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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
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WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, April 15, 2009

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYER

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 17—The Workers Compensation Amendment Act

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister charged with the administration of The Workers Compensation Act): I move, seconded by the Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade (Mr. Swan), that Bill 17, The Workers Compensation Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur les accidents du travail, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Allan: It gives me great pleasure to introduce Bill 17, The Workers Compensation Amendment Act. This act expands the list of presumptive cancers for firefighters to include primary site esophageal cancer and primary site testicular cancer.

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

PETITIONS

PTH 15

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 2004, the Province of Manitoba made a public commitment to the people of Springfield to twin PTH 15 and the floodway bridge on PTH 15, but then in 2006, the twinning was cancelled.

Injuries resulting from collisions on PTH 15 continue to rise and have doubled from 2007 to 2008.

In August 2008, the Minister of Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) stated that preliminary analysis of current and future traffic demands indicate that local twinning will be required.

The current plan to replace the floodway bridge on PTH 15 does not include twinning and, therefore,

does not fulfil the current nor future traffic demands cited by the Minister of Transportation.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Transportation consider the immediate twinning of the PTH 15 floodway bridge for the safety of the citizens of Manitoba.

Signed by Colleen Carswell, Eva Prysizney, Nancy Garand and many, many other Manitobans.

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 a 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 Barb Rampton, Bob Billing, Linda Thiessen and many, many others.

Seven Oaks Hospital—Emergency Services

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

The background to the 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 P. Sousa, R. Mouton, K. Mercado and many, many other fine Manitobans. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

*(13:40)

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Provincial Ice Jams and Flooding

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): Mr. Speaker, as of yesterday, we now know that we're facing the third worst flood in a hundred years. We're now expecting water levels will be slightly higher than in 1979, a flood which saw the evacuation of more than 10,000 Manitobans and caused nearly \$20 million in flood-related damages throughout the Red River Valley.

We are continuing to deal with the lingering effects of the unprecedented ice jams which occurred north of the city of Winnipeg. We are also focussed on the Red River as it crests south of the city, and we are focussed on overland flooding. As the

temperature increases, the rate of melt has also drastically increased.

Mr. Speaker, the Red River crest is forecasted to arrive in Emerson today or tomorrow, in Morris on April 19, St. Adolphe on or around April 18 and the floodway control structure on April 18.

Today, water levels have risen by 36.78 feet in Emerson, 33.51 feet in Morris, 32.37 feet in St. Adolphe and 18 feet in Winnipeg at James Avenue. It is estimated that the floodway has reduced water levels in the city of Winnipeg by over 6 feet. We are currently forecasting a peak stage of 22.6 James Avenue level on April 18.

The ring dikes are partially closed at Brunkild, Emerson, Dominion City, Letellier, Morris, Riverside, Rosenort, St. Adolphe, Ste. Agathe and St. Jean Baptiste. MIT issued a message to all municipalities for continued vigilance in monitoring water levels and road closures in their area.

The flood is evolving day by day. We're monitoring the rapidly changing circumstances closely. We're working with the City of Winnipeg and the affected municipalities in the Red River Valley to ensure that they have the most up-to-date flood information, that they are prepared. We're continuing to urge Manitobans to remain vigilant in their efforts to protect their homes and communities from the rising water.

If I could, Mr. Speaker, and I realize this is the not the normal practice, I would just like to advise, if I could by leave, a one-sentence addition on a breaking development that Manitoba Health officials are working with the residents and families in the St. Adolphe Personal Care Home to evacuate residents as a precaution. That is in advance of the anticipated crest in that area, and it's to make sure that there is no disruption if a further evacuation is needed to people in a very vulnerable situation.

I realize that's not part of the written statement, but I received this note about two minutes ago and thought it would be important to raise it in the House as soon as possible. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): I thank the minister for the update. We all, as Manitobans, continue to monitor the circumstances as they evolve with the rising levels of the Red River, as well as the rivers and tributaries that are flowing into it.

I want to just take a moment to commend the efforts of staff of various levels of government, as well as the many volunteers who've responded to the call for assistance along Scotia Street and other places, both within the city and outside the city of Winnipeg, as calls have gone out for volunteers to assist with sandbagging and the raising of dikes in various places.

This morning, on Scotia Street, there were several hundred residents, as well as students, from places such as St. Norbert Collegiate. The Salvation Army was present there with Don Timmerman and others providing support for volunteers, and we were advised of the contributions being made by businesses such as Safeway, Sobeys and McDonald's in providing food and water for the volunteers who have come out and made time available to sandbag as is required.

So we are supporting the efforts of all governments and all citizens as they meet the challenge of the rising waters. We were certainly reassured by the statements yesterday by the Prime Minister of Canada, as well as the Premier (Mr. Doer), with respect to the support and partnership of senior levels of government in dealing with both the short-term challenges as well as the issues that will arise as the waters recede.

So we offer our support and good wishes to all involved in this effort and, I, again, Mr. Speaker, thank the minister for his statement.

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

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

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the minister for his statement, including the recent update on the situation of the personal care home in St. Adolphe.

I'd also like to say a big thank-you to all the volunteers and the municipal and provincial staff who have worked so long and so hard and contributed in one way or another. Manitobans are certainly pulling together in these difficult circumstances.

I think it's important to recognize that it's not just along the Red River but up along the Fisher River. The Peguis and Fisher River First Nation are affected by flooding, and we need to be, you know, sympathetic and concerned and make sure that every

effort is made to help in areas like that which are also affected. There are, of course, many roads covered in different parts of the province, from St. Laurent to even in the city of Winnipeg, Ness Avenue and perhaps Hamilton.

So there is lots to do all over the province, and just a big thank-you to all those who are helping to fight the various floods and to protect people, their homes and their lives. Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today Alex Forrest, International Association of Firefighters, Canadian Trustee president, Winnipeg Firefighters, and a Winnipeg firefighter.

Also, Winnipeg firefighter Ron Morden and his wife, Petrina; Betty Martin with family, who is the wife of the deceased Winnipeg firefighter, Ron Martin; Winnipeg firefighter Mark Oswald; Portage la Prairie firefighter Corey Jowett, who is president of the Portage la Prairie Firefighters and executive members from Portage la Prairie, Winnipeg and Brandon firefighters; also, Brandon firefighter Terry Parlow, who is the president of the Brandon Professional Firefighters and Paramedics.

These are the guests of the honourable Minister of Labour and Immigration (Ms. Allan).

Also in the public gallery we have Maria Jose Malo Caballero, an exchange student from Queretaro, Mexico, who is currently attending Kildonan East Collegiate and her sister, Anaid Malo Caballero, who is visiting her from Mexico. These are the guests of the honourable Member for Rossmere (Ms. Braun).

Also in the public gallery we have from Inkster School 50 grades 4 and 5 students under the direction of Ms. Karen Tayfel. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Family Services and Housing (Mr. Mackintosh).

Also in the public gallery we have 30 students from West Kildonan Collegiate. These visitors are under the direction of Ashley Brasca. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Attorney General (Mr. Chomiak).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Provincial Ice Jams and Flooding Communication to Public

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity this morning, along with the Member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson), to visit with a number of residents along the Seine River, south of downtown, as well as residents along Scotia Street today, many of whom are anxiously watching the waters rise and dealing very proactively to meet whatever threat may arise. There is a great sense of camaraderie and a positive attitude among all involved in terms of dealing with the challenges.

One question that has arisen, though, Mr. Speaker, is just the ability of the government to transmit timely and accurate information to residents who are at various points along these waterways in different parts of the province. The concern and the question that was asked by many was: Are there other ways the government could provide us with more timely information and more frequent updates in terms of the developments as they occur, recognizing, of course, that they seem to be changing every number of hours. What measures is the government taking to ensure a timely and effective communication with all Manitobans who could be impacted by what's coming?

* (13:50)

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): First of all, I'd like to start by thanking the Prime Minister for visiting Manitoba, in terms of his announcement yesterday, but also taking time on a flood tour to be briefed on the conditions north of the city of Winnipeg, to be briefed by Minister Toews and myself on conditions all across Manitoba, in fact, in some degree, in some parts of Saskatchewan on overland flooding based on the freezing up of culverts and the challenges that represents.

I also was able to brief the Prime Minister on the situation that is pending in Souris, and we obviously had the opportunity to look at the operation of the floodway, again pay tribute to former Premier Roblin for that vision, and visit and witness communities south of the floodway including in Morris.

I also want to pay tribute to the municipal leaders that have been dealing, some of them 24 hours a day seven days a week, particularly those who have been dealing with the situation where ring dikes are now in place south, where people have

been affected north of the city of Winnipeg. Even in the communities north of Winnipeg, we had situations where our R.M.s had to alert people on Friday night, try to convince people on Saturday night and then participate in a rescue on Sunday, Easter Sunday, at quite a perilous situation. They just deserve all our credit along with all the volunteers that are working from one end of this province to another. It's not just the Red River Valley.

In terms of alerting the public, we let the municipalities know instantly when we get a new, revised update. For example, the daily briefing to the public at 2:30 is preceded by, in this case, in the city of Winnipeg, with an update yesterday morning; again, an update today, this morning, just to make sure that we're looking at different forecasts with all the tributaries running into the city, with the ice jam on the Assiniboine that's slowly moving through the system, or quickly moving through the system, and also the impact, potentially, of rain either tomorrow or Friday.

So we do provide that as quickly as we get it. We sometimes even give it to them in draft form before they rerun the computer models through Mr. Warkentin's office, but that is definitely given to the municipal leaders before the 2:30 briefing every day.

Mitigation Strategy for Lake Winnipeg

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): We certainly appreciate that there are many things taking place on many fronts as we speak in terms of developments under the control of Mother Nature and, certainly, they're having an impact.

Mr. Speaker, one of the questions which has arisen and which we posed yesterday and are hoping that we can get some further clarification on is one that has come up for many Manitobans, and that is concerns about the amount of water now flowing through the Red River Valley and through tributaries that drain into the Red River as that water approaches Lake Winnipeg, which continues unusually to be frozen solid at the moment and continues to have very thick ice.

There are questions about what, if any, impact that could have as the waters reach Lake Winnipeg, and I wonder if the government can shed any light in response to that question, what impact, if any, that could have. We're not assuming that that impact

would be dramatic. We're not assuming that it won't be dramatic. We're just wondering what information the government may have on that potential issue.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): My briefing last week and the current briefing we have is that the ice—we had about a 200-mile stretch of unusually thick ice from Lake Winnipeg right to Drayton as of two weeks ago. That ice in the Red River has moved out and most of it is residing north of Netley Creek in the delta where it normally melts, actually, in that area. It doesn't go over top of the ice in Lake Winnipeg, but, again, we are in unusual conditions. I have no different briefing as of this point. If that changes or if the ministers of EMO or Water Stewardship know anything differently, certainly we'll provide that to the member, but that's the current condition of the ice.

We have some ice that we expected later on in the Assiniboine River. It's now, as you can see—and I saw it just last night—flowing through to the Red. It should not cause the same problems in Selkirk and north of Selkirk that we had with that massive ice sheet. In fact, one piece of ice in one of the communities I think was a mile long last Thursday, last Thursday night in St. Adolphe, hung up on the bridge. We're pleased it was able to go through the floodway and be managed in the floodway channel, but, at the same time, we had massive amounts of ice in the floodway intake. Of course, that was on the webcam. Some people thought it was quite interesting.

We didn't like the fact that that ice was there, but the floodway operated with very, very high efficiency rates. The bottom line is that ice, we believe, is in the delta.

River Crest Predictions

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): One of the issues that is arising today is the sense of scenarios changing very rapidly in terms of predictions. There was an announcement, I believe, two days ago that the river would be cresting at Emerson yesterday. We now have reports, obviously, of rising water overnight at Emerson and additional work being done on the dikes at St. Adolphe, Ste. Agathe and in other communities south of the city.

I wonder if the government could indicate what its revised prediction is with respect to the cresting of the river at various communities and whether they remain confident. I know there's a lot of confidence

in all communities that have done work since the floodway, and in the period of time since the flood of 1950 lots of work has been done.

But I wonder if the Premier could just update us on the level of confidence they have in the existing ring dikes and what measures may be taken over the coming hours, as it appears the crest has not yet hit Emerson and other communities south of Winnipeg.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): The predictions about a month ago were that we would be at or above 1979 levels. That looks to be true. It's the question of when it's happening and the concurrence of what's going on with some of these tributaries.

Emerson, as you know, in 1997, they had freeboard and evacuation of the residents in Emerson in '97, evacuation in '79, I believe, and now the permanent dike in 2002 was raised. The infrastructure in Emerson was moved from outside of the ring dike to inside the ring dike. I think it was the water treatment plant and the sewage treatment operation was moved inside. So, so far, we think Emerson, yes, it's gone up a tenth of a foot in Emerson. It has lasted longer than predicted, but the rivers, the tributaries are moving into the Red River system south of Emerson and affecting the length of the crest and the timing.

In Morris, the dikes have been improved to previous events. We also had evacuations in those communities. I would point out Rosenort, we've built a diversion around Rosenort from 1997. Regrettably, Riverside has had to be evacuated in every flooding event. That has taken place. Ste. Agathe was flooded dramatically in '97. The ring dike has been increased and improved. The water tubes have been backed up by clay dikes, and it looks as if it can handle some of the challenges heading its way. As you know, the water goes more downhill toward St. Adolphe from Morris. The crest will move quicker to the inlet of the floodway.

We're taking precautions in many of those communities. There are no evacuations ordered, save the patients that might be more vulnerable at a last-minute call in the St. Adolphe area. Obviously, we're trying to manage the situation south of the floodway and manage situations within the floodway in a balanced and fair way for all Manitobans.

Livestock Industry Provincial Comparisons

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, Manitoba's livestock industry is in a state of crisis.

The government of Alberta has committed \$356 million to stabilize and strengthen their livestock sector. The Saskatchewan government has just recently announced \$71 million for their hog and cattle producers. While other provinces are deeply committed to growing their livestock sectors, this government is ignoring our producers.

My question for the Minister of Agriculture is: Why are our neighbours developing plans, long-term strategies, to see their livestock sectors grow while Manitoba's is shrinking?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for the question. I can assure him that we worked very closely with the livestock industry when they came to us last spring and asked us for programs. We worked with them. We established those programs.

If he would be listening and if he really was meeting with the Manitoba Cattle Producers, he would know that they have grave concerns about what the impacts on trade will be by the programs that have been put in place by the Province of Saskatchewan and the Province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows that there have been challenges in the Interlake and Westlake areas, and we have worked with those producers along with the federal government, used AgriRecovery to help them. Our industry is not declining. Our producers are facing challenges.

*(14:00)

Government Growth Strategy

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): So let me understand this real clear, Mr. Speaker. So we just sit on our hands and do nothing, saying we are worried about a trade challenge. Unacceptable.

My colleagues and I recognize the importance of the livestock sector. A strong livestock sector is vital to the province's economy, something Alberta and Saskatchewan governments have clearly recognized. They're investing in the long-term future for their livestock industry so it will be competitive, but we're not seeing the same vision and leadership here with this provincial government.

My question for the Minister of Agriculture: Is she prepared to develop a long-term strategy for our livestock sector? When will she do it and will she table it today?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, I think that it's important that as a government we work with other provinces and indeed do develop long-term strategies through the programs that we have put forward under Growing Forward, a program that producers have had input into, that producers have helped us design.

Under this program, we have insurance programs, Mr. Speaker. We have programs to help producers if their income revenues decline, and there are also programs to help in emergencies such as in the Interlake and Westlake, where I was able to work with the federal Minister of Agriculture and put in place an AgriRecovery program to help those people maintain their herds.

As well, Mr. Speaker, we lobbied the federal government very hard to get a tax deferral for cattle producers, so that when they had to reduce their herds they would not have to pay tax on that money. They could use that money to re-establish their herd.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that ministers are supposed to have meetings from time to time to discuss issues, common issues that are important to their industry. Obviously, this minister is not at the table or she can't negotiate with the other ministers.

The financial world has said time and time again that the livestock production was the most important economic driver that can do just that. We also need leadership and will for this government to move forward on the livestock sector. Our hog industry, our beef industry, are hurting significantly.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Agriculture commit today to develop an action plan with the livestock sector in order to make us competitive before we lose our entire industry?

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, the member opposite may be giving up on our livestock producers and saying that they're going to walk away. Mr. Speaker, I have far more faith in this industry—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I can't hear. Let's have a little decorum. I can't even hear the person that has the floor. Let's have a little decorum here.

The honourable minister has the floor.

Ms. Wowchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite may have given up on the livestock

industry, saying that that industry is going to die in this province. I'm not with him. I believe in our producers and I believe in working with them, and when they come to us and they work with us to develop various programs, we have been there.

I say to the member opposite, we also work with the federal government. He may not realize that, but in order to develop these programs we have to work with our colleagues—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Livestock Industry AgriStability Program

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Mr. Speaker, the AgriStability program under the Business Risk Management program has been a colossal failure to the livestock producers of Manitoba.

I ask through you to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives: Can she tell this House how many dollars have gone to the primary livestock producers under the AgriStability program—AgriStability only, not AgriRecovery, not disaster relief, AgriStability only, to livestock producers?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Well, Mr. Speaker, the member wants to take a very narrow vision on what programs are there. I would tell him that he should look broader than that. He should look at the cash advance programs that are there. He should look at the Livestock Feed Assistance Program.

Mr. Speaker, I wonder why the member opposite won't recognize the fact that under the programs that are developed, producers can get a cash advance interest free. They wanted a program similar to what the grain producers had where they could get a cash advance without paying interest, and they can do that now, and they can have a cash flow.

But the member asks a very specific question about how much has been paid out. We're going to be doing Estimates very shortly and I'll be able to share that information with him, but I would ask him not to have such a narrow focus because there are many other places that—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I'm not going to ask too many times. Decorum is getting out of hand here. I'm not going to ask too many more times. If members do not wish to hear the questions and the answers, they

can go to your caucus room or your office, and that way the members that do want to hear the questions and the answers will have the opportunity. We're not going to let just a few disrupt question period anymore. That's not fair to the members that are trying to hear the questions and the answers.

The honourable Member for Carman has the floor.

Business Risk Management Programs

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've had five years of negative margins, and we're coming up to six years for BSE. Cash advances, as the minister was explaining, are being clawed back, and just ask me, I can give you the personal experience of cash advances being clawed back. The livestock sector does not qualify for AgriStability.

Will the minister commit to revisiting the issues of negative margins? Will she work with Manitoba's livestock industry to design an effective Business Risk Management program?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, I've always had a very open-door policy with the industry. I meet with the industry on a regular basis. I recently met with the Manitoba Cattle Producers. In fact, I will be meeting with Manitoba pork producers later today. So I am in discussion with the industries and we are looking at various options.

The member wants to be critical. There are issues of cash flow that producers are facing. That's why there are various programs such as the beef targeted advance, the cash advance from the federal government.

As well, Mr. Speaker, there are programs that we have put in place to address specific challenges of producers in various parts of the province.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, the minister is using the current Business Risk Management program as an excuse for non-action. Negative margins, poorly designed programs have left Manitoba's livestock industry with no alternative but a steep decline both in profitability and in actual numbers.

What steps will the minister take to work with Manitoba's livestock industries to develop a workable, long-term Business Risk Management program which includes using negative margins?

Ms. Wowchuk: I can say to the member again that my staff and I meet with the industry on a regular basis. We have discussions about how the programs are working and what kinds of changes can be made in the programs.

Mr. Speaker, one province cannot make the changes alone. This is a federal-provincial program that people all have to be part of. The people have raised the issue of negative margins. I would remind the member opposite that when these programs are being developed, there is consultation with the industry. The industry has input and it is based on that input that the programs are developed.

Are the programs perfect? No, they're not. Is there need for change? We will continue to work and consult with the industry.

Livestock Industry Feed Assistance and Restoration Programs

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, when they bring programs in, they're not equitable anyway.

The Minister of Agriculture has known since last spring that there's been a disastrous shortage of feed and water for livestock in southwest Manitoba, in the very southwest corner of Manitoba, Mr. Speaker. Yet, when recently announcing feed assistance and restoration programs, these equally disaster-stricken livestock producers in southwest Manitoba were left out.

Even though the minister was fully apprised of the catastrophe, why has she not included this relatively small area of farmers in the support program she has just announced? Why did she leave them out, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, when programs are developed, when issues are being addressed such as the one the member speaks about or the flooding in the Interlake, our officials, both federal and provincial, review the situation and they give us advice. The advice we received was that AgriRecovery would work in the Interlake, and the federal government agreed that AgriRecovery would work in the Interlake, but this was not the program to cover off the small area that the member speaks about in southwestern Manitoba.

However, Mr. Speaker, we did lobby the federal government and did get a tax deferral for the people

of the western part of the province as well as in the Interlake.

Mr. Speaker, as I say, we work on the advice of officials. They review the data and decide and advise us on where we should be using AgriRecovery, which is the program that was used in the Interlake.

* (14:10)

Mr. Maguire: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's no solace to the farmers in southwest Manitoba. Thousands of head of breeding stock were sold for slaughter in southwest Manitoba last fall. These farmers saw no support coming from this government, so many of them sold their herds because on top of everything else, the southwest disaster left them without feed and water for their herds this past winter. To add insult to injury, they were dismissed by the minister when decisions were made to pay cattlemen \$70 per bred cow in the Livestock Feed Assistance Program. To them a disaster is a disaster.

So, today, Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Agriculture to consider their catastrophe and seek to include these hard-hit southwest Manitoba ranchers in the same or similar recovery programs that she recently announced.

Ms. Wowchuk: As I said previously, when we are developing programs or looking at an area, whether they have programs that work or whether there's need for assistance, federal and provincial officials review the data. In this case, the federal and provincial officials said that the Interlake area—and, in fact, the federal minister agreed with these recommendations, that there should be an AgriRecovery program and feed assistance and forage restoration assistance in the Interlake.

In the southwest part of the province, Mr. Speaker, the member speaks about all the livestock that have been sent to slaughter. He neglects to mention that a tax deferral program was put in place to help those people, so that they did not have to pay taxes, but they can re-establish their herds when there are better conditions.

Mr. Maguire: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to table a letter today for the minister signed by the seven southwest municipalities that are most hard hit by this. This is a letter dated March 28 to Madam Minister and signed by the reeves and councillors of that region.

Mr. Speaker, the minister certainly knew of the catastrophic conditions in southwest Manitoba from the fall of '07 and the spring of '08. I had asked questions in this House last May, requested support for hauling water in letter form to her last fall. Her own department officials described the conditions in the southwest as the worst in decades, quote, the lowest precipitation levels on record. That's what the news media covered last May.

So why the double standard, Mr. Speaker? Why did the minister support one disaster for livestock producers and not another? The end result was the same.

I ask the minister: Will she review the request of the disaster-stricken southwest municipalities that are requesting her support in the letter that I've tabled today?

Ms. Wowchuk: Indeed, I have received a copy of this letter, and I want to say to the member that, as I said earlier, federal and provincial officials review the situation. They reviewed the situation in the southwestern part of the province. They reviewed the situation in the Interlake-Westlake region.

Mr. Speaker, they made a recommendation and I supported their recommendation to put in place AgriRecovery and assistance in the Interlake, and I lobbied the federal government for a tax deferral.

I would remind the member that that was the first request that we had from the people in the western part of the province, was to have a tax deferral, because they knew they had to reduce their herds, but they wanted to have the ability to re-establish those herds, Mr. Speaker. That was the request from the people of that area. That's what we've worked on and that's why we've put in AgriRecovery and programs in—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hog Industry Government Support

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, the pork industry has contributed \$2 billion annually to the provincial economy and provided for more than 13,000 jobs for Manitobans. It was the largest source of income for Manitoba farmers, yet this government wants to drive it out. Hytek has already relocated a part of their operation to Saskatchewan, and some of the smaller producers are already gone.

Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the Minister of Agriculture: Is it her intent to kill the pork industry in Manitoba?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker.

Bill 17 Legislation Withdrawal

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Well, Mr. Speaker, this NDP government has backtracked on some other ill-conceived legislation. They backtracked on Bill 37, the vote tax bill, and decided that for now they're not going to take that and line their pockets with taxpayers' money. They backtracked on Bill 38, the unbalanced budget bill, and last year's Bill 17 was also ill conceived. So I'm understanding, to hear the minister today, that she's committing to re-examine that bill, or is she still going to continue on this mission?

What is she going to do? Is she going to look at that bill again?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, I want to, first of all, thank my colleague the Member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) who started asking ag questions because the members opposite wouldn't.

You know, Mr. Speaker, maybe if we keep asking, maybe we'll get a lead question. That would be wonderful if the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) would show some interest in agriculture. He hasn't to this point.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very important industry. We know that we need processing in this province. That's why we've made investments in waste water near Neepawa for Hytek. We've made investments in Neepawa and in Brandon so that Maple Leaf can double because we believe value-added is very important. We need primary production, but we also need value-added and have—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Taillieu: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Interlake can't even get an answer from his own government when he poses questions. The Minister of Agriculture did nothing to support farm families. She sat on the sidelines and let the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers) take away their livelihood. This is how the minister regards people in rural Manitoba, people like the Hutterites, who dropped everything and went to fill sandbags hours

on end, because they understand the hardships of people, unlike this Minister of Agriculture who does not understand the hardships suffered in rural Manitoba.

Will the Minister of Agriculture stand up for hardworking rural Manitobans, allow them their livelihood, and repeal last year's Bill 17?

Ms. Wowchuk: I never thought I would get a lecture from that Member for Morris, Mr. Speaker. I wish she would have used some real facts. The member opposite talks about us taking the livelihood of people away. The member opposite refuses or ignores the issue that we have real challenges with exports, and the reason pork producers are not making money right now is because of barriers that have been put in place. Country-of-origin labelling and the blockage of our pork to move into the U.S. is really a serious challenge.

If the member is questioning my pride in being a farmer, I can tell her I have been a farmer. I still live on a farm, and I am very proud to be a farmer like all of the farmers in this province.

*(14:20)

Livestock Industry Government Growth Strategy

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Mr. Speaker, as an MLA who speaks to farmers every single week, I can tell you that the minister who has presided over this portfolio for 10 years is extremely out of touch with what is going on in rural Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, the legacy that she leaves behind for the farmers of this province is one of neglect of the industry, total mismanagement and disgraceful leadership on behalf of this government.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta and Saskatchewan have shown real support for the ag industry. They have developed plans for a livestock industry that will take that livestock industry into the future.

In Manitoba, we are seeing a rapidly declining livestock industry, and I want to ask the minister what it will take for her to finally get the message that this industry requires support, and when will she put a plan into effect that is, in fact, going to help the industry rather than hinder it?

Mr. Speaker: Before recognizing the honourable minister, I'd like to remind members that questions and answers should be put through the Chair, not

directly at an individual. *[interjection]* Order. That's the rules of the House.

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Well, the member opposite says he talks to farmers every week. I can tell him I talk to farmers almost every day and I listen to them, Mr. Speaker. I listen to them.

I can tell the member opposite that I met with the beef industry very recently. I'm meeting with the pork industry today. I attend their annual meetings. I hear what they say and I invite them in to have input, Mr. Speaker. I work very closely with them and the member opposite should think about some of the things that we have done in rural Manitoba and the investments that we have made that will affect farming communities.

The member opposite forgets that investments like an ethanol plant very close to him have a huge impact on farmers. Investments in wind energy have a huge impact—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, not a day goes by that I don't receive phone calls from farmers who are complaining about how this government is neglecting this entire industry. Not a day goes by that I don't get phone calls.

Mr. Speaker, the minister was warned about this a long time ago. In 2003, when BSE hit this province, she said that within two years we would have a livestock-processing industry in this province. Today, six years after, we are still waiting for that commitment from this minister.

Mr. Speaker, this minister has no plan. She has no vision and she is taking this province down in terms of the livestock industry. I'm asking her or her Premier (Mr. Doer) to do something about this problem that we're facing in the livestock industry, develop a plan and show Manitoba farmers that, indeed, they have some support in this government.

Ms. Wowchuk: I know the member opposite doesn't want me to remind him about when he was in government and in Cabinet, Mr. Speaker, but I will remind him that it was while he was in Cabinet that the Burns plant closed, the Canada Packers plant closed, and they did nothing. They did nothing to save those plants.

I can say to the member opposite, we continue to work with the industry. I wanted very much to have slaughter capacity in this province. I surely wish the

members opposite would not have worked so hard to sabotage the plant when it was going to go, Ranchers Choice in Brandon, because they wouldn't give it one—[*interjection*] in Dauphin, I'm sorry. They wouldn't give it one ounce of support.

Mr. Speaker, we are hopeful. There are people that are working to increase slaughter capacity, but I would remind the member that Hytek has expanded, that Brandon Maple Leaf has expanded and those are livestock industry plants as well.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, perhaps this minister should take a bit of a history lesson, because the demise of the livestock industry and the processing industry in this province happened under the Pawley-Doer-Harapiak administration.

Mr. Speaker, under their leadership or the mismanaged leadership of this minister, we have seen a livestock industry that is leaving this province while other provinces are supporting their industry so that, in fact, they can grow their industry. This Premier (Mr. Doer), this minister, are neglecting the entire industry, and I want to ask this minister when she is going to work with producers in this province, develop meaningful programs, so that the industry can survive for the future.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, I work on an ongoing basis with people in the industry. When programs are being developed, they are consulted, but the member opposite should remember that there is expansion of the processing industry in this province, for the hog industry. There are people that are working very hard to establish a beef processing plant. I hope the member opposite isn't going to be critical of this one as they were when Ranchers Choice was trying to get started in Dauphin. They did nothing. They spoke out against it.

Mr. Speaker, we will continue to work with the industry. The member opposite says we're in government. Well, you know, when there's a good idea, it would be nice of the opposition if they would support it, and they certainly did not support Ranchers Choice. I hope that they will support Keystone Processors.

**Winnipeg Regional Health Authority
Attendance at Standing Committee**

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, over the years, the government of the day has more than doubled the expenditure on health care to in excess of \$4 billion. Many individuals wonder how it is that you could spend in excess of \$4 billion,

doubling health-care expenditures, while at the same time you're cutting back on services that are having such a real impact on Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker, I have brought forward several cases now that have had threatening life situations, put individuals in discomfort for 24 hours and beyond. This government has dropped the ball in terms of providing good quality health-care services to Manitobans.

My question to the Minister of Health: Will she agree to have the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority come before a standing committee of the Legislature?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, as I've said to the member opposite on several occasions—[*interjection*]

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Ms. Oswald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've said to the member opposite on several occasions, we are indeed expanding services at the Seven Oaks Hospital. Further, I would encourage the member, as I have strongly several times before, that when he has a specific situation of a constituent or a citizen that's come to him that needs some assistance, to provide those details to my office. We will continue to do that.

I know that I have written at least two letters to him requesting such information to which he has not responded. I don't believe that he is trying to make political points, Mr. Speaker, do you?

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health is out of tune, and she's just not accurate, quite frankly. The Minister of Health needs to realize that she needs to reverse her decisions in regard to Seven Oaks Hospital.

It is not true to say that the services are increasing, Madam Minister. The services in emergency are decreasing, Mr. Speaker. That is the facts. The minister is wrong to tell Manitobans anything other than that. She is wrong. She is wrong.

It's a simple question: Will she have the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority come before a standing committee of this Legislature?

Ms. Oswald: Mr. Speaker, to clarify a few incorrect bits of information the member continues to put on the record, the decision to consolidate after-hours general surgery was a medical decision made by medical doctors. I would not substitute the judgment

of a politician for the medical decisions of medical doctors that are made concerning the consolidation of general surgery.

We know, and I've explained to the member several times, that general surgeons subspecialize much more these days than they did in days past. We know that the member has no issue with the specialization of cardiac surgery at a centre of excellence, for an eye-care centre of excellence. I don't know what he has against kidneys, Mr. Speaker, but they require specialized services as well. At the same time that that consolidation occurred, we are expanding services at Seven Oaks.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to finish my question.

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member have leave to finish his supplementary question? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, my issue is with the Minister of Health. The Minister of Health needs to acknowledge, in her own mind, that there is a reduction of services at the Seven Oaks emergency ward.

First and foremost, she needs to recognize that other provinces have, in fact, now had regional health authorities come before a standing committee. We're not asking the government of Manitoba to do something completely unique across Canada. We're asking for more accountability with the regional health-care authorities, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health is making a mess of our community hospitals, and it's time that these regional health-care authorities come before a standing committee.

Will the Minister make the commitment to do so today?

Ms. Oswald: First of all, I would again encourage the member to respond to my requests when I've asked him to give me some specific details, where he is able, on cases that he raises, because I believe that the member wants improved outcomes for the people of Manitoba, and while all evidence is to the contrary, suggesting that he's playing political games, I believe he wants better outcomes. Together I believe we can do that if he's willing to share information.

I've checked my correspondence from him. I haven't had any correspondence from him in about a

year and a half on a casework. Further, we are expanding services at all of our community hospitals. Yes, general surgery is being consolidated because of subspecialization, a decision made by medical doctors, Mr. Speaker, but we're expanding our community hospitals and I believe the member should acknowledge that.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I just want to explain to the House what the parameters are around questions and supplementary questions because there seems to be some confusion here.

When a member rises to raise a question or a minister rises to respond to a question, I have negotiated a 45-second time limit, whether it's preamble, post-amble, so whatever you can get into that 45 seconds—that's 45 seconds, okay? So when the honourable member asked for—I heard some members, question, question, and the honourable member has 45 seconds to put his questions, with preamble or post, same as ministers, same as ministers.

The only exception to that rule is the leaders of the recognized parties in this House have unlimited time to pose their questions and their answers. So that's just a clarification for the House.

* (14:30)

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Rick Pettinger

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): I rise today to recognize one of my constituents, Rick Pettinger, for his hard work and dedication to the community through his volunteerism. Rick Pettinger this year received the February 2009 Volunteer of the Month Award through Hockey Manitoba, as well as the Souris Minor Hockey Volunteerism Award in memory of Larry Perrin, a community volunteer, who passed away a few years ago, who was an unbelievable support for the community.

Rick has served his community with dedication for the past 25 years, coaching hockey in the winter and summer months. He has also served on the Souris Minor Hockey Board for the last 20 years and is currently president. Rick has been an incredible asset to his community and has worked with a multitude of volunteers while hosting local, provincial and national hockey events in Souris. He continues to help organize the Bantam Tournament of Champions, which has 12 bantam teams participate each year. This year alone he has

successfully coached the bantam hockey team to be provincial champions. The team has also won the Souris Tournament of Champions. They placed second overall in league finals and were semi-finalists in the Brandon Tournament of Champions.

Rick's enthusiasm for the sport of hockey and his passion for instilling love for the game through coaching have facilitated a contagious excitement for hockey throughout the community and has contributed to Souris being known as a great hockey town. He has been and continues to be a role model for coaches, parents and children because of this passion and his years of dedication.

With hockey numbers declining in most of Manitoba, it is imperative that the game remain both affordable and fun for both children and parents. For over two decades, Rick has worked to ensure that this is the case for the many families that have been active in the sport in his region.

So, once again, I would like to congratulate Rick on his achievements and the recognition of them with these awards. We are very proud of you, and we wish you all the best continuing to advocate for this great sport. Thank you.

Manitoba Power Wheelchair Hockey League

Ms. Marilyn Brick (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to share with this House the accomplishments of the Manitoba Power Wheelchair Hockey League.

Power hockey began in Manitoba in 2003, with only six players, but by 2006 the Manitoba Power Wheelchair Hockey League was established. Today the league is made up of four teams, each with seven or eight players, who meet every Sunday at the St. James Civic Centre from September to April. The league is open to both males and females and has players as young as 12 and as old as 84.

Before the league, many of the players were unable to participate in any sport. Power hockey gives Manitobans who are physically challenged the chance to do something they love and to learn the values of teamwork, commitment, team management and communication. By playing a competitive team sport, individuals are given the chance to succeed and become leaders, whether they win or lose. A real community has developed around the Power Hockey Association. Players, their families and friends meet

regularly for games or to fundraise for upcoming tournaments.

In August 2008, 11 players from Manitoba participated in the 2008 Power Hockey Cup in Minneapolis: Emmett Fuerst, David Freund, Kerry Burke, Ian Dmytriw, Kyle Hoare, Mitch Potter, Luke Savoie, Leo Yates, Matthew Ferguson, Richard Foster and my constituent Samantha M. Brouillette, with their coaches, Keith Potter, Gord Dmytriw, Keith Brouillette and Bill Muloin. The self-esteem and sense of belonging generated from participating in such a tournament should not be underestimated. In the words of one player, "I never dreamt that I would be representing Manitoba in a hockey tournament."

Mr. Speaker, it is wonderful to see Manitobans benefiting from the values of competitive sport. I would ask all members of the House to join me in congratulating the Manitoba Power Wheelchair Hockey League on their well-earned success and to wish them all the best in their current season.

Claudia Campbell

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, a constituent of mine was recently chosen to receive a very prestigious award. Claudia Campbell is one of 75 Canadians to receive the Governor General's Caring Canadian Award. Mrs. Campbell is a valuable member of the Teulon area. She has contributed more than 50 years to volunteerism in her community.

The Caring Canadian Award was created in 1996 and is awarded to individuals whose unpaid, voluntary contributions provide extraordinary help or care to people in the community. It is a way to recognize people in our community who provide years of voluntary service but may not be recognized for their hard work and dedication in any other way.

Claudia Campbell is certainly a prime example of what it takes to win this award. For decades, Mrs. Campbell has worked with the Ag Society, has been named as a member of the Rockwood Music Festival of the Arts from the very beginning. She has also been a committed member of the Teulon United Church for more than 60 years. Mrs. Campbell has been involved with the United Church Women for many years and has taken the place of acting choir director for the senior and junior choirs for over 40 years.

Claudia Campbell says that she was inspired to become an active member in her community by

those around her. Her husband, David, also is a recipient of the Governor General's Caring Canadian Award as he received the award in 2005. Mrs. Campbell's parents, George and Christina Doern, were also very active members of the community, which encouraged her to do the same.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to congratulate Claudia Campbell on receiving the Governor General's Caring Canadian Award. The work that she has done has not gone unnoticed, and I believe that this individual is very deserving of the award. Hopefully, other Canadians will be inspired by the work of Mrs. Campbell and consider volunteering in their own community as well. Thank you.

Hudson Bay Route Association Convention

Mr. Frank Whitehead (The Pas): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the successful 66th Annual Hudson Bay Route Association Convention, which took place earlier this April in The Pas. The event brought together many supporters throughout the prairie region to advocate for a common-sense approach to the regulation of grain transportation.

This year's convention focussed on maximizing the transport cost-efficiency of the Port of Churchill. In these present times of economic struggle, it would only make sense for many of Canada's prairie producers to utilize the prairie seaport of the Port of Churchill. The route through Hudson Bay and Hudson Strait is the shortest possible route from western prairie fields to world markets. There are countless economic advantages to be gained by using the Bay Line route instead of shipping the longer seaway route. More than 90 percent of the shipments going through the Port of Churchill in recent years have been through the Canadian Wheat Board.

* (14:40)

Regrettably, the grain elevator at The Pas was closed last year and the owner plans to tear down the building this year. Such actions have become common across the prairies over the past 20 years, raising costs for farmers in places like the Carrot Valley, Carrot River Valley. As such, increasing use of the Hudson Bay line is becoming evermore important for farmers.

Many people came out to the convention to show their support, such as Bill Drew from the Churchill Gateway Development Corporation; Kyle Korneychuk, the Canadian Wheat Board director for District 7; the MP for Churchill, Niki Ashton; the MLA for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen)

and myself. We discussed many pressing issues, Mr. Speaker, issues facing producers in Manitoba, including the necessity of promoting awareness of the need for continued and increased use of the Hudson Bay line on the Port of Churchill, and the economic and strategic reasons why these two infrastructure developments are of great value to Canada in general, and western Canadian prairie region in particular.

I am proud to say, as a member of this government, that the Province of Manitoba continues to be a major supporter and promoter of the Port of Churchill. I was pleased to provide a grant from the Province to the Hudson Bay Route Association for their valuable work. I urge all members to join me and stand up for the Canadian Wheat Board and the Port of Churchill. Thank you.

Provincial Ice Jams and Flooding

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, the quality of a government and its MLAs can be measured by its efforts to prevent problems.

North of Selkirk, residents in low-lying areas along the Red River have been asking for many years for help with dikes and for other measures to give them adequate flood protection. Sadly, this wasn't done on time and there was much flooding this year as a result.

Yesterday, the NDP minister suggested no one foresaw the extent of flooding north of Selkirk. Wrong. Many residents have expressed these concerns over the last decade many times. But, sadly, the minister wasn't listening.

Closer to the Legislature, along Sturgeon Creek, people have been calling for efforts to store water upstream to prevent the huge rush of water which accompanies spring run-off in some years. It hasn't been done adequately. In this year the water is running over Ness Avenue.

In health care, I've been calling for years for adequate efforts to prevent diabetes and FASD, but it hasn't been done and the epidemic of diabetes rages on and more children continue to be born with FASD.

When it comes to bridge building, it is the same. For many, many years, Elmwood and adjacent areas have been represented by NDP members civically, provincially and federally. It was possible to see quite a number of years ago, when it came time to repair and rebuild the Disraeli Freeway, that

planning was essential to avoid the traffic chaos to be expected with the closure of the Disraeli Bridge. Sadly, the planning was never done adequately. As recently as a few weeks ago, the present MLA for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie) was saying that this was only a city issue and that people shouldn't politicize it. Then, in the waning days of the recent by-election, the present MLA had a conversion and a realization that preventing traffic chaos on the Disraeli Freeway was actually important, and so he said he would stand up and prevent the closure of the Disraeli Freeway.

It's now several weeks after the election and the new MLA for Elmwood said in his debate on the Throne Speech that he doesn't want the Disraeli Freeway to close. We're all waiting. The MLA for Elmwood has said the Disraeli Bridge will not close. Prevention clearly is important. Preventing traffic chaos in northeast Winnipeg is important not only to residents of Elmwood, East Kildonan and adjacent areas but to all Manitobans.

House Business

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to present to the Legislature a signed copy from myself and the Opposition House Leader (Mr. Hawranik) outlining the Estimates order to take place. Hopefully, our intention is to commence on Monday for the Estimates to take place in the Chamber, rooms 255 and 254. I'd like to table the signed copy that outlines the proposed order.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, for the information of the House, the honourable Government House Leader has just tabled the Estimates sequence. It's been signed by the Government House Leader and Opposition House Leader. The expectation is Estimates will start on Monday, and there will be three sections: here in the Chamber and rooms 255 and 254. That's for the information of the House.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

BUDGET DEBATE

(Seventh 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, and the proposed motion of the honourable Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) in subamendment thereto, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Minnedosa, who has 15 minutes remaining.

The honourable Member for Minnedosa, are you going to conclude?

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): I have a few more minutes, and I would like to put a few more things on the record with regard to the budget. I'd like to speak a little bit about Agriculture and Rural Initiatives and, again, keeping on the theme that there were some things I think that were missed by this government that could have been identified and spoken to in this budget but were not.

There's, I believe, an agreement within this Chamber that there are economic challenges being faced by many, many people within the industry of agriculture, whether it be cattle, pork sector, grain sector and, at times, through drought or flooding with the grain sector. But, you know, there are a number of issues that need to be addressed by this government, and they seem to continue to ignore the challenges based in different sectors.

I'll speak briefly about the livestock sector, which really saw a devastating hit last year with this government bringing in legislation that actually worked in direct conflict to the industry's well-being, Mr. Speaker. I guess to ignore the challenges that the livestock sector is facing is a sign that this government is definitely out of touch with what is going on in our communities.

The budget speech only gave passing mention of the fact that Manitoba's livestock sector is still assessing and adjusting to the impact of U.S. country-of-origin labelling, Mr. Speaker. The government may wish to pretend that these types of economic and trade challenges do not exist, but that type of head-in-the-sand attitude will only lead to greater problems down the road, when our primary producers are forced out of the business and their contributions to the provincial economy are gone for good.

I guess an example of how this industry is being struck is—I believe the critic for Agriculture indicated that the average age for producers is 60 years of age. I don't disagree with him at all on that point because in the communities that I represent, and especially the one I live in, you see less and less individuals getting into agriculture as a profession. You see in

the community where I reside, in our grade 12 class last year, I think there were 60 or 70 children graduating and I would say less than five actually have indicated they have an interest in agriculture or wanting to remain in agriculture. To me, that's disturbing, and that's very, you know, sad, Mr. Speaker.

What you hear from the parents is there's not a chance I would encourage my family to consider a career in agriculture. There's just no leadership from the provincial government on any of the programs that are out there. There just seem to be so many hoops they have to jump through to get things approved, and with more regulations in place, without incentives to help the producers move in that direction that the government is wanting them to, it just doesn't seem to be working out for them at all. So families leave communities and communities die.

*(14:50)

Well, at one time, the government touted another program, the Alternate Land Use Services pilot program, as a way to potentially recognize producers' significant contributions to protecting the landscape. The budget was devoid of any mention of it or a comparable program, Mr. Speaker, and that concerns me as well. The minister was out and did the photo op on this program, but we don't see any movement from the pilot. I'm very concerned. Here's an excellent program that's working well in western Manitoba, and it doesn't seem to be going to gain any legs and move further. You see that with a lot of programs or a lot of announcements with this government, be it ethanol, be it wind power, be it, you know, those types of—biofuels—you see the government do one project or support one project and then walk away. Often that one project that's successful, like the ethanol, it was there prior, but there's been nothing to show the government has a strategy to become a leader in fostering and supporting those programs more than maybe just the token project.

That is what I hear often in my communities, that there just doesn't seem to be the desire or the interest in this government to help foster an industry. It's willing to look at a token project and then move on. So, with regard to Agriculture and Rural Initiatives, I think there is lots of room where this government can do better, and I'm looking forward to this government showing that that is a potential opportunity.

With regard to Conservation and Water Stewardship, Mr. Speaker, the budget did contain some positives related to provincial parks such as campgrounds and upgrades and a commitment to provide Manitobans with free access to our parks for two years.

I was recently in Dauphin at a hockey tournament and, actually, a constituent of the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers) said that they'd heard a rumour that park fees—or not park fees, long-term camping sites—could potentially be going up to possibly \$200 a year. So I guess we need to know whether these rumours can be confirmed, and if that's the case, then that really does take away from the free access to a park, if your fees are going to go up.

You know, this came from a constituent of the Minister of Conservation so I'm hoping that he's clear and can confirm that that is not going to happen because that definitely would be a deterrent. *[interjection]* Oh, well, it was Mr. Pulock that mentioned it to me, so I hope that the minister can confirm or make a call and just see, make sure that that constituent of his is given the goods on that. But it would be interesting also to see some measures aimed at encouraging people from outside of Manitoba to visit the parks. Competition for tourism dollars would become increasingly fierce during the recession so we could do a lot more to promote Manitoba as a recreation destination.

The government has had a fairly poor record when it comes to setting aside land for new provincial parks in protected areas and there is no commitment in this budget to do more of that in this important area. Mr. Speaker, the NDP government recently received an F grade from Manitoba Wildlands for its poor track record when it comes to setting aside lands for parks and protected areas. This is the second consecutive year with a net loss of protected lands.

By comparison, under the Progressive Conservatives in 1999, a similar report awarded the PC government a B-rating for its record in setting aside land throughout the province for permanent protection. So we look forward to this government taking a more proactive approach to this.

Mr. Speaker, another area that was lacking clarity in the budget was in the area of seniors and the support for them. Seniors do need more than just safety aid programs, something this government touts in every budget. They need a vision from a

government that intends to take real action to empower them to make their lives better. They need well-supported services to seniors groups in their area that have the funding that they need from this government to fulfil their mandate, and they need access to timely health care. They can't be shuffled from hospital to hospital along crumbling highways hoping that they're going to get the care that they need at the next facility. So they need better long-care options. Our seniors shouldn't have to wait for weeks or months for personal care placement.

My Aunt Sue that was here last session, 104 years old and she's on a waiting list. She's 100th on a waiting list to get into a personal care home. Mr. Speaker, to me, that should raise some alarms to this government.

So this government has a responsibility to ensure that the money it says is for seniors is actually making it to the people who need it. That means that, for example, if you're going to fund congregate meal programs, the government should actually fund them.

In the Winnipeg health region alone, there are three- to five-year wait lists for this kind of program which is vital to helping seniors maintain their independence, enjoy healthy meals and socialize with other seniors.

So, Mr. Speaker, I've tried to cover a number of areas that I think this government has a lot of work to do or just tends to ignore the issues in those areas. So I look forward to the session, Estimates, and have a good dialogue with government and, hopefully, we can see some of these issues addressed in the short term.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): I'm delighted to rise in the House today to speak in favour of the 10th balanced budget presented by our Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) here in the province of Manitoba.

I'm also very proud to stand here today representing the constituency of Gimli and of residents in St. Andrews, West St. Paul, Dunnottar, Winnipeg Beach and, of course, the municipality of Gimli.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome our new table officers, as well as our veteran table officers. It's good to see them again. I certainly take this opportunity to welcome our new MLAs—and my

colleagues, on this side of the House—from The Pas and from Elmwood.

Mr. Speaker, I must first start by saying that I've really been impressed with the hard work of the communities of West St. Paul and St. Andrews, in my constituency, when it comes to dealing with unprecedented flooding. Reeve Dearman in West St. Paul and Reeve Forfar in St. Andrews have provided tremendous leadership and work very closely with the provincial government officials and EMO services to address this unprecedented flooding that we've experienced this year. I have to say that the public works departments in both these municipalities, the volunteer firefighters in these municipalities, have gone above and beyond in a very difficult time for the residents of these municipalities.

Certainly, the volunteers, the sandbagging volunteers—I had the opportunity to sandbag with some volunteers over the course of the spring break, and I've been meeting with many of the officials and the volunteers on a regular basis. There were volunteers from all over Winnipeg who had come to answer the call in St. Andrews, and many of the Hutterite colonies in the neighbouring communities had come en masse, in force, to provide support for the citizens of West St. Paul and St. Andrews, and that became sandbag central for distributing sandbags to areas in Selkirk, and to East St. Paul and St. Clements, as well.

So it was just an incredible effort by all these volunteers, students and teachers, that I met over the course of the spring break, who were there as well. Some who had been there prior to spring break, with their school, had come back and volunteered their time during spring break. So it really speaks to the sense of community, it really speaks to the notion of working together, Mr. Speaker, which is the way Manitobans do things when they're faced with very adverse conditions.

Frankly, Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to see that the tone had changed from members opposite today in their questioning regarding flooding because yesterday, quite frankly, I was disgusted. I was disgusted that they would choose to politicize the situation here in Manitoba. I was very disgusted, as I listened to the questions—the nature of the questions, the tone of the questions—around flooding from the opposition.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

When they were asking those questions, Mr. Acting Speaker, I would think to myself of the face of that individual in St. Andrews that I saw coming out of his home in a boat carrying whatever goods that could be carried in that boat and bringing them to higher ground because he was one of the first victims to be flooded, and I thought how horrible it is that members should politicize and try to score cheap, crass, political points on this very tragic situation for my constituents.

When I thought about these questions that they're asking, I was thinking about Ryan Yackel, the chief of the West St. Paul Fire Department, who had been up day after day after day. He hadn't seen his family, hadn't been able to shave, he looked really tired, but he kept going because he knew that he had a job to do to protect property and person in West St. Paul. He gave tirelessly of his time and his efforts to ensure that that happened. But the members opposite were politicizing this yesterday and asking questions that, once again, I think the best word to describe that would be disgusting.

I think about the volunteers that were there sandbagging day after day and all the efforts that have gone on, all the meetings that we've had with municipal officials, all the co-ordination by EMO services, all the investments that we've made proactively to prevent and mitigate flood circumstances in these areas, Mr. Acting Speaker. Yesterday, I was absolutely appalled by the tone and the nature of the questions because, as the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs (Mr. Ashton), the minister responsible for EMO services, said yesterday, Manitobans work together when they're faced with adverse conditions. That's what we do best and that's what we've been doing best, working with our colleagues to ensure that we mitigate the situations that are unprecedented here in Manitoba, unprecedented flooding.

*(15:00)

Yet we have the Leader of the Liberal Party stand up today in a members' statement, and he made some rather interesting suggestions about not having any dikes. Well, the member should know that north of Winnipeg in 2006, during some storm surges from Lake Winnipeg, it was our government that initiated a \$9-million south basin diking initiative on private property, and worked with our partnerships in municipalities to get that job done. That was an

effort in 2006 and a considerable effort that was made.

The member opposite said we ignored north of the city with respect to flood mitigation initiatives. So I should remind the member that these are unprecedented conditions and that's why these dikes, which had been built to 1997 levels, which had been built on the best advice of previous flood episodes, you can't account for nature and what nature will do when we have unprecedented thickness of ice at a time where we have rising water levels or we have saturated land, the combination of overland flooding and riverine flooding. All of these factors contributed to this unprecedented episode. Yet the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), stands up and questions what we've been doing to mitigate flooding. All the efforts made to purchase the Amphibexes, two of them now, and the ice cutters. All these have made a difference, Mr. Acting Speaker, and that has been our initiative.

Now, I know the Leader of the Liberal Party also has two positions on the floodway. We know that that position differs north of Winnipeg than it does right in the city proper. It's fascinating that the party of two can have three positions on one issue, but they consistently do so. But, you know what I would like to ask the Leader of the Liberal Party is what he would say to the residents of Breezy Point when we do an analysis. An argument can be made for the fact that there has been no dredging at the mouth of the Red River for 10 years and this is something that was stopped under the Liberal government of the day.

Now, they haven't dredged that mouth of the river for 10 years. There's some suggestion that the Province signed on—there's a federal MP suggesting that the Province signed on to take over that responsibility, yet he can't produce the paperwork because the Province said, no, that's not our responsibility. Fisheries and Oceans and waterways, you're responsible for the dredging of that river. But the river has not been dredged in 10 years. There is an argument that can be made, and I would ask the Member for River Heights, why he would, when he was in Cabinet, cut funding for dredging of the Red River. Why would he do that? There is an argument that can be made that that would have an impact on the ability of the ice to flow through the mouth of the Red River into Lake Winnipeg. There is an argument that can be made for that. So to have him suggest that we haven't taken measures when, perhaps, one of the impediments to the efforts that we've been

making as far as flood mitigation has a lot to do with the decision that he made when he was a federal Cabinet minister.

I'm really quite concerned when members of the opposition stand up and try to make cheap political points over a very natural disaster situation that we have here in Manitoba. We've done more to prevent flooding and more to deal with the ice floes and more to deal with the protection in this province than any other government has done in the last 100 years that we've experienced flooding in the flood plain that is Lake Agassiz, the flood plain that is the Red River Valley. So every time we have one of these episodes we learn, and every time we make improvements. We'll continue to look at what happened here in unprecedented event and we'll continue to look at how we can protect more properties here in Manitoba if similar events should occur.

Before I go on to something else about the budget, I would like to say again, thank you to all the volunteers, thank you to the public works departments, thank you to the volunteer firefighters, to the Hutterite colonies, to the municipal leaders and to our partners here throughout the various departments in the government of Manitoba that have been working very hard to mitigate the impacts of flooding in my constituency, and the efforts to mitigate the flooding impacts throughout this province of Manitoba in a very unusual and unprecedented year.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I feel I have to turn to discuss budget as it relates to my portfolio because I have yet to be asked a question on education, and I say so at my own peril after what we witnessed today. But I have yet to be asked a question about the second-largest expenditure, the second-largest investment here in the province of Manitoba. I haven't been asked a question. *[interjection]* So they might yet, but we'll see. I'm not going to hold my breath.

It's rather timely that I would receive this article in the Manitoba Teachers' Society publication, *The Manitoba Teacher*. It's talking about the history of the Teachers' Society organization, which goes back 90 years as of April 22. One week today it will be celebrating 90 years, but the headline is, "Ninety Years of Trials, Turbulence and Triumphs." I'd like to read two paragraphs from the synopsis of the history of the Teachers' Society from 1990 to present day.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

I'll just read what they have to say about the '90s: Much of the '90s was devoted to fighting blows to education and teachers' bargaining rights imposed by the provincial Conservative government of the time. The mandate was to reduce provincial deficit without raising income taxes, and to accomplish this, government cut funding to many areas, including education. It also passed Bills 22 and 72, which were aimed at severely restricting collective bargaining rights. MTS used all of its resources to fight back. Staff changed their assignments. Meetings with association members were held around the province and a grass-roots communications campaign was launched to inform and mobilize teachers. Teachers across the province pulled together and held mass rallies to protest the attacks on the public school education.

Attacks, and I was part of that mobilization. I was in this Chamber as a teacher. I was in the hallways of the Legislature as a teacher. Members opposite chose to cut what is, fundamentally, one of the most important services that we can provide for the future of this province, and that is education.

Now, if you look and compare what they were doing to what we were doing, Chris Adams of Probe Research said in an A-minus rating, for our budget to the *Free Press*, that the Finance Minister, the Member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger), is one of the very few provincial financial ministers in Canada to put forward a balanced budget without cutting social services—without cutting social services.

Now I know this is painful for members opposite, but let's take a look. If you were to look at the record of members opposite when they first formed a majority government in 1990, the budget for the public school system in Manitoba, as funded by the Filmon government, was \$754.9 million. That was 1990. Well, let's skip ahead a few years—1999, thankfully, the last year of the Filmon government, the budget was \$761.6 million. You do the math. It's a net increase of \$6.7 million over 10 years, because, if you go through the history, you'll see a 2 percent decrease to public schools, \$14.3 million less in '93-94; a 2.6 percent decrease to public schools, \$20.5 million less than the previous year; a zero percent increase—a zero percent increase—I love the oxymoron of that—in '95-96; a 2 percent decrease in '96-97; zero percent in '97-98. The net increase from '89-99 was \$6.7 million.

Now here we are in difficult economic times, but what do we bring to the table as a government in Manitoba? A 5.25 percent increase, over \$50 million announced in the budget this year for education because we value education. We know the importance of education is part of an economic recovery and this is a government that has and always will stand up for teachers, stand up for students and stand up for the investment that we make in education.

If you compare that to the \$761.6 million when we were first elected and came into office in 1999, the current education budget is in excess of \$1.060 billion for a government investment in education, over \$314 million more invested since we've come into office, Madam Deputy Speaker. So I think our—pardon me, I forgot to add this year's \$53 million. I better correct the record. So it's a \$360-million investment in education since we've been in office, and that speaks volumes to our commitment to education and our commitment to an economic recovery that includes education as an integral part of that.

*(15:10)

Now it's been interesting listening to the budget debates over the last couple of weeks because we keep hearing from members opposite, oh, you know what? You're spending too much money. But then you hear from members opposite, well, you're spending too much money, but could you spend a little more in my constituency? It's always, you're spending too much money, but, you know, I want this highway. You're spending too much money, but I want this school.

Now we hear some of the members—it was curious when we announced our schools capital, unprecedented schools capital. When that was announced, the television coverage—I saw the Member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck). He was speaking to the media saying that we were ignoring the educational needs of south Winnipeg by not announcing that we were going to build a school there. So I thought that was rather curious coming from a member who we had just informed we would be building two schools in his community.

So, you know, you're spending too much money, but you need to spend more in my constituency. That's what we hear from members opposite.

Well, let me talk about schools capital for a little while, if I may, because here we are in very difficult

economic times. Everyone knows that. We announced unprecedented capital funding for schools: two schools in Winkler, two schools in Steinbach and a new school in La Broquerie. Now, I was curious, because after the announcement I had been listening to the radio, and I heard someone call in about south Winnipeg and say, well, obviously we're not going to get a school because we're a Tory riding. So I thought maybe we should start polling in Winkler and Steinbach after the announcement where we have two schools in each of those communities.

But, quite frankly, the potential site has been identified for Waverley West. We do know that that's a very large geographic area. We do know that students have to travel a fair distance to go to school right now in that community. Manitoba does, however, have one of the best records as far as students attending community schools is concerned, and that's because we believe in community schools and we would like to see schools in every neighbourhood. We're doing our best to deliver on that particular notion. So a potential site has been identified for Waverley West.

This announcement did not ignore south Winnipeg because we did commit money also for additions to Oak Park—or, pardon me, Shaftesbury, where we could accommodate the immediate needs of students who are in the Fort Whyte community. But we do know that that community is not well served if there is not a high school, particularly with the growth that is anticipated in Waverley West.

You know, what's encouraging is that houses continue to be built here in Manitoba. In its economic downturn we continue to see housing starts in Manitoba in communities like Waverley West, and we know that it's a matter of time where that school will be built in south Winnipeg.

Now, the capital announcement includes \$3 million to ensure 15 more schools can accommodate students with disabilities. It includes \$12 million for roofing projects that will be completed on 53 schools. It includes \$13 million in structural renewal projects at nine schools. It includes \$13 million to replace or upgrade heating and ventilation systems in 29 schools. This announcement this year: 106 major capital projects to be completed with that funding that we announced, an increase of \$302.5 million from the previous decade.

But members opposite will say, you're spending too much, but could you spend a little more in my constituency?

You see, again, getting back to south Winnipeg, community school, yes, we want to build a school there. We want to have a community school. But members opposite are a little bit offside on that because we brought in legislation to talk about community schools.

It was interesting to hear the Member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat) when she talked about being out of touch with rural Manitoba. Well, members opposite did not support Bill 28, strengthening community schools. Members opposite didn't know what to do about Bill 28. The fact that we said you should put a moratorium on school closures because we believe it makes more sense to keep schools open, particularly in rural Manitoba. We believe that, as we heard at the presentations at committee, if you close a school, it's licence to close a community in small rural communities in Manitoba. That's what we heard. That's why we brought forward that legislation, because school divisions are closing schools that we didn't think were in the best interests of the community.

But members opposite, well, they really didn't know what to say about that, quite frankly. They were more onside with the trustees who were protesting that we were taking away some decision-making authority. Well, one trustee said in presentation at committee hearing, if they're worried about taking away decision-making authority, don't make bad decisions. We felt it was a bad decision that you would take a public building, an asset, and you would take it out of the public domain, take it out as an asset, many of them not having plans for what could happen with that school, and then the asset suddenly becomes a liability. But we feel that there's lots of room in those buildings, if their enrolment is low that we can encourage a community to participate in that building in a variety of different ways, whether it's more child-care spaces which, by the way, we've been able to deliver for a very small amount of money by renovating school spaces, whether it's seniors centres, resource centres, community centres, adult learning centres. You name it, whatever the community can work with us to put in that space and make use of that space, we'd certainly like to see those things happen to make better use of a public building.

So members opposite were quite offside. The Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler) mentioned that with Bill 28 the government has forced front-line teachers, children and property taxpayers to suffer, proposing to make our schools glorified strip malls. It's about a hardship that I'm imposing on school boards. Well, the glass-half-empty Member for Springfield doesn't understand that if we were to build stand-alone day cares it would cost a heck of a lot more to do so than converting the spaces that we have converted through our initiative through the Public Schools Finance Board, through our initiative through Family Services and Housing and my colleague's Family Choices initiative. We've converted a lot of empty school space into day cares, which is a very important strategy and a natural fit because students at an early age are exposed to the institutional setting of a school. Some of them will end up attending that school.

I know one example here in Manitoba where a school that was scheduled for closure has more children enrolled in the day care than they have enrolled in the school. So I think that school will remain viable for quite some time because of this model. But members opposite are consistently offside Manitobans when they didn't support Bill 28 and school closures when they—or the school closure moratorium when they stand up and they talk about flooding in a political sense and try to score cheap political points. Members opposite continue to put things on the record that, quite frankly, are mind-boggling, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I heard one of the members—the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach), in fact, and this is related to education. When he was talking about education he says, we are not going to be very competitive when it comes to having our students compete with other students in other jurisdictions. Then he said, the proof of the pudding is already there. I'm not sure what proof of the pudding is, but he said the proof of the pudding is already there. If you look at the grade 12 results in Manitoba and compare them to other jurisdictions, we fall to the bottom of the ladder. This is what he said.

He also said that I'm going to ask him to put his documents on the table, I being me, because I suggested to him that he was wrong, but he says we can table evidence that shows Manitoba grade 12 students are not competing with other jurisdictions. That's what the Member for Russell said.

Well, that's curious because neither Manitoba nor any other provinces in Canada participate in standardized testing in grade 12 that permits comparisons of academic achievement across provinces. The reason is that curriculum and testing programs across the provinces vary. So he's suggesting that he has the data, he has the information. Well, perhaps, he has some fictitious data or fictitious information when he was having a conversation with a fictitious friend of our Member for Brandon East—or Brandon West, pardon me. He did say he had a fictitious friend he was talking to the other day when he was going on about the budget.

So, for them to raise these fictitious notions—*[interjection]*—every time you hear the members opposite stand up and say, I was talking to somebody who said, it calls into question who is that somebody because there was an admission by the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) that, well, it's a fictitious Manitoban who rang up his credit card, whose job was being threatened, who was buying a big screen TV out of no interest, no payment, no money down deal and he said it was a fictitious friend.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would ask you, what does that say about every single time a member of this House on the opposite side has stood up and said, I was talking to somebody who said? It calls into question the integrity of that whole premise when they're saying, I was talking to ordinary Manitobans. Well, quite frankly, they can talk to as many fictitious Manitobans as they want. We listen to real Manitobans, and budget 2009-2010 is an example of listening to real Manitobans.

* (15:20)

Now maybe the members would like to hear more of what real Manitobans had to say about our budget and—*[interjection]*—the spin that he's talking about coming from Jim Carr, "Business applauds NDP for entrepreneurial spirit": The commitment to eliminate the small business tax is easily the most applauded initiative of the Finance Minister's budget. A very powerful move.

Manitoba tables balanced budget at a time when most provinces are projecting multi-year deficits. Manitoba is boasting a \$48-million surplus. That's from *The Globe and Mail*, not the fictitious *Globe and Mail*, the real *Globe and Mail*. Dave Angus, the real Dave Angus, not a fictitious Dave Angus from Brandon West, president and CEO of Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce: We were quite happy with

today's budget. We asked the government for a balanced approach and we see that in this particular budget. The zero percent, small-business tax rate is something that is unique across the country.

Chamber of Commerce, the Knowledge Bureau, Probe Research, TD Bank, Scotiabank Group, CIBC, chief economist for BMO Capital Markets, TD Economics, CIBC World Markets, BMO Capital Markets, as mentioned: they have all said positive things about this budget here in Manitoba being a beacon for other budgets across the country as we have provided, once again, a balanced budget for the 10th consecutive year.

So we listened to real people when it comes to the budget discussions, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I hear from my constituents that they were verily impressed with the budget because, as I said earlier, as was mentioned by Chris Adams of Probe Research, a balanced budget without cutting social services, because we know what's important to Manitobans. We know that it's important to provide the best possible health care, to provide the best possible education system, provide the best possible infrastructure, and to provide the best possible resources in a very difficult time here in the province of Manitoba. But—

An Honourable Member: What do they do when it comes to the voting for the budget?

Mr. Bjornson: Yes, as my colleague is mentioning beside me here, what do they do when it comes time for the budget vote? They're going to vote against it. They're going to vote against the new schools in Winkler and Steinbach and La Broquerie. They're going to vote against all the new health capital initiatives. They're going to vote against income tax—or, pardon me—personal tax reductions that we've been bringing forward. They've been voting against—

An Honourable Member: Show me your personal tax relief.

Mr. Bjornson: I corrected myself if the member was listening. I said personal tax reductions—

An Honourable Member: Show me your personal tax reductions.

Mr. Bjornson: Well, maybe you could look at your education property tax bill, you know the one that went up. The Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik), perhaps, could look at the property tax bill. I think it went up over 100 percent while he was in Brandon as the mayor or the MP or one of the

two roles that he had in Brandon. Maybe he could look at his education property tax bill because it's gone down with the increase in the education property tax credit. So—

An Honourable Member: Seven-point-five percent on the tax bill from education. I went back.

Mr. Bjornson: Well, I hear the member chirping again, but, you know, it was reported last year that Manitoba was the only province in Canada to have a net reduction in property taxes. And why was that? Why was that? It was because of our initiatives in education property tax mitigation through the education property tax credit.

Now, I appreciate the member's perhaps a little disconcerted about taxes in his community because Brandon School Division, for whatever reason, couldn't make it work with the tax-incentive grant. I don't understand why they could not make that happen, but they chose not to take the tax-incentive grant. Where most of the school divisions took the tax-incentive grant, some chose not to. That's regrettable, Madam Deputy Speaker, because here we are in tough economic times, we provided a very substantial amount of money. We said to the school divisions with \$60 million in surpluses that, with a \$53-million increase in funding, you should not have to raise taxes.

Now, the other thing I heard from members opposite is, oh, no, what are you saying. You're going to take away the taxing authority from school boards. How dare you do that.

Well, this is rather curious because during the election a couple of years ago that was their platform: We'll immediately strip education authorities; we'll immediately strip taxing authority from school boards. So it's a little duplicitous for them to look at us and say, what do you think about doing that—you shouldn't be doing that, when they promised to do it.

But the other thing that I find most disconcerting about that is the fact that they were going to increase funding to education by—get this; drum roll, please—\$10 million. Because the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) doesn't understand education, he said, well, you know enrolment's going down; enrolment's going down, you know, we shouldn't have to increase funding, but we'll give \$10 million to schools of excellence. That's what he said.

Now, that's what he said for one year. I don't hear any shadow budget this year. They haven't put

out a shadow budget because they wouldn't know what to do in tough economic times, Madam Deputy Speaker. They wouldn't know what to do in this particular situation because their shadow budget probably would have said we're going to cut health care, we're going to cut education, we're going to cut family services, we're going to cut the legal services because these are tough times.

Well, yes, they're tough times, but we can do it. We can balance the budget. We can maintain the services and we can deliver for the people of Manitoba the quality of services that they've come to expect and they've come to enjoy under this particular government, because I tell you—I know I've mentioned many times about my experience during those tough economic times—what that meant for teachers. Any nurse can tell you from the 1990s what it meant for nurses, and anybody in the front line will tell you what that meant when they made the decisions that they made.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we're balancing the budget. We're bringing forward increases to the social services that are important to Manitobans, and we are going to continue to do so in tough economic times. We're going to continue to work with our friends and colleagues in the municipalities who are facing tough, natural times with the disaster that we're seeing with the flood. We're going to continue to work together, as Manitobans, to weather the storm economically and to weather the storm that we currently see with the Red River rising.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): First, just let me start off by expressing my appreciation and thanks to my constituents and my family and friends and supporters that, in essence, have provided me the opportunity to be able to be here, to be able to provide a critique of the government.

Having said that, Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to get right into the discussion. The discussion really needs to be brought to a different level, I believe, to a certain degree with regard to the propaganda machine that the NDP, time and time, are so successful at getting across. I think this is kind of where all their spin doctors get all tuned up and ready, and they kind of throw all these things during the Throne and budget debate. I want to start off by saying I'm voting against the budget.

Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, that should be no surprise to members of the government that I'm

voting against the government. Why? Because I believe the Liberal Party could provide a better governance of this province than the New Democratic Party. That's why I'm voting against this budget.

Now, if you listen to certain members of the New Democratic caucus, you would believe a couple of things. One of them is that if you vote against this budget, you, in essence, are going to be voting against babies being born at the Health Sciences Centre. You're going to vote against anything that's constructive, anything where a public dollar goes. Just listen to what the NDP Member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell) had to say: You're voting against this, this, this and so on and so on.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I think the Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie) needs to enlighten his members in terms of what it means to be in opposition. The Member for Elmwood voted against how many federal budgets? Does that mean that he opposed equalization payments coming to the province of Manitoba? I sure hope not. I believe that he voted against the government and all the things that were being spent in government because he believed that the New Democrats could have provided a better government than the Conservatives or the Liberals. That's what I would assume. I could be wrong, and I look to the Member for Elmwood to point out if I'm wrong on that point. I believe he does support equalization payments. I believe that that is the case.

We've seen indication that this Premier (Mr. Doer) sure loves equalization payments. We're more dependent on equalization payments per capita than any other province in Canada, Madam Deputy Speaker. So, when we talk about voting for or against, let's put it into proper perspective and, if you don't believe me, sit down behind closed doors with the Member for Elmwood, and he'll explain to you why it is that, yes, he voted against federal budgets, but he supported equalization payments. I think that's a very important point to make.

I was intrigued and I listened for the Member for Elmwood when he presented his speech, and I thought, you know, it highlights, I believe, the mentality that a lot of New Democrats have. That is, if it wasn't for the New Democratic Party, the province of Manitoba wouldn't exist. Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would argue that it was not the New Democratic Party that made our province or

made our country. Yes, it contributed, but it did not make it.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when it comes to social policies—and I did do a little bit of research, compliments of the speech that I heard from the Member for Elmwood. We could go to Premier Greenway, who—present-day educational system, thank you very much—we could go to Premier Norris, who enabled women to vote; brought in workers compensation; established minimum-wage legislation; established public nurse system; brought in mothers allowance for widowed, dependent mothers; established a civil service commission. In 1916, he established the Manitoba Power Commission. There goes half the speech from many of the members. Manitoba Hydro—we wouldn't have been able to build the hydro that we have today if it wasn't for Liberal premiers in the past that established Manitoba Hydro.

* (15:30)

Madam Deputy Speaker, we can go to Premier Garson. Premier Garson is the one that was one of the founding fathers of equalization payments. Imagine what would happen if there were no equalization payments today. You're talking billions of dollars plus. *[interjection]* Well, the Member for Wolseley (Mr. Altemeyer) is starting to get on the right track. He's saying, you know, that if it wasn't for the Liberals, we wouldn't be here. Well, I wouldn't be as arrogant as the New Democrats. I'm suggesting to you that leaders and premiers and individuals members of this Legislature today and from the past have all contributed to making Manitoba the province that it is today, and you do a disservice when you try to heap all the praise onto one political party, because that is not the case, and each and every one of us should know that and be aware of that.

I could go on to Premier Campbell. Premier Campbell extended electrical services into rural Manitoba. I understand it was Premier Campbell that established Thompson, the community of Thompson. He's the one that got the agreement with Inco. Madam Deputy Speaker, what about enabling of the Aboriginal people to vote? Again, Premier Campbell, and I suspect you could go to virtually every premier and you could indicate things in which they have been able to accomplish, all premiers. I like to think that all premiers had other individual MLAs of all political parties participate in

discussions that would have ultimately led to the province going in the direction that it is today.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to challenge the government on the whole issue of balanced budgets, not to overestimate how, even if it's not true, the government persists at telling that untruth. You know, even in the budget documents, the current Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) says, well, for X number of years we've had surplus budgets. He constantly says that and we know it's not true. Well, I want to give members a specific quote, and I know the Premier (Mr. Doer) or others might get the opportunity to respond to this quote. I would like to hear the response to this particular quote. It comes from a January 6, 2005, article. It's a quote from the provincial auditor and it states: Manitoba's Auditor General yesterday accused the government of misleading the public about the state of the province's financing by trumpeting balanced budget figures arrived at through unacceptable accounting practices. Jon Singleton said the province had a 2003-2004 budget deficit. That was the second highest on record at \$604 million, but taxpayers would never know that from reading government news releases, he said.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly that has said that there was a deficit. Yet we have a Minister of Finance who says, no, we didn't have a deficit. If we take a look at the current budget and the minister says, okay, we have this surplus, even though he gutted the balanced budget legislation—you know, the Premier campaigned on balanced budget legislation. He saw the merits, he saw the votes, of telling Manitobans, I believe in balanced budgets. He saw the merit of doing that and saying that, so what does he do? He keeps the legislation, the shell, but he guts the legislation, which enables him to run his deficits and continue to give the impression that this is a government that knows and has its hands firmly on the managing of the province of Manitoba and the different departments, and I want to talk about the managing of different departments, in particular, the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald).

But let's take a look at that budget document. You know, the Leader of the Liberal Party pointed out what we believe are gross overestimations of revenue and the impact that that could likely have. You get the feeling that the Minister of Finance might have intentionally put in the figures that he did, even though he knew that those numbers were not going to materialize, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Now we hear that they're going to have to make yet some more changes to that shell of what used to be balanced budget legislation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Department of Health is an issue that I take great exception with in terms of this government's ability to be able to manage. I suspect that never before in North America have we ever seen so much money on a per capita basis pumped in, in terms of increases into health care, as we have in the province of Manitoba, from \$2 billion to in excess of \$4 billion in nine and a half years.

Well, one would expect if you were going to have that sort of increase in health care, you would have better health-care services being delivered. It would be a no-brainer, Madam Deputy Speaker. How could you not have done that? Well, this Minister of Health and, I suspect, some of her predecessors have found a way to do that. I can't believe the types of changes that are happening in health care, that are diminishing the quality of health-care services in our province.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is not just a perception that I have. I've canvassed constituents. Through the years, I've canvassed through surveying; I've canvassed through just discussions; I've had literally hundreds of individuals provide me input on this issue. And, I can tell you, a majority of Manitobans today believe that health care is no better today than what it was in 1999. Yet we have doubled up on the financing of health care.

Let's take a look at what's actually happening, a reality check, what is actually happening in Seven Oaks Hospital. You know, yesterday I brought up an issue where we had an individual that arrives at the hospital emergency at 10:30 in the morning on a Saturday. Later on, several hours later, he's told, well, he has to get a CAT scan, and even though the Seven Oaks Hospital has a CAT scan, he has to be transferred over to the Health Sciences Centre because there's no one there to operate the CAT scan at the Seven Oaks Hospital. It wasn't until 6:45 in the morning, the following day, the Sunday, that he's actually at the Health Sciences Centre getting the CAT scan and then he's returned back to the Seven Oaks Hospital.

What does the Minister of Health want? She wants the name of the individual. Give me the name of the individual. You know, correspond with me, tell me about this particular individual. Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, it goes beyond the individual. The

system is broken. The Minister of Health has made a mess of the situation. This is one example.

A couple of weeks ago, I talked about someone that, in all likelihood, should have died, but because of luck, because of the rolling of the dice, that individual is alive today. Had she got into the ambulance from Seven Oaks to go to the Health Sciences or Grace, health-care experts—more than one—have told me that she never would have made it. The Minister of Health, surely to goodness, was aware of it. She hasn't told me that she wasn't aware of it, the incident, now, Madam Deputy Speaker, but that was purely on luck.

Madam Deputy Speaker, if you're spending so much more money on health care, why are we getting the types of problems we're getting today in our community hospitals? Does the government believe in community hospitals? I would argue, no. This is the government that shut down obstetrics over at Victoria Hospital, that's looking at reducing other services.

You know, the other day, I got someone calling from the Concordia Hospital telling me, or asking me, to get involved with the Concordia because they feel that Concordia is getting neglected. So this government, in their pack mentality inside the Chamber, where there are 35 of them, feel really brave. They feel they can say whatever they want, and they'll applaud like seals in support of what the Minister of Health or the Premier (Mr. Doer) is saying, but in reality, Madam Deputy Speaker, the impact that they're having on average Manitobans throughout the province is negative. The types of health-care services that they are delivering are to the detriment of Manitobans, and they need to wake up and smell the coffee and start doing something about it.

* (15:40)

The Liberal Party today in question period came up with an idea, a suggestion that would help fix the system. What does the government do? It laughs it off. Why would they oppose regional health-care authorities coming before standing committees of the Legislature? Other jurisdictions do it, Madam Deputy Speaker. We spend more on health-care administration than any other province, per capita. Why can't we have regional health-care authorities coming before standing committees? Well, because this government doesn't like accountability.

The years of experience that the current Premier got in opposition he's using well as the Premier of the province and he avoids accountability wherever he can. That is the reality of it. Unfortunately, because of the blinders being on and because members of the New Democratic caucus sit back and do nothing in terms of holding the government and some of these ministers accountable for the actions that they're taking, these horrible decisions are being made.

What does the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) say? Well, we're now going to reduce emergency services over at the Seven Oaks Hospital. Well, she doesn't actually say that, Madam Deputy Speaker, because she refuses to admit it. It's happening, but she refuses to admit it. I have a big problem with that. If it's not happening, then why won't the government join me in explaining in a public forum what it is that they're doing? If they're that confident that the direction that they're taking community hospitals is positive, is moving forward. If someone has a bleeding ulcer or other serious issues, they believe if they go to a community hospital where they have the emergency room that they're going to be able to be dealt with. Well, that used to be the case. You'd have to go back to the Gary Filmon era and earlier in order to ensure that that would've been the case.

More and more, there are services that are being limited in our emergency rooms. That is the reality. The Minister of Health can say whatever she wants, but the reality speaks volumes and emergency services are being cut back at Seven Oaks Hospital. I suspect—and I will be finding out, because I have been invited out to other hospitals now—that other hospitals also have been cut back in terms of emergency services. But I'll be sure to report back to the House on that particular issue.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I hope and trust that the Premier (Mr. Doer) will see the light and see the benefits of having Winnipeg Regional Health and other health-care authorities come before a standing committee of the Legislature. I would applaud the Premier if he would acknowledge the need for it and allow it to happen. If he doesn't allow it to happen, one could question once again why it is that the NDP refuse to show Manitobans that they're prepared to be accountable.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there are other issues within the budget that I wanted to be able to comment on. If we take a look at the Hydro, the

future of Manitoba Hydro is very positive. All of us are encouraged by the potential that Manitoba Hydro has in terms of making our province even that much better, that much stronger. Having said that, there is a very important decision that needs to be made, and the government has been quiet on it over the last little while. I look forward to, ultimately, the government making the final decision. I am hoping that they'll make a decision that's based on what's in the best interests of Manitobans, not the political party. A bad decision here could cost in excess of a billion dollars.

What I'm talking about are the transmission lines. There are three viable options. The government has said where its preference is. The government has yet to clearly demonstrate that the under-the-Lake Winnipeg-option is just not practical. We have had reports inside the committee room. We've had professionals indicate that it is, in fact, quite doable. We've had strong academics, even from within the New Democratic Party, who have come out saying that it makes sense to do it under Lake Winnipeg. So this is a decision that we look forward to seeing. We're hoping that the government is going to make the right decision, and for the opportunity, once the decision has ultimately been made, to be provided the opportunity again to have Manitoba Hydro in committee to be able to talk and get a better understanding of why it is that they made the decision that they made.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I also wanted to talk about Justice. It's interesting, quite often whenever the Minister of Justice stands up, he likes to be able to talk about car thefts and how car thefts are down in the province of Manitoba. The reality is that, yes, car thefts are down, and they're significantly down, but right now they're probably down to about the 2000-2001 statistics. We're still not doing as well as we were doing in the '90s and earlier. There's still room for a lot of improvement in terms of addressing the car-theft issue.

I am concerned, Madam Deputy Speaker, about the ankle bracelets. The government went with the GPS ankle bracelets. There are different forms of ankle bracelets that are out there. I believe they can be a valuable service to the Department of Justice and the different stakeholders if, in fact, you brought in a comprehensive ankle bracelet program. My fear is that the government is going to retract, or fall back, on the ankle bracelets because, in certain situations, the GPS ankle bracelet policy has not materialized in the way that they had anticipated.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there's a great deal of concern from Manitobans in regard to crime in our streets, and this crime needs to be addressed. We should be looking at ways in which we can have comprehensive policies that deal with the criminals and also deal with some of the causes of crime.

We look to initiatives to see what government is actually spending the money on that will actually make a real difference. I suspect that there are a number of programs that do make a positive difference and, where that occurs, I do give credit for the government. We need to get more involved in getting our young people involved in activities outside of the school. I've never been a big fan, for example, of school suspensions where a student is just sent home. In-school suspensions, I think, are the way to go into the future, and we need to focus more attention and more resources in that particular area.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I also wanted to comment in regard to the Provincial Nominee Program. This is a program that has done exceptionally well for the province of Manitoba. It's a program that was established during Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and Premier Filmon. We were, I believe, if not the first, the second, province to enter into that agreement. As our immigration numbers will clearly show, that the origins of the idea and the benefits of that program are being materialized in a very real way as the numbers of immigrants continue to grow in the province, and we look forward to seeing that number continue to increase.

Obviously, as I have stated in the past, we do have concerns that are related to waiting times and issues of that nature. We want to ensure at all times that there is integrity in the system and that there is appropriate and due process in processing all applications.

* (15:50)

I would welcome an open discussion with the minister and the deputy minister in regard to this program, at any point in time, to be able to express my thoughts in detail on this program. I do believe that the potential for this program is even greater than what it is today if we continue to build upon it, Madam Deputy Speaker, and the government will have my co-operation in terms of making what I believe would be changes that would make the program even better. As I say, I extend that as a branch of co-operation and we'll wait and see what happens.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I also want to talk about a couple of other industries that I think need to be highlighted. I represent a city of Winnipeg seat. Doesn't mean that I don't care about what's happening in rural Manitoba; I care passionately. I like to think, just as much as other members of this Chamber, Winnipeg needs rural Manitoba as rural Manitoba needs Winnipeg, and when rural Manitoba is hurting, the city of Winnipeg is hurting.

There are a couple of industries that I believe that the government needs to give more attention to. I'm speaking of the cattle industry. I believe that the government needs to do more and be more progressive in coming up with ideas that are going to allow for our cattle industry to grow. I think that there was a sense of disappointment that not enough was done to assist the cattle farmers during and immediately following the BSE crisis. Other provinces, for example, did see an expansion of processing and, at the end of the day, even I have heard from members of the cattle industry expressing disappointment that we really lost an opportunity.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you know, we could look at the pork industry. The pork industry is an industry that's been very hard hit over the last little while. The government's response to the industry has not been positive. We saw that with the Bill 17 last year and the large number of people that actually came out to the Legislature in protest. I think that there's this general feeling amongst not only the stakeholders, but individuals beyond that, that the Premier (Mr. Doer) of the province put his environmental image over the interests of the pork industry, at a fairly significant cost to the industry.

There are many things that we can do to protect Lake Winnipeg. The Leader of the Liberal Party has talked about a number of those things that we could have done. There are things that we shouldn't have done, and I think we should not have singled out the pork industry and treated them in the fashion that they were treated. To the best of my knowledge, there was no scientific proof to clearly show that the government was going to achieve the targets it was hoping to achieve by bringing in the moratorium, as an example.

Rural Manitoba, obviously, makes up a lot more than just farms. It's very pleasing to see some of our rural communities grow, communities like Winkler and Steinbach. You know, we applaud that. We look for a government to be able to show leadership in terms of not being as partisan in allocation of

budgets, and that's why I like to think that we got the schools built in Winkler and in Steinbach, that where there is a need that something needs to be done. It also means looking at communities where we could assist in terms of diversification, economic diversification, in order to be able to assist that community, that we should also be doing that.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I also wanted to comment very briefly in terms of labour laws. I've talked in the past about the issue of final offer selection. I am disappointed that the government to date still hasn't addressed the issue of final offer selection, or even the important issue of anti-scab legislation. Again, they wouldn't be the first at this point to be able to do so. Other jurisdictions have, and it would be nice to see some sort of action. It's an issue that I've also raised in the past.

Madam Deputy Speaker, all in all, if you spend \$10 billion-plus, you're going to find that a lot of that money is going to go towards a lot of good things. There's no question about that, and I support a lot of the ways in which tax dollars are used to better our communities, and individuals should be aware of that. On the other hand, there are concerns in terms of the way in which government is spending the money, and that's why, ultimately, we believed it was important to move a subamendment to the budget, and the reason why I vote the way I do on—

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

Ms. Marilyn Brick (St. Norbert): Madam Deputy Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to outline the reasons why I am supporting budget 2009.

With the global economy throwing many challenges our way, we need a wise and a competent approach to keep Manitoba's economy on a steady and a balanced path. I believe budget 2009 represents that approach by investing in infrastructure, health care, education and training. That is why I am proud to stand on this side of the House and offer my support for this budget.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to thank the residents of St. Norbert for the amazing privilege they have provided me by electing me as their representative to the Legislative Assembly. I am very proud and honoured to serve them and to work hard on their behalf.

Prior to beginning my address on the budget, I want to take this opportunity to welcome our two newest members to the Legislative Assembly. I was

very moved to hear the budget speeches put forward by the Member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead) and the Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie). They both spoke eloquently and referred to their democratic roots and the personal experiences that led them to enter into political life. I welcome them both, and I know they will be a great addition to our caucus.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member for The Pas and the Member for Elmwood expressed their support for budget 2009 which provides responsible tax cuts and initiatives for the green economy. Budget 2009 provides many specific measures that will help Manitoba communities, like funding preservation of the ruins at the Trappist Monastery Provincial Heritage Park in my community of St. Norbert. The Trappist monastery is built of brick and Tyndall stone and is a celebrated historical site that is important to historians and Manitobans alike. Bill Loewen, a long-time resident of St. Norbert and chairman of TelPay, has referred to the ruins as a crowning piece of history for the province. I know many residents of St. Norbert are very pleased to see the funding for the repairs of the ruins mentioned specifically in budget 2009.

When it comes to investing in infrastructure, Manitobans have shown a long-term vision. Take for instance the Red River Floodway. The Province built it between 1962 and 1968 at a cost of \$63 million, but it has since saved the province more than \$10 billion in flood losses, not to mention lives, and it continues to save us money this year. Despite opposition from our colleagues on the other side of the House, our government made upgrading the floodway a priority and co-invested in the \$655-million Red River Floodway expansion project to increase flood protection to residents of the city of Winnipeg, East St. Paul and West St. Paul. It is one of the largest public infrastructure projects in Manitoba's history.

Plans have included changes to the floodway channel and replacement and upgrades of the bridging crossing. Once completed, the projects will protect more than 450,000 Manitobans, over 140,000 homes and over 8,000 businesses, and prevent more than \$12 billion in damages to the provincial economy if a one-in-700-year flood occurs.

For residents of St. Norbert, like other Manitobans, the security and safety of their homes is a very important concern. In 1997, people in St. Norbert were forced to evacuate their homes, and

they could not return until their homes were deemed safe from the potential hazards of flooding. As the flood of 2009 is still very much an unfolding event, we can see the unfortunate effects that an overabundance of water can have on people, property and wildlife.

* (16:00)

I want to commend all the workers and volunteers who are currently battling the floodwaters to make it safer for the residents of Manitoba. In St. Norbert, we know that the expansion of the floodway and the more than 2,500 people and 120 companies that have worked and continue to work on the project have helped to make the expansion of the floodway a success.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we're also helping create another long-term legacy in the new, relocated Duff Roblin Park Reserve. It's named after a former premier who had the vision to build both the floodway and the provincial park system. The new Duff Roblin Park Reserve will be relocated to the floodway inlet control structure in St. Norbert as part of the commitment to support recreational and economic opportunities along the expanded floodway. The development of the new park will bring in picnic areas and shelters, walking and cycling trails, and a toboggan run. There will be washrooms, drinking water, fishing facilities, bike racks, a parking lot and landscape improvements. About 25,000 Manitoba residents and tourists are expected to visit the expanded park at its new location.

Manitoba Hydro also looked to a more environmentally sustainable future when it started its new headquarters, which will be a signature piece for Winnipeg's downtown. According to Hydro's Web site, the building will be a world-class, energy efficient structure and a global leader in sustainability and green building design. For example, the building has higher floor-to-floor heights and narrow floor plates to optimize daylight, which will reduce lighting needs. It will have a living green roof and a water feature in the south atrium, which will help provide humidification and dehumidification, and the building will have a geothermal heat-pump system for ground-heat exchange. As of mid-April, Hydro reported that there were 1,307 employees working in the downtown office.

So, while we are still responding to natural disasters and environmental needs, this time the

challenge is a world-wide economic downturn. Going back to budget 2009, its investments in infrastructure respond to the short-term need to stimulate the economy, while naturally providing for the long term.

On infrastructure, the budget raised capital investment to \$1.6 billion or an increase of \$625 million from last year, which will help create jobs.

We're funding a new multimillion-dollar, four-year capital program to construct new schools and renovate existing facilities. The budget also invests funds to build and improve highways with a total of \$535 million for Manitoba roads. That includes Highway 75, a critical north-south corridor, on which my community of St. Norbert serves as the gateway to Winnipeg.

In the budget, we're continuing support for CentrePort Canada, Manitoba's 20,000-acre inland port. Yesterday, we had a visit from Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada, who announced that the federal government and the provincial government will co-share the \$212-million CentrePort Canada construction project.

Very important to the people in south Winnipeg is that this budget 2009 also includes funding for stage one of the southwest rapid transit corridor, part of a \$17.5-million provincial capital contribution over four years.

Finally, the government is investing \$46 million in water and waste-water projects and developing a new all-purpose road in partnership with communities on the east side of Lake Winnipeg.

I was pleased to see the budget invest in post-secondary capital improvements at institutions throughout the province, including the University of Manitoba. This institution is one of the main employers for St. Norbert and it's very important to my constituents. Our government has committed to provide a 6 percent overall increase in the base operating funding and strategic program investments for universities and colleges.

Also important to my constituency is the redevelopment of the emergency department at Victoria General Hospital. The new emergency department is part of a redevelopment project that includes the recent opening of the Buhler Cancer Treatment Centre, which is a huge improvement on the previous treatment facilities at the hospital.

I am particularly pleased to see that we are paying attention to the training and recruiting of staff, in addition to the funding of new buildings and equipment. Information from Manitoba's nursing college indicates that there are 245 more nurses practising in the province, currently, over this time last year. Since 1999 we have seen an increase of 2,034 new nurses practising in our province. In this budget, we will be providing funding to hire more emergency room staff and add new ambulances to the provincial fleet.

Furthermore, among our province-wide health construction projects, we're building a new Aboriginal personal care home. The new care home will be located in Winnipeg's south end, on land next to Southeast Collegiate, a school operated by the Southeast Resource and Development Council for First Nations youth. The school is located near my constituency, and I was pleased to attend the project's official announcement on March 27.

The Province is partnering with eight Manitoba First Nations to develop Winnipeg's first personal care home for Aboriginal elders, a project that will help them age with dignity in an environment that respects traditional approaches to aging. The facility will be a new, 80-bed, 52,000-square-foot personal care home that will provide Aboriginal seniors with the health care and support they need to remain in their community, close to family, friends and other resources. Construction is scheduled to begin this summer.

The Southeast Resource and Development Council, which represents eight First Nations in southeastern Manitoba, will contribute funds and the land for the projects. One of their long-standing goals is to provide appropriate care for Aboriginal elders from First Nations, Métis, Dene, Inuit and non-status communities. The new personal care home will also be one of the most environmentally friendly projects of its kind. It will meet the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, LEED, silver environmental standard and will incorporate numerous green design elements that will minimize the project's environmental impact and reduce energy costs over the life of the building.

Looking elsewhere in budget 2009, Madam Deputy Speaker, I'd like to touch on taxes. Government has carried through this year with our previously announced tax commitments to maintain the buying power of families and the financial strength of businesses. For individuals, the budget

has dropped the tax rate for the first income tax bracket to 10.8 percent from 10.9 percent. We've raised the threshold for the middle income tax bracket to \$31,000 from \$30,544, and we've increased the threshold for the top tax bracket to \$67,000 from \$66,000. The budget has also raised the personal amount, spousal amount and eligible dependent amount by \$100. Finally, we've increased the amount used to calculate personal tax credit by at least 2.6 percent. In addition to reducing income tax, we've increased the personal—the education property tax credit by \$50 to \$650, saving home-owners and renters an additional \$16 million this year. Our government has made it easier to access the Primary Caregiver Tax Credit for caregivers of people with disabilities, and we will completely eliminate the small-business income tax rate as of December 2010. Finally, our tax leadership will also help encourage healthier lifestyles by raising the tobacco tax rate by 1 cent per cigarette.

It's good to see, as well, the government's continued emphasis on education. Budget 2009 funds a 6 percent overall increase in the base operating grant and strategic program investments for universities and colleges. University of Manitoba, we are seeing that we're expanding training for nurses, as we are at other provincial universities. The budget also provides a 5.2 percent increase, or \$53 million, for public schools. This is the largest-ever investment in public school funding. We're strengthening the tax incentive grant to help school divisions hold the line on property taxes, and doubling the available scholarships for Aboriginal medical students.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I was also pleased with the announcement on March 12 when the University of Manitoba received a donation from the Manitoba Métis Federation to support a unique program that educates Aboriginal students at the doctoral level. Through the Manitoba Scholarship and Bursary Initiative, our provincial government is matching the Federation's \$50,000 donation to the program. The program, which was launched in collaboration with the Faculty of Graduate Studies two years ago, supports students academically, financially and personally, with special emphasis on needs specific to First Nations, Inuit and Métis people. Once students are admitted, they can receive up to \$20,000 per year in scholarship support. Because of the generosity of the Manitoba Métis Federation and other donors, the University of Manitoba will be able to offer more graduate fellowships and have a

dedicated fund to support Aboriginal doctoral candidates.

* (16:10)

Elsewhere in education, budget 2009 increases funding to both the Manitoba Bursary Fund and to the Bright Futures fund. Madam Deputy Speaker, this fund will encourage and support youth to pursue post-secondary education.

We're increasing the amount of money going to adult learning centres. The budget has introduced more training seats for apprenticeship training and set up a new bursary fund to help those who want to apprentice but are having problems affording the program. Our government is also providing a new financial incentive to encourage youth to pursue careers in skilled trades.

Finally, we're increasing funding under federal-provincial labour market agreements. This will support training and new skills development for workers affected by economic downturn.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I know that many Manitobans are pleased to see our green initiatives that include increasing funding to the e-waste initiatives for old electronics, expanding support for the proper disposal of household hazardous waste, introducing a new Power Smart program to help small businesses save resources through upgrades to their equipment and buildings, funding scientific research to support the reduction of nutrients. In addition, our government is encouraging families to spend time together, exploring the many recreation opportunities available in our province by removing entrance fees to all provincial parks for the next two years.

I believe Manitobans will see these investments, and they will conclude that we are on the right track. Manitobans living in the constituency of The Pas and Elmwood recently voiced their confidence in our government by sending two new colleagues to the Legislature.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Manitoba and Saskatchewan are the only provinces that have delivered balanced budgets this year. Budget 2009 gets our province going in the right direction and I'm very happy to support it. Thank you very much.

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): Madam Deputy Speaker, I welcome the opportunity on behalf of my constituents in the constituency of

Lac du Bonnet to put a few brief comments on the record with respect to this year's budget, but first, before starting, I'd like to certainly welcome the Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie) and the Member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead), congratulate them on their election in the by-election.

I know it's a huge responsibility being here representing 20,000-plus constituents, and I wish them well as MLAs here in the Legislature as I know my colleagues and others who have put some words on the record with respect to the budget as well. So, with that, I welcome them here in the Legislature and I wish them well in representing their constituents.

With respect to the budget, Madam Deputy Speaker, I have a number of concerns about the budget and of course I will be voting against the budget. I made the offer to several members opposite that, if they supported our amendment, perhaps we'd look at supporting their budget, but I haven't heard anyone take that up yet. As the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) indicated in his budget debate, simply because we vote against the budget doesn't necessarily mean that we are against everything in the budget. I think the government members know this, but they take great delight in answering questions in question period by saying, well, you voted against this and you voted against that. Well, that's not quite correct. It's the totality of the budget, the sum total of what happens in the budget that we vote against that really triggers whether or not we vote against or for a budget.

I have some concerns with some of the things that are in the budget, and some of the things that are in the budget I don't have concerns with and I support. But, overall, I can say I don't support this budget. One of the most important reasons why I don't support the budget is because of the debt, the way it's being portrayed in the budget and the way the debt is increasing in this province, particularly relative to other provinces in western Canada.

There are three debts, really, that we have to be concerned about. The operating debt is the difference—is all the cumulated deficits that have occurred in this province over successive budgets. That's something that we in Manitoba and the government has control over, the operating debt. I know that's the one that the government says that they reduced because they paid it down. Of course, in the same year that they pay it down, they also increased the operating debt. The net result is that the operating debt goes up.

Secondly, the total debt of the province is an important number as well. We're now more than \$20 billion in total debt. I know the government likes to point to the fact that they do have money in reserve in different accounts, and that offsets the total debt. The reality is that the interest that we're paying, the servicing costs, the debt servicing costs that we pay in this province are calculated on the total debt, not on the net amount that sometimes the government likes to portray as the real debt of the province.

Madam Deputy Speaker, \$20 billion is a lot of money; \$20 billion, for example, if we had an increase in interest rates of 1 percent—just 1 percent increase in interest rates in this province—that the Province would have to pay an extra \$200 million in interest. That would probably pave every road within the constituency of Lac du Bonnet and still have money left over for other services for other constituencies as well. That's just a 1 percent increase in interest rates that could occur in the next few years.

I say that right now the interest rates are almost at the lowest point in history in Manitoba. The reality is that with the injection of piles of money by governments, whether it be Manitoba or other provinces or the country, or huge amounts of money, trillions of dollars by the United States government into the economy, that's going to trigger inflation. When inflation starts to take hold, mark my words that governments will increase interest rates to keep down inflation. I think we're at a point in history where we may have seen the lowest interest rates by far for many, many years, but we will likely see increases in interest rates. That's going to affect our ability to delivery services here in Manitoba.

The budget debt servicing costs at this point has gone up by—already, with decreased interest rates, according to the budget, it went up from \$776 million last year to \$803 million this year. Yet interest rates went down, and why, Madam Deputy Speaker? Because our debt went up. Our debt went up so much that when you look at the net debt of the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and British Columbia, three provinces that have nine times more population than the population of Manitoba, that we now in Manitoba have a net debt more than the other three western provinces combined. That's alarming. It should be alarming to Manitobans, and it will be a problem in the future, particularly, as I said, when interest rates do climb, and they will climb. There's no doubt about it. Anything that goes up, comes

down. Anything that goes down, also comes up. It's a matter of cycles, and it depends on our economy and so many forces that we, in Manitoba, don't have a lot of control over.

I have concerns, as well, with the claims that this is a balanced budget. I heard with interest many members opposite indicate in this House that they took great delight in the fact that they said that Alberta has a deficit this year. Well, the reality is Alberta does not have a deficit this year. Alberta was honest to Albertans, indicating that they had a deficit. The reality is they didn't. If we use the same rules that we use in Manitoba in Alberta, they would not have a deficit. They covered their deficit with their heritage fund, which is our rainy day fund in Manitoba. In spite of the fact that they covered the deficit with their heritage fund, they were honest to Albertans, indicating that they did have a deficit.

* (16:20)

That's not so here in Manitoba. We covered our deficit here with the rainy day fund—took \$110 million out of the rainy day fund to cover the difference between expenditures and revenue. So I found it quite astonishing when I heard members opposite indicate here in this House that Alberta had a deficit. Yet, if you applied exactly the same rules here in Manitoba and Alberta, there would be no deficit in Alberta.

So, really, what I am concerned about is the play on words, and the fact that we seem to take great delight in other provinces, which are honest and open and straightforward to their constituents, to their citizens, to their residents, and yet we kind of try to show ourselves in a light better than we really are in Manitoba.

I am also concerned about the rosy outlook in the budget. We had updates on almost a weekly or bi-weekly basis by the governor of the Bank of Canada leading up to this session, indicating updates that occurred as a result of economic influences from outside the country, updates that would influence our economy and our ability to raise funds and revenues and also would influence the expenditures that we have in the country. We had continuous updates, and we waited with bated breath for our budget here in Manitoba. What came out of this budget was the fact that the Finance Minister, I think, had not really considered all the factors in spite of waiting till March to do that. I think it was highlighted in question period over the last few weeks, just the profits that were projected for corporations in

Manitoba showed that they were going up this year from last year. Yet in the last recession there was a massive decline in corporate profits.

That's a pretty rosy outlook for Manitoba, considering that we are in a recession, and make no doubt about it that we are in a recession. There's a worldwide recession and Manitoba won't weather the storm likely any better than the rest of Canada. It seems to me, over the years that I've been practising law—I've been in business for almost 30 years—that, first of all, what I've seen in other recessions is that the United States seems to enter a recession first, takes six months to a year for the rest of Canada and it takes another six months to a year for Manitoba to feel the effects. I think we're still to feel the effects of the recession that's going on in the rest of Canada and the rest of the world and in the United States.

So I think the outlook, the projections that were in this budget are not correct. I think they're out. We only have a \$3-million surplus that's been projected in this budget, and we don't have a lot of room for mistakes. We also have a rainy day fund that's being depleted, projected to be depleted this year—not depleted, but reduced down by \$110 million, and we don't have a lot of money left in the rainy day fund to cover huge decreases in revenues or huge increases in expenditures.

So I would really caution the Finance Minister with respect to this budget and indicate that these are very special economic circumstances this year and perhaps even next. If you're only projecting a \$3-million surplus this year, you may end up next year—or even this year at the end of the year you may end up with a \$110-million deficit to cover with the rainy day fund, and next year it could be three or four times that.

So I don't think it does any good, in my view, to project surpluses and try to show a very optimistic side of the finances of this province. Make no mistake about it, we are a diversified economy in Manitoba, but we have a diversified economy in the rest of Canada. Canada is undergoing a recession and Manitoba will as well.

What if those revenues don't come in as projected? We may end up taking much more money out of the rainy day fund than it was anticipated very quickly. If transfer payments go down next year, particularly when Ontario is likely to draw substantially into that pool of funds, likely the transfer payments from the federal government will likely go down as well. We have a heavy dependence

on transfer payments, 40.5 percent of revenues come from the federal government. Yet we see, day after day, ministers asking questions in question period, blaming the federal government for this and blaming the federal government for that. Yet they don't have any problem taking 40.5 percent of the revenues from the federal government to provide services here to Manitobans.

We're still taxed, in my view, at unbelievably high levels, with a two-earner family of four earning \$60,000. That involves quite a number of Manitoba families, Madam Deputy Speaker. That's a fairly average family in Manitoba, and we're actually the highest taxed outside of Québec. I know the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) will point to the fact that, well, we have a lower cost standard of living here in Manitoba, and certainly we do. I don't know that the government of the day can take credit for that. I think that's been happening for many decades here in Manitoba as a result of other factors for which we don't have a lot of control. But that's no excuse to tax them as a province, to tax them as the highest taxed outside of Québec.

You know that the various members were crowing about the small-business tax rate, that they're going to reduce it to zero, and I applaud that. I support that. The reality is, though, that most small businesses, the vast majority of small businesses in Manitoba, are not incorporated. This is only the small-business tax rate applicable to corporations in Manitoba. The vast majority of businesses, small businesses, are not incorporated, so they are not going to feel the benefit of this reduction in the tax rate, in the small-business tax rate.

The other point that I think the Minister of Finance should take notice of is that most small businesses don't have any taxable income. They don't really have any taxable income. Most of the money, in fact, if not all of the money, in most small businesses, small incorporated businesses, actually gets paid out to shareholders in terms of salaries and business owners and partners in that business. Very little remains in that company and very few companies leave money in the corporation to be taxed at that small-business rate. So the reality is it doesn't affect a great number of small businesses, although we certainly applaud the fact that the business tax rate is going to zero. At least, we hope it will. We've seen instances already where the Minister of Finance has reneged on promises in the election in terms of reductions of rates, and we're hoping that it does go to zero.

The other thing that concerns me about this budget, Madam Deputy Speaker, is the fact that it's indicated in the budget that the floodway is now at one-in-700-year flood protection, and when I look at the No. 15 highway bridge, and I cross that bridge quite often on my way to the constituency, that bridge hasn't been replaced. There's a narrowing of the floodway at that bridge. It has not been expanded underneath the bridge. As a result, all we really have in the floodway at this point, in any event, until that bridge is replaced, is we have extra storage capacity for water because most of the floodway is wider. But that doesn't enhance the flow of water from south of the city to north of the city, so we don't have one-in-700-year flood protection.

I have a number of concerns in terms of the budget, in terms of its inability and failure to address issues that are specifically within my constituency. I mention a number of roads in particular. Highway 304, from Powerview-Pine Falls south to the 59 highway, there are about 12 kilometres of road that need to be reconstructed. It's a dangerous highway. I've been after the government to reconstruct this road for the last seven years, since I was first elected. In fact, that was my first question in question period in 2002. I still keep getting the same answer: we're not going to do it. Well, I can tell you that after the next election, if we're in government, we are going to do it.

* (16:30)

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would encourage the Minister of Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) to take a look at that highway for himself and deal with that particular road, even as it progresses north from Manigotagan to Bissett. Road 502, in the LGD of Pinawa, is a gravel-surface road which services the Lee River-Bird River-Lac du Bonnet area in terms of ambulance service going directly to the Pinawa Hospital. Quite frequently in the spring, ambulances can't travel that road because of the condition of the road, and they have to take a longer route to get to the hospital.

No. 11 highway, Highway 317, PTH No. 12, PTH No. 15, 313, No. 11. I could almost name any road within the constituency, and I can indicate that all of those roads do need work. I will continue to work with my constituents to try to get them done and to make sure that they're safe for the travelling public, whether it be tourists or residents alike.

Personal care homes are needed within the constituency. Powerview-Pine Falls personal care

home has the longest waiting time in terms of people who need service within those personal care homes. Also, Lac du Bonnet needs to have a personal care home expansion as well.

We need low-cost seniors housing in Pinawa, and in Manigotagan, as well.

Ambulance facilities are needed in both Lac du Bonnet and Pinawa and not just one between the two communities, which are 30 kilometres apart. Each of those communities currently have ambulance services. They both have ambulance facilities which are staffed by volunteer attendants and I heard in this House that the minister is thinking of ensuring that we have full-time ambulance attendants in both of those, in Lac du Bonnet and Pinawa. I would encourage the minister to speak to the community to ensure that Lac du Bonnet does have a facility and Pinawa also has a facility with both full-time attendants, and that we don't get rid of both and make one ambulance facility in between the two communities. I think that's going to hurt the service. It's going to hurt residents, and we ought to enhance services, particularly when we're spending \$4 billion more a year in health care than we did in 1999.

Hon. Bill Blaikie, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

I am looking forward to further expansion at Milner Ridge as well, and I would encourage the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak) to ensure that that facility is expanded. The community is in support of it.

We also need support for off-street parking in Beausejour and the reconstruction of Park Avenue, as Beausejour moves from diagonal parking to parallel parking.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

So those are just some of the constituent concerns that I have, and I wanted to briefly mention them here in this House. Hopefully, the ministers are listening to this presentation. I look forward to working with them to ensure that these improvements are made in our constituency.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Erin Selby (Southdale): Mr. Speaker, I stand today to support the budget as presented by our Finance Minister, and not the amendments.

Mr. Speaker, as much as I enjoyed the company of my former seat mate, the Minister of Education

(Mr. Bjornson), I am very pleased to be sitting next to one of our new members. Let me take the time to formally welcome both the Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie) and the new Member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead), and I look forward to working with both of you, learning from you and getting to know both of you as the newest members of our team.

Now, I must be honest. I have some selfish reasons for wanting to sit next to one of the newest members of the Legislature. You see, I've been a rookie around here for the last couple of years. How that goes is you sort of glance at your neighbours to see if I'm sitting or standing at the right time, and ask the person next to you, what does the acronym stand for. Of course, the most important lesson you learn is figuring out when the Whip is really angry and if he's actually serious that you can't take a break.

But now I'm seated next to one of the rookies, the Member for The Pas, and, luckily, so far at least, he is patient enough to put up with my advice, and even though he's only been here a short time, in the few conversations we've had, I already know that I've got much to learn from him and his culture. I won't let that opportunity pass me by, because I regret not having spent more time with the former Member for The Pas, Oscar Lathlin. I know I still had so much more to learn from him.

Both of our new members gave fantastic opening speeches, both are gifted in communication, but it also helps that this an excellent budget to speak to.

You only need to watch the national news to see that many of our neighbours outside of Manitoba are facing much more difficult times. My uncle, who should be planning his retirement, was just laid off from Chrysler in Windsor, Ontario. He's not sure whether to take a buyout package or go with a pension and hope the money doesn't dry up.

I heard an interesting news item the other day on Alberta's economy. As you know, their economic boom is also starting to dry up, and thousands of people in Alberta have lost their jobs, many of them returning home to the more stable economy of Manitoba. The news story I was listening to included an interview with a financial expert on Alberta's economy. They were saying that Alberta relies too heavily on one industry, that instead of writing prosperity cheques, the government of Alberta should have been reinvesting that money towards creating a diverse economy, and how that would have meant more stability. Those words sound familiar, diverse economy leading to stability during

a recession. It kind of reminds me of something. Oh, yes, that's right, Manitoba. That's exactly what our government's been doing.

Manitoba is not immune. We're facing the same degree of problems, but we aren't facing the same degree of problems as our neighbours outside our borders, especially those to the south. In the past I've heard complaints that maybe our budget wasn't daring enough, maybe, it didn't push the envelope. Well, thank goodness. Our prudent economic planning means we'll ride out this storm in a better position than most governments around the world. We're also one of the few provinces that will still balance the budget. Manitoba is one of the few provinces that will not run a deficit, and, in fact, we'll see a \$48-million surplus that includes core government departments, Crown corporations and pension obligations.

One of the hardest lessons to teach your children is to save for a rainy day. They live in the moment and, of course, we're all encouraged through TV commercials and magazines to buy, buy, buy. But Manitobans can be grateful that this government understands putting something away for a rainy day. We've tripled the Fiscal Stabilization Fund since coming into office, and that will mean, although, there may be less to work with in the coming years, Manitobans do not have to worry about losing essential services. Have no doubt, it's raining, and so we'll use a little of that rainy day fund to make sure vital services will still be available when needed.

One-third of government departments will hold the line or even see a slight decrease in expenditures, but we're not talking about firing nurses or not training new doctors, that would be short-sighted. No, we'll continue to invest in health care, continue to train more medical professionals and go forward with health capital construction.

Manitobans can feel confident in this government's balanced budget, but it's not just enough to balance the numbers. Budgets are more than just decimal points, but I'll give it to you, the numbers are exciting: \$1.6 million in infrastructure renewal this year, \$160 million into social housing renewal, \$545 million in investments to upgrade and build roads and highways. Those are all really exciting numbers. But, at the end of the day, a budget is not about numbers, it's about people. And will people want to know? Yes. Is the budget balanced? Yes. And are we continuing to pay down our debt? Yes, we are. But what people really want to know is,

am I going to be okay and will I lose my job, and if something goes wrong will government be there to help me? Yes, our commitment goes beyond the good times.

I'm proud to be part of a government that takes our responsibility to the people very seriously, a proactive government that puts plans in place to keep people working. That \$1.6 million I mentioned earlier, the investment in infrastructure, that won't just mean shiny new buildings, it will mean jobs, food on the table and a sense of pride for someone who can provide for their family.

That \$545 million in road construction will pave a smoother path for us to travel, but it will also mean Manitobans will keep working.

That \$160 million in social housing renewal, I think that might be the most important money we spend. It is certainly the most money ever spent in Manitoba on housing, and think of what those numbers will mean for people. Someone will have work. Perhaps someone right out of school will apprentice on the building site, gaining new skills and confidence, and that's not all. Someone will move into a freshly renovated house. No, not a house, a home, something, perhaps, many of us here take for granted. But, waking up in your home can make a huge difference on how you go about your day, and who knows where that fresh start may lead? Maybe waking up in a safe clean home will be the catalyst someone needs to make a change in their life, to find the courage to go to school or to train for a new career. I don't mean to simplify things, but, if a new haircut or a new pair of shoes can put spring in your step, what can waking up in a new home do for someone's self-worth?

* (16:40)

Last month, I got a clear sense of my own self-worth, on paper, anyway. I did my taxes. Well, to be honest, my accountant did them for me. I used to do my own taxes, and it worked out okay, but I have three children and it's not very quiet in my house. It's tough to crunch numbers. I don't claim to be an accountant, and nor could I teach a course on GAAP or generally accepted accounting principles, but I do understand one thing clearly: you can't really get a good financial picture of something if you can't see it all, if there's another set of books you don't know about. Budget 2009 is GAAP compliant; that means it requires one set of books. That makes sense to me. I know next year at tax time I will be, once again, thanking this budget. I'll be thankful for things

such as the increase to the education property tax credit, an increase of \$50 to a total of \$650. I'll also be grateful that budget 2009 increases the basic personal amount, spousal amount and eligible dependant amount by \$100.

There's another thing I notice every time I fill out my taxes, and that is that the federal government takes some of my money through taxes as well. So, if some of the money that I pay to Ottawa comes back to me and other Manitobans, that's a good thing. I pay taxes to Ottawa, and some of that money is returned to Manitoba in funding. Makes sense to me.

It's Family Fun Night tonight at my children's school. It happens every year. The whole family eats supper at school while listening to the Collège Béliveau school band. This is pretty exciting stuff for a group of eight-year-olds who will someday be going to Béliveau. They will stare in fascination at the teenagers, and at some point, point out to me tonight that everyone in Southdale has pierced ears except for my daughters. It's an ongoing argument in our home.

After pizza, we'll pair off to try a new activity. My daughters keep a very exact schedule of whose turn it is to be with Mom or Dad or our family friend who helps out. Last year I learned to carve soapstone and tonight I think I'm learning calligraphy, some kind of interesting project no doubt.

Now, other than the pizza and the juice boxes, Family Fun Night is free. It's a wonderful community-building initiative and it's really great to see schools finding creative ways to build spirit. But, with budget 2009, we'll see more than just spirit building. A new multimillion-dollar, four-year capital program will see schools built as well, existing ones renovated, and schools will see \$53-million increase in investments, the biggest increase ever in Manitoba. This, along with strengthening the tax incentive grant, will encourage divisions to hold the line on property taxes.

I hope events such as Family Fun Night will help my kids to associate school with fun. They're at an age where they do think it is fun, and I hope they continue that and follow in my husband's and my footsteps to follow a post-secondary degree.

Our government also wants to encourage more young people to stick with school. This budget means increased funding to the Bright Futures fund and Career Trek, both of which can help young

people follow a path to higher education that might not otherwise be there for them.

The goal of this government is to keep Manitoba competitive. We support that idea through tax initiatives, training opportunities and child care. Child care is an essential element to the economy, and having access to high quality child care provided by educated professionals makes it easier for Manitobans to get to work. It's also a great start for Manitoba children. We know that children who go through our licensed child-care programs are well-prepared for kindergarten and those who are prepared and ready at kindergarten have a head start and a better chance of staying in school.

My children are at a fantastic day care. When I pick them up, it takes them 10 minutes to get ready because they don't want to leave. I have to give credit to the people who take care of them in the after-school program. I wonder sometimes how they manage to work so hard and have endless patience and handle conflict with grace and respect amongst the children. I wonder sometimes if we might be better behaved in this Chamber if we had an early childhood educator watching over us sometimes.

I'm proud to be part of a government that recognizes and supports child-care workers. This budget will see increased wages for child-care staff along with more spaces and more real choice for families.

Like many people around the world, my husband and I re-evaluated our budget in the last few months, and we cut back on a few things that weren't necessities, like cable television, although with Stanley Cup season upon us, my husband's probably rethinking that choice.

Although we still invest in our future and the future of our children, we're investing a little bit less right now and keeping an eye on our weekly spending, ensuring that we've got our own rainy day fund.

Our government is also making smart choices about spending. For the first time since 1961, Manitoba is fully paying the employers' current service contributions for all civil servants and teachers and will continue to pay down the debt with a \$20-million payment. The balance will be used to address infrastructure, stimulate the economy and create jobs. That's smart spending. Mr. Speaker, Manitobans can have confidence in budget 2009, a

steady, balanced budget—in 10 years in government, 10 years of balanced budgets.

Our experience shows in the smart choices we've made on behalf of Manitobans, but, in those 10 years, have also included constant renewal, with new members joining us in 2003, 2007 and just last month, Mr. Speaker. Manitobans can see their government reflects themselves in diversity in our ages, culture and gender. Manitobans can see our government in itself in terms of a balance of experienced members, along with new people who bring fresh perspective and new ideas. With a budget of tax relief and strategic investments, Manitoba is ready to face the challenges ahead while building our future. I am proud to support this budget and what it means for the future of my children and all Manitobans. Thank you.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Once again, I rise to put some comments on the record in regard to the budget. Let me just say right off the top, I will not be voting for this budget for a variety of reasons which I will be getting into as I go along. But, before I get to that point, I do want to welcome and congratulate the new members in the Legislative Chamber, the Member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead) and the Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie). Certainly, you will recognize over the term that you're here that, as we do speak in this Legislature, sometimes we are very partisan and other times we are very friendly. I know that the Member for Elmwood would have experience in that regard. I also want to acknowledge the new table officer that we have in the Legislature, as well.

Mr. Speaker, I want to just talk a little bit about my constituency, primarily because of the situation that many of my constituents find themselves in at the present time with a flood of the magnitude of a greater-than-1979 event and approaching a level-of-'97 event, it's a very traumatic thing for the people in the valley to live through once again. Having said that, many of them, most of them, have prepared. The municipal officials, the government officials, people themselves, many organizations, have done a lot over the last 12 years to mitigate future high-water events—as we like to refer this type of a situation, especially in Morris because they don't like the word "flood." They've done a lot of things to prepare. There are ring dikes of which a number of them are being closed right now, have been and will be. Many people just south of the floodway operational gates have either a ring dike or they have temporary dikes, plywood dikes which, again, are

not as effective against the higher waters, but, certainly, we're hoping that these do hold and that they will be protected.

The issue of high water is really—it's something that happens every year, and I want to impress upon the people in this Chamber that, when we're talking about the flooding in the Red River Valley, it's something that happens every year—well, almost every year. There are drier years where the water does not spill over the banks of the river, but this is an event that is ongoing. It's not something that happens every couple of years. It happens every year, but what we are seeing is, the magnitude, the severity of the flooding is getting more and more. Since 1997, we've had summer flooding in 2002 and 2005 due to backup water, due to operating the floodway in summer operation. We've had a high-water event in 2005, a flood in 2006 and, again, now in 2009.

* (16:50)

So these are things that the people are living with and certainly are coping with, but have a lot of anxiety as the waters go up and down because—I need to explain how this works. When someone is on a earthen dike, their house is built there and their driveway goes down to the road and that's all covered with water, they're perched up in their house. They need to be able to get their vehicles out so that they can then boat from their back door to their vehicle and drive to wherever they need to go, and then the reverse on the way back. So these waters going up and down and no notice and no notification of what's happening is very complicating to the lives of those people, Mr. Speaker.

But I do want to say that this has been a very unusual year with ice jams, although ice is not something that we don't know about in this province. We certainly recognize that every year the rivers freeze and we are going to have ice on the river every single year. We do know from last year we had ground saturation and, I think, it was very predictable. Some people would say that we would have flooding this year but, again, Mr. Speaker, the problem in the constituency that I would like to see addressed has to do with keeping Highway 75 open. We noticed that Prime Minister Harper was in Morris yesterday, once again—he was there three years ago in 2006—surveying the broad waters that cover for as far as the eye can see and cover the access into towns like Morris and other towns. So there needs to be a strategic plan to make sure that

we can keep Highway 75 high and dry during flood events. That ties in very nicely with the announcement that was made for the funding for CentrePort yesterday. We will look forward to seeing what their plans are for Highway 75, Mr. Speaker.

But I want to speak a little bit about the budget, Mr. Speaker, and just say that this is a budget that, really, we cannot support. We cannot support it. I know that the people on the other side will say, well, you wouldn't support this, you wouldn't support that in the budget. I recall the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) when he was speaking of all the points that he was making, and also the Member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik), and that point being there are bits and pieces in any budget that we could support and we do support. However, overall, the totality of the budget, the ideology behind the budget, is something that we cannot support, and so we have one vote: do we support, do we not support? And we cannot support the totality of this budget because of the fact that, first of all, it's not a balanced budget, and they're misleading Manitobans by saying that it is. We do not support that concept.

Mr. Speaker, I think it was also the Member for Lac du Bonnet that was explaining when the Alberta government went into deficit and took money from their rainy day fund. They were quite up front with the people and told the people of Alberta what they were doing. They were honest, they came clean, they explained the situation, unlike what our government is doing here in Manitoba by trying to claim a balanced budget. When you draw down the rainy day fund, don't pay as much on the pension funds, and yet try and claim that there's a surplus, it's just not right.

I think people at their kitchen tables, when they try and look at their own funding and their own money, if they're saying, well, if we borrow on our credit card and we don't pay down our debt that we have, then we can claim that we have more money at the end of the month. They know that just doesn't work for them. They know they cannot survive that way, even as much as they want to delude themselves into thinking they can. They can't and they know it. I think Manitobans, when they take a close look here, will say, what are you doing? What are you doing here? The simple answer to that is the government wants to mislead Manitobans for their own political purposes, and that is one purpose only. They have no vision for the people of Manitoba. They have no vision for the future, for future

generations. Their vision is so narrow in scope all it has to do with is how do we make ourselves look good. That's all it is about for this government, Mr. Speaker.

Its already been suggested, I think, from the Member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik) that look at the billions of dollars in debt, \$20 billion. Is it \$20 billion in debt? A huge amount of debt and I think, as the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) has said before, that debt is more than the debt of British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan combined. Can you imagine that?

The debt in Manitoba is higher than the debt of British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan combined. That is astounding, astounding, Mr. Speaker, and as the Member for Lac du Bonnet and others have mentioned, what happens when interest rates go up just half a percent, 1 percent? The amount that it's going to cost to service that debt could be used to fix infrastructure, build rural hospitals, look after children in care.

There are a number of ways that that money could be spent, but this government has not taken into consideration, yes, right now interest rates are low, but there is that eventuality as cycles always go. Should those interest rates go up, we will find ourselves here in Manitoba servicing a huge debt and leaving a legacy of failed infrastructure, further health-care costs and leaving the most vulnerable children in this province without foster homes and care. I think that is something that they should really take a hard look at and think about that.

I did hear someone say today that Ontario received their first equalization payment. So now Ontario is a have-not province like Manitoba. This government has almost felt proud to say that they're a have-not province because it's in their best interest to be a have-not province so they can suck the 40 percent of the dollars that they get for the budget every year from the federal government, which means it's coming from our neighbours. It's coming from our neighbours in Ontario. It's coming from our neighbours in Saskatchewan, Alberta and B.C.

Mr. Speaker, you know if I was—if you think about it, if you were the one person on the block that was taking from all the other neighbours around that were wisely using their money and helping to then look after you, I think that at some point the neighbours are going to say, well, wait a minute,

wait a minute here, I'm working so I can pay for you and you're not.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba needs to recognize that when provinces like Alberta start getting equalization payments, then equalization payments to the province of Manitoba are going to go down. Revenues are going to go down. They're not going to be able to rely on the 40 percent of the budget they get from the federal government and I suspect next

year's budget is going to tell a different story. I suspect that the hard times will be coming next year, harder times—

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu) will have 17 minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, April 15, 2009

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