

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLAN, Nancy, Hon.	St. Vital	N.D.P.
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	N.D.P.
BLADY, Sharon	Kirkfield Park	N.D.P.
BLAIKIE, Bill, Hon.	Elmwood	N.D.P.
BOROTSIK, Rick	Brandon West	P.C.
BRAUN, Erna	Rossmere	N.D.P.
BRICK, Marilyn	St. Norbert	N.D.P.
BRIESE, Stuart	Ste. Rose	P.C.
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CULLEN, Cliff	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard	Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary, Hon.	Concordia	N.D.P.
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	P.C.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	P.C.
GRAYDON, Cliff	Emerson	P.C.
HAWRANIK, Gerald	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
HICKES, George, Hon.	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
HOWARD, Jennifer	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
JENNISSSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	La Verendrye	N.D.P.
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MAGUIRE, Larry	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
MARCELINO, Flor	Wellington	N.D.P.
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McFADYEN, Hugh	Fort Whyte	P.C.
McGIFFORD, Diane, Hon.	Lord Roberts	N.D.P.
MELNICK, Christine, Hon.	Riel	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	P.C.
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	N.D.P.
OSWALD, Theresa, Hon.	Seine River	N.D.P.
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Carman	P.C.
REID, Daryl	Transcona	N.D.P.
ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Rupertsland	N.D.P.
RONDEAU, Jim, Hon.	Assiniboia	N.D.P.
ROWAT, Leanne	Minnedosa	P.C.
SARAN, Mohinder	The Maples	N.D.P.
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield	P.C.
SELBY, Erin	Southdale	N.D.P.
SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	N.D.P.
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	P.C.
STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon.	Dauphin-Roblin	N.D.P.
SWAN, Andrew, Hon.	Minto	N.D.P.
TAILLIEU, Mavis	Morris	P.C.
WHITEHEAD, Frank	The Pas	N.D.P.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 21, 2009

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

Long-Term Care Facility—Morden

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

The background for this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This is signed by Ruth Thiessen, Audra Thiessen, Cindy Peters and many, many others.

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

**Parkland Regional Health Authority—
Ambulance Station**

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

The communities of Eddystone, Bacon Ridge and Ebb and Flow First Nation rely on emergency medical services personnel based in Ste. Rose, which is approximately 45 minutes away.

Mr. Speaker, these communities represent about 2,500 people. Other communities of similar size within the region are equipped with at least one ambulance, but this area is not. As a result, residents must be transported in private vehicles to the nearest hospital if they cannot wait for emergency personnel to arrive.

There are qualified first responders living in these communities who want to serve the region but need an ambulance to do so.

A centrally located ambulance and ambulance station in this area would be able to provide better and more responsive emergency services to these communities.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) to consider working with the Parkland Regional Health Authority to provide a centrally located ambulance and station in the area of Eddystone, Bacon Ridge and Ebb and Flow First Nation.

This petition is signed by Jenny Houle, Patricia Houle, Carmen Houle and many, many other fine Manitobans.

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.

Mr. Speaker, 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 or 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 (Mr. Lemieux) consider the immediate twinning of the PTH 15 floodway bridge for the safety of the citizens of Manitoba.

Signed by Gary Lange, Linda Mitchell, Bill Barendregt and many, many other Manitobans. Thank you.

Education Funding

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

Historically, the Province of Manitoba has received funding for education by the assessment of property that generates taxes. This unfair tax is only applied to selected property owners in certain areas and confines.

Property-based school tax is becoming an ever-increasing burden without acknowledging the owner's income or owner's ability to pay.

The provincial sales tax was instituted for the purpose of funding education. However, monies generated by this tax are being placed in general revenue.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth (Mr. Bjornson) consider removing education funding by school tax or education levies from all properties in Manitoba.

To request that the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth consider finding a more equitable method of funding education, such as general revenue, following the constitutional funding of education by the Province of Manitoba.

This petition is signed by Teena Bourgouin, Taralyn Goodall, Ken Jones and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Photo Radar

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

It is important to protect the safety of construction workers who are on the job by having reduced speeds in construction zones when workers are present.

The provincial government handed out tickets to thousands of Manitobans who were driving the regular posted speed limit in construction zones when there were no construction workers present.

A Manitoba court has ruled that the reduced speed zones in construction areas were intended to protect workers and that the tickets that were given when no construction workers were present were invalid.

The provincial government has decided not to collect unpaid fines given to motorists who were ticketed driving the normal posted speed limit when no construction workers were present.

The provincial government is refusing to refund the money to the many hardworking, law-abiding Manitobans who had already paid the fine for driving the regular speed limit in a construction zone when no workers were present.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Attorney General (Mr. Chomiak) consider refunding all monies collected from photo radar tickets given to motorists driving the regular posted speed limit in construction zones where no workers were present.

This petition was signed by Jeffrey Brown, Diane Stasiuk, Paul Barsy and many, many other Manitobans.

Provincial Nominee Program—90 Day Guarantee

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

Reuniting families through the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program should be the first priority in processing nominee certificates.

Lengthy processing times for PNP applications cause additional stress and anxiety for would-be immigrants and their families here in Manitoba.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to consider establishing a 90-day guarantee for processing an application for a minimum of 90 percent of applicants that have family living in Manitoba.

This is signed by J. Nuqui, M. Cudal, C. Mariano and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. We haven't even gotten into question period yet. Come on. Let's have some order here.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table the Annual Report of the Provincial Court of Manitoba 2007 and 2008. 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 Marc and Louise Badiou who are the parents of our page, Joel Badiou.

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

Also in the public gallery we have from Red River College Language Training Centre 13 adult English as an Additional Language students under the direction of Ms. Lorna Hiebert. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for Fort Rouge (Ms. Howard).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Photo Radar Tickets Support for Proposed Motion

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, as the members know, thousands of Manitobans, many of whom are struggling to get by, were wrongly issued photo radar tickets by this NDP government. That injustice was recognized by the court when the court threw out tickets that were wrongly issued to Manitobans, but thousands of others have yet to have their tickets refunded by this government.

In response to that, the Member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) will be filing a motion that calls on

all members to support the idea that the provincial government consider refunding the fines and court costs collected from those people who received photo radar tickets while travelling in construction zones with no workers present and travelling at or below the normal speed limit.

* (13:40)

I want to ask the Premier: As the Member for Steinbach will be tabling this thoughtful motion to be debated within the next two weeks, will the Premier personally commit to his support and the support of his caucus so that we may have unanimous non-partisan support for this fair and balanced resolution from the Member for Steinbach?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, members on this side have had the great opportunity to experience the wisdom of the Member for Steinbach. In fact, he co-chaired the last provincial election campaign, and I want to say, in a non-partisan way, to the Leader of the Opposition that they spent more money and got less seats than the previous election campaign.

As many things as can be stewarded by the honourable Member for Steinbach, we, on this side, appreciate it. We always appreciate his advice to the Leader of the Opposition. It always works well for us.

Mr. McFadyen: Well, Mr. Speaker, we all well recall the Premier's pessimism about the future of Manitoba and his pessimism about the capacity of Winnipeg to host an NHL team. We remember it well from that campaign.

Mr. Speaker, I'm with the Member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen). He's optimistic about Manitoba and its future, and we continue to be optimistic, however pessimistic or deceitful the Premier may be during election campaigns.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the Member for Steinbach—*[interjection]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

We have to choose our words carefully here. I just heard the honourable member use the word "deceitful" and that's unparliamentary in this House.

I ask the honourable member to withdraw that word.

Mr. McFadyen: I withdraw that word.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the honourable member for that.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition has the floor.

Mr. McFadyen: The Member for Steinbach has realized the injustice of what has happened to these thousands of Manitobans. He's bringing forward a motion asking that those who travelled at or below the speed limit get the refunds that they're entitled to.

I want to ask the Premier: Even if he is not prepared to support the motion, will he give the rest of his NDP members the freedom to vote with their constituents on this fair and balanced motion brought forward by the Member for Steinbach?

Mr. Doer: Well, Mr. Speaker, the members on this side of the Chamber and members on that side of the Chamber were all sent here by constituents. They obviously exercise their judgment in all the discussions on all the issues before Manitobans.

We would point out that there is a healthy debate in our community about this issue. Lots of people feel, last year, that they drove the speed limit through the construction sites. They were safe. There are people that don't agree with that. That's part of democracy. Ultimately, that will be determined, as it should be, in a formal election campaign.

This issue of tickets being issued was tested in Elmwood, I believe, in the by-election campaign. There was a promise made by members opposite. The members opposite will have their surrogates of the Taxpayers Association involved in some of these issues. We're fine with that.

Back on to the issue of the hockey team returning to Winnipeg, the issue for us was always that the only person who could make that promise was not the Leader of the Opposition. He can promise anything or even the Premier could promise things. But it wasn't any of us that could deliver on that promise.

The only one that could deliver on the promise was the person who led the efforts to build the MTS arena and owned the rights and management of the MTS arena. That was the issue in the campaign.

Having said that, I'm proud in terms of our optimism that every member on our side—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable First Minister.

Mr. Doer: I'm proud that on the issue of optimism every member on this side voted to contribute and support the building of the MTS Centre in downtown Winnipeg, and every member on that side voted against it, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has just said that he can't be held for delivering on election promises, and when we look back at his hallway medicine promise, Manitobans are well aware that he won't commit to delivering on election promises. His promise to keep the balanced budget legislation, that's another one of those promises he made.

So I want to give the Premier the opportunity to actually deliver on something that he can promise today, and that is to deliver the right to every member of his caucus to vote freely on the resolution to be brought forward by the Member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen).

Mr. Speaker, even if the Premier doesn't support fairness for these thousands of Manitobans, even if he's not in favour of a free vote for members of his caucus, will he at least allow the Attorney General (Mr. Chomiak), who has said that he has lobbied the mayor to refund the money, the Attorney General who wants to refund the money—if the caucus can't vote in favour of the motion, will he at least allow the Attorney General to vote in favour of this fair and balanced motion from the Member for Steinbach?

Mr. Doer: I haven't even seen a copy of the motion yet. I'm sure members opposite will get it, but, again, if it's coming from the co-chair, the other co-chair of the last election campaign, we'll be very careful before we vote on it, Mr. Speaker.

I just want to deal with an issue, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Leader of the Opposition quoted the chief of police at his press conference from last week. He said that the chief of police said last week that he thought there may be some value in photo radar where workers are present at sites but that we're talking about a different situation.

Well, the chief of police actually talked about, and I quote, at the press conference he said: I believe that it's important for us to enforce construction zones when people are working or when there are other safety issues. I've said that before; nothing has changed. The chief of police also said: If you look at the specific issues, if you had police officers in these zones using hand-held radars, it would be speeding. The chief of police also said: As a police service, it's

important for us to reduce speeds. He also said, at the same press conference, which the Leader of the Opposition fails to mention—and I doubt if he's consulted with the chief of police in the two weeks that he's been rambling on on this issue—he also said, the chief of police considers the people are breaking the law as far as he's concerned.

So when it comes to a motion from the Member for Steinbach or it comes to supporting the police in Winnipeg, we're going to vote with the police force of Winnipeg, Mr. Speaker.

Photo Radar Tickets Support for Proposed Motion

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice's new position on photo radar is that he'd be interested in refunding the money that the court said should never have been taken from drivers, but the mayor of Winnipeg won't let him do it.

The minister said on Tuesday, and I quote from *Hansard*: I said to the mayor, will you pay back the money? They said, no, we're not touching it.

Yesterday, the minister's comments were read to the mayor of Winnipeg by a local radio host, and the mayor responded by saying: Yours truly has never made comments like that and never would.

Mr. Speaker, did the minister just make up this conversation with the mayor, or is he going to stick by his story?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, I always thought that one of the hallmarks of the new-style Tories was mean-spiritedness, and part of the tactic is to destroy and attack various individuals—

An Honourable Member: Every day.

Mr. Chomiak: Every day in this House, Mr. Speaker, every single day.

An Honourable Member: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let's have some decorum here. We're early into question period, and some members are asking questions and the minister is trying to answer. In order to put a supplementary question, the person has to be able to hear the answer. So let's have some decorum here.

The honourable Attorney General has the floor.

* (13:50)

Mr. Chomiak: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

—by misquoting the chief of police, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) yesterday, by the member bringing in the City and talking about the City and misquoting, Mr. Speaker.

Let's get the facts straight as we know it. The member doesn't have a motion before this House. The Leader of the Opposition says, we're going to bring a motion to this House, and then he said there is a motion before this House. He's talking in the abstract.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, the law, as defined by myself on day one, is the law as it is. The mayor knows what the law is. The City has indicated they are not refunding the money.

Mr. Goertzen: You know, only one person has dragged the City into this, and that's the Minister of Justice who on Tuesday seemed eager to give up the mantle of government as he demanded that we as opposition run to City Hall and get the money from the mayor because the mayor wouldn't let go of it.

Well, it looks like a local radio host beat us to it, because he spoke to the mayor and reported that the mayor said: If the Province makes a decision, it's provincial legislation; we're not in a position to say that we're not going to refund the money.

Mr. Speaker, that's what the mayor said. The Minister of Justice said in this House that the mayor had said that he wouldn't give up the money and that's why they couldn't do the refund. The mayor said he never said that.

Did he make up that conversation? Did he just make it up for political expediency?

Mr. Chomiak: The letter to the Province from the City, from Councillor Gordon Steeves, head of the parks, said: The City cannot afford to reimburse people who have already paid their photo radar tickets, said by Gord Steeves in the letter to the Province. He also said: Any refund required to be issued by the City directly impacts the Winnipeg Police Service budget, which will result in a corresponding decline in police services. I trust that any unilateral decision by the Province to reimburse people for tickets issued would mean that the Province, not the City, would be responsible for the entirety of the cost; forgiveness, Mr. Speaker.

That was from the City of Winnipeg to the Province of Manitoba. I've also had—from the person directly responsible for it. So the fact of the matter is,

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite are trying to make a political issue out of something that's been decided. They have stated inaccuracies and they can rant and rave all they want. The fact is—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Goertzen: You know, the Minister of Justice, he's flip-flopped around on this issue for three weeks. He raised hopes and then he dashed hopes. He blamed drivers and then he blamed the mayor. The Premier (Mr. Doer) attacked a single mother who had gotten a ticket and said that she wasn't being truthful to those who she was speaking to.

The Minister of Justice is beyond repair on this issue, but his caucus, members of his caucus, the Member for St. Norbert (Ms. Brick), the Member for Radisson (Mr. Jha), the Member for Kirkfield Park (Ms. Blady), all the members will have an opportunity to do the right thing on behalf of their constituents.

Are they going to take the extreme hard-line view of the Premier and just vote the way he wants them to vote, or will they come into this House, listen to the phone calls, listen to the letters, listen to the e-mails and represent their constituents when it comes to a vote in this Legislature, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, on the Order Paper is an environmental act. On the Order Paper is a residential tenancies act. On the Order Paper is a police act. On the Order Paper is a cellphone act that we can debate, Mr. Speaker.

All we've heard from members opposite is misconstruing—it was the member opposite who first stood up in this House and demanded and put on their Web site that 60,000 tickets be refunded, on the Tory Web site, Mr. Speaker. He asked of me to refund 60,000 tickets unilaterally.

They have raised this matter. They can raise this matter as long as they want. Today we had a poverty reduction announcement that did more in this province than during the lean, mean Tory 11 years of Gary Filmon, Mr. Speaker. That's why we're put here. That's why we're sitting here. Let's get on with the debate.

Education Facilities Asbestos Report

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Speaker, on April 28, 2009, the issue of asbestos in our schools was raised with the Minister of Education. He

indicated that he would provide a list of schools in Manitoba that have asbestos in them.

Can the minister table that report today?

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): During Estimates I also advised the member that the school divisions would be—we would be contacting the school divisions to get that information. The member seemed to have this misconception that the school divisions didn't actually own the schools, that we did, but we, in fact, build the schools, hand the keys over to the school divisions. They're responsible for the maintenance of the schools.

When emergent situations arise, such as asbestos or such as air quality issues for mould, we respond very quickly to those emergency issues. I have asked the school divisions for the information where they have encapsulated asbestos or where other issues of asbestos might be found, and they'll provide us with that information. I will do the same for the member.

Mr. Schuler: Mr. Speaker, I would like to cite for the House an example that shows the seriousness of this issue. In April 2005, eight construction workers were exposed to asbestos in a British Columbia school when the fact that asbestos was present was not communicated to them. Nearby teachers complained of dust and experienced respiratory problems.

This is an example of the safety concerns when a comprehensive list of schools with asbestos is not produced. I ask again: When will he table that list?

Mr. Bjornson: Mr. Speaker, when I get the list, I will provide the list to the member.

We are talking to the school divisions to find out where there are situations with asbestos. We know that there are a lot of schools where asbestos would have been used in the construction of that school. We know that asbestos is encapsulated and, as such, does not pose a health risk, and if there is a health risk, the Public Schools Finance Board reacts very quickly to those health risks and works with the school division to address those health risks. They mediate mould as quickly as possible. We built brand new schools when there's been a mould issue that couldn't be remediated.

So we respond very quickly to any issue of health concerns with the schools, and we work with them as partners to do that, Mr. Speaker, and I will provide the list when they provide me with the list.

Mr. Schuler: Out of this terrible example, the following advice was given by WorkSafe British Columbia, and I quote: "to maintain an accurate inventory of asbestos-containing materials in their buildings and to keep that inventory up-to-date." This minister is again failing in his duty to protect those entrusted in his care, namely the children, the staff and workers who enter our schools.

Will he now make this a priority of his and take the advice that was provided, get an inventory that's up to date of those schools with asbestos in them? Will he now make this a priority of his?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, Mr. Speaker, school safety is a daily priority for this government. It's been a priority in every sense of the term. We are the government that brought in the Safe Schools Charter, and we were the government that has invested every year more and more money into capital around safety issues.

As I mentioned to the member the other day: \$3 million will ensure that we can accommodate 15 more schools with disabilities; \$12 million for roofing projects at 53 schools; \$13 million for structural renewal projects at nine schools; \$13 million to replace heating and ventilation systems in 29 schools; 106 projects will be undertaken this year that deal with health and safety issues and infrastructure issues in schools. That's because every year we bring more money to the table to support our infrastructure.

School safety has always been a priority and will continue to be for this government, Mr. Speaker.

Education Facilities Asbestos Report

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Well, if that is a priority for this minister then he should have a list of every school that contains asbestos. He should have it.

So I ask the minister whether he can guarantee to all of the parents and all of the students and all of the workers in the schools in this province that their schools are asbestos free, since he says that they have such a high track record in terms of health and safety.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): We have 684 public schools in the province of Manitoba. I've had the privilege of visiting about 354 of them, Mr. Speaker, and I hope to visit more. Each time I go to those

schools, just about every school I've visited, I've seen the results of our capital program which deals with health and safety issues, which deals with structural issues, which deals with providing the best possible learning environments for our students.

As I mentioned in the Estimates process, school divisions own the schools. They're responsible for maintenance. We provide funding to support the maintenance. We have asked the school divisions to provide us lists of information that deal with asbestos, and once we have that list, we'll be sure to share that with the members.

We're working with the school divisions to do that. That's what it means to work in partnership, and I can assure you that our investment in structures around this province is making a tremendous impact, providing safe, healthy learning environments for our children every day, Mr. Speaker.

*(14:00)

Mr. Derkach: The minister hasn't answered the question, and there have been four of them posed on this issue, Mr. Speaker.

So I'm going to ask the minister again: Parents whose children attend the schools that may have asbestos in them have a right to know that there is asbestos in the school and that there's a potential for danger, so that they may make informed choices about where their children should attend school.

I want to ask the minister whether he has a list. Now, I know he sits in an asbestos-free office, but can he assure those parents and the children who attend our schools that, indeed, every school in this province is safe and free of asbestos?

Mr. Bjornson: Mr. Speaker, as I said, we've talked to the school divisions. The school divisions will provide us with that information. They're required to have that information by law. They're required to know of any health risks. When we get that information, when we compile that list from the school divisions, we'll be sure to share that with the members opposite.

But, as I said, if there are any threats to health in our schools, the Public Schools Finance Board and the school division work very quickly to respond to those health concerns. We've done so on mould remediation, on asbestos remediation, and if there's any threat whatsoever, it is addressed very quickly to ensure that there is no threat to our children's health, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Derkach: As long ago as 2005 there was a list that was recommended that be made available to parents and to teachers and to the public in terms of safe schools in B.C. and also in this province.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the minister why he doesn't have a list of those schools that have asbestos in them. If this is a priority, why has it taken him now more than three weeks to provide the list to the House, if this, indeed, is a priority of safety and health for children and workers in our schools?

Mr. Bjornson: Mr. Speaker, when the school divisions provide us with the lists, we will provide the members opposite with the list.

What we continue to do as government is each year we bring forward budgets to support capital infrastructure in this province. What they continue to do as opposition is stand up and vote against it. We'll continue to provide a lot of support for our schools in every facet of infrastructure renewal.

When we came into office, there was a \$1-billion deficit on infrastructure issues left by members opposite, and members opposite built a lot of schools in a lot of Tory ridings. We build schools for all Manitobans, Mr. Speaker. We continue to meet the capital needs for schools all over the province of Manitoba, and we continue to work with school divisions on any issue of safety and health concerns, and we'll continue to do so.

Communities Economic Development Fund Funding for Bakery

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, with staggering unemployment rates in northern Manitoba, 90 percent in some communities, it's critical that programs and services are actually doing what they are intended to do. Last week we learned that the Communities Economic Development Fund signed over \$300,000 to a B.C. baker for a bakery operation in Churchill.

My question is for the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs: What due diligence was done on the B.C. baker's business plan prior to the government sinking so much dough into this business enterprise?

Hon. Eric Robinson (Acting Minister charged with the administration of The Communities Economic Development Fund Act): Mr. Speaker, I believe that the question was put to the government last week and my colleague the Minister of

Intergovernmental Affairs (Mr. Ashton) did respond to the question.

The business, in fact, was going to be located in Churchill. The practice of the CEDF board, before allocating any monies to people that want to start up businesses, requires them to be in Manitoba. It happens to be that the business proponent was from Burnaby, B.C., but I think that this person wanted to do business in the province of Manitoba, and I see nothing wrong with that.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, all loans, all loans over \$200,000 must be vetted through Treasury Board prior to final approval by the Communities Economic Development Fund.

Mr. Speaker, Manitobans deserve to know what due diligence was exercised by Treasury Board on the qualifications of the B.C. baker's half-baked idea. Why did they not ask the tough questions to determine the viability of this loan?

Mr. Robinson: Mr. Speaker, I hardly find trying to develop a business in an area like Churchill to be half baked.

The point is, Mr. Speaker, no money was ever released from CEDF to this business because of operational plans that fell through for the proponent that wanted to establish this business in Churchill. That's the end of the story.

Mrs. Rowat: There is a bakery in Churchill and it is operational and working fine. Maybe the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs will be able to confirm to the House that the \$300,000 loan intended for the bakery went flat. My goodness, even the B.C. baker couldn't make this business rise.

Can the minister, today, indicate to the House whether the dough will now go into general revenue or will it actually go to where it is intended to go, into a viable northern business enterprise?

Mr. Robinson: Mr. Speaker, what I will do is ensure that the Member for Minnedosa does get a briefing on the workings of CEDF. She may not be aware, but the CEDF, in fact, is a loan organization, arm's length from government. They make their decisions on business plans that are feasible for business start-ups in the province of Manitoba.

Family Doctors Shortage in Rural Manitoba

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Yesterday, I asked the Minister of Health a question about doctors accepting new patients. The Minister of Health, once again, responded that they've hired more doctors.

Mr. Speaker, people in my area of the province can't access family doctors. I ask the Minister of Health: Where is she hiding all those extra doctors?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I did inform the member yesterday, as I have in the past, that the recruitment of doctors for rural and northern communities is more challenging than in urban centres. Having said that, we have worked to not only restore the cut spaces in our Manitoba medical school so that we can grow our own doctors here at home, but we've actively worked to recruit doctors, to bring them here.

We have 288 more doctors—[interjection] I thought they wanted to hear the answer, Mr. Speaker, I must have been mistaken.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I've been looking directly at the Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler) about six times, and I've been saying order, order, and I've been totally ignored. There is still the authority of the Chair, and I hope all members will respect that. We have to have decorum in the House. We have guests in the gallery. We have the viewing public and, also, if there is a breach of a rule, I need to be able to hear that. So let's have some co-operation here.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Pointing back and forth is not going to help any here. Let's all have some order here. It's time to hear the questions and to hear the answers.

The honourable minister has the floor.

Ms. Oswald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have had a net gain of doctors to the province of Manitoba every year since taking office. That's a total net gain of 288; 105 of those are in rural Manitoba, but we're continuing to commit to bring doctors to all regions of the province.

Mr. Briese: Nearly 1,500 doctors have left this province under this NDP government. The area I refer to encompasses a huge area of Manitoba, from Portage la Prairie to Dauphin, from the Riding Mountains to Lake Manitoba. Many people in this

area, including some 200 or 300 new immigrants and at least three First Nation communities, cannot access family doctors. Many of the hospital ERs in the area are closed as well.

Why has the Minister of Health failed to meet the health-care needs in such a large area of this province?

Ms. Oswald: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the most important things that we can do, aside from growing our own doctors here at home, and, of course, we are achieving that by raising the level of seats in our medical school, which is in stark contrast, incidentally, and highly ironic coming from the member opposite who chose, during difficult economic times, the last time they hit Manitoba, to cut the spaces in medical school.

In addition to that, an important thing that we can do is build capital in places in rural Manitoba. We know that we have renovated or newly built over 65 facilities across rural Manitoba. We've brought technology to rural Manitoba. We brought programs to rural Manitoba. We're going to continue to work on it to build our commitment of bringing 100 more doctors, which is a hundred more than they promised to bring during the election. Their promise was zero.

Mr. Briese: Mr. Speaker, I'll remind the minister once again, nearly 1,500 doctors have left this province under this NDP government. The shortage of family doctors is not unique to one RHA. The area I represent includes parts of three RHAs: Parkland, Central and Assiniboine. I would suggest that the shortage of family doctors is systemic in all regions of Manitoba.

This is a government that promised to fix health care 10 years ago. Will the minister commit today to addressing this issue sooner rather than later?

* (14:10)

Ms. Oswald: Well, Mr. Speaker, shortage of doctors is a national and an international challenge. We know that it's not unique to Manitoba. We know that our record on investing in rural health-care facilities is clear.

I spoke about investing in 65 health-care facilities. We know that we're investing in a \$5-million redevelopment of the Portage ER. We know we've brought CT scanners to Brandon, Steinbach, Thompson, The Pas, Selkirk, Morden-Winkler, Portage la Prairie, the first MRIs

outside of Winnipeg in Brandon and Boundary Trails, a new mobile ultrasound for Eriksdale, over 160 ambulances, Mr. Speaker, replacing the whole fleet, adding new community cancer programs to Neepawa, Russell, Hamiota, Deloraine, Pinawa, committing to providing expansions to Ste. Anne, Gimli, Peguis, Berens River—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Seven Oaks Hospital Emergency Surgeries

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I am very concerned in terms of the quality of patient care and the misinformation of what I believe is being circulated in the north end of Winnipeg in particular.

Mr. Speaker, I've had two public meetings. I've had meetings with individuals in the malls to share with them concerns with what this government is doing at the Seven Oaks Hospital. They are cutting back emergency general surgery. This government, on the other hand, is trying to give the impression that they are not having cutbacks, that everything's wonderful at Seven Oaks Hospital. They're even saying this in e-mails.

Mr. Speaker, the minister time and time again tries to give the impression that everything's okay at Seven Oaks Hospital. My question to the Premier (Mr. Doer): Will he not recognize that it is to the detriment of patient safety by trying to give Manitobans the impression that there are no cutbacks in services at the Seven Oaks Hospital?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, well, to begin, the member opposite speaks about making misleading statements.

Yesterday when we were in the House the member spoke during concurrence saying that there was nowhere in print that he had ever said anything about bringing heart surgery back to community hospitals, in direct contradiction to what his own leader recommends and what Dr. Koshal recommended. I can tell the member that it's directly in print in the *Ang Peryodiko* Filipino newspaper, where the member says that I operate on the assumption that if a person has a heart attack that he or she should be able to go to any emergency facility and get operated on if necessary.

He said it was nowhere in print. It's absolutely in print in the Filipino newspaper. He has no credibility

on so many issues so far, and let's add this one to the list.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that the minister reads my articles that I write for *Ang Peryodiko*. I applaud that. Hopefully she'll take some action on many of the suggestions that I put in there.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health and this government are giving people in the North End the wrong impression by trying to say that there are no changes, that everything is status quo at the Seven Oaks Hospital. This is not in the best interest of patient safety.

I'm looking for leadership from the Premier (Mr. Doer), from a Premier who at one time used to stand up for Seven Oaks Hospital and be honest and tell Manitobans that are using the Seven Oaks Hospital that there has been a cut in emergency general surgeries which is to the detriment of people living in the North End, Mr. Speaker. That's a fact, Madam Minister, and no matter how you try to spin it, you cannot change the fact.

Ms. Oswald: Mr. Speaker, what is a fact is that yesterday in this House, with his hand over his heart, the Member for Inkster said, there is nowhere in print such a statement and you are making that up, Madam Minister.

We see clearly in print in this article that he is suggesting, against the recommendations of Dr. Koshal, against his own leader who is, of course, a doctor, that cardiac surgeries should be done. So that's just one thing that is a fact. I was sure he was going to stand up and apologize for those statements made yesterday. I'm still waiting.

Further, Mr. Speaker, and more alarmingly, he's spreading information in his area of town that the emergency room at Seven Oaks is closed. He's frightening and misleading seniors, and it's irresponsible.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the person who's being irresponsible here is the Minister of Health and the behaviour of the Premier by not telling the truth in terms of what is happening at the Seven Oaks Hospital.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

We just had the discussion a little earlier about picking our words carefully. Not telling the truth is not a parliamentary word that any Speaker would accept. I ask the member to withdraw that word.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I withdraw that.

Mr. Speaker: You have the floor.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the government, on the one hand, is trying to say that everything's okay at Seven Oaks emergency; there have been no changes of any consequence. We know in reality there have been significant changes in general surgery, emergency general surgery. There have been incidents that have occurred at Seven Oaks Hospital emergency that have been life threatening and decisions that ultimately have been providing in question the quality of care for patients.

This is a very serious issue, and I'm asking for the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) to be honest and tell Manitobans and admit that there have been significant changes to the detriment of providing emergency care in north end Winnipeg.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I would point out that the emergency ward at Seven Oaks Hospital had a \$10-million investment to expand the number of treatment spaces from 13 to 24. We have eight new family medicine beds in the North End. There are 1,235 more surgeries at Seven Oaks today than there were in 1999. There were 4,000 more CAT scans in 2008 than there were in 1999. There are 5,659 more ultrasounds.

We believe the efficiency in patient flow is improved, and I could go on, Mr. Speaker. The new contamination area and other isolation areas are very, very positive for the people of the North End.

Poverty Reduction Government Strategy

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Wellington): Mr. Speaker, today the Province marked 10 years of fighting poverty with a new strategy called ALL Aboard. It felt so good to be at the Crossways-in-Common at noon today to witness the launching of a homeless strategy with a focus on mental health housing. The church sanctuary was filled with community leaders, workers and housing advocates eager to hear a very important announcement.

Can the Minister of Family Services and Housing give the House more details about this vision?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Well, I certainly was honoured today to be joined by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), the Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross), many MLAs, business leaders, health and social service providers, the United Way and, indeed, those with lived experience, Mr. Speaker, to announce western Canada's first comprehensive poverty reduction strategy which builds on 10 years of fighting poverty.

But there are some new features to what we believe must be done to counter the scourge of poverty, Mr. Speaker. We're going to make sure that we enhance the co-ordination of our investments. There will be practical measures to ensure that, indeed, in a good, straight-up way we understand the progress we make every year on poverty reduction. Public reporting will be an important part of that, as well as integrated oversight and consultations.

Mr. Speaker, I hope all members will join us—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Land Value Appraisal Committee Length of Deliberations

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Mr. Speaker, the Fouillard family in the R.M. of Ellice have been involved in a land expropriation case with the Fort Ellice site for the past five years. It is now before the Land Value Appraisal committee, LVAC, for resolution.

However, it has now been two years since going to the LVAC with no resolution in sight, and both the R.M. of Ellice and the Fouillard family are looking for closure on this issue.

Will the minister commit to ensuring that the LVAC will complete their deliberations in a timely manner?

* (14:20)

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Mr. Speaker, it is an arm's-length

body. It's a body that performs an important role. It's certainly not one we would interfere in.

Certainly the member has raised the concern. Obviously it would be our hope that the LVAC would be able to deal with this matter expeditiously.

Mr. Speaker, again, we in government do not direct arm's-length bodies like the Land Value Appraisal Commission. That would be inappropriate, and I don't think the member would expect us to do so.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Russell, on a point of order.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Mr. Speaker, members on this side of the House feel extremely frustrated from time to time because we ask questions to gain information so that we can communicate this information back to constituents who raise issues in earnest. When we ask questions of ministers, we expect that there will be an honest attempt to not simply move away from the question and put just rhetoric on the record, but, indeed, to answer that concern that comes from us by way of our constituents. We are the voice of our constituents when we bring these issues to the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, it's true that decorum in this House does deteriorate when, in fact, frustration gets to a level as a result of ministers trying to avoid in every respect the answer that should be given and that was requested through the question.

Now my question, and I'm going to refer to my situation specifically, because my question was to the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) regarding asbestos in buildings. I didn't get an answer to that question. My constituents don't have an answer to the question. This is a priority because it is a health issue and because it concerns parents whose children may be attending schools that have asbestos in them.

The minister treated it very lightly. He treated it as though it was just a general question, and he went on to talk about how much his government invests in schools. That had nothing to do with the issue. The issue that I asked for was an issue that concerned the health and safety of workers, of children and of parents and teachers in our school system, and the minister chose to treat that very frivolously.

So, Mr. Speaker, I ask you to call the minister to order so that, in fact, he will answer a question that is asked of him for the benefit of children in our schools, parents in our schools, workers in our schools and teachers in our schools. That is what I am requesting, that you call the Minister of Education to order so that, in fact, he will come forth with answers to questions that are asked of him.

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

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I do not think the member has a point of order. I think this is one of those times in the House when I think it's appropriate to say that there's enough blame to go around and that, in the cut and thrust of debate in this Chamber, myself included, everyone got pretty cranked today. I think that all members of the House bear equal—*[interjection]* I know the Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler) is concerned that—*[interjection]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let's have some order.

The honourable Member for Springfield, I heard you very clearly respecting your reflecting on the Chair. I heard you very clearly. You said the Speaker only looks one way, and, you withdraw that immediately.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): I withdraw that.

Mr. Chomiak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the Member for Springfield.

What I'm trying to say, Mr. Speaker, in the context of this is that I think tempers and I think issues have escalated today, and people have been angry. It has gone back and forth.

On one occasion last week the Speaker directly made a very clear direction to me to ease it up and I did accordingly. I think today the member made a reference to one member. I think, in the cut and thrust of debate, that happens on occasion.

I don't think the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) intended to reflect on the Speaker at all in his comments or on the Speaker's rulings. I think the Member for Russell was frustrated, as we are on this side of the House sometimes. I think we all recognize that throughout your tenure that you have been even-handed in this House and that we all respect your rulings. If there's any blame for decorum in the House, it extends to all of us, and that

on occasion that happens and on occasion you are forced to ensure that we acknowledge that.

I acknowledge that today in your reference that you made, and I think it's an appropriate time for all of us in this House to take a step back and to recognize that we have a lot of business to do. We do most of it co-operatively. We do have periods of time when we are not co-operative with each other. We might have gone over the top a little bit today, and I think we all understand that. I think there's no point of order, but I think there's an acknowledgement in all members of the House that today was a little bit over the top—

An Honourable Member: Raucous.

Mr. Chomiak: —raucous, perhaps, and we're all responsible. I think that, in that spirit and in light of that, we should move forward to continue the debate that we're in.

I noted yesterday, Mr. Speaker, that we had a very good cut and thrust, a very good parrying back and forth and useful exchange in concurrence. I expect that will continue, and I expect that we can move forward insofar as with quoting and not quoting, and quoting back and forth different quotations. I noted it myself that I had quoted myself for saying something yesterday, and that I had not noticed that I had said the day before. So this happens. I think that, in the spirit of this Chamber, we ought to note that some of us more than others went over the top a little bit today, and that there's no point of order and we can get on with the business of the people of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised, I'm going to make a ruling, and then I want to make a statement to the House.

On the point of order raised by the honourable Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach), *Beauchesne* Citation 416: "A member may put a question, but has no right to insist upon an answer."

Also, I want to quote from *Beauchesne*, page 433—

An Honourable Member: Marleau and Montpetit.

Mr. Speaker: Pardon me, oh, this is Marleau and Montpetit: "The Speaker ensures that replies adhere

to the dictates of order, decorum and parliamentary language. The Speaker, however, is not responsible for the quality or contents of replies to questions."

That's in both rule books.

I want to make a statement, because there is probably some misunderstanding here. When we're in question period and decorum gets out of hand or a member insists on disrupting the House, what I have been doing is I have been looking at the member that is doing it and I will say order a few times and then the member usually stops.

I know that feelings in the House get passionate at times and that's the way it should be. If members cannot be passionate about an issue, I would question why they are even here. I understand that. I always allow a member to get their say, and when I've had enough of it, when people can't hear, then I look at the member and I say, order. I will never, never stop a member from getting their shot either way back and forth. I never have done that. I allow that, and then when it's gone too far or it's long enough, I say order, and I expect the member to stop; not ignore and continue on and on and on on every question or every issue.

That's the rule that I use. When I have signalled a member out it's because, to me, they've gone beyond the boundaries that I have set for every member. I know there was finger pointing back and forth, saying what about that side, what about that side. But when I look at either side, the member that is doing that, when they do make their comment and they get their shots in, when I say order, if they stop, that's the end of it. That's all I ask. I ask no more. I'm not going to stop members from getting their thrust back and forth, because that should be part of question period. But it doesn't have to be constant throughout the whole question or the whole answer. And that's the rule I use.

So I hope members in the future will pay a little attention, and when I'm saying order that should be enough for that one. You will get other opportunities. I'm not going to stop that, but that's the rule that I use, and I use that rule on both sides. I just want to make that very clear to the House.

So that should take care of the point of order. We will move on to the rest of the business, and we'll deal with members' statements.

* (14:30)

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS**Anniversary of Chinese Immigration**

Mr. Mohinder Saran (The Maples): Mr. Speaker, 2009 marks 100 years of Chinatown in Winnipeg. In the late 1870s, Chinese immigrants began to make their way to Canada after the gold rush in California. According to an 1881 census, only four people of Chinese origin resided in Manitoba. As the year went by, the Chinese community grew. In 1909, the first Chinese immigrants settled in what is today known as Chinatown in Winnipeg. They were mostly laid-off railroad workers who had moved east looking for work. By 1921, there were 1,331 people of Chinese nationality living in Manitoba, and 1909 is known as the birth of Chinatown in Winnipeg.

The Chinese population had undergone a tremendous transformation in Canada since the first settlers arrived over 150 years ago. They have experienced everything from a head tax that was imposed on Chinese immigrants under the federal Chinese Exclusion Act of 1923 to gaining the right to work in 1947. Today, Chinese Canadians are the largest visible minority group in the country and comprise 15.4 percent of total visible minorities in Winnipeg.

On April 21, 2009, the Member for Wellington (Ms. Marcelino) introduced the PMR in the House, recognizing the vital role the Chinese community plays in the province and thanking it for its contribution to Manitoba. It passed unanimously.

A special mention was also made to Winifred Paktung, the first woman of Chinese heritage born in Manitoba, who was named after her home town of Winnipeg. She is still alive and will be celebrating her 97th birthday on May 30, 2009. I wish her a happy early birthday.

Mr. Speaker, as we all know, the Chinese community contributes widely to our province in cultural, economic and social ways. To celebrate, the Winnipeg Chinese Cultural and Community Centre will be hosting celebration events throughout the year. I encourage all to attend.

It is a history that began with hard work, commitment and perseverance and continues still to this day. We congratulate the Chinese community for 100 years and celebrate its contributions and dedication in Manitoba and Canada and look forward to the future. Thank you.

Ray Loewen

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate a very special constituent of mine. Ray Loewen received Altona's 2008 Citizen of the Year Award for his extensive community involvement. His passion for people has set an example of how one person can and does make a difference.

Ray began his career as a reporter, a photographer and a layout person for *The Red River Echo*. He soon moved on to Friesens printers in the yearbook division. A year later, Ray decided to leave Friesens and join West Park Motors in 1973. He went on to become president and owner of this successful business.

Immensely active in the business community over the years, Ray served two terms as the president of the Altona and District Chamber of Commerce. He was active with the Sunflower Toastmasters Club, as a trustee on the former Rhineland School Division and served on the Altona Community Development Corporation. He has also served a number of terms on the General Motors Dealer Marketing Council for both Manitoba and Saskatchewan. He was on the Manitoba Business Advisory Council to the Minister of Education, headed a business coalition effort to save Manitoba's sugar beet industry and headed a fundraising committee for the Rhineland Pioneer Centre.

The local sporting community also benefited from Ray's efforts. He was a coach and a manager of the Altona minor baseball and hockey, as well as a coach for the girls and ladies' fastball. Ray has also served on various committees at the Altona Bergthaler Church. Ray's current involvement includes serving on the board for the Red River Mutual Insurance Company, of which he has recently been elected chair. He sits on the Altona immigration steering committee. He was a community leader in the Build a Village projects that involved building homes in El Salvador and Jordan and more recently sponsoring refugee families in partnership with MCC.

Appointed as chairman of the Altona Refugee Network, Ray has devoted endless hours in helping new families adapt to a life in Altona. This has included several families moved to Altona, donating clothing and food, sorting through red tape and providing rides to their appointments.

So may I ask members of the House today to join me in congratulating Ray Loewen. He has displayed sincere kindness to everyone around him. He has become a role model for younger generations. He leads by example and inspires other citizens in his community to become involved in enhancing Altona. He's described as an advocate, an ambassador, a refugee sponsor and a friend. All of these qualities are key ingredients in making him a very worthy recipient of the 2000 Citizen of the Year Award. Congratulations, Ray Loewen. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Vision Quest Conference

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): A few days back, on May 12, I had the pleasure to attend the 2009 Vision Quest Conference on behalf of the Premier (Mr. Doer). This year's conference marked the 13th year of bringing people together to discuss and promote Aboriginal business, community and economic development. This event was very well organized and very, very successful.

Vision Quest Conference Inc. is a non-profit, charitable organization formed through partnerships with six Manitoba Aboriginal Community Futures Development Corporations. The conference provides opportunities for learning, networking, information sharing, partnership building, as well as cultural awareness and entertainment.

Mr. Speaker, in the past 12 years, more than 7,000 people have attended this great event. Each year, the Vision Quest Conference plays an important role in shaping tomorrow's entrepreneurs, entertainers and the labour force; the main focus being youth and entrepreneurship. This year's conference was especially, very, very important given the ongoing global financial crisis and global recession. There is an old proverb that states: Where there is no vision, the people perish. This is true of the business world. In times of uncertainty, only those with a vision for their future will successfully navigate their path.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be part of a government that invests in the potential of Aboriginal business. Some of the recent initiatives we have established include the First Peoples Economic Growth Fund, the Aboriginal Youth Mean Business Web site portal and the Young Rural Aboriginal Entrepreneurship Program. University enrolment of Aboriginal people has increased by 77 percent over the past few years while college enrolment has increased by 60 percent.

I spoke very passionately, Mr. Speaker, encouraging our Aboriginal youth to participate in the business development projects throughout our northern and regional communities. I would like to thank the conference organizers for doing such a great job of bringing all those people with knowledge together. I would also like to thank Elder Luise for her wonderful prayer and motivational speech.

Mr. Speaker, we in Manitoba are fortunate to have very talented youth population in our Aboriginal community. Young Aboriginal people especially have much to offer. Let us all work together and grow this great resource, great province and build our future. Thank you.

Lieutenant-Governor's Winter Festival

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): It's an honour for me to rise in the House today to recognize the Lieutenant-Governor's Winter Festival for its recent achievement. The Winter Festival, which takes place in Brandon each year, was the winner of the Sustainable Tourism Award at the annual Manitoba Tourism Awards. Each year, the award is presented to organizations in recognition of excellence in product or service delivery and demonstrates sustainable tourism practices.

In 2003, Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Peter Liba was interested in creating an event in Brandon that would encourage the public to celebrate winter rather than simply survive it. Therefore, the next year, the Winter Festival was created and eventually expanded in its short history from six pavilions to 13 pavilions.

The intent of the Winter Festival is to be accessible to everyone no matter what their financial situation may be. This festival showcases the many cultural backgrounds that make up the city through food, music, dance and education. The response from the public towards the event has been extremely positive, as there were over 60,000 pavilion visits to the Winter Festival last year alone.

*(14:40)

Brandon was recently voted one of the 10 best cities in which to live, in a large part because of our people, our volunteers. Brandon may have a small-town feel to it but it definitely has a large heart. Volunteers are what make the Lieutenant-Governor's Winter Festival a success each and every year. The city of Brandon, through the dedicated efforts of Tom Keep and Esther Bryan have made the event a resounding success. I would like to thank

both Mr. Keep and Ms. Bryan, along with the more than 600 volunteers, for their continuous effort to expand the Lieutenant-Governor's Winter Festival.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Lieutenant-Governor's Winter Festival for receiving the Sustainable Tourism Award. I would also like to encourage all Manitobans to visit the pavilions at the Winter Festival as it is a wonderful experience. The winter festival is able to keep us warm in the dark, cold days of our Manitoba winters.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Elaine Bishop

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Wellington): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about an outstanding woman from our community who has made an incredible contribution to our community at large and was recognized with a Women of Distinction Award for her achievements.

Elaine Bishop is a truly unique woman in our community. Her objective is to work for peace and justice in our lives. Currently, she is the executive director of the North Point Douglas Women's Centre, which aims to create opportunities for women in North Point Douglas to develop their potential and to engage fully as citizens in their neighbourhood and in the broader community. Her interest in human rights has also led her to volunteer with the Aboriginal Rights Coalition of the Canadian Council of Churches, Mount Carmel Clinic, Sage House and the Mennonite Central Committee.

Elaine's belief in peace and justice for all has led her to work with the Mennonite Central Committee in Manitoba. She is a true role model. Elaine is not paid a salary but, rather, earns a stipend as a service worker, which is below minimum wage. She moved to Point Douglas to reside in the community that she loves and is working to rebuild. Her passion inspired the Point Douglas Residents Committee with support from the Mennonite Central Committee to nominate her for a Woman of Distinction Award.

On May 6, Elaine Bishop was the recipient of the 33rd annual YMCA-YWCA Women of Distinction Award under the community volunteerism category. Nearly 60 women were nominated for the awards, which are meant to recognize outstanding community volunteers, professionals and young people. Elaine's hard work, dedication, enthusiasm for Point Douglas and commitment to the Women's Centre were just a few of the reasons why she was recognized.

On behalf of all members of the House, I wish to congratulate her on her achievements and wish her all the best in the future as she continues to make a difference. She is an inspiration to us all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

House Business

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, on House business. In accordance with rule 31(9), I would like to announce that the private members' resolution that will be considered next Thursday is a resolution on problem gambling sponsored by the honourable Member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon).

Mr. Speaker: In accordance with rule 31(9), it's been announced that the private members' resolution that will be considered next Thursday is the resolution on problem gambling, sponsored by the honourable Member for Emerson.

ORDERS OF THE DAY (Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if you might resolve the House into Committee of the Whole.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, the House will now resolve into Committee of the Whole to consider and report on Bill 33, The Appropriation Act, 2009, and Bill 34, The Loan Act, 2009, for concurrence and third reading.

Madam Chairperson, please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Madam Chairperson (Bonnie Korzeniowski): The Committee of the Whole will come to order to consider the following bills: Bill 33, The Appropriation Act, 2009; Bill 34, The Loan Act, 2009.

During the consideration of these bills, the enacting clauses, the schedules and the titles are postponed until all other clauses have been considered in their proper order.

Also, if there is agreement from the committee, I will call clauses in blocks that conform to pages, with the understanding that we will stop at any particular clause or clauses where members may have comments, questions or amendments to propose. Is that agreed? *[Agreed]*

Bill 33—The Appropriation Act, 2009

Madam Chairperson: We will begin with clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 33, The Appropriation Act, 2009.

For the information of the committee, as the 100 hours have now expired, according to our rules this bill is not debatable.

Clause 1—pass; clauses 2 to 4—pass; clauses 5 to 7—pass; schedule—pass; enacting clause—pass; title—pass. Bill be reported.

Bill 34—The Loan Act, 2009

Madam Chairperson: We will now move on to Bill 34, The Loan Act, 2009.

For the information of the committee, according to our rules, as the 100 hours have now expired, this bill is not debatable.

Clauses 1 and 2—pass; clauses 3 to 5—pass; clauses 6 and 7—pass; schedule—pass; enacting clause—pass; title—pass. Bill be reported.

That concludes the business currently before us.

Committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION**Committee Report**

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski (Chairperson): Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has considered the following bills: Bill 34, The Appropriation Act, 2009; Bill 34, The Loan Act, 2009, and reports the same without amendment.

I move, seconded by the honourable Member for St. Norbert (Ms. Brick), that the report of the committee be received.

Mr. Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Member for St. James (Ms. Korzeniowski), seconded by the honourable Member for St. Norbert, that the report of the Committee of the Whole be received.

Agreed? *[Agreed]*

CONCURRENCE AND THIRD READINGS**Bill 34—The Loan Act, 2009**

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), that Bill 34, The Loan Act, 2009; Loi d'emprunt de 2009, reported from the Committee of the Whole, be concurred in and be now read for a third time and passed.

Motion presented.

* (14:50)

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Speaking to Bill 34, The Loan Act, which will allow the government to borrow yet another \$3 billion and add to our debt in Manitoba yet again.

Mr. Speaker, it is interesting because, a year ago, we were into some rather contentious bills here. If I may refresh everyone's mind, we were in the middle of Bill 17, which was attacking the hog industry, the largest industry in Manitoba, putting them under a moratorium. The downsizing of that industry as a result of the moratorium affects the tax income for the Province. We had Bill 37, infamously noted as the vote tax. Our party said we were not going to take the vote tax and the NDP reluctantly got shamed into not taking it as well.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

But the third bill that was rather contentious at the time and still remains that way, Bill 38, called the balanced budget, which was anything but balanced budget legislation. It allows the government to, using a summary budget, take the profits from the Crown corporations and add them on to their bottom line so that they could, in fact, actually balance the budget. That would be the only way they'd be able to balance the budget, to use the Crown corporations to do that, on a yearly basis, and they only have to balance the actual budget once every four years. We thought it was bad legislation at the time; we still believe it's bad legislation. But even apparently that legislation didn't go far enough for this government because here we are back now with Bill 30, and this loan act on Bill 34. This was before the economic pandemic that hit the world last fall, and has, in spite of the government's claims that Manitoba's immune to this, we are seeing the effects and we will continue to see the effects.

For that reason, I have a lot of problems with this loan act, Bill 34, and also with Bill 30 because, in Bill 38 they said, we will continue to repay \$120 million a year in debt repayment, as what was in the original balanced budget legislation. Now Bill 30 comes out and they're saying, first of all, we were told they were going to repay \$20 million a year, and now we learn that they're not going to make any debt payment for the next three years. While at the same time, though, our debt is going to increase astronomically. In fact, the projections are, for this year, for operating debt to go up \$1.7 billion. While the government doesn't want to admit it, we really do, we did, and we will continue to have more debt than Saskatchewan, Alberta and B.C. combined. That's putting us in a very dangerous position for the next number of years.

Of course, the Premier (Mr. Doer) will go on to say, yes, but the bond rating; the Finance Minister will say our bond ratings, we're getting higher rates. Well, of course you're getting high reviews from the bond agencies. Well, of course; you've got the taxpayer to back you up. It's not like a company with limited assets. I guess when you consider the taxpayer as unlimited access for assets and access to repay or to pay your debt—repay would be one thing, but just to cover the debt because they're not even going to make debt payments in the next three years and our debt is just spiralling out of control. It's something that maybe many people don't relate to on a day-to-day basis, but there is no doubt that this is going to come—it's haunting us now and it's going to affect us down the road, but there is no provision in this budget, in Bill 30, in Bill 34, to address the skyrocketing debt.

There are so many ways that they could begin to mitigate this and, first of all, certainly, it would be best if they just withdrew Bill 30 and continued to repay the debt. That would be, at the very least, what they could do.

There are many other things, and we're just given these examples day in and day out. We got \$13 million they're going to spend on an enhanced driver's licence that nobody wants or nobody's using. Even if you took part of that, everybody in Manitoba could have a passport that doesn't already have a passport. Now you could supply passports to the rest of Manitobans much cheaper than this enhanced driver's licence, and you still need a passport if you were to fly. I realize that many people who don't have a passport now are not flying, but an enhanced driver's licence is not going to get you on an airplane

down the road. You will still have to have a passport. So there's \$13 million down the drain.

We got this west-side bipole line, and I think it's underestimated greatly, Madam Deputy Speaker. They're talking about \$640 million extra to build this line on the west side, and I think that's, again, the shovel's not even in the ground. Hydro is spending money right now. They're visiting our municipalities out in southern Manitoba and western Manitoba trying to decide where this line will go. That's costing Hydro money to do that. I think this \$640 million is grossly underestimating what it will really cost, never mind the line loss and never mind the loss of valuable farmland that it's going to go through.

If they would look at things like this, we know that they could save money and spend less money. But, there doesn't seem to be any appreciation. They've been on a roll for the last 10 years. They've had increasing cash coming in every year, thanks to the federal government, thanks to their payroll taxes and other taxes that make us uncompetitive with the rest of Canada, and they've seen no need to be fiscally prudent in the last 10 years.

So we know that they are not going to do this. Apparently, they don't know how to do this or are unwilling to do this. Their debt these days is like the credit card that's maxed out, and all they're doing now is they're taking on more credit cards to pay off other credit cards. There's no plan at all in this to be able to—down the road where are we going to be? Down the road we're going to have a huge debt. We have interest rates that are historically low, and if any of the members here happened to be in business during the early '80s, like I was, and went through the 21 and 22 percent interest rates, I hope we never go back there. That was not a good time at all.

But, with the historically low rates, even if we go back, we're spending almost over a billion dollars a year, I guess it is, on interest payments every year. If that interest rate, when the interest rate—it's not a matter of if, it's when the interest rate goes up, we are going to have a serious cash-flow issue, again, just trying to repay the debt. Repaying debt, there's always a place for debt if it's used properly, but this government is not using it properly. They're borrowing money to pay for their pet projects, whatever it is they're doing. They're not using the money in a fiscally prudent way, and down the road it's going to cost us a lot of money—[interjection]

Good, good. A west side line is certainly prudent use of taxpayers' money.

An Honourable Member: It's not taxpayers' money.

Mr. Pedersen: It's not taxpayers' money? I thought the taxpayers in Manitoba own Manitoba Hydro.

An Honourable Member: Well, that's a good thing.

Mr. Pedersen: So it must be taxpayers' money then.

That's the difference is that this government and members opposite have no sense of ownership on this. It's not their money that they're spending, so they really don't care.

* (15:00)

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, we would certainly like to see—this loan act at borrowing an additional \$3 billion is a very dangerous move, and we would like to see it pared down. We would like to see Bill 30 repealed. You will not move Manitoba forward by not repaying debt, and that's the only fiscally prudent way to get out of this is to start paying off your debt and being competitive with other provinces. Bill 30 and Bill 34 are not going to make us competitive with other provinces, and with that, I will leave it there. Thank you.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I appreciate the opportunity to speak on The Loan Act, Bill 34. My colleague from Carman made a number of very good points regarding this government and their slow erosion of the balanced budget legislation which was brought in by the former Conservative government, I believe, in the year 1995.

A bill that, in some ways, was validated and signed off on by Manitobans because it came forward prior to the election in 1995 and was quite the topic of debate at that time, one of the more revolutionary bills to come forward in Canada because not only did it put in place the mandate that there had to be annual balanced budgets but it also had taxpayer protection provisions in terms of certain increases in taxes. It also had provisions for debt repayment, and at the time—now we look at different pieces of balanced budget legislation and think that it's sort of a commonplace in many jurisdictions, but at the time it truly was groundbreaking and leading-edge.

It went to the people of Manitoba in that election and they decided that they believed in the balanced budget legislation, that it was the right thing to do, that it made sense that, just as families and

individuals have to, or certainly look to balance their own personal budgets on a year-to-year basis—and they can't just continue to lend and to borrow money without any end, there had to be some restraint on that—that so, too, should governments live under those same principles and under those same restraints. So the taxpayers of Manitoba put a stamp of approval on that particular piece of legislation in that election.

Fast forward to 1999 and the then-Opposition Leader, the Member for Concordia (Mr. Doer), knew that this was a popular piece of legislation, something that Manitobans believed in. So one of the things that he ran on was to leave that piece of legislation, the balanced budget legislation, in place.

He made a promise to Manitobans, and I know that members on our side of the House look at those promises and we see them as important. We make this sort of declaration to Manitobans that they expect it's going to be kept. In fact, in the few promises that the NDP made in 1999, most of them were to do nothing, and one of them was to do nothing about the balanced budget legislation, that they would leave it in place, that they wouldn't touch it and that, just like Manitobans who had said in the election prior that they agreed with the bill, the NDP had had a bit of a conversion on the road to Damascus and said, yes, we also now agree with the bill. We're going to leave it in place. We're not going to touch it.

That's what they went with to the people in 1999. I think that that's something people wanted to see adhered to, they wanted to see kept, and even though there were struggles, I'm sure, within the NDP party, to have that promise go forward, it was, at least on that part of the election platform, the right thing to do.

But, since then, we've seen the erosion, the NDP slowly eroding this bill that they probably, truly, in their caucus and in their discussions, never supported to begin with, because we know that New Democratic governments, and this government in particular, and some of the governments in the past, don't like to be constrained and don't like to have to be fiscally responsible like most other Manitobans do in their own daily lives. So we saw the slow erosion of the bill, most notably last year with the debate around Bill 38 in the Legislature where one of the foundational pillars of the balanced budget legislation was taken down when the government decided that instead of having to balance the budget

every year, they would only have to balance the budget every four years. Well, what a luxury for most Manitobans to have that ability. Of course, there were other accounting changes and rule changes by allowing the revenue for Crown corporations to come into the books that would make it almost impossible for the government not to, under those rules, balance the books.

So it was a bit of a crafty handiwork by the government, a sleight of hand, and we saw the result, as many Manitobans from across the province came here to the Legislature, got past the door closed sign that had been put up by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak), and came and made a presentation to committee about how concerned they were that the government was eroding the balanced budget legislation. They came from all walks of life and from all different parts of Manitoba to express that concern. *[interjection]*

I know that the Minister of Justice is now attacking the individuals who came to make a presentation on that bill. I guess he figures he's attacked the mayor, he's attacked individuals—60,000 Manitobans—he might as well add on to the litany of attack by going after those who came to the Legislature last year. There might be no Manitoban left unturned who hasn't felt the wrath of the Attorney General (Mr. Chomiak) by the time his term in office is over.

But they came—

An Honourable Member: Just keep running the campaigns, Kevin. Just keep running the campaigns.

Mr. Goertzen: My name's Kelvin, actually, but anyway. They continued, Madam Deputy Speaker, to come to the Legislature and express their concerns with the direction of the government and tearing down the pillars of the balanced budget legislation.

I appreciated those concerns and certainly the ones that showed up here at the door of the Legislature were a small group of those who were expressing concerns through e-mails and through letters and through phone calls because it's not an easy thing to decide to come to the Legislature, to get past the door closed signs hung by the Minister of Justice, to stand before a committee of politicians and to have your views heard. That's not an easy thing for most Manitobans to do. It's outside of their comfort zone. So, clearly, those who came to express their concerns on Bill 38 represented many others, many thousands of others in the province who felt

the same way, but either because they didn't have the opportunity or didn't feel comfortable enough to do that sort of a presentation, but felt very much the same way about the bill.

Now we have, one year later, the government tearing down another pillar of the balanced budget legislation by doing away with the debt repayment schedule that Manitobans agreed with when the bill was originally introduced. They agreed with it because they understood, Madam Deputy Speaker, that, for every dollar you pay down in debt, there would be money saved on the interest that would have to be paid on that debt and that money could be either returned to individuals through tax reductions or could be reinvested into programs to support all Manitobans. It only made sense to them that there would be this debt repayment.

Of course, the debt couldn't be repaid overnight and so there was a schedule, a reasonable and balanced schedule in terms of how that debt would be repaid over the course of decades. But at least there was a target, and at least there was a goal and we were working toward that debt reduction so we didn't have to just look at other provinces like Alberta, and now Saskatchewan and British Columbia, with envy as they reduce their debt and ours was continuing to increase.

I think Manitobans felt that it was a reasonable approach to have a slow and steady hand in debt reduction to ensure that at some point in the future, even if they weren't here to enjoy the benefits of it, their children would be and their grandchildren would be. I say, Madam Deputy Speaker, it just made common sense. It just simply made common sense to have this debt repayment schedule. But along comes our New Democratic government, after having torn down the first pillar of balanced budget legislation and on the annual debt repayment and decided to take a swing at the second pillar.

*(15:10)

The Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) decided that he didn't even want to make the minimum payment on the Province's credit card, on the Province's debt, that he couldn't even live within that restraint, that he couldn't even live up to the goal that most Manitobans would applaud and say that's the right thing to do to make the minimum payment on that debt.

So now he comes here before this Legislature and says, I'm not concerned about debt. I'm not

concerned about what's being left to our children and to our grandchildren in terms of what they're going to have to pay at some point. He's willing to live for the moment, to live for today, and not to be concerned about tomorrow and it's not as though this government doesn't have a lot of other options.

You know, in many ways they, of course, are their own victims. They've put themselves in—*[interjection]*

Well, you know here's an interesting thing, you know, the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) and I suspect that this is the sort of trick that—well, I know is the sort of trick that the minister might want to use and point to certain projects and say, well what about this project or what about that project.

Well, we can do the same thing; what about building the Hydro line on the west side of Manitoba, 600—at least \$600 million? Well, now the Minister of Education puts his head down and looks at the paper. He might want to listen a little bit more. The crossword's not as interesting as this debate, Madam Deputy Speaker, because you don't have to cancel projects that should have been done a long time ago. You don't have to cancel projects that many other people have waited for and that they expect that government should be investing in. But you can look at projects like putting the Hydro—the new bipole line on the west side of the province, instead of the much shorter, cheaper and safer east side route and say, well there's \$600 million right there.

There's \$600 million right there, oh, but the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) doesn't want to have that debate. He doesn't want to talk about the options. He wants to go to Manitobans and say, there's nothing I can do. My hands are tied. We're going to have to cut this project, cut that project, when if he even just looks at cutting that one project, just that one project, he could fulfil the debt repayment for four or five years and fulfil the schedule by moving the project from the west side to the east side. That would take care of the debt repayment for four or five years.

There are other issues, you know. There are other issues, Madam Deputy Speaker. We could look at the vote tax brought in by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak), the long hits of the Minister of Justice. That's one of them. That's one of the classic hits, bringing in the vote tax and saying to Manitobans, we're going to take your money and we're going to put it into the NDP party. Just by

virtue of you exercising your democratic right, we're going to take money from you and put it into the NDP party.

Well, the Minister of Justice bowed to a little bit of pressure this year and said, all right, well maybe we won't do it this year but I ain't taking it off the books cause I might want to do it next year. Well, I mean, why don't you just talk about not bringing in that issue and then you'd have a little bit more money and you could put that against the debt?

It's all about priorities, Madam Deputy Speaker. It's always been about priorities. I believe Manitobans have the right priority when they say we can have a balanced approach, we can have debt repayment, we can balance our budget every year and if you have the right priorities you can still do the things that they expect governments to do. Thank you very much.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): I rise today to put some comments on the record regarding The Loan Act.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I find it somewhat perplexing that a government that claims to have such good control of their fiscal responsibility all of a sudden finds itself having to borrow \$1.3 billion of new money totalling in all, including the existing authority, we're at \$3.014 billion of borrowing authority.

Now, normally speaking, in times of recession these kinds of measures might be tolerated, but in the case of Manitoba we are already living on the good fortunes of other provinces and have been for the last number of years, nine or 10 years now in total, Madam Deputy Speaker, where the Manitoba government has basically been the recipient of the wealth that has been created in other jurisdictions. We have never seen such high transfer payments from Ottawa in the time that I've been in government as we have under this government and, of course, they've been able to then enter into all kinds of projects and brag about the building that they've been doing, but it's all been on the backs of taxpayers, not only from this province but, indeed, from other jurisdictions in Canada.

Madam Deputy Speaker, what is most disturbing about all of this is the fact that the government has had to, first of all, steal money from Manitoba Hydro in order to be able to balance their books. Now they've gone into the kitty again, and, still, with the massive transfers from Ottawa, they can't balance

their books unless they start to take from other agencies, such as Manitoba Hydro.

Now, one of the things that disturbs me most is the fact that now they're going to start changing the balanced budget legislation once again. One of the things that all Manitobans, I think, applauded in 1995, was the move to a balanced budget and to start making a serious commitment about paying down the debt of Manitobans, so that our children, our grandchildren, will not have to burden this debt that we have created in this province.

But, once again, this government, like the government of Howard Pawley, has no concern about debt. They will borrow to the nth degree, and they really don't care about what kind of a legacy they leave for our children and great-grandchildren, Madam Deputy Speaker, as long as times are good for them. As one of their MLAs said to me, he said, you know, every once in a while the Conservatives get elected and they put the financial house in order and then we come back and we're able to spend again. That came from the mouth of a fairly senior NDP MLA. As a matter of fact, someone who actually holds a Cabinet position.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, we understand where they're coming from, and so Manitobans should as well, because ordinary Manitobans understand the importance of having a balanced budget in their own house. They understand the reason that, as a government, we should be running a house that has a balanced budget. We should be running a financial house that has the means to be able to pay for the things that we buy and for the services that are provided.

But, Madam Deputy Speaker, the previous speaker, the Member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), pointed out that if the government would only listen to what Manitobans are saying with regard to the west-side hydro line that they're proposing and put it on the east side, where it should be, they could save enough money to make a number of payments on the debt that this province has. But, instead of doing that, they're going to fritter away all of that money because of a philosophical bent, and they will cost Manitobans over \$600 million more by putting that line where it is rather than by listening to Manitobans and putting the line where it should be. And, again, that's money that'll have to be borrowed. It's not money that they've found somewhere as a new source of revenue. It's money that's going to have to

be borrowed on the backs of taxpayers in this province.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, the government has to find its way in terms of starting to look at the financial house in this Province as one that needs to be put in order. We can't simply borrow our way out of debt. That has been tried before in the Pawley administration, it failed then and it's going to fail now.

Madam Deputy Speaker, if you were to divide this debt by the number of citizens that we have in this province, it comes out to about \$1,500 per man, woman and child of new debt that this province has to undertake. Now, that's significant, because there is not only the debt, there is also the interest on the debt that has to be paid back by each and every citizen of this province. We know that in the course of our lifetime, those of us who are sitting in this Chamber are never ever going to see that debt repaid. It will have to be repaid by future members of this House, by future generations and, indeed, some of that debt will still be paid back by our great-grandchildren. Now, is the kind of legacy that this Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) really wants to leave to the citizens and the future citizens of this province? Because that's what he's really doing.

* (15:20)

Madam Deputy Speaker, the other part of this is the fact that now the government has decided that not only will it, by the bill that was passed last year, have to only balance its budget of books once every four years, today we now have a bill before this House that says the government does not have to repay any of its obligations this year.

Now we accepted the fact that, you know, sometimes you have to slow down your debt repayments, but nevertheless you should make an effort to make a debt repayment of some kind. The Minister of Finance has now found it impossible. He points and he points to specific projects that wouldn't be done if he couldn't do this, if he wasn't allowed to proceed with his plan not to repay any of the debt in this next fiscal year. Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, I say that's wrong, because I think Manitobans supported, in 1995, the concept of balanced budgets, the concept of making a payment on your obligations each and every single year, the concept that we have to account for the debts that we create and we have to make sure that we are there to pay them back.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, we are not going to be in favour of what this Minister of Finance is proposing to the House. This loan act authority simply says that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) and the Premier (Mr. Doer) cannot get their house in order. They have a spending habit that they can't control, and because of that they are causing Manitobans to go further and further into debt, and that's not leadership, that's not leadership.

I know the former Minister of Finance, Clayton Manness, took a lot of heat because he was bold enough to control spending. He was bold enough to come forward with a plan that mandated that this Province would repay its debt on an annual basis, chip away at that debt, and I think at that time the forecast was that in 30 years, in 30 years this Province could, in fact, pay back its debt. Well, where are we today? Where are we today, Madam Deputy Speaker? If we continued on that plan that Clayton Manness had put forward, maybe with the debt that's been added by this government we could be out of debt in 50 years. I don't even know if that's possible, and now the Minister of Finance has taken a move that will even make that window of opportunity less likely to be achievable.

So I find it regrettable that the Minister of Finance has taken this regressive course of action. We certainly are not going to support Bill 30. We're not going to support his objectives of, you know, absolving him of the responsibility to continue to pay down the debt. We want to hold his feet to the fire and ensure that, like other ministers of Finance in the past he too has to ensure that his obligations are met and that he pays back the debt as Minister of Finance as he's obliged to under the balanced budget legislation.

With those comments, Madam Deputy Speaker, I find that it's reprehensible that we have to be debating a bill like this in the House today.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): I would like to put some words on the record with regard to Bill 34, The Loan Act. This act is another piece of legislation that actually is going to further gut Manitoba's balanced budget legislation, and I think that there are a number of things that I would like to put on the record as to the reasons why I believe that is so.

The Loan Act is actually going to increase government's borrowing authority to increase Manitoba's gross debt by a substantial amount of money. It's going to take the debt, which is right now \$21 billion gross debt and take it to \$23.5 billion,

and that's significant, because it's significant in that, as the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) had indicated, it's not only the debt itself that is going to be a burden on Manitobans, but it's also going to be the interest that we have to pay on this debt. As a family of four, I'm seeing, you know, \$21,000 being tacked on, not only myself, my husband and each of my children, and that's a significant amount of money. Madam Deputy Speaker, \$21,000 for myself, my husband and each of my children and every Manitoban is a significant financial challenge that I don't feel very comfortable about.

The Minister of Finance has talked about the debt-to-GDP ratio and has bragged about how he has it under control and various things. But, you know what, Madam Deputy Speaker, that is now changing; that is actually going out of control. It's increasing. I think he's failing Manitobans by not being able to get that under control and failed to do his job in providing some safeguards to ensure that was taken care of.

B.C.'s debt-to-GDP ratio is 15.8 percent; Alberta is zero; Saskatchewan is 6.3; and Manitoba is 23 percent and climbing and climbing and climbing. So I think that we have some very serious red flags. The government obviously is colour-blind because they should have been seeing a number of red flags in various departments. But, again, they have failed to see these red flags which are definitely going to be a major problem, not only for Manitobans today but for generations to come.

I'd like to speak a little bit about this government's track record on a number of issues, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have here a card, and I was told to keep it. It was something that was provided during the 1999 election, I believe. It was talking about commitments to you and your family. It's a little card that was given out to Manitobans and there were five commitments that were identified there. I'm going to just speak to No. 5, and it says: We'll keep balanced budget legislation. Then there's a statement from the Premier (Mr. Doer) on this and it says: It's time for a government that's in touch with the hopes and dreams of today's Manitobans. The No. 5 commitment was we'd keep balanced budget legislation in place.

So I think by keeping this card actually has demonstrated to me that this government can't keep a promise. It cannot keep its promises to Manitobans. I think that the government might want to go back in some of their election material and actually have a

look at that and see what they can do about reversing this decision.

There are number of wasted dollars by this government over the last 10 years. I'm going to just go through a number of them shortly and indicate, ask Manitobans what they think about this government's mismanagement on several files.

In Agriculture, there is an untendered contract to Clay Serby, a former NDP Agriculture minister from Saskatchewan. That was \$23,975 put to waste, Madam Deputy Speaker. I think that there are a lot of really talented rural development officers out there in Manitoba who could have easily given the minister the advice that she needed. People that actually live in these communities and raise their families in these communities and actually could have provided the advice that the minister needs to make rural Manitoba a stronger place for families to live and grow.

Spirited Energy: \$3 million. A sound stage purchase: another \$3 million. A loan to a B.C. baker for \$300,000.

On that point, I would like to raise the point in the bill on page—or on the schedule, it looks like they're going to be giving the Communities Economic Development Fund an additional \$15.5 million. I'm wondering how many doughnuts that actually will feed in Manitoba. I really am concerned, \$15 million in the Communities Economic Development Fund. I really would like to know what this government is going to do with regard to determining the feasibility on these projects.

*(15:30)

Northern Manitoba has one of the highest rates of unemployment, 90 percent in some of the northern communities. I think they look to this fund as a support for these peoples in these communities. They want to see a fund that's actually going to help grow businesses and help communities survive in northern Manitoba. So we would like to see what type of criteria is going to be used to determine the feasibility of these types of loans. What indicators are going to determine the economic enterprise success rates? We need to know what Treasury Board is going to be doing in ensuring that they do their due diligence when they look at loans over \$200,000, to ensure that these dollars go to communities and actually to businesses and to individuals who can actually sustain and help grow

northern Manitoba businesses and communities, Madam Deputy Speaker. So I really am looking at this fund and I want to see this government show some leadership and actually use this fund in a way that it is intended, and to help Manitobans who are wanting to make a difference in their communities in northern Manitoba.

I'm extremely, extremely concerned with this bill. I'm extremely concerned that they're going to be wasting away more Manitoba taxpayer dollars. They've missed opportunities. The east side Hydro line: excellent economic opportunity for people along the east side, \$640 million. There's just so many cost overruns and so many bad decisions by this government, that we have seen so many dollars being wasted and not going to where they should be going.

So I want to close on my statements today and indicate that I am wanting to see this government actually do something with regard to debt repayment and look at investing in the future so that my children and Manitoba's children don't have to be worrying about this NDP government's waste and this NDP government's inability to toe the line and actually make a difference in Manitoba and make us competitive across the country. Thank you.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I am pleased to stand in the House today and put a few words on the record with respect to Bill 34, The Loan Act, 2009.

I would encourage members opposite—I know from their seats many of them are yelling things out in the House as we're standing up and debating this bill. I would encourage them, too, to stand before Manitobans and stand up in this Legislature and contribute to this debate because they obviously have things to say from their seats. So I think they should stand in their seats and put some words on the record. I would encourage each and every one of the members opposite not to allow this bill to go through, not to support this bill.

This bill, Madam Deputy Speaker, is the equivalent of letting a child loose in a candy store, locking the door and throwing away the key. That's the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger). It's allowing the Minister of Finance the power and the ability to spend more and borrow more money. We see what he's done with the spending spree that he's been on and his government has been on for almost 10 years now in this province. They've spent things on so

many different things. They're talking about spending money on a Bipole III line that—an extra \$650 million on that, talking about purchasing doughnut shops, et cetera. So I think members opposite should stand in this House and join with us in not supporting this bill and not allowing it to go through.

There are several issues that we have with this bill. One thing, actually, I'd like to point out with respect to the bill itself, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that section 2 says that—it is entitled "Increase in government's borrowing authority," and it says, I quote: "The authority of the government to borrow for purposes other than to refinance debt is increased by \$2,300,000,000." So that gives the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) an extra cushion of \$2.3 billion to go out and spend that amount of money in Manitoba. I would note that, in the Minister of Finance's own budget books, under the borrowing requirements for 2009 and 2010, it says under new cash requirements that new cash requirements are some \$1.78 billion.

So there's a bit of a discrepancy there, Madam Deputy Speaker, of the difference between \$1.78 billion and \$2.3 billion—some \$520 million. So that is an extra \$520 million that the Minister of Finance, under this act, is allowing himself to borrow over and above what his own budget books are requiring him to borrow.

So, to me, Madam Deputy Speaker, that raises a huge red flag. This allows the Minister of Finance—where is that 520? Why is that cushion built in there in this legislation, the extra \$520 million? What is the plan required for that? What is the hidden agenda, the hidden spending agenda, from this Minister of Finance?

I am extremely concerned. We know, from the past, that he, his government, members opposite and members of the Crown, Madam Deputy Speaker, have a serious spending problem in this Province. It concerns me, when the actual budget books say one thing, but then they're bringing forward legislation that says something else. So, in one instance, we're talking about \$1.78 billion that they're required to borrow for their budget purposes, their borrowing requirements, Madam Deputy Speaker, yet they're bringing forward a legislation that says it will give them the ability to borrow \$2.3 billion.

Well, I would like to ask the Minister of Finance: What is the plan for the extra \$520 million? Why is there an extra \$520 million in this bill? I

think it is extremely scary that this Minister of Finance is allowing himself the extra cushion. What is the extra cushion for, Madam Deputy Speaker?

These are very serious questions that need to be answered before a legislation such as this is passed in this House. It's why we're here debating it today, because there are serious concerns that we have, there are serious concerns that Manitobans have, when it comes to the spending problem of this government.

Beyond just the spending problem that they have and the increase of the debt in our Province, Madam Deputy Speaker, we know that the members opposite have also introduced another bill in this House that we have serious concern with, being Bill 30.

Certainly, if we go back in history here a little bit, Madam Deputy Speaker, last spring, the NDP government introduced changes to the balanced budget legislation that eliminated the requirement for the Province to balance their books on an annual basis. Instead of having to balance their operating budget each year, the NDP can now balance their budget on a four-year rolling average using income from Crown corporations. This legislation was passed in the fall of 2008. On April 30, 2009, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Finance introduced Bill 30, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2009. This bill removes any obligation that the Province has to pay down their debt in 2009-10, 2010-11, 2011-12.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in the 2009 budget, the Province indicated that, instead of making the legislated \$110-million payment against debt set out in the newly passed balanced budget legislation, they would be reducing their minimum debt payment to some \$20 million.

Just weeks, Madam Deputy Speaker, after presenting their 2009 budget, the NDP introduced this Bill 30, and, under the bill, the Minister of Finance now has the authority to determine how much, if any—if any, and that's the key here—of the debt is paid down for the next three years.

* (15:40)

So, rather than rewriting legislation in order to balance the budget, we are calling on the NDP to take another look at their wasteful spending practices. There are so many examples that each day,

day in and day out, members on our side of the House stand up in this Legislature and ask questions about the spending problem, the spending habits of this government, the wasteful spending habits of this government, and each time we don't get an answer, but we know from year to year, from budget to budget, we've gone from when this government first came into power from some \$6-billion budget to now over a \$10-billion budget. The size of government is growing. The amount of government spending is growing, but the services that are being offered to Manitobans are in decline.

So we have serious concern with respect to this bill, and we have serious concerns with the spending habits of this government. This bill allows an extra \$520-million cushion for the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) to spend on whatever he deems fit, I gather, Madam Deputy Speaker by allowing this to pass. I don't know why he didn't just make the bill reflect what is in his own budget, the \$1.78 billion. Why did he not do that? Why is he building in the extra \$520-million cushion?

Well, that is the \$520-million question. I would suggest that members opposite, members of this government, should be asking the Finance Minister that very question as well. Why are they allowing the Minister of Finance, on their side, this extra \$520-million cushion? If there is that \$520-million cushion in increased debt in our Province, that ability to spend an extra \$520 million, what is that going to be? Is that an extra increase in the operating budget? Where would that money potentially be spent and how would this be spent? I think those are questions that the Minister of Finance should feel an obligation to Manitobans to stand before them today and answer the question about the extra \$520-million cushion that he seems to be building in for himself.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, this is obviously not a piece of legislation that we can support in this Legislature. I would encourage all members in this House to have a second look at this legislation and see that it is a scary piece of legislation when it gives the Minister of Finance of this Province the extra powers that he does not need nor does he deserve. Thank you very much.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I rise to speak briefly on this legislation. It gives me an opportunity to reflect on the situation of the present government and their budget and their plans for the coming years.

First of all, for a government which claims that it has a balanced budget, there clearly is, in the budget itself, an \$88-million deficit in the core operations of the budget, in the core revenue and the core expenditures. That, of course, should make us leery in interpreting and believing what the government says about this budget.

We have other reasons to be sceptical. I give you a recent example. Within this budget, there is \$52 million in revenue from fines. This is up from \$45 million last year. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) was asked what contribution the photo radar makes to that, and the Minister of Finance didn't know. He said it was the responsibility of the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak). So I asked the Minister of Justice what the contribution the increase of photo radar was expected to play in this increase of \$7 million, and the Minister of Justice said he didn't know.

An Honourable Member: Who knew?

Mr. Gerrard: Who knew? That's a real question. The Minister of Justice said he would get back to me, but he's not got back to me, so it must be very difficult information to get a hold of.

Certainly, when you have basic facts like that that the ministers don't seem to know, then it gives a certain level of credibility or lack of credibility in terms of what's in the budget. It certainly allows us to question and raises concerns for us here in this Chamber, and I think it should be for Manitobans generally.

I've also mentioned that we have some questions about the projected revenues from corporate income taxes. We suspect that they are higher than they will be when the numbers actually come down, and I think it's important to add that, in addition to the \$88-million deficit in the core operations of the budget, when the government is putting money toward infrastructure, a portion of those dollars is borrowed. So that will, as well as the \$88-million deficit, increase the amount of debt that the Province has.

So the government should have, at a very minimum, provided a plan to address paying off its deficit, getting us back on the right track after the recession. But, as I have pointed out before in my remarks on the budget, and at other times over the course of the last several weeks, we don't believe that that plan is there in the way that it should be there and that this is not as forward thinking as an

approach that will get us back on the right track and that will help us move forward and position Manitoba well for the future.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, with those few comments of my concerns about how the government is handling the finances of the Province, I will let my colleague say a few words as well.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): I do want to be able to raise a few thoughts and share with members actually something that I kept. I kept a document because I was told to keep the document. It was an election document that was issued by the Premier (Mr. Doer) himself, and on this document it says five commitments for you and your family.

It says right underneath that, keep this list, we'll keep these commitments. So I kept the list, and I'd like to tell you what it is that—why it was so important that the Premier wanted Manitobans to keep this list. Just in case the Premier lost it, at the end of my speech, I'll have maybe one of the pages put it on his table, so he, too, will have the list that I copied. I went and spent a little extra money to make sure it was kept in colour for the Premier—can't say that I'm cheap to the Premier.

Madam Deputy Speaker, here is what the list says. Number one, we'll end hallway medicine and rescue health care beginning by hiring more nurses and reopening hospital beds to reduce waiting lists. Some members say that it's done. Well, reality check: no, no, it wasn't done. In fact, the problem's even a little bit worse today.

Well I don't want to waste too much time of the Chamber by going through 2, 3, and 4. I want to go right to—now where do we talk about this balanced budget legislation? Oh, here it is, No. 5, we'll keep balanced budget legislation and lower property taxes. Some government members are saying, here, here. Well, to a certain degree, they were successful on part of that particular commitment, but I'm not 100 percent sure of that.

The point of it, of course, is the statement where the Premier says: We'll keep balanced budget legislation and then a specific quote. This is a quote from the Premier, quote: It's time for government to keep its commitments, and that's in touch with the hopes and dreams of today's Manitobans.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is what the Premier circulated throughout the province of Manitoba. I

think that he needs to reflect on it because you know what I believe, that the Premier has kept balanced budget legislation in one sense. He's created this shell in which, yes, you can say that there is balanced budget legislation on the books, but in reality there's nothing in the legislation. The Premier has, in essence, gutted it. It's similar to what it is that they're doing with Seven Oaks Hospital to a certain degree. They're saying we have an emergency ward in Seven Oaks Hospital, but we no longer do emergency services. We've kind of taken that away, and what a slippery slope we slide.

* (15:50)

It's one thing to say something. It's another thing to have it in terms of reality. That's what we need with this government. We need a reality check. The government says that we have balanced budget legislation, but, in reality, they're gutting balanced budget legislation. There is no balanced budget legislation. Sure, it might be there on paper, just like, sure, we might have this emergency hospital sign at Seven Oaks Hospital, but, in reality, you're gutting the services that provide the emergency. You're taking away the emergency service.

You know, you're doing the same things in terms of the legislation that we have before us. What is the government asking? This legislation is supposed to be about borrowing and ratifying the monies that are necessary for the budget that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) presented just a few weeks back. That's what it was supposed to be about, but this bill goes over and above that. It's requesting an additional hundreds of millions of dollars of additional borrowing authority.

Well, if I were a New Democratic MLA, I would be, duh, let's think about what it is that this bill is proposing to do. To what degree do you trust the Minister of Finance? Did you have any idea that the Minister of Finance was even proposing to do this? I suspect that they didn't know. I don't really think they knew about it. You know, I suspect that you have the spin doctors within the Cabinet, within—I wouldn't even say within the Cabinet—that inner circle of Treasury Board that says, well, we want an extra \$500 million. Don't worry about our—what do they call them?—"flems," you know, those birds that just kind follow you off the cliff? Don't worry about them backbenchers. They don't know. What they don't know, we don't have to worry about. They're just going to follow. They will follow the advice of

the government Whip, and the government Whip says, this bill we vote in favour of.

Heaven forbid, you get someone from the opposition or someone with intelligence pointing out the problem in this particular bill. What I'm talking about, opposition or some government member, you know what I mean, that actually wants to hold government to account for what it's asking for. Here you have a good opportunity. You have opposition that has made it very clear to you that the government, your Minister of Finance, is doing something outside of the budget. He's asking for additional authority for hundreds of millions of dollars.

The government backbenchers should be aware of it. I'll bet, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I don't know if they keep minutes for their caucus or for the Cabinet. I think, by Cabinet, there is a need for it, but I suspect that you will find that there was no one that posed the question to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) within the NDP caucus or within the NDP Cabinet, possibly the Treasury. I would be surprised—well, maybe I wouldn't be surprised—but, hopefully, someone in Treasury Board at least questioned: Mr. Minister, why would you be asking for hundreds of millions of dollars more spending debt authority in just a few weeks? Why did we not hear anything about this in the budget presentation?

It seems to be a fairly simple question to pose to the Minister of Finance, and I hope ultimately, before this bill actually passes, that MLAs, the backbenchers, will be aware of what it is that this Minister of Finance is doing. At some point in time, you know, you have to do more than just sit in the seats of the back benches. There is a role for you to play in terms of what this government is doing, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I can't believe, and you know, it would be interesting, for those members that are not here, I suspect that if you went and you asked them about it before, Madam Deputy Speaker, there's a good chance that they're not aware of it. In fact, I would like to see any sort of a memo, anything that the government could show that would demonstrate that it was actually taking this action to any colleagues. I would welcome that. I suspect that it doesn't exist because it's just one of those things in which you get this small, little circle of individuals that control all the levers and the power of the brain trust of the Cabinet that make this decision and everyone else is

just going to comply by it, because we're not hearing anything from the government. I appreciate the fact when issues of this nature are brought to my attention, whether it's from the member from Brandon or whomever else that it might be, through raising the profile of the concern because it is important.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

It is an important issue, debt and the impact that it's having. I might make, to a certain degree, light of it in some of my remarks, Mr. Speaker, but I'll tell you something: we all should be concerned, because as I said the other day, I have two teenagers—well, one's in his 20s who's no longer a teen—whether it's pages or young people outside of this Chamber, this is who it's really going to be impacting. At some point in time, the bill does have to be paid. At some point in time, we are going to be held to account to this. That's why I believe that there needs to be more discussion on issues that are of critical importance like this. Do we really understand, as legislators, the impact some of this legislation is actually going to have?

I think sometimes, maybe, some might be taking it for granted and believing that, well, because it appears here and it happens to be an NDP-sponsored bill that we have to abide by it and there's no sense of true accountability on it. I think that's wrong. I believe that all of us have a role to play. I was elected and I appreciate the fact of being an elected representative to this Chamber; I take very seriously my responsibility in terms of holding government accountable and providing options and so forth, Mr. Speaker. But I also have a role to play in terms of being creative with some creative ideas and suggestions for the government, and we do that. I like to think that through my support network we're able to bring some good ideas to the floor of this Chamber and sometimes it gets recognized and ultimately passed or acted upon. But equally, government MLAs also have a responsibility to make sure that some of these government bills are held to a little bit more accountability. At the very least, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) should have pointed this out in his second reading comments, even ultimately in the press statements that would have gone out in regard to this bill or first reading of the bill.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, I anxiously await to see more accountability on this particular bill.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): I, too, would like to put a few words on the record in regard to The Loan Act, 2009, Bill 34 that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) has tabled in the House, in regard to some of the issues of accountability.

My colleagues have mentioned today in this House part of the reason that we are speaking to this bill today is to provide the government with advice in regard to how they can be more accountable in the spending of the funds in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, but also to let Manitobans know just how much further in debt this government is providing each and every individual Manitoban. Yesterday, I had the opportunity of indicating that each Manitoban's share is about \$20,000 now and a family of four is \$80,000 that it would take to pay back the debt of Manitoba today.

That's just one aspect of it, on top of the fact that they have had some of the largest transfer and equalization funds in Manitoba's history, in fact, certainly have had the largest in Manitoba's history. Yesterday, I said that all provinces receive transfer payments. I just want to correct that a little bit, Mr. Speaker. They do, but they don't all get \$2 billion like we do. Other provinces, many of them get much, much smaller transfer payments than that and yet, on top of that, we get the \$2 billion of equalization payments as well. I guess I only say that if you take that out of Manitoba's context, the \$4 billion that we would lose from transfers and equalization, we would be in extremely dire straits in this province. Now, we're not going to be because that's a national formula that calculates the transfer payments, and so it's not all doom and gloom in those areas. But I do want to say that I am concerned and my constituents are concerned about the accountability of how the government manages its budget. When you bring a budget forward you usually stick to it in The Loan Act and be accountable.

* (16:00)

You know, you've got budget documents that some of my colleagues have mentioned today indicate that the total borrowing of the government would be in the neighbourhood \$1.78 billion for 2009-2010 when, in fact, this bill, as I pointed out yesterday, provides, and I'll quote: "The authority of the government to borrow for purposes other than to refinance debt"—this is not counting refinancing debt, Mr. Speaker—"is increased by \$2,300,000,000." That's quite a cushion, \$520 million, and so that's

why we're asking for the attention of the backbenchers of the government, not only in regard to a free vote on photo radar, but also in regard to voting on this particular loans act.

Why does the government of the day who will stand up and say everything is rosy in Manitoba and even the minister of highways has indicated that things are booming in Manitoba from time to time—I've heard him in this House say that. On the other hand, I've heard some of his members say that, no, there's doom and gloom all over. The financial situation is so bad that we can't even pay back the \$10 million worth of photo radar tickets that we've captured from unsuspecting Manitobans who were not speeding in these construction zones and when no workers were present.

I guess I would say that if things are as good as the government makes them out to be publicly, then why are they borrowing or providing a bill, a loans act, that gives them a 30 percent cushion in regard to the amount of borrowing that they have in The Loan Act compared to what they put in their own budget document which just came down some few short weeks ago. In fact, the budget, of course, was two months ago, Mr. Speaker, but this is quite a change for a government. This has certainly not happened in Manitoba's recent history, at least. I don't know whether the Member for Dauphin-Roblin (Mr. Struthers), the Member for St. Norbert (Ms. Brick), the Member for Assiniboia (Mr. Rondeau), the Member for Kirkfield Park (Ms. Blady), as an example, many of the other constituencies that are in the House today—I don't know if they would really want to have—what their banker would say if they went to their financial institution and said: Well, here's my budget, but just as a cushion, I want 30 percent more. I want a 30 percent cushion in this budget, because I might not be right. I just might not be able to figure this out.

Now we know that certain things can happen and catastrophes can happen, Mr. Speaker. We have large forest fires from time to time. We have floods as we've experienced this spring. We've also had droughts as experienced in southwest Manitoba in the fall of '07 and the spring of '08 that the government's still never taken care of, but we know that those things happen. The budgets that we've seen take into consideration those kinds of natural disasters in Manitoba. They do receive on top of that funding in disaster financial assistance, if it's bad enough as the flood was this spring. There will most

in all likelihood be a 90 percent kick in from the federal government in regard to the share of costing of those programs.

Mr. Speaker, if that's the case, why does a budget—I want to come back to Bill 34—why does The Loan Act have to have a 30 percent cushion in it, maybe a few percent or 5 percent even, but not 30 percent, surely, if things are as good as the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) makes them out to be in this province? Now I would suspect that they know they are in trouble financially as a government. Manitobans can basically be doing very well, but the government is not. In regard to the spending of this Province, when we've got the largest debt at \$21.167 billion in the Province, and when we've got the largest transfer payments ever, when we've got the largest taxation being collected by a provincial government in Manitoba's history, when we've got all of these fines and levies and fees that the government has put on tap, when we've got the increased PST that this government has been collecting since they came into government—on two different sources on two different occasions they've raised the PST as to what is taxable under the 7 percent PST that we have in this provincial sales tax, which makes us uncompetitive with our neighbours to the west—Saskatchewan at 5 percent, that's for sure—and other jurisdictions.

Even the federal government acknowledged that people would be better off with some of these taxation funds in their own pockets and reduced the GST—the goods and service tax—in Canada from 7 percent down to 5 percent. The federal government knows that that has been a pretty strong area of stimulus for the government, Mr. Speaker, for the citizens of Canada, I should say. It's provided some stimulus, as has the \$85 billion worth of—over the next five years announcement of dollars to be provided for stimulating the economy.

Ms. Erna Braun, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

A number of those were announced recently in infrastructure projects for Manitoba, and I will give credit where it is due for the provincial government matching some of those along with, however, the local citizens in each community and municipality that receive those funds as well. There's been a great deal of initiative taken in some of those areas.

But, surely, we have taken that some of that is in the \$1.6-billion worth of infrastructure that the government announced in the budget that they'd have, Madam Acting Speaker. I know that it's there

and the minister of highways tells me all the time—I have concerns about the fact that he is lapsing some of those funds from time to time—but to have to build in, on top of all of these gifts that you might say have been granted to this government, some of them from outside in transfer and equalizations and others from strictly increased fees that the government is charging citizens of Manitoba.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

Why would you have to build in a 30 percent cushion in The Loan Act to cushion your needs if, in fact, you had the confidence in the economy that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) of Manitoba is saying he has today?

I share the optimism of many Manitobans, but I don't share the pessimism that the government documents provide us. It's like you're talking the talk, but not walking the walk. Walking the walk would be to provide what you're saying you're going to do in the budget documents. Of course, we're seeing that in Bill 30, where the government is saying, well, we're saying things are great, but just in case, we'll eliminate the debt payments in our own balanced budget and debt payment legislation. We'll eliminate those. Not take them down from \$110-million to \$20-million payments like they said they would do in the budget, but eliminating them completely. Not for one year or two years but for three years, and that's certainly not what the government said they would do in their budget implementation bill, Bill 30, that's before the Legislature as well.

So that's why I have concerns. When you've got a—and I'll just repeat before I close, that this government has built in a \$520-million cushion by saying that they need \$2.3 billion when their budget document really only states that they need to borrow \$1.78 billion. They're building in a 30 percent cushion in case things get tougher.

But, Mr. Acting Speaker, that's what the rainy day fund was supposed to be for. The rainy day fund was to protect Manitobans and to help the government meet its balanced budget legislation in times of dire straits. Of course, this government doesn't think they're in dire straits yet; they just refuse to look at the rest of the world and think that Manitoba can operate in isolation of all of the other jurisdictions around us.

So, with those words, Mr. Acting Speaker, I believe that I will allow for others to comment on this bill in the House as well.

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): I am pleased to have the opportunity to provide some comments with respect to the matter currently before the House, which is a bill to provide added borrowing authority to the government, borrowing authority that goes beyond the—in our view—the requirements of government and authority that will further provide the government with a blank cheque to lead the Province further down the path of increased debt and less financial security for Manitobans, particularly in future generations.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

* (16:10)

There are two areas of particular concern, Mr. Speaker. One is the actual direction of the finances and the buildup in debt that's provided for under this act. The second area of concern is the way the government is presenting the numbers to the public of Manitoba in terms of its accounting policies. The one is designed to take Manitoba significantly down the wrong track in terms of the Province's finances. The other steps taken by government that we have a concern about are the attempts by government to obscure the fact that they're taking Manitoba down the wrong path, to present information to Manitobans that is not a true picture of the scale of the Province's debt and financial obligations, thereby creating a situation where the true picture of Manitoba's finances is worse than what is being presented to the public, thereby depriving the members of the public of the opportunity to have the information that they require to form their own judgments about whether the policies of the government are appropriate and balanced or not.

Dealing first with the issue of accounting, Mr. Speaker, the concern that we have about the way the numbers are being presented not just in the budget but in the quarterly and annual statements that follow each and every fiscal quarter and year in the Province of Manitoba—what the government has effectively done through the use of summary operating statements is to present an inflated picture of government's revenues and a deflated picture of the Province's total liabilities and debt, thereby presenting a very distorted picture to Manitobans of the true state of our finances. As an example of that, the government is including, within the government reporting entity, agencies such as personal care homes in the city of Winnipeg, other entities over which the government doesn't have direct control,

shouldn't have direct control and, most importantly from an accounting perspective, has no ability to access those funds that exist within those agencies, but is nonetheless including those revenues in its balanced budget statements, providing a very misleading picture.

The inclusion of Hydro net revenues, the inclusion of net revenues of other regulated utilities, creates a picture for Manitobans that would suggest that revenues are higher than they actually are when, in fact, those net revenues are and must be dedicated to either the repayment of debt at Hydro or the reduction of rates or investment of new capital at Hydro or some combination of those three things—not to be used for general government core operating purposes and, for that reason, should not be included in the government's calculations where they present to Manitobans a picture of the operating budgets.

If the government was going to be consistent and include within its operating statements revenue over which it has no direct access and control, it should be honest and consistent enough to also include the full debt picture of the Province, but that is, in fact, not what they do, Mr. Speaker.

The third-quarter report presents a bottom-line net debt figure of \$11.1 billion, but that figure is arrived at after taking out of the calculation the debt that now has been built up at Manitoba Hydro, at Lotteries and other Crown corporations, meaning that, in fact, the total debt of the Province, which includes Hydro and other Crown corporations for which the government has some responsibility is, in fact, closer to \$21 billion, which is an amount that is significantly higher than what the government is communicating to Manitobans through its financial statements. If the government wants to consolidate statements for the purposes of annual operating revenues, they should do the same thing when it comes to debt and present to the public a consolidated debt number, an honest debt number, of close to \$21 billion and not the \$11 billion that's currently being presented.

Notwithstanding those concerns about the accuracy of the picture that's being painted through the government's financial statements, even at \$11.1 billion the debt is moving in the wrong direction. It's higher today certainly than it was 10 years ago and with the bill before the House today, the authorization is being sought on the part of the government from this Legislature to increase the

debt by an alarming amount this year, in addition to the debt that already exists, which, in our view, is already higher than it ought to be, Mr. Speaker.

The government has been arguing now for years that we don't need to worry about debt because the economy is growing, and that means we have the capacity to repay this debt. That was the case in certain years when the economy was growing and allowed the government to present a picture of growing GDP that would enable the government to safely forecast its ability to repay its growing debt.

Well, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, what that approach failed to take into account was that economies go in cycles, that economies don't grow forever. In fact, the reality of what's happening today is that the GDP of the province is projected to shrink this year, not grow, even as the debt of the province is growing at rates unlike anything we've ever seen in our province's history. This means that, as our capacity to repay the mortgage and repay the credit card bills goes down, those bills are going up under this government.

Manitobans understand the recklessness of this kind of approach and the dishonesty of not presenting to the public the fact that, if you're going to consolidate statements for the purpose of operations, you have to do the same thing with respect to the level of debt; otherwise, you get a picture of inflated revenues on a year-to-year basis and deflated debt. These are very significant concerns about the ability of Manitobans to understand what it is that this government is doing and the sort of legacy that the current government proposes to leave to future generations and to future governments, governments and generations that are going to have to manage this large and growing debt, to repay that debt to bankers and bondholders, and to take that money away from programs such as health care, such as family services, such as schools, such as roads, take away from our ability to reduce taxes if appropriate and instead direct money, in an environment where interest rates are forecast to rise, toward paying interest and principal on debts that are accrued, bought through banks, and to bondholders.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that this underlines one of the main concerns we have about this government, which is that it governs only for the sake of day-to-day political popularity. If the government sees an issue that they feel is getting away from

them, their answer is the same each and every time. It's spend more, make an announcement, back up the Brinks truck, spend the money today, and don't concern ourselves with where that money is going to come from down the road. Let's not worry about the next generation of children in our province who are going to have to work longer hours or deal with a lower level of public services in order to meet and repay the debt that's being accrued today by this government. I don't think that this government would want it to be part of its legacy to have a massive debt left to the next generation.

The decision in Bill 30, the attempt in Bill 30 to get out of debt repayments for the next three years—after committing only six months ago to \$110 million a year annual debt repayments as the minimum payment—the decision in Bill 30 to try to get out of those debt repayments for the next three years is a further signal of a government that is absolutely desperate in terms of its current financial circumstances and absolutely uncaring about the impact of those decisions, the decisions that are being made today in this House and by this government, the impact of these decisions on children and on our grandchildren and on the future generations that are going to have to repay the debt. At the rate they're going, Mr. Speaker—even if they didn't add another penny to the debt after this year—at the rate they are proposing to repay debt, it is going to take more than 500 years, six generations of Manitobans, to repay the debt.

I don't think that any member of this House will want to have as part of their legacy, as their epitaph, that this was the government that left six generations of Manitobans saddled with debt; six generations working longer hours for lower pay; six generations with a lower level of health-care coverage; six generations with schools that aren't funded to the level they need to be; six generations of Manitobans paying NDP debt and interest payments to banks and bondholders rather than investing that money in roads, schools, hospitals and in the quality of life that all Manitobans will see.

It underlines, I think, a very different and stark approach between this NDP government and the opposition, the Progressive Conservative opposition, which understands the need to invest today but also understands the need to be responsible in terms of the position that we leave and the state of the finances that we leave for the next generation.

* (16:20)

So, Mr. Speaker, I know the government is blasé about the rising debt, and I know that they continue to maintain this don't-worry-be-happy attitude, that no matter how much debt we pile on, don't worry, somebody, somewhere else, at some point down the road will figure out how to repay it. That's the attitude of the government.

I think there's a cautionary tale being sounded today by what the Labour government, their ideological cousins in the U.K., have done to that country. Just this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, coming out of the U.K. on the *Times* newspaper on-line this afternoon, the headline is, "UK credit rating under threat as debt hits £8.5bn." That's the headline in today's *Times Online*, that the Labour government in that country has put at threat the United Kingdom's triple A credit rating because of new debt that's being proposed of 8.5 billion pounds in that country.

The U.K. already had a better credit rating than Manitoba, a triple A rating, which is a better rating than Manitoba's double A rating; however, as a result of Labour-NDP style policies, it is putting that credit rating at risk. It will mean higher interest rates, and it has already dealt a blow to pensioners in that country who saw a major hit to their pension funds today as markets went into a steep fall as a result of the prospect of a downgrade in that country's credit rating.

Mr. Speaker, it's all well and good to take massive federal transfers of the last 10 years and brag about what has happened with credit ratings while global economies have been growing, but it's quite a different matter to be continuing the trend of piling on debt even as GDP is shrinking and to put ourselves in a position where we may be not far behind the U.K. Labour government in putting a threat and putting at risk Manitoba's credit rating but, more importantly, creating a situation where future increases in interest rates may very well pose a threat to the well-being of future generations of Manitobans.

What the government is doing with this bill is proposing to increase our debt-to-GDP ratio, something that's already been highlighted by the Canada West Foundation as being alarmingly high in Manitoba compared to other western provinces. As we look at B.C., with a debt-to-GDP ratio of 15.8 percent, Alberta which is at zero, Saskatchewan,

6.3 percent, here in Manitoba our debt-to-GDP ratio is four times that of Saskatchewan, at 23 percent. Not only is that an alarming number in and of itself, Mr. Speaker, but we're concerned about the fact that it's going in the wrong direction. It should be 23 percent and declining. Instead, under this government, it's 23 percent and rising. That's the wrong direction for Manitobans, and that's why we cannot support the effort by this government to pass legislation giving themselves the authority to take us even further into the pit of rising credit card bills, rising interest rates and a reduced quality of life for future generations. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House is concurrence and third reading of Bill 34.

It's been moved by the honourable Government House Leader (Mr. Chomiak), seconded by the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), that Bill 34, The Loan Act, 2009, reported from the Committee of the Whole, be concurred in and now read for a third time and passed.

Mr. Speaker: Agreed?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Voice Vote

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

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

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

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

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

Formal Vote

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Official Opposition House Leader): Recorded vote, Mr. Speaker.

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

Order. The question before the House is concurrence and third reading of Bill 34, The Loan Act, 2009.

Division

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

Yeas

Allan, Altemeyer, Bjornson, Blady, Blaikie, Braun, Brick, Caldwell, Chomiak, Dewar, Doer, Howard, Irvin-Ross, Jennissen, Jha, Korzeniowski, Lemieux, Mackintosh, Marcelino, McGifford, Melnick, Nevakshonoff, Oswald, Robinson, Rondeau, Saran, Selby, Selinger, Struthers, Swan, Whitehead.

Nays

Borotsik, Briese, Cullen, Derkach, Driedger, Dyck, Faurschou, Gerrard, Graydon, Hawranik, Lamoureux, Maguire, McFadyen, Pedersen, Rowat, Schuler, Stefanson, Taillieu.

Madam Clerk (Patricia Chaychuk): Yeas 31, Nays 18.

Mr. Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 21, 2009

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