenues and let's just see. I mean, how is it sustainable? How can we pay for those social programs and the social safety net that needs to be there for Manitobans who have paid into it over the years, who need, and should have, a health-care system that's there for them when they need it, which it's not right now.

We've seen that through the likes of Brian Sinclair and others who have waited for hours upon hours upon hours in waiting rooms. Yes, and people do die in hospitals. I know that, but people should not have to die unnecessarily waiting for services that should be there for them when they need them. I think what's unfortunate is that we, this government, is doing all of this on the backs of other provinces. They're gambling the future of our social safety net on other provincial provinces and their ability to be able to pay us and to pay our province.

I think what's unfortunate is that until this NDP government sees that, until they understand that concept, we are going to continue to rely more and more on other provinces to pay for the spending problem and the spending habits of this NDP Doer government.

I don't believe for a moment, unfortunately, after being here for eight and a half years, I don't believe and I believe this might be my ninth budget that I've

spoken to, eighth or ninth, I can't recall now, but, Madam Acting Speaker, what is extremely unfortunate is that year after year after year I have stood in this House and I have, on behalf of my constituents, said to this government, we need to reduce the reliance on federal transfer payments. Each and every budget in the last eight and a half years they've increased the dependency on those transfer payments from the federal government. I think what's unfortunate is that they've gone in the wrong direction. They've gone in that direction in the good times when we should have been becoming more self-reliant and reducing our dependency on paying for our social safety net in this province on other provinces. But what's unfortunate is that this government just doesn't get it. We are in a position where I don't believe that we are prepared for the future and that we're offering the best hope and the best possible future that we can, as a province here in Manitoba, for our children and our grandchildren. That is the unfortunate part and the biggest difference between the NDP and ourselves.

So, having said all this, I think, it's again of no—I'm sure it won't come as a shock to members opposite that I will be forced because of this NDP government's inability to recognize the seriousness of the situation that we're in. They laugh; they say what they want to say, but we are mortgaging the future of our young people in this province. That's why I will vote against this budget.

Thank you very much, Madam Acting Speaker.

Ms. Jennifer Howard (Fort Rouge): It's my pleasure to rise today in support of the budget. It's a budget that I'm very proud of. I want to talk a little bit about what does makes me proud about this budget and proud to be a part of the government and the caucus that brought in this budget.

First, I think, the previous speaker, the honourable Member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson), I just want to assure her that there is no denial on this side of the House that we are in difficult times. There is no denial that there's a global economic crisis that will affect us. Perhaps she doesn't have the pleasure of listening to the Premier (Mr. Doer) and the Finance Minister speak as often as I do. But, certainly, in all of their speeches, they've been very clear that Manitoba cannot isolate itself.

So, in this budget, I'm proud of the choices that we've made in difficult times. I'm proud that we've chosen a balanced budget. I think, as time will tell, we may be one of the very few provinces that do

make that choice. I'm proud that we've chosen to invest in all kinds of infrastructure in this budget, not only the infrastructure that we can drive our cars on, like roads and bridges, but also very important infrastructure to the economy like child care, ensuring that there are people there to look after our children, to give them the early education that we know creates tremendous benefits down the road; that we've chosen to invest in an unprecedented way in our schools; that we've chosen to invest in health care and in housing. This investment in our infrastructure does prepare us for coming economic storms.

There are choices to be made when you face difficult times. I suppose we could, as the honourable Member for Tuxedo has suggested, choose this time to rein it in, to pull back, to freeze, to stop dead in our tracks. Now we know that is the approach that was taken in the '90s. That is the time that I certainly remember different choices being made.

I'm proud that we are choosing to give more Manitobans more access to the things that make life enjoyable in Manitoba, like being able to visit a provincial park or campground, like being able to enjoy all of the incredible cultural industry that we have in this province, like being able to enjoy low cost and free recreation.

So this is a time to make choices, choices that will define our future. Often, Madam Acting Speaker, I think difficult economic times can become an excuse to exercise your ideology. I think that's what we saw, frankly, in the 1990s, when we saw a freeze to things like health capital spending. I think we should all reflect for a moment what that would mean. To decide that we are not going to build another hospital, another personal care home, that we are not going to repair aging infrastructure, that we're not going to invest in the latest technology, those were the choices made in the 1990s. That led to things like delaying the redevelopment of the Health Sciences Centre that didn't take place until we were elected; that resulted in issues like fruit flies in the operating rooms at the largest hospital in our province.

* (15:40)

I remember at the time of the last recession that we saw absolutely draconian cuts to social assistance, that we saw those economic tough times taken out on those who are most vulnerable in our province. We saw cuts to organizations like friendship centres and foster family organizations,

people that are in place to help those who are most vulnerable in our province.

We are still, today, recovering from those choices. One example is certainly in health care, where we continue to recover from the decisions made to cut back on the training and education of nurses and doctors. We will never recover that missing generation of health-care professionals; they are gone forever. Those were choices made by a very different kind of government.

There were also choices made federally in the last recession that are going to make this recession more difficult to cope with. The last time we experienced difficult times there was a much more robust unemployment insurance scheme. Manitobans who found themselves out of work could access insurance benefits that they had paid for. That is not as true this time around.

I recently had the opportunity to speak at the annual general meeting of the Community Unemployed Help Centre. It is an incredible organization that represents people who are appealing decisions made by EI, and they win those appeals. They win over 80 percent of those appeals. That organization alone is responsible for putting over \$600,000 in benefits directly into the hands of families. So I know that for people who are depending on employment insurance, this is going to be a much more difficult time, but I also know that we are not going to abandon those people.

We will make different choices and you can see some of those in this budget. One of the choices that's very important to me is the \$160 million put aside for social housing renewal. This is the largest investment in housing in history in Manitoba.

I want to talk about one small example of what investing in social housing can mean for a community. In my constituency, there are some large Manitoba Housing complexes in the Mayfair area, and recently I was able to go with the Minister of Family Services and Housing (Mr. Mackintosh) to open a family resource centre, right in that housing. It's run by the Family Centre of Winnipeg. It provides much-needed services to the residents, simple things that many of us take for granted like access to a washer and dryer, a place to come with your children to play a board game, a place to come when you need a timeout from parenting to talk to people who can give you that kind of support to make good choices. It is a small program. It doesn't

cost a lot of money, but it's making a tremendous difference to the people who live in my constituency.

We also saw in this budget an unprecedented increase for public schools—5.25 percent, unheard of—and I know that's going to make a difference to the schools in my constituency, Fort Rouge School and Gladstone School, who do a tremendous job of educating the children that live in those neighbourhoods and who have seen, in their schools, an increase in the number of children coming from newcomer families.

Every time I visit those schools, I'm struck again about the number of children who are there, who are new to the province, who have come from countries all over the world, and many of whom are learning English also as they're taking classes with their schoolmates. For a lot of those families, those kids are the English speakers. Those kids are the ones that help their parents understand important information and those schools are doing a tremendous job to encourage those kids.

I also know in this budget we're investing in child care. I was very pleased recently to tour the new child-care centre at River Avenue—the River Avenue child care co-op—that recently opened. It's a beautiful centre. It is incredible to be in a child-care centre that was built by people for the exact purpose of taking care of kids: everything from sinks that are at kids' level, to a beautiful gym, to lots of places to put clothes and boots in the wintertime. It's an incredible facility. I'm very pleased that not only did we participate in building that facility, but we're also going to participate in making sure that the workers who work there are receiving a more fair wage.

I expect, as they have every year and will continue to, that the child-care community will ask us to do more, as they should, because child care is an economic necessity. It is absolutely necessary and a crucial investment in the future. We know that early childhood education works. We know that it helps kids perform better throughout their lives, and we know that it helps those kids who are most at risk the most. There is no greater use, I think, for investment than early childhood education, and I'm very proud of the progress we're making in that area.

I also want to talk briefly about some of the things that this budget will do for people with disabilities. This is a community that I am meeting with often in the last few months. It's a community to which I belong, and so it's important to me when I look through a budget to see that we are continuing

to help and provide supports to people who live with disabilities.

One of the areas that we're doing this is in housing through very innovative approaches for housing for people with mental illness. The approach is known as Housing First, which is an innovation in that you take people who have many, many challenges in their lives—mental illness, addiction—and you say to them: The first thing we're going to do for you is to help provide stable housing in whatever way you need that help. You don't have to earn housing. It's something that we believe will help. If we provide stable housing at the beginning it will help folks to deal with all of the other challenges that they face. So I am pleased that we have chosen to invest in that innovative approach.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

We're increasing access to treatment for children with autism, the Applied Behaviour Analysis services. That's going to be very important for those kids to be able to learn and participate in schools and in everyday life.

We're increasing supports for people who are living in the community, and there are many things that are going to improve the lives of people with disabilities that are part of other areas of government. If you take a look at the school capital announcement, the millions and millions and millions of dollars building new schools and repairing schools, you look within that you will find that \$3 million is going to help make schools more accessible: for ramps and lifts and elevators and all those things that help kids learn, who need to get in the front door. That's probably not part of the announcement that's going to get a lot of coverage, and it may not be something that the members of the opposition are going to vote for, but it's critically important and it's something that I'm very proud that we're investing in.

Now, of course, when you're faced with challenges, economic challenges, there is a temptation to abandon those things that you think you could do tomorrow, those things that we often think could wait. One of those things, I suppose, is working to improve our environment, working to clean our lakes and rivers and making sure that we are changing the way that we live our lives every day so that we can improve the environment for generations to come.

I am proud that in this budget we are not taking that approach. We're continuing those investments. We will see \$3 million go to the City of Winnipeg in this budget for transit operating. We'll see funding for stage 1 of rapid transit, which is critically important to the constituents that I represent. We'll see funding for an e-waste initiative. You know, it's incredible when you go door-to-door in your constituencies you really hear what people are interested in and what they are talking about. I was stopped a number of times when I was going door-to-door recently and asked about e-waste initiatives—people that had participated in some of the pilot programs returning their computers and used printers—and they were very supportive of that and wanted us to do more, and I'm proud that we will be doing more.

We've talked about the free access to parks, upgrading parks and campgrounds. These are all things that one would be tempted to say, in challenging economic times, could wait for tomorrow, but we know that the results of that approach—we've seen that in the '90s—is that we stop moving forward altogether.

I'm also proud in this budget that we are continuing to support culture and recreation, that we are not using the challenge of the economy to penalize culture and to penalize artists. In fact, we're increasing grants to cultural organizations by 2 percent. We're funding festivals that bring Manitoba international renown, such as the Manito Ahbee Festival, and we're going to be funding youth recreation in inner-city neighbourhoods in a substantial way.

*(15:50)

I have had, of course, the occasion to see those kids who benefit from recreation programs that are free or low cost. I've been able, in my own constituency, to see the kids that play soccer for the first time that could not afford to do it without subsidy available to the organizations that provide coaches, that provide equipment. I've seen the joy on their faces when they're skating in the wintertime. I've been able to see newcomer kids experience that for the first time ever, and I know that it's an important investment, not only for health but to give those kids activities that are constructive. So I'm proud that we're going to be investing in that kind of recreation.

Yesterday we had the opportunity, all of us in this House, to meet our newest colleagues, and I'm

very proud to be a member of this government and this caucus that have people such as that part of our family. Listening to the words of our two newest members, I was struck that, in many ways, these are very different people. They grew up in very different parts of Manitoba. They come from different cultures. They've experienced different geographies. But, in their speeches, I heard both of them talk about how they've dedicated their careers and their lives to serving their communities. I also heard from both of them that they are both guided by underlying values and a faith that the cause of justice is essential to our collective humanity. I believe I'm privileged to have them as colleagues.

I'm proud of this budget. I'm proud of our choices, and I know they'll be criticized by members opposite, but I am more than willing to defend the choices we've made because this budget, I believe, represents what a caring and progressive government does when times are tough. We don't abandon people who are most vulnerable. We don't short-change our future by freezing progress. We continue on a steady course. We fight for our vision, a vision that is shared by Manitobans, a vision of a compassionate society filled with hardworking and innovative people. When times get tough, I believe our government chooses hope. That's why I'm proud to support this budget. Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I rise to speak to the budget. I want to begin by saying a few words about Brian Sinclair and his tragic death. His life was foreshortened—talk about budgets which don't foreshorten lives, it would be nice—but what we're dealing with is a failure by this current government to be able to manage things in health care so that we don't continue to have major problems. We should never have had people like Brian Sinclair waiting for 34 hours in an emergency room for the help that never came.

I have talked with many people about this, and there are concerns in many, many areas that there should have been better attention, better understanding of Aboriginal people, better concern for people who are like Brian Sinclair who may have had not always an easy time of communicating, but he should have been given the consideration, he should have been looked after promptly, but, of course, sadly, he was not.

If this was an isolated incident, it would be one thing. But the problem is that in our emergency rooms, we have had many, many incidents. We know

because it's been reported that there were more than 50 critical incidents in the last three years. One has to ask, why is it that we haven't learned more from these incidents that we can prevent the kinds of problems that Brian Sinclair experienced? We know that there was a huge review at the time of the death of Dorothy Madden. It was, at the time, seen as the review to end all reviews, to make sure that, once and for all, the emergency rooms were working properly. But something happened. Either recommendations weren't implemented or the recommendations weren't as good as they should have been. There were, clearly, problems, and we've ended up with continued problems in our emergency rooms.

Now the government may argue, well, health care's complicated. The minister gets up and says, well, I don't make the decisions; it's the medical people who make the decisions. We can accept that there are a few areas where the minister may not have responsibility but, quite frankly, the emergency room is one of the really critical areas, and it's critical because it's the first entry point for a lot of people. It's where people who are really sick come in. It is, as it were, an interface. It brings together people, emergency physician specialist, the family physician referring, all sorts of people in the health-care system. It's one of those critical places that you must get right if you're a health-care minister.

The NDP in more than 10 years still haven't figured out how to make sure that our emergency rooms are working right. It's as if we had a car which had a problem, and we kept taking it back and back, and it's the same problem all over again. It's not much of a car, and it's certainly not much of a government when you can't get it fixed properly the first time, instead of having to have it go back and again and again and again.

We learned over this last weekend about Gail Glesby who went into the emergency room. From what we know she had cerebral hemorrhage. We're lucky that her daughter had asked for an autopsy, because otherwise we might have not known the details as well as we do know. We're told by the minister today that there was an investigation, but there was never any report shared with the family. They were never even told there was an investigation, and the family is very dismayed at not having these basic facts and the results of the

investigation followed up and shared with them so that they could understand what went wrong.

It's an odd government which has problems in emergency rooms and then goes to try and solve them by closing an emergency room down—*[interjection]* Seven Oaks. I mean, this is compounding the problem because it's just shuffling people around when they should be able to be looked after at Seven Oaks.

This is a problem. We have the story of Chace Barkman, who died down south because the diagnosis wasn't made quickly enough up north. There needs to be a provincial standards for care, and we need to make sure that no community is without the kind of support and health-care support that they should have. This government just sometimes blames the federal government, but where were they? They should have stepped to the table and, if not providing the services, gone down to Ottawa to make sure that those services were being provided. The government has not been there.

They can blame anybody, but let's look at this budget from several perspectives. Let's look at it from a financial management point of view, one of: we're in a recession. The Finance Minister may not believe it, but today, I think, or yesterday, the Conference Board said the Canadian economy went over the cliff the last three months, and we're not exactly immune. We may not have gone over as big a cliff, but there are a lot of firms and people hurting, and there are people being laid off, you know. We should be paying attention.

* (16:00)

One of the areas of revenues which is most effective is corporate income tax. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) has projected that this last year the corporate income tax will increase up to \$380 million. The interesting thing is that when you look at his own third-quarter financial statements up to the end of the third quarter, the revenues from last year were \$253 million, and this year they're \$227 million. There's quite a slippage this year in terms of revenues coming in from corporate income taxes in the first three quarters.

So I asked yesterday, the minister, is he suggesting that there was a huge upturn in the Manitoba economy the last three months so that the corporations are doing much better? That's certainly what you'd read from his figures, but, sadly, that doesn't seem to be the case. The minister is sort of

living in maybe a wonderland, but the fact is that if you're going to present a budget, it should be a realistic budget based on where we are, the recession, with the expectation that corporate income taxes are not going to stay the same.

The prediction for the year which we've just started is that we would have \$346 million in revenues from corporate income taxes, which is fairly close to what it was two years ago with \$367 million. The fact is that based on the recession in the early '90s, we're likely to be much, much less than that. The minister at least admitted yesterday that they were having to adjust their numbers week by week because the situation was deteriorating. We anticipate that if he's doing that that he may have to adjust his deficit numbers from maybe 8 million up week by week because of what's happening.

We're waiting for some accountability from the Minister of Finance and for the next report, for his adjustments to his budget because when you plan for a deficit at the beginning of the year and you're going into a year like this in a recession, you're gambling, you're gambling.

We would hope that the minister would have moved to provide more accountability in health care. We have introduced many times legislation to have accountability in the operation and the delivery of services, but the NDP have rejected it.

We have pushed for changes as recommended in the Kirby report to move from the global trickle-down budgets of the NDP to the budgets based on the front-line services actually being delivered so we can have some accountability and quality controls and standards and best practices and make sure that the system is working properly instead of what's happening at the moment.

We should have the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger)—he's starting to look at pension liabilities and that's good, starting to look at environment liabilities. There's nothing yet in this budget for the liabilities related to the cleanup of Lake Winnipeg, but that's a pretty big item which was omitted. We need to have the minister being up front with people about the health-care liabilities that they're accruing. Hopefully every person diagnosed with diabetes, the lifetime cost probably in the order of \$100,000; if we've got 7,000 people diagnosed this year with diabetes that's a lifetime liability of \$700 million to all of us as taxpayers.

We need to make sure that we have some realistic accounting, that we're taking care of these and taking note of these liabilities that we're handing on to future generations. This will be known as the government which handed on huge liabilities for diabetes care, FASD treatment and health and care and so on and so forth to future generations.

It is not just the dollars of the moment when you add up the \$88-million deficit; it's the future liabilities that we should have had addressed and noted, and some plan. Where was the plan to deal with the epidemic of diabetes? Diabetes wasn't mentioned in the budget speech specifically, and we just feel that this government is not paying attention to some of the really critical issues of the day.

I'm sure that if this epidemic was in SARS or this epidemic was the pan influenza epidemic, we would have notification, but it's a diabetes epidemic when they just don't seem to pay attention.

The needs, physical infrastructure, I think that we can all agree that some investment in physical infrastructure at the time of a recession is reasonable, helping to make sure that there are jobs available for people, carrying us through at the time when private sector investment may be down. The reality is that what's important is that you have some strategic investment. One of the most strategic investments for the future of our city of Winnipeg would be rapid transit. Although we're pleased that the government is starting to talk a little bit about it, I note that rapid transit was never even mentioned in the budget speech. You know, an odd omission, certainly not a focus of this government, in spite of what the Member for Fort Rouge (Ms. Howard) has said, that rapid transit needs to be the backbone for development in the city of Winnipeg, the future-thinking change that we need.

Speaking about rapid transit, it's important not only that we know that it's there, but where it's going. Make it easier to plan, for example, for transportation across the Red River to the northeast of Winnipeg. There's been a lot of debate about the Disraeli Freeway and the Louise Bridge—*[interjection]* Oh, well, we're waiting for that.

We could have resolved this situation if there'd been a member of Parliament, an MLA, who'd had the foresight 10 years ago to think about what was happening in the area and to make sure that there wasn't traffic chaos, but that didn't happen. So what's happening now is that we're into a situation where traffic chaos is being threatened because the planning

wasn't done, and we're in a situation where some changes need to happen. If this is not happening in terms of forward planning related to rapid transit, putting in the bridge a little bit ahead of time for the provision of rapid transit so it could be used while the Disraeli Freeway is closed, putting in a second bridge by the Louise Bridge so that the traffic congestion is alleviated is probably the simplest.

The concept that was put forward by the former MLA for Elmwood of a bridge beside the Disraeli bridge and, I think, supported by the Conservatives, was a very poor suggestion, in fact, because it's very difficult to build that expensive and that long a bridge over the railway and the river and a lot of homes, a lot of expropriation. It's a huge, huge expense and it's unlikely that you could do it quickly. But the Louise Bridge twinning would be feasible and doable and could make a big difference for people if properly planned with the changes to the roads.

These are the sorts of things which, when we're talking about physical infrastructure, should have been detailed, but we didn't have that kind of detail or attention in the budget, and it's too bad. We waited. We thought maybe this would come over the last several years, but it never came and it never came in the budget, so we're still waiting and we'll see what happens.

Human infrastructure. We need some attention. I'm glad that the NDP decided not to cut back on education spending, but we should have some emphasis on real outcomes and targets. During the time of a recession, what happens is that people get laid off, right? We need to have the capacity so that those who are laid off can get the training or education quickly, right? Post-secondary education having wait times for some programs at the Red River College of not just months, but a year or two or three years, that's just not acceptable, being that people are waiting, swinging in the wind, unable to move forward on their lives unless, of course, they move out of province where they can get onto education quicker than here, but we don't recommend that. We were looking for a government which was actually going to say, we're going to ensure that there are no waiting lists for our Red River College and other post secondary education. That's what we should have had.

* (16:10)

That's what a Liberal government would have done; made sure that there are no waiting lists, set

the bar, and then made sure it happened. What they've done is to sprinkle a little bit of dollars here and there, but they have set no bars. They've provided no goal in terms of ensuring that the capacity is there to make sure that people don't have to wait and wait and wait if they want an education in this province.

Where was the future thinking? Investments in things like research and development? We should have, at the minimum, expected a Manitoba science, engineering, and humanities research council. It's been needed for years in Manitoba to make sure that those areas are supported provincially, that we are going to get provincial investments to address provincial needs in research and development and it's not happened.

We're sadly missing in critical areas in terms of this budget and it's too bad. You know, we did have some attention to child care, and the MLA for Fort Rouge was talking a little bit about this. I've had people in my office throw, what's the matter? This is a province where you have to wait, whether it's for health care, whether it's for education, whether it's for child care. Get in line, 250 people waiting ahead of her. It might be two or three years down the road. If you've got a baby and you need child care in two or three months, this is the NDP answer sometimes: have people wait, then you can avoid having to provide the service because in due course, they may not need it in the same—we should have had a plan to make sure that there's elimination of these wait lists for child care instead of having what we've got at the moment, a situation which is very troubling for many young parents and makes it very difficult to live in Manitoba. I certainly heard this in different parts of the city of Winnipeg, and I'm sure it applies in a number of rural areas as well.

There are lots that could be improved. There are lots that should have been improved in this budget, and certainly from the Liberal perspective, with the strong Liberal traditions and premiers in this province. Greenway and Norris and Garson and Campbell made major advances in social and infrastructure programs, and, I think, it's time we have a Liberal government once again because this NDP government is not doing the job we need to have done for the people of Manitoba.

Therefore, Madam Deputy Speaker, I'm going to move an amendment. I'll wait till my colleague is in his seat.

I move, seconded by the MLA for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux),

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

And further regrets that this budget fails to address the priorities of Manitobans by:

(g) failure to put patients first by continuing to base RHA spending on global budgets, rather than services delivered; and

(h) failure to provide full emergency services at our community hospitals, including Seven Oaks; and

(i) failure to account for the health-care costs of the diabetes epidemic; and

(j) neglecting the need to address the diabetes epidemic facing Manitoba; and

(k) failure to consider historical recession data from the 1990s in projecting corporate income tax levels; and

(l) continuing to ignore the need to set targets for cleaning up Lake Winnipeg and other Manitoba lakes suffering from toxic algae blooms; and

(m) failure to address climate change by running a carbon-neutral government; and

(n) failure to mention rapid transit in the budget speech; and

(o) failure to implement a plan to reduce child poverty rates in Manitoba; and

(p) failure to create an adequate action plan and funding for early childhood education in Manitoba, and

q) failure to support the agricultural sector by refusing to fund eco-friendly farming practices, such as a province-wide ALUS program; and

r) refusing to acknowledge the damage the payroll tax has on economic growth; and

s) failure to act on economic development for First Nations and rural Manitobans; and

t) failure to support reductions in wait times for post-secondary institutions; and

u) failure to recognize the need for, and address establishment of, a Manitoba Science, Engineering and Humanities Research Council; and

v) failure to address Northern Manitoba housing issues.

Madam Deputy Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable—order, please.

It's been moved by the honourable Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), and seconded by the MLA for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), that the amendment be amended—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The subamendment is in order. The floor is open for debate.

Oh, sorry. The honourable Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade): Madam Deputy Speaker, it's certainly a pleasure to stand and speak to my fifth budget as the member of the Legislative Assembly for Minto, which is an area which truly is one of the most fascinating communities in the province of Manitoba.

I want to begin my comments this afternoon, Madam Deputy Speaker, by congratulating our two newest members: The Member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead) and the Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie). The Member for The Pas, I've come to respect in the short time that I've known him. Certainly, we picked one of the coldest days in March in The Pas to go door-to-door, but, certainly, I know he's respected in his home community of OCN, I know he's respected across the river in The Pas and I know he's respected in the R.M. of Kelsey, in all the various communities that make up his very, very large constituency.

I'm very pleased that certainly he commands respect—it was so clear to see when I was in The Pas—commands respect from all his different communities. I'm so glad he's chosen to run for a party that respects people in all communities, not just one side of the river or the other side of the river, but respects all people living in The Pas and living in the north. Certainly, I know the Member for The Pas brings passion to continue the work of Oscar Lathlin, passion to continue to improve the lives of northerners and all Manitobans. I'm really looking forward to working with the Member for The Pas.

Of course, the Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie) is someone with whom I've said many times I can truly see eye to eye. The Member for Elmwood brings with him vast experience from his time in Ottawa, and I know that he brings with him a deep social conscience. I think we all enjoyed hearing his speech yesterday. I know, from his lengthy career in Ottawa, he truly provides the link for some members of the party to the true social gospel proclaimers that were the foundation of the CCF and the NDP—and it's so exciting to have somebody with so much confidence, so much experience with us here in the Legislature.

I've had the chance to get to know the families of both of these gentlemen. I, indeed, met some of the sisters of the Member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead). It's a very strong and a very loyal family. And, of course, I know well the family of the Member for Elmwood. I know both of these gentlemen are well grounded in their families and in their communities and will certainly be great members of the New Democratic team.

* (16:20)

Now this is probably the toughest budget, I think it's fair to say, that I've had the opportunity to speak to, as events south of the border and events elsewhere in Canada have created concern about the United States and, indeed, the world's economic and financial systems.

As we've said many times, Manitoba is not immune to these global shocks and its after-effects, but, due to the hard work and the partnership of Manitoba's workers, Manitoba's businesses, Manitoba's education institutions and, thanks to a government who supports the creation of a modern, well-trained work force that supports innovation, that supports excellence, Manitoba is very well placed to take on the difficult times that lay ahead.

Now most Manitobans know that Manitoba has turned in solid economic performances. It's predicted by most independent observers to have one of the two strongest economies in Canada in the upcoming year. Indeed, Madam Deputy Speaker, I say most Manitobans, because it appears that no members on the opposition benches have actually read a newspaper or watched TV since the House sat sometime last year. I don't know if they take extremely long vacations. I'm thinking that may be the case. It may simply be they don't listen to their constituents. They don't listen to Manitobans. They don't listen to the facts that are coming forward about

the way in which Manitoba is almost uniquely positioned to take on the difficulties of this recession.

Indeed, in the last year, Manitoba enjoyed the greatest increase in capital investment of any province in Canada. Of course, what do we hear from the Conservative members? They say, well, that's because of all the public money, all the things that your government is doing: investing in schools, investing in hospitals, investing in highways. Well, that's true. We are doing all those things.

I know the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) always tries to get the Speaker to listen to his questions. Somebody has to, I suppose. The Member for Brandon West will be very interested and, I'm sure, celebrate the fact that, in 2008, Manitoba had the greatest increase in private capital spending in the entire country. I know the Member for Brandon West is a good man. I know he comes into this Chamber with his ears open. I'm sure that will move him alone to see the benefits of this government working in partnership with all sectors of our economy.

Now we also know that Manitoba enjoys one of the lowest unemployment rates in the entire country. I listened carefully to the Member for Carman (Mr. Pedersen) in his comments late yesterday afternoon and earlier on this afternoon. I believe he's my critic. I think that's the case. That's the rumour I've heard. I presume he's my critic, so I was very, very careful to make notes of things that he said that might require a response. Well, I didn't fill up very much of a sheet of paper. In fact, I only wrote down one or two things from his speech.

But I do want to highlight another point the Member for Carman made. He talked about layoffs and people losing their jobs. I think that's very helpful. I think we should look at how Manitoba has performed in the job market over the past, say, four months. It's been about four months of StatsCan figures that we can say the recession has truly taken hold elsewhere in Canada. In the past four months Statistics Canada is reporting, Canada has lost 250,000 jobs; certainly, a fraction of what the American economy has lost; still, a substantial number.

It's interesting. How has Manitoba fared over that same four-month period? Well, not only has Manitoba not lost jobs, Manitoba has actually gained, StatsCan tells us, gained 1,000 jobs over that same period of time.

We know, of course, that Manitoba is predicted by the Conference Board of Canada and by any number of independent observers, banks, economists to be one of the top two performing economies in Canada in 2009. That's not the government machine, as the Conservatives seem to believe, coming up with those numbers. Those are independent observers who see Manitoba's balance, who see Manitoba's diversity, who see the investments that we've made in our work force here in Manitoba, who see that we are going to do among the best of any provinces at coming out of this recession.

I know that with the hard work of our business community, the co-operation of our workers, the involvement of our universities and colleges and our investments, when the world economy catches fire once again, Manitoba is going to be very well placed to enjoy all of the advantages that we built over the past number of years, because we're building an economy. It's relying on the strength of its work force.

The number of university and college students in Manitoba has gone up by more than 33 percent since 1999. I think it bears repeating that the last time the Conservatives were in power, in those deep, dark '90s, not only did the number of college and university students stay static, it actually dropped. By the end of the '90s, there were 15 percent less students in post-secondary education than there were in 1990, and that is because of the shameful way that the Conservative government treated our universities, treated our colleges and, worst of all, treated young people in Manitoba. Well, those days are long behind us, and we're now enjoying record numbers of students attending universities and colleges.

I'm also thrilled, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the number of apprentices in Manitoba has continued to rise year after year since 1999. In fact, we now have 90 percent more young Manitobans in apprenticeship programs than we did in 1999. Those are young people who stand ready to take on skilled jobs—careers, not jobs—in the skilled trades and really help us build our economy here in Manitoba.

Now, budget 2009 charts a balanced and a steady course by investing in health, by investing in education and, of course, investing in training. It stimulates the economy through major infrastructure investments. This, of course, is the 10th consecutive balanced budget since 1999, and this, indeed, is the

first full decade of balanced budgets by any government in Manitoba in more than half a century.

This budget makes important investments into the knowledge and skills economy to keep our province moving forward to better enable us to emerge from this time of economic uncertainty stronger than before.

Again, I provide you with the contrast of the Conservatives in the '90s cutting money to public schools—not just being negligent in leaving funding where it was, actually many years cutting funding to our public school system, bleeding universities and colleges and jacking up tuition rates. As I've said, the number of students in post-secondary education, those most likely to stay and contribute to our economy, were cut adrift by Gary Filmon's Tories, many of whom still sit in this Legislative Assembly.

Now, just today, I had a great opportunity to see, Madam Deputy Speaker, as you're aware, I had a chance to see some of our investments in action. I was at a very, very happy event, an announcement at the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce's Industrial Manufacturers Employers Group, as I had the privilege and the honour, on behalf of our government, of announcing \$5 million to strengthen work-force skills and workplace initiatives for unemployed, underemployed and young Manitobans.

Let me just give you some examples. Now, Opportunities for Employment Inc. is a faith-based agency which has its location in the heart of Winnipeg, in downtown Winnipeg, and they provide services to people who are unemployed, who are threatened with job losses or facing multiple barriers for employment. I'm very pleased our government this year is going to give Opportunities for Employment \$1.3 million for employment services to more than 1,100 people to make sure they get the training they need to rejoin our economy and help us grow our province.

Another very exciting program that was represented today was Building Urban Industries for Local Development, or BUILD. This is an absolutely brilliant program, Madam Deputy Speaker, which takes unemployed Manitobans and gives them basic pre-apprenticeship and, in some cases, apprenticeship training retrofitting older homes in the heart of Winnipeg. The BUILD program actually provides hope for unemployed and underemployed Manitobans. It teaches them valuable skills while at

the same time performing energy retrofits on older housing stock in the city of Winnipeg. The homeowners save money on their heating bills. The homeowners enjoy the comfort of a well-insulated and well-protected home. The workers obviously gain the skills and all of us as a society benefit. So I was very pleased that we're part of that program as well.

As well this morning, I announced \$522,000 for the Reaching E-Quality Employment Services program. This program helps to integrate 500 people with disabilities into the labour force each year. I know my seat mate, the MLA for Fort Rouge is a very passionate and very intelligent speaker on the subject, and I think she has made all of our caucus aware of the benefits that disabled workers bring to a workplace in terms of the education levels, in terms of the loyalty that disabled workers provide to a workplace. I'm very proud that our government supports that initiative.

*(16:30)

We also provide for this year \$438,000 for a comprehensive training program in the area of welding and metal fabrication for 56 unemployed Manitobans. This program is a partnership with the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, and it's offered, of course, in the lovely constituency of St. James on King Edward Street. As well, I announced the money for pre-employment services to approximately 700 unemployed individuals through Winnipeg Technical College and the Osborne Village Resource Centre, as well as \$300,000 for immigrant employment services offered by Employment Projects of Winnipeg. This agency offers specialized employment services and programming for unemployed and underemployed immigrants.

So there you have a government, the NDP government, working not just with what some may consider our traditional partners. We're partnering with anybody who comes forward with good ideas of training Manitobans, of gaining essential skills, of getting people into apprenticeships. We work with the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, we work with faith-based organizations, we work with community-based organizations, we work with our colleges, we work with our universities, we work with our unions to work together to strengthen our economy, and that's something which was never, ever understood by the Progressive Conservatives, and I will guarantee you, Madam Deputy Speaker, it's something they certainly don't understand today.

Now, there are many other things which have been announced in budget 2009. Of course, we've announced a 6 percent overall increase in base operating grants and strategic program investments for Manitoba's universities and colleges. We've announced additional training seats and a new bursary fund for prospective apprentices. In the last election campaign, we were the only party to talk about apprenticeships; the Conservatives, the Liberals, the Greens never actually got around to even thinking about the importance of this very, very excellent method of training new workers. And indeed, we promised 4,000 more apprenticeship seats. In the last budget year, we delivered 1,100 more seats, we're delivering more this year, and we will continue to lower barriers and make it easier for Manitobans from every corner of this province to have the chance to take on a skilled trade. I'm very pleased we're doubling the number of scholarships for Aboriginal medical students, who, it's hoped, will get their education and may feel they want to go back to their home communities to provide care to their communities, and I think that's a very, very positive thing. We're also providing new incentives to encourage high school graduates to pursue careers in the skilled trades.

I'm very pleased, as an inner-city MLA, that our government is investing more than \$160 million as part of a social housing renewal, the largest single investment in public housing in Manitoba's history. I've talked about the BUILD Program in Winnipeg, there's also the BEEP program in Brandon, which gives young Manitobans chances to prepare for careers in trades while doing something incredibly useful and helpful.

Now, it's not just individuals that we're helping. I've heard, as has the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), as has the Premier (Mr. Doer), as has every member of this House, that the economic and financial crises around the world have resulted in a credit crunch for many businesses, profitable businesses which may have some very good ideas on expanding, on finding new markets, but they are finding a difficult time right now in raising capital to do so. So I'm very pleased that budget 2009 provides businesses in Manitoba with improved access to capital by actually tripling the potential value of loans available through the Manitoba Industrial Opportunities Program for businesses creating or maintaining jobs in Manitoba. I've already had the chance to travel to numerous communities around Manitoba where the MIOP loan program is helping

companies to become more efficient, helping them to take on new processes, to pursue new markets and continue to grow for the benefits of all Manitobans.

And what about business taxes? I really haven't heard much from the members on the other side because I'm not sure what they could say to this government except to stand and applaud the steps this government has taken to reduce the tax burden on Manitoba businesses. You know, in 1999, when this government came to power, the small business tax rate was 8 percent. The threshold, the maximum amount you could earn to be taxed at that relatively low rate was \$200,000. Well, where is it now? The small business tax rate in Manitoba is now 1 percent. The threshold is now \$400,000. Small businesses in Manitoba actually enjoy the lowest tax rate of any province in Canada, and we're not finished yet. Budget 2009 has promised that within the calendar year 2010, the small-business tax rate is going to go from 1 percent down to zero percent, making Manitoba a small-business, tax-free zone that has not been seen in Canada ever, and I think we should all be very, very proud of that.

We know as well, working with our business community, that we need to reduce the general corporate income tax rate. When the Conservatives were in power for—I believe it was 11 long years—they did not take one step to reduce business taxes in this province. In fact, when we came to power in 1999, the general corporate income tax rate was 17 percent. It's now 13 percent. It will be going to 12 percent in July 2009. We've already eliminated the corporation capital tax for manufacturers in Manitoba. For all other companies, we'll be continuing with the phaseout of this general corporation capital tax, which will be eliminated by the end of 2010.

We've reduced the mining tax. In fact, there's now a progressive tax rate for mining of 10, 15 and 17 percent depending on the amount of taxable income, to kick-start our mining industry which right now is suffering with low worldwide commodity prices.

We've also paralleled business tax reductions announced in the 2009 federal budget, including the increased depreciation rates for manufacturing machinery and equipment and computer systems. I'm very proud, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we're providing additional funding for innovation for the Manitoba Research and Innovation Fund, and I was

very pleased just yesterday to be with the Minister for Science, Technology, Energy and Mines (Mr. Rondeau) as we officially kicked off the Manitoba Innovation Council, consisting of some of the best and brightest minds in private industry, in universities and colleges and in government to give us advice on how we can best develop an even stronger culture of innovation and excellence in the province of Manitoba.

We also recognize that research and innovation generates new business opportunities, creates jobs, supports immigration and builds our economy, and that's why we'll be enhancing the Research and Development Tax Credit to further support important research and innovation in Manitoba.

As well, we've doubled the Community Enterprise Investment Tax Credit to provide up to \$17 million more in investment capital for small and medium-sized companies. Whether you're an individual, whether you're a university or college, whether you're a business, there are good things in this budget for all as we continue to build a stronger, wiser, better Manitoba.

So, indeed, Madam Deputy Speaker, I believe that education training is a big part of our province's future. That's why I'm a New Democrat, and why I'm going to vote for this budget. We believe, as New Democrats, and I believe in building partnerships among workers, among businesses, universities and colleges and our government. That's why I'm a New Democrat, and I'll be supporting this budget. I believe in making investment in infrastructure, in our roads, our bridges, in social housing, schools, hospitals and our human infrastructure, and that's why I'll be supporting this budget. I believe in encouraging innovation and excellence, and that's why I'll be supporting this budget. Most of all, I believe that all Manitobans, wherever they come from in this province, have the right to participate in our economy, the right to a proper education, the right [*inaudible*] whatever it is they choose to do and [*inaudible*] the province of Manitoba. That's why I'm a New Democrat, and that's why I'll be voting in support of budget 2009.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Thanks for my colleagues and their applause. I know that I won't disappoint them. I never have in the past, and I don't plan on doing it in the future.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the budget is a mixed bag of untruths. We'll try to help the members opposite to further understand the reason for the problems that they're going to face with this type of budget.

You see, steady as it goes really suggests that it's coasting. Coasting only goes downhill. It's a lot like the water. It will find its way downhill. Coasting is going downhill. Steady as it goes would suggest that they have been doing a good job up to this point. If we take a look at our sister provinces to the west who have no debt—they have no debt. Do you understand what no debt is? They have no debt in comparison to Manitoba, but we have steady as it goes, and with more debt, more debt and more debt. They try to cover this up. They try to cover it up with more borrowing. We will borrow our way out of debt.

*(16:40)

One of their ministers, in times gone by, had said that a deficit was a good thing. Well, they've had a deficit for so long, they're starting to believe that. That minister couldn't get re-elected, as I recall, because a deficit was not a good thing, Madam Deputy Speaker. It wasn't a good thing at that time. We understand there's a need for stimulus in a bad recession. We understand that. We also understand that, through all of the good times, you should have put some money in the bank to use for that stimulus. You cannot borrow your way out of debt. How do you borrow your way out of debt? You haven't been able to show that today with the craftiness in the budget. You just have not been able to. But the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) can fool some of the people some of the time, and he will find that he can't fool all of the people all of the time. But, if he's going to continue coasting, as he is doing now, it's all going downhill. It's unfortunate, something that we aren't looking forward to. It's something that our grandchildren will have to pay for and every member opposite's grandchildren will be paying for this too.

There is no plan. There's no plan to carry us forward from 2009 to 2010, '11 or '12. You have to have a plan. Even if something goes wrong with that plan, Madam Deputy Speaker, you can adjust that plan. You can adjust it so that you can be flexible and still save the next generation and the generation after that. In this whole budget, there is no plan. There is nothing to carry us forward. If we take a look in some of the different departments, what we're seeing—there are many, many Manitobans that, if

they increased their debt by the 15 percent and decreased their debt payments by the 80 percent, as this government is suggesting, they would not be living in a house, the same as some of the people in the United States today that couldn't pay their bills. And that's exactly what this budget is suggesting. It's suggesting that Manitobans aren't smart enough to see the folly in this budget.

The government changed the balanced budget legislation so that it could run deficits. And they didn't waste any time in giving this new legislation a test run. They've done that. That's what you have here today, it's a test run. This balloon won't fly. This balloon has no air time left in it. It cannot succeed. It cannot succeed.

What you're going to see is you're going to take some more money out of Hydro to balance this budget. That doesn't work. You've tried that before in the good times. It didn't work. It's come back to bite you. It came back to haunt you. You're going to take—as we see in the budget and the ministers here today should be able to answer that—there was a deficit of \$9 million in Manitoba Lotteries. How can that possibly take place? So we borrowed \$9 million in this budget to cover that deficit in Manitoba Lotteries, and on top of that, we borrowed another \$50 million. Will that go in to balancing this budget, Mr. Minister? Madam Deputy Speaker, I suggest that that's where that \$50 million will go and we'll be hard pressed to be able to follow the money. It'll be a tough job, but we intend to follow that money to see where it went. I don't believe that the Crown corporations should be raided at all, and especially by this young minister who I had a lot of respect for until I saw his figures in the budget.

The government also appears to have forgotten some of its promises, and it was pointed out by my colleague from Lac du Bonnet today, when he raised the question, and the question wasn't taken very seriously by the member that it was directed to today, but it is a serious situation. And when they do say something, you would certainly hope that it would build up some confidence in you that they will carry that plan out, or that they will go forward with it, if there is such a thing as a plan. Last year, they said that there was going to be a five-year plan to reduce the personal income taxes by 2011. Scrapped it, just scrapped it. Unforgivable. How can we believe you? Especially the first rate of 10.5 by 2011 and to increase the coverage to 35 by 2011, among other commitments. These tax relief

measurements appear to be out the window. They're not in the budget.

Argue with it if you like, but talk to your minister. Talk to your minister. Where is he today? Talk to your minister and have him explain that to you, because he hasn't been able to explain it to the people of Manitoba or to the members on this side of the House.

He is the only one that can understand it, since it's so convoluted that it doesn't make sense to anyone else in the House. As a result, we're falling farther and farther behind, not only with our neighbours, as it was pointed out today by my good colleague and friend from Brandon West, that pointed out that our total debt, our total debt is more than the total debt than of three provinces. Do you understand per capita debt? I'm sure that most of you do, but your Finance Minister doesn't.

It doesn't seem that he understands that, and it's certainly not in the budget today. It hasn't been in the budget that was put forward in the past, and it's a growing debt that even our grandchildren will have trouble—they'll have a serious, serious issue with that debt, to try and pay that debt off. For every dollar in tax relief as was pointed out—there is certain tax relief in the budget—there is \$13 of new spending. For every dollar, you're spending 13 more. How can you do that? How can you do that?

If you're going to use money for a stimulus, learn to use it in a proper way. Do not misunderstand. We still support an economic stimulus in a recession, but you've had 10 years of no recession—10 years, Madam Deputy Speaker, of no recession and nothing done to lower the debt of this province—only increase it.

The budget continues our province's unhealthy dependence on financial support, financial support from the have provinces. I'm sure the members opposite would love to be in that situation where they could help someone, where they could help some other poor province like P.E.I., for example, or Newfoundland, that doesn't have the resources that this wonderful province has. They would love to help. I'm sure that these members would love to help, but had they looked after the finances for the last 10 years, they would be able to. Instead, they're welfare recipients, welfare recipients from other provinces. The have provinces in this country looked after their income. They were frugal with their spending—

An Honourable Member: Prudent.

Mr. Graydon: —and very prudent with their spending, and they put some money away in the good times for the bad times. They didn't continue to borrow and try to borrow their way out of debt.

So here we are depending on one third of our budget; one third of our provincial budget has to come from our neighbours. I wonder if our colleagues, our members opposite, will go to their neighbours next door when they go home tonight and want to borrow one third of their budget. Would you do that, and would you feel good about it?

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

I'm sure that some of our neighbouring provinces that put the money into the Province of Manitoba are not happy about it. They're forced to do that, but I want you all, each one of you, members opposite to go and borrow one third of your budget tonight from your neighbour, and see what the answer is. Come back and tell us. We could probably do a real nice little movie on that.

How can we trust a government who, from 2008-2009 to its third-quarter forecast, for that same year increased the net debt by \$1 billion? They increased the debt by \$1 billion—

An Honourable Member: Tommy, are you listening to that?

Mr. Graydon: Of course, he is. He's a wonderful Member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff). He understands that. He understands agriculture and sheep.

Mr. Speaker, it's very easy to govern in good times. It's easy to sit at the roulette wheel when you're winning. It's easy to throw the dice when you're winning, but when the tough times come, when you're down to the last 15 cents in your pocket, are you going to throw that on the roulette wheel? That's what this government has done to us in this budget. They have thrown our grandchildren on a roulette wheel, and they expect them to pick up what the mismanagement has been today and for the last 10 years. Disgraceful. Despicable. That's what it is.

* (16:50)

The last 10 years have been characterized as one of missed opportunity, unfilled potential in a number of areas, and I should list them for you because some of you probably haven't heard that: tax reform,

tourism, Aboriginal education and improved access to health care, planning for immigration-related growth. There's been none of that taking place. None of that's taking place.

Mr. Speaker, on more specific issues, and these are issues that are very important for the growth of Manitoba going forward; these are issues that we need to make Manitoba a have province, and to bring us into the 21st century. We have to eliminate this debt. It can't be eliminated overnight, but there needs to be a plan to do that. That plan going forward has to address a number of concerns, and these concerns have a wide range. I would like to point out some of the concerns that our party has, that we know that need to be addressed as we go forward.

We need to address issues like—the budget speech contains promises to increase access to primary and acute health care and services for Aboriginal people. What we have seen in the past is that promises have not been fulfilled. I guess I pointed out earlier that we really, really question whether some of these promises will ever be fulfilled. We have no reason to believe, by the track record, that this government will do what it put forward. There are laudable goals to do these things and we think they're very important. We think it's important that the First Nations people will play a very important role in our economy. They do today; they will, going forward.

We strongly encourage the government to focus on the education and training. Education and training in all levels of our society is the backbone of our society going forward: they give people the tools that are necessary in order to become great Manitobans, productive Manitobans. We need to carry that promise forward, and I would expect and hold your feet to the fire for this promise in this budget.

Advanced education and literacy, for Manitobans to remain competitive, its post-secondary institutions have to be strong. They need to be strong. We've had 10 years of tuition freeze. Anytime that you're going to freeze the income, you're going to drop the ability to attract the type of professors to carry you forward, to challenge the students. So this is exactly what you said: It's steady as she goes; we will not increase the level of education to our post-secondary students. That's what you have said in this budget. You have not put anything in the budget. You've put nothing in there for the chronic underfunding, which has included

insufficient funding for the library acquisition, decreased number of labs offered, lab equipment becoming obsolete, larger classrooms, more classes being taught by sessional instructors and less by tenured professors. You need to have money to attract the professors today to our facilities to raise the level of the education that's necessary to go forward in this world today. There's nothing in the budget, Mr. Speaker, that would lead us to believe that that's going to take place.

I'd like to address a couple of issues on agriculture, but before I go there, I'd like to maybe address some of the infrastructure issues that we've seen in the past. There's been talk that the infrastructure budget was—perhaps the minister could help me out—\$440 million—is that what it is?—over a five-year plan. Now he's raised it \$185 million—is that what it is?—over the next five-year plan. We ended up with quite a surplus from last year that didn't get spent. I know that things collapse, projects collapse and whatever, but we have probably—as I look around the province, we have deteriorating roads. We have Highway 75 under water again. It's not something new; it happens more often now than it has in the past, and it will continue to happen more often now. That's a very important route for the economy of this province. That's an important route if we're looking at having a CentrePort in this province, and I think that's a very laudable aspiration. We need to have that; we should have that. It will help us to become a have province, but at the same time we need an infrastructure that allows the traffic to get here from the United States, the northern Pacific gateway.

The minister has had many incentive programs from the federal government to do that. They've cost-shared that highway, but it's still the same level. It's still in the bottom of the lake; it's in the bottom of Lake Agassiz. We need to address that.

He needs to have a plan going forward. He talked earlier today in the House, I'm going to do this and I'm going to do that, but he has nothing. He has no plan on the table. We would love to sit down with him and just say, hey, that's a good idea. We don't mind waiting five years. We'll even wait 10 years, but there's no plan. In 10 years he won't be here, and in five years he won't be here. In fact, in three years he won't be here. We will have a plan then.

An Honourable Member: How about in two years?

Mr. Graydon: Two and a half.

Some of the infrastructure, and I don't want to be selfish, but I'm going to take the opportunity since I have the floor, I want to point it out to the minister that there is one bridge that he's neglected for 10 years—[interjection] I can't say that, but it has been an economic albatross to the communities on both sides of the river, and it's embarrassing for the minister, I know it is. It's embarrassing that it's brought up in the House here as often as it has.

The infrastructure in the province is part of the backbone of any province, and we just need to address that. I mean it has to be done. The longer you put it off, the higher the costs. There's no question about that either. So I would encourage the minister to get out there, get at it, and if he needs just a little bit of help, call. We're willing to be there. We're there for you; honest, we are.

In the agriculture sector, to ignore the challenges in the livestock sector is ludicrous. It's ludicrous. To ignore the challenges that have been there since 2003, and some of that has been ignored by the federal government as well, by the opposition in the federal government—they ignored the challenges as well. Today they have a chance to make it right. Some of them do. Some of them do today because now they're with us; they're in this House today. They can make a difference.

Agriculture is made up of six main sectors. You have the grain sector, the hog sector, the cattle sector, the vegetable sector, the feathers sector, and you have the specialty crops. So I consider that as a six-cylinder engine that drives the economy, and it's a big driver in this province. It contributes a lot to the economy of the province of Manitoba. If agriculture's in the tank, so goes the economy.

Here we have two cylinders of that six-cylinder engine that are out; they need to be fixed, just need

to be fixed. They're not being addressed. The hog industry gets slapped with a moratorium. Slap. Put a moratorium on the whole industry. Cave it in. Cave the industry in. The cattle industry, since 2003, has trouble going forward since the BSE outbreak in the province of Manitoba, and we hear nothing from the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) about the new COOL. We hear nothing about these. These are trade restrictions.

Our Minister of Agriculture should be standing up for the producers of this province and saying: We need to be heard; we need to have some help in this province; we need to help those producers.

I did hear, I heard the minister today say that we have put money into the Interlake, and I applaud them. I applaud them for that. That was federal money. A good portion of it was. Some of it is provincial money, and I applaud them for that.

However, the flood was last year. You can't feed the cattle snowballs. Those cattle went to market. You lost one third of the producers in the Interlake. You should be proud of that. You should be proud that now we're going to put some money in there to try and fix the ruts in the field, to try and feed the last remnants of the cattle industry. The Interlake is—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable Member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon) will have eight minutes remaining, and the debate will also remain standing in the name of the honourable Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross).

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, April 7, 2009

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