

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLAN, Nancy, Hon.	St. Vital	N.D.P.
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	N.D.P.
BLADY, Sharon	Kirkfield Park	N.D.P.
BLAIKIE, Bill, Hon.	Elmwood	N.D.P.
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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.
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MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McFADYEN, Hugh	Fort Whyte	P.C.
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MELNICK, Christine, Hon.	Riel	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	P.C.
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	N.D.P.
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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.
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SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	N.D.P.
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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

Wednesday, April 8, 2009

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYER

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

**Bill 14—The Consumer Protection
Amendment Act (Payday Loans)**

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Family Services and Housing (Mr. Mackintosh), that Bill 14, The Consumer Protection Amendment Act (Payday Loans); Loi modifiant la Loi sur la protection du consommateur (prêts de dépannage), be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

Long-Term Care Facility—Morden

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Mr. Speaker, I, too, 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 Deb Thiessen, Ron Wiebe, Barb Rempel 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.

**Ambulance Service—Eddystone, Bacon Ridge and
Ebb and Flow First Nation**

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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 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 Marjorie Mozdzen, Marlene Sucharyna, Faith Trotter 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.

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

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

The current plan to replace the floodway bridge on PTH 15 does not include twinning and, therefore, does not fulfil the current nor future traffic demands cited by the Minister of Transportation.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

Signed by Peter Kotyk, Jacques Lévesque, Louise Daoust and many, many other Manitobans.

Paved Shoulders for Trans-Canada Highway

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

This petition is signed by Rodney Sheane, Mary Carruthers, Emily Finlay and many, many others, Mr. Speaker.

Seven Oaks Hospital—Emergency Services

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This is signed by M. Hay, J. Hay, J. Hay and many, many other fine Manitobans.

* (13:40)

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Conservation): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table for all members the 21st Annual Report of the Manitoba Hazardous Waste Management Corporation.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Act): Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table the following report: the Manitoba Public Insurance Quarterly Financial Report, 4th Quarter, 12 months ended February 28, 2009.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Red River Floodway Operation

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): Mr. Speaker, due to the rapidly changing conditions on the Red River, the decision was made this morning to partially raise the Red River Floodway gates for the first time in 2009.

Engineering staff recommended an immediate partial operation of the floodway in order to mitigate flooding in southern Winnipeg. The gradual raising of the gates is expected to minimize the diversion of ice into the floodway channel to hold city river levels to 18.5 feet at James Avenue, while maintaining lower than natural levels upstream.

The operation is necessary to reduce the risk of flooding in Winnipeg as a result of the combination of high river flows and the potential for serious ice jams. We have never before been presented with water flows exceeding 47,000 cubic feet per second with such solid ice cover in the city of Winnipeg.

We needed to respond quickly to a rapid increase in water level in south Winnipeg. Future floodway operations will be dependent on ice conditions both upstream and downstream of the

structure. The operation of the floodway with ice is unusual but not unprecedented.

The horn was sounded at the inlet structure at 12:30 p.m., and the gates were partially raised at 1 p.m. in accordance with floodway operating rules. Affected municipalities south of the inlet structure have been notified as has the City of Winnipeg. The Province and the City of Winnipeg are on a high state of alert and are monitoring the situation closely. The city of Winnipeg has been divided into three zones with crews providing 24-hour live monitoring of river water levels and conducting visual surveillance for ice jams.

Both Amphibex icebreakers are on standby inside the city of Winnipeg to deploy in the event of ice-jam situations within the city. The City constructed three pads extending into the river at the Redwood Bridge, Louise Bridge and the south Perimeter bridge. Long-reach excavators will be positioned on each pad in an attempt to break up any ice jams that may occur.

I will keep members of the Legislature informed as to any further developments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the minister for that statement and recognize that, as we are sitting here right now, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen), the Leader of the Liberal Party (Mr. Gerrard) are with the Premier (Mr. Doer) as they are touring the area today.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all of the municipal leaders south of Winnipeg, in the valley, throughout Winnipeg and north of the city that have worked long and hard to deal with this impending situation.

Also, there have been a number of volunteers throughout the valley and throughout the city and north of the city that have been working around the clock to help sandbag and prepare people for what has been an unprecedented year with the ice jams that we've seen.

With the raising of the gate, the operation of the floodway at 12:30 when the horn sounded, I certainly got a lot of e-mails from people that I represent in that area telling me that they had been notified, and certainly there is a level of anxiety because it is uncharted territory as to what these ice jams will do with some of the structures that are there at present and with the earthen dikes.

Within the city, I'm sure that there is just as much anxiety as to what's happening and, certainly, we hope that this decision to activate the floodway at this time will mitigate rather than exacerbate the situation.

I certainly, again, want to thank everybody that has been involved and thank the minister again for his statement and look forward to future updates as we move forward. Thank you.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I would ask for leave to make comment on the ministerial statement.

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

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, just to briefly add comment in terms of recognizing the important role that our floodway does play in terms of diverting water to protect the city of Winnipeg, but, at the end of the day, we trust and have faith in our engineers and professionals that are recommending this because we want to do whatever is in the best interests in terms of minimizing flooding and ice damage in the entire region that's affected by it; and, to that extent, to comment to the degree in which to provide compliments to all those Manitobans that are coming to the table to minimize the negative costs of this particular flood and also to provide compliment to the government, in particular the Premier (Mr. Doer), in taking the initiative in inviting leaders of both the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party so that they, too, can get a fairly good understanding of exactly what Manitoba is actually looking at. We do look at that as a positive, co-operative way in terms of trying to resolve this.

We appreciate the constant updates. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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 from the Winnipeg Mennonite Elementary School-Agassiz 24 grade 4 students under the direction of Mr. Wes Krahn. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Winnipeg Regional Health Authority Investigation into Unrestricted Funds

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, businesses and ethics experts have called the WRHA \$20-million brown envelope practice unethical. Others have gone even further and called it influence peddling, bribery and kickbacks.

Can the minister please explain her naiveté in calling it courageous?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): We know that the central name callers in this issue really have been no further than the members opposite calling for people's heads, making accusations on issues that are currently being reviewed by the office of the Auditor General, a review that was invited by the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority on this practice.

Admittedly, it's a different practice than is used in some areas of the country, and, indeed, it's very, very different, Mr. Speaker, than any practice that members opposite used when they made no records whatsoever of value-adds that they accepted in their time in office.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, even the Auditor General said, and I quote: "There's no question it's an unusual practice compared to almost every other tendering activity I've ever seen in the public sector."

That's from the Auditor General, yet the NDP have condoned this practice since the year 2000.

I'd like to ask the Minister of Health to explain her strong defence of the practices when even the Auditor General has criticized the practice and is now investigating it themselves.

Ms. Oswald: The Auditor General has made those comments in the public domain. I accept those comments. I also accept the fact that the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority invited the office of the Auditor General to have a full and transparent overview of their practice concerning value-added benefits to the WRHA, things that include training for front-line professionals, additional equipment, education for professionals on things like chronic disease.

They welcome that review, as do I, Mr. Speaker, and, certainly, if there are difficulties found by the office of the Auditor General on this practice, we're going to accept those recommendations in full and

ensure that we work with the region to adapt that practice. We'll wait for the recommendations. I know members opposite seem to have some kind of sinister crystal ball. We'll wait for the answers.

* (13:50)

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health may be interested to know that prior to the WRHA requesting the Auditor General to get involved that we had already sent a letter to the Auditor General asking her to investigate. If the minister would like it, she can easily phone the Auditor General herself for a copy.

Mr. Speaker, the CFO of the WRHA was the one to call this a brown envelope practice. In fact, it was the CFO of the WRHA that said himself there could be cash in the envelopes, yet this Minister of Health, even hearing those comments, didn't seem to have any red flags go up for her. She didn't see a problem with this.

So considering she sees no problem with this, can she tell us if she allows this practice to also continue or also to go on in her own department?

Ms. Oswald: I want to be explicitly clear, as members opposite have certainly not been in their spurious accusations of members of our health system, that the WRHA has a very strict conflict-of-interest policy that requires staff not to use their position with the WRHA facilities for personal gain; to not solicit any personal gain regardless of value; that the staff shall not accept gifts, gratuities or entertainment and so forth. That's a very strict policy to which members of the WRHA adhere.

Another thing on record, Mr. Speaker, is the statement that before the region changed its practice in 2000, there was no system of accountability. No records were kept whatsoever. That's the difference today. The office of the Auditor General is continuing to investigate.

Winnipeg Regional Health Authority Investigation into Unrestricted Funds

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): In the 20-million brown envelope scheme of this government, we know that more than \$2.2 million was unrestricted and went to undisclosed recipients.

More than two months ago, the Minister of Health said that she would look into this matter and find out where this money went. More than two months later, could the minister please update us? Where did the \$2.2 million go?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Again, I've said to members opposite, spoken in the media that we support the office of the Auditor General investigating the practice that's being used by the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority concerning the acceptance of value-adds after the process of bidding has happened so as not to unduly influence the selection of a particular manufacturer or a particular company. The office of the Auditor General is reviewing this carefully.

We know that value-adds in the past, as kept in records since 2000 but never before, Mr. Speaker, go to things like educational seminars for front-line workers for chronic disease, diabetes and so forth, for additional equipment like ultrasound, for education of professionals. These are indeed values to the system.

Mrs. Stefanson: The minister said herself and I quote: She'll probe further to find out exactly how the money has been spent. This was from January 31. I think it's more than two months later. I think the minister either hasn't done her homework or she's embarrassed to say where the money went because it may embarrass her government department. Either way it's unbecoming of a Minister of Health.

So I ask the minister again: Will she indicate and update this House, where did the \$2.2 million go?

Ms. Oswald: I'll say again for the member opposite's benefit that the accounting of value-added monies that have come forward since the year 2000, the time at which records started being kept, have gone to educational programs for front-line workers. They've gone to equipment that help people on the front line. It's gone to materials and supplies that come with this equipment. It's gone to educational opportunities and professional development for front-line workers.

I think what's unbecoming of any member of this House is to make allegations about people's behaviour and their receipt of cash, which is completely untrue, and to disregard the fact that the office of the Auditor General is investigating this, and we welcome that, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, this is a very simple question and I don't know why the minister is refusing to answer it. We're talking about the \$2.2 million that was unrestricted, that came into this government department, and the minister herself said that she would look into this on behalf of this House. She is not indicating where that unrestricted money went. She's talking about all the rest of the money.

An Honourable Member: No?

Mrs. Stefanson: No, she's not. She's not indicating where the \$2.2 million went.

I'm asking a specific question. I expect a specific answer from this minister about where the money went. Where did the \$2.2 million go?

Ms. Oswald: I can tell the member opposite that unlike the allegations that have been made, the personal attacks that have been made by members opposite in the name of scoring cheap political points, the money has not gone to individuals. There's a very strict policy in the WRHA that prevents such behaviour, Mr. Speaker, contrary entirely to what members have alleged.

The office of the Auditor General is investigating the practice. I will say, for the third time now, that money has gone to equipment, to education, to continued professional development, and it will continue to be investigated. Asked and answered, Mr. Speaker.

Winnipeg Regional Health Authority Investigation into Unrestricted Funds

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): We know that \$2.2 million in unrestricted money went to the WRHA under the brown envelope scheme. In January, the Minister of Health is on record saying she did not know where it went but that she would investigate, Mr. Speaker.

So, now, more than two months later, I ask the Minister of Health: In accordance with her investigation, can she tell the House, was Dr. Postl the only person who had a say over where the money went or were there other people involved in that decision?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Well, again, Mr. Speaker, you know, the more things change, the more they stay the same. Members opposite want to smear and make personal attacks on individuals working in the system.

What I can tell you is that the WRHA has invited and welcomed the office of the Auditor General to review the practice, a practice that they admit is not the same as other practices across the country but, indeed, a practice that's moving towards more transparency, transparency that was absolutely lacking, no recordkeeping whatsoever in the time when the members were in office.

I can tell you that the office of the Auditor General is going to review the practice, review all the people that were involved in making decisions concerning the use of that money for education and improved front-line care, not a small point, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hawranik: I think the Minister of Health should read the WRHA policy where it indicates that the CEO has authority to access and authorize the use of those funds. So it's not a smear. Nowhere is there a smear.

The WRHA refuses to disclose where the unrestricted money went. The minister claims she did not know where it went. The minister, however, knew that the envelopes game was commonplace in the WRHA and, as a result, deemed it to be acceptable, simple as that, Mr. Speaker. Only after a public outcry about it did she have discussions, did she commit to follow the money. She committed publicly to follow the money.

So I ask the Minister of Health: She's had two months, over two months; did she have any discussions with Dr. Postl before January of this year as to where the money was spent or where the money should be spent?

Ms. Oswald: I can say that at the time that the policy was amended in the year 2000 to change to an open and accountable system where records were kept about where this money went, certainly I had not had a conversation at that time concerning that.

I can tell the member that we meet regularly with regional health authorities. We prioritize with regional health authorities concerning their budget. We continue to put money toward front-line care, which is what Manitobans want, and with this value-added money, a practice, incidentally, that takes place across the country, with this value-added investment and money, these investments have been made—I'll say it again for the member—to additional equipment, to educational programs, to additional supplies.

Members opposite suggest that I'm not aware of where this money is going. I've given this answer four times now. Maybe they ought to listen to it.

* (14:00)

Mr. Hawranik: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health knew full well that this shady practice was taking place. She knew that the money was going to the WRHA on an unrestricted basis. She knew that the

money could have gone anywhere. It could have gone anywhere.

So we're going to ask the minister a very simple question. She should know where that money has gone. She's had two months to investigate. We're getting no answers. So I ask the Minister of Health a very simple question. We want to know: Did she or her officials, did her colleagues or their officials receive any of the benefits from that money?

Ms. Oswald: Mr. Speaker, I'm a citizen of Manitoba, so when I go to the doctor or the hospital and have front-line care, I'm likely receiving some of the benefits of that. When I work with members of my family, who are living with diabetes, and I receive educational materials on how to best support my family members with diabetes, I've likely benefited from those value-adds.

But if the member opposite is suggesting, in the way that they always must lower themselves to do, that there are some kinds of direct value-adds—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable minister has the floor.

Ms. Oswald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If they're suggesting that members of the WRHA have benefited personally from envelopes of cash, or if I have personally, or any some such, I can tell you that the answer is no and that the office of the Auditor General is going to be reviewing all details of this case, going forward to ensure that this practice is appropriate.

Winnipeg Regional Health Authority Investigation into Unrestricted Funds

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, all we're doing is asking the minister to be accountable and transparent. That is what we are trying to find out right now. We have been simply asking, out of the \$20 million in brown envelopes, \$2.2 million was money that was not specified or targeted; \$2.2 million went wherever the WRHA wanted it to go.

We're asking the minister right now, seeing as there is no accounting of that \$2.2 million, where did the \$2.2 million go? We know \$1.1 million of that went into corporate administration.

So the minister needs to come clean here right now. Where exactly did the \$2.2 million go?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Thank you again, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to be very clear on this issue, that the WRHA, again, has a very, very strict conflict-of-interest policy, that they're also moving forward to expand to physicians in their employ where there have to be disclosures made between physicians and the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, and companies and the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, concerning any relationships that they may have with manufacturers and companies, a kind of agreement that will be, likely, among the first of its kind in the nation.

But they have a very strict policy that requires staff not to use their position with the WRHA facilities for personal gain, not to solicit any personal gain regardless of value, and staff shall not accept gifts, gratuities or entertainment from current or prospective vendors or suppliers that may have a real or perceived influence on their objectivity in the performance of his or her duties.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health is avoiding answering a very, very simple question. There's restricted money that went for research, that went for machinery and equipment. It may have gone to other things, but there's \$2.2 million of unrestricted money and it does say that the CEO of the WRHA has sole authority to access and authorize the use of value-added funds.

All we want to know from this minister and, hopefully, she's had some discussion with Dr. Postl, who has the ability to determine where that money is: Has she asked him where did the \$2.2 million go?

Ms. Oswald: Mr. Speaker, we have conversations with our regional health authorities concerning funds, transparency and accountability all the time.

On this particular issue I can say to the member opposite that there have been disclosures about a policy. The office of the Auditor General has been invited in, welcomed in to review the entire process. There has been an accounting since the year 2000 about where these value-adds were assigned, to educational programming, to equipment, to education concerning using equipment, to additional supplies, and the office of the Auditor General is going to continue to review this.

I might ask the member opposite, is it her contention that there should be no place for value-adds in any form in dealing with manufacturers or

corporations in the health-care system? Is that her position, Mr. Speaker?

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, we have \$2.2 million of unrestricted money, which means it can be used wherever the WRHA wanted. Half of that money went to the corporate administration office. Now, the corporate administration office isn't for breastfeeding programs. It's not for nurses to be sent on trips. It went into administrative coffers.

So we're asking the minister right now to please explain more clearly where the \$2.2 million went and, if, in fact, she could add whether or not she was wined and dined or whether she and the Premier (Mr. Doer) were wined and dined by any of these companies that provided brown envelopes to the WRHA.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Minister of Health.

Political Parties Public Financing

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the thousands of Manitobans who protested the NDP's attempt to take a quarter-million dollars a year from taxpayers and to stuff it into their political party, they scored a victory. The NDP experienced a conversion, a conversion on the road to the vote tax, by saying that they wouldn't take the quarter-million dollars. Well, they're at least not going to take it this year.

Can the Government House Leader (Mr. Chomiak) tell Manitobans whether he is going to actually repeal the vote tax legislation, or is his government just hiding in the bushes waiting to ambush Manitobans next year for the quarter-million dollars?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, I indicated that several weeks ago in a meeting that we held. I wonder if the member is going to ask his caucus, party, to pay back all the partisan mailings that they put into Elmwood riding about the money that is being paid, all the partisan mailings, the thousands of mailings that their caucus used to send into The Pas and into Elmwood during the by-elections and before the by-elections.

They were wrongly accusing this government of taking money with respect to that. Will they pay it back to the taxpayer, as we're going to ask for in amendments in this Legislature?

Mr. Goertzen: Politicians are sometimes partisan, Mr. Speaker. The Government House Leader and the NDP seem to have decided to take a year-by-year approach on whether or not they're going to take a quarter-million dollars from Manitobans.

Manitobans would like to know what the criteria is for the NDP deciding that they might take it next year. Are they going to wait to see and make it dependent on the value of Crocus funds? Oh, they can't do that because there are no more Crocus funds.

Maybe they're going to wait to see how much money they get into the Department of Health through brown envelopes. Maybe they're going to take that practice to see if that's going to be the criteria. We know the motive. We know the motive why the NDP wants to take a quarter-million dollars from the taxpayers and put it into their political party, but Manitobans want to know what the trigger mechanism is so that taxpayers can get ready and duck when it happens.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, if Manitobans watched question period today and heard that rant by the member, and if they're aware of the fact that, in 2007, the Conservative Party took \$1.1 million in public financing, more than the NDP, I think that member might want to change his tune.

In addition, when the public financing was brought in, I remember Gary Filmon saying: As soon as we get into office we're going to change it. Well, during the 11 mean, cutting, nurse-firing years they didn't change that legislation, Mr. Speaker. They didn't change it one bit. They took the money. They still take the money, and they're going to continue to take the money. That's why I think the position of the Conservative Party is known by Manitobans to be somewhat, shall we say, inconsistent.

* (14:10)

Mr. Goertzen: The minister makes my point. There's already enough money. Mr. Speaker, there's already enough money. Trying to get direct public money through a vote tax is a priority of the NDP at every level. In fact, the federal NDP were willing to hijack a government and sign a deal with separatists just to get the vote tax in Ottawa; you know, close friends of the newest Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie).

So we know that taxpayer funding is high, very high, on the wish list of this government, but a great Canadian once said that a political party doesn't need a wishbone; it needs a backbone.

Mr. Speaker, when is the NDP going to follow the advice of Tommy Douglas and have a backbone and repeal this tax?

Mr. Chomiak: I hate to say this to the member opposite, but I knew Tommy Douglas. And, Mr. Speaker—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let's have some decorum here.

Mr. Chomiak: —principles like banning corporate and union donations that we put in place on this side of the House that members opposite opposed, principles like maintaining Crown corporations like MTS so that all the public can benefit, that members opposite sold out to their friends, Mr. Speaker, are principles worth fighting for, are principles worth running elections on. We're willing to stand on our record and on our principles versus members opposite any time, any place, anywhere.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Steinbach, on a new question.

Correctional Facilities Investigation of Critical Incidents

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I was a little concerned the minister was going to say he knew John A. Macdonald, but that might be going back a little far.

Mr. Speaker, we learned yesterday of a tragic death of a woman who was in custody with a known medical condition in which Manitoba Justice was alerted about that condition.

We also heard today about a serious assault that took place at the Headingley Correctional institute regarding two inmates. There have been past experiences and past occurrences of violence in Headingley recently. There's been a recent escape. I asked the Minister of Justice in the fall of last year whether or not he would take an outside operational review of Headingley because of the overcrowding. He said, no, he was satisfied with how things are going.

I ask him again today: After all of these incidents, is he still satisfied with how things are going or does he maybe take caution that he's sitting on a tinderbox ready to explode?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, the member asked about the Headingley situation after a riot had occurred at the federal institution at Stony Mountain.

Unfortunately, a very unfortunate suicide occurred last week at Stony Mountain institution.

Mr. Speaker, our institutions and our people who work in our institutions care and do a lot to try to provide for the care of all of the people in the institutions. The incidents that occurred in the last several days, one is being investigated, obviously because it was between two inmates at Headingley. The other incident is before the Chief Medical Examiner, and I welcome whatever the Chief Medical Examiner recommends in this regard with respect to—and I welcome any direction the Chief Medical Examiner may make in that regard.

Overcrowding

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, the good men and women who are working in our correctional facilities are worried about their safety, and they're also worried about the safety of inmates in those facilities. As of this morning, the Headingley Correctional institute was 200 inmates over capacity.

We applaud the fact that the federal government is making changes at the criminal justice level for the two-for-one, because there finally is a government, at least, who's making changes, Mr. Speaker, eliminating two-for-one, putting in mandatory minimums, reducing conditional sentences. But that will do two things: first of all, it takes away the excuse that this government always puts on to the federal government, but, secondly, it's going to cause more people to be in our institutions. The overcrowding is going to get worse; it's not going to get better.

Why doesn't this Minister of Justice take this issue seriously and ensure the resources are there to ensure that those who are in the prison, working in the prison and outside of the prison and the public are safe and secure from what's happening inside our correctional systems?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): That's why we've recently completed a \$33-million expansion at Milner Ridge for 150 beds. We expanded Headingley by 26 beds. We added 22 beds in Milner Ridge. We're going to construct a women's institution, and we've added, in Corrections, 329 positions since we've been in office.

I just want to remind the member that his federal member of Parliament, the Honourable Vic Toews, commended this government's position with respect to Criminal Code amendments two weeks ago when

we were announcement and said we are a good supporter of the issues dealing with crime and dealing with these issues, the only issue that members opposite campaigned on the whole last election and campaigned on the whole by-elections.

The only thing they ever talked about was crime. We've worked on it, and we've been complimented on it by the federal government themselves, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Goertzen: The minister seems to think that his only role is to be a lobbyist for the federal government. He has hours invested in him as the Minister of Justice. The reality is that in our prison system right now, there's an 80 percent re-offence rate. We know that individuals who are going into those prisons have a high level of drug addiction. We know that many of them have gang ties that they continue on in that prison system. Even with the expansions that are going to happen, it doesn't cover today's overcrowding at Headingley. If every one of those beds was open today, even Headingley would still be overcrowded, let alone all the other facilities in Manitoba.

So with the changes that are coming from the federal justice system, it'll only get worse. He's sitting on a tinderbox. He doesn't want to acknowledge it, and he doesn't want to put the capital investment into making this problem better.

Is he comfortable knowing that more problems are going to happen if he doesn't take action?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, the job of any government is to deal with problems, deal with issues and try to solve them. From the day we took office, we said that gang crime was the most difficult issue that had been neglected during the 11 mean, lean, nurse-cutting years of the 1990s. During those years, we've added 210 police officers and 300 people to the correction institutions.

Mr. Speaker, we've made gang organization one of the top issues in the country. We formed an alliance with Québec and Ontario, the first time in its history to combine. We attended a conference specifically on gangs in western Canada two weeks ago in Calgary where we were lauded for the efforts put in by the former Minister of Justice for the act that's been copied across Canada, The Safer Communities Act, where almost 800 places of prostitution and bawdy houses and crack houses have been shut down, for our Spotlight program—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Seven Oaks Hospital Emergency Services Reduction

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I'm beginning to believe, genuinely, that this particular Minister of Health is intimidated by the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, that Brian Postl is actually the one that's calling the shots. You see that whether it's the brown envelopes or the decisions that are happening with our community hospitals.

Mr. Speaker, I think Manitobans need to be aware of that intimidation factor. The Premier (Mr. Doer) himself, yesterday, said, we will continue to listen to the advice of medical professionals, and we will continue to heed their advice in delivery.

Mr. Speaker, if Gary Filmon had done likewise, we would've had a shutdown at the Seven Oaks Hospital. He realized that it was a bad decision and took the corrective action, and that's why we have the Seven Oaks today.

We need a Minister of Health that is not intimidated by the bureaucracy, Mr. Speaker. She needs to realize that those professionals she's relying on have made a bad decision. Will she do that and reverse the decision today?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I begin by saying I can confirm for the House that I'm not afraid of the Member for Inkster.

Second of all, I can let you know that we take the advice of the medical experts that have approached the general surgery after-hours consolidation on medical advice. I've explained to the member opposite, and indeed, I've invited the member opposite to come and meet and discuss the issue of subspecialization for general surgery and the improvement of patient care and patients not being bumped from surgeries.

He hasn't taken me up on that offer yet. I welcome him once again. I don't think he's doing this for cheap political points, Mr. Speaker. I could be wrong.

However, I will continue to tell the member opposite that when he's suggesting to people that services at the Seven Oaks General Hospital are being declined, he's absolutely wrong. They're being expanded, Mr. Speaker.

* (14:20)

Mr. Lamoureux: The Minister of Health makes my point. You see, I believe that she is intimidated; she's scared of Brian Postl, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we have more general surgeons today than we had before. There is no reason why we cannot be providing the same services in emergency that we were providing before.

What she's done, Mr. Speaker, is she doesn't want to rock the boat of the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. That empire has grown to the degree in which they are intimidating this government. It's clouding her ability to make good decisions, and I'm asking for the Minister responsible for Health to take charge.

She's the boss. Unfortunately, she doesn't seem to realize that, but she either has to make the decision and get it reversed because that's what Manitobans' best interests are. I don't care if you're intimidated by me but do what's right for Manitobans.

Ms. Oswald: Again, Mr. Speaker, I welcome the member opposite to come and discuss this issue further, to talk about the medical expert opinion that talks about the subspecialization that's occurring in general surgery. He may wish to put his head in the sand and not recognize that general surgery and its practice is changing.

We know that we have centres of excellence, Mr. Speaker, for cardiac surgery. We have centres of excellence for eye care. The member doesn't seem to dispute that medical judgment whatsoever.

And, again, we need to put on the record, Mr. Speaker, very clearly that the member spreads false information when he says the services are decreasing at the hospital. They're increasing with expansions of orthopedic surgeries, CT, ultrasound, opening of eight more family medicine beds, dialysis expansion and, of course, the ER capital investment that's being made there, not to mention the extraordinary leadership of Dr. Ricardo Lobato De Faria, who is now the provincial adviser on ER—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lamoureux: *[inaudible]* prepared to take a medical professional and meet with the Minister of Health and Mr. Brock. In this way, Mr. Speaker, hopefully—*[interjection]* Mr. Brian Postl, I'm sorry—with Brian Postl and a medical official and we'll sit down, the four of us, and the Minister of Health, it would be made very clear that the Minister of Health is making a bad decision, that just because it's Brian

Postl saying something doesn't necessarily mean that that's in the best interests of the province of Manitoba.

If you believe in community hospitals, Mr. Speaker, you have to recognize that Brian Postl is wrong. Until she realizes that, she is not serving Manitobans and the public safety of Manitobans. So she needs to get on the right track, and I'm more than happy to meet with her and Brian Postl to get her on the right track.

Ms. Oswald: Mr. Speaker, I didn't hear a question there but I will take this opportunity to welcome this news that the member wants to talk about the issue and not try to score political points. It's welcome news indeed.

Again, I'll go on to say that our support for community hospitals is clear with our announcement and building of the emergency capital project, the expansion of dialysis at Seven Oaks, the expansion of staffing, the expansion of orthopedic surgery, the expansion of diagnostics, of ultrasound, the expansion of wellness and cardiac connections, expansion, expansion, expansion.

The member opposite is fearmongering, saying false things to the people of his constituency. That's inappropriate and unfortunate. Many medical doctors were involved in the decision making of this general surgery consolidation, not one individual but a team of individuals. They actually talk to each other. I recommend that the member opposite get on board.

Workplace Skills and Placement Government Initiatives

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski (St. James): Mr. Speaker, with the current economic uncertainty, Manitoba's watch continued to improve our work force. Would the Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade inform the House of some of the initiatives announced yesterday to strengthen work force skills and work placement initiatives for Manitobans?

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade): Mr. Speaker, it was another great day in sunny St. James yesterday, and I had the honour of announcing on behalf of this government a \$5-million investment to strengthen work force skills and work placement initiatives for unemployed Manitobans.

Through budget 2009, which we'll be voting on next week, our government intends to continue to

work with organizations such as Opportunities for Employment; Employment Projects of Winnipeg; Success Skills Centre; the International Centre; BUILD, Building Urban Industries for Local Development; Reaching E-Quality Employment Services; the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce's Industrial Manufacturers Employment Group; Winnipeg Technical College; the Osborne Village Resource Centre and Taking Charge!.

Mr. Speaker, we're working with organizations across this province, everywhere from the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce to organizations, community organizations, to work to improve Manitoba's work force.

Health-Care Services Out-of-Province Treatment

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I listened carefully to the Minister of Health's response to a question from the Member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon). In response to a question about a referral to the Mayo Clinic, the minister said, and I quote: "They need to have a doctor to demonstrate that this is, of course, required and have a specialist referral."

I would like to table a specialist referral from Dr. Rockman-Greenberg, director of Metabolic Services, Health Sciences and a letter from Dr. Casey from Physical and Metabolic Rehab at Health Sciences referring my constituent to the Mayo Clinic.

I ask: Why has the minister not moved to address these recommendations?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I don't have the letter in front of me right now. I suspect I know the case that he's speaking of because we've spoken about it before. Part of the process that I was outlining in my answer yesterday concerning out-of-province or out-of-country referrals does involve medical specialist referrals. That's part of the process. More information needs to be sought and decisions are made based on whether or not there are services that are similar, that are available in the province or in the country.

It's one step in the process, Mr. Speaker, an important one, but it is a step in the process for referring people out-of-province for service.

Mr. Briese: I worked on this file for over two years and brought the case to the minister's attention several times. Manitoba Health has not compensated

the constituent for travel or necessary diagnostic testing at the Mayo Clinic.

I ask the minister: When will she take action to address my constituent's concerns?

Ms. Oswald: While not speaking specifically on the personal health information of this case, I can say that steps have been taken to work with this family on their particular issue. We'll continue to work with them on their particular issues involving medical specialists, involving health professionals and a variety of services that may be available to these individuals.

I would like to be able to help this family as much as any member in this Chamber. I know that the member acknowledges that, and we'll continue to work with this family on where the best possible service can be for unique, complex and sometimes very difficult situations.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Portage Terriers

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, I rise today with a great deal of pride to offer, on behalf of all honourable members, congratulations to the Portage Terriers on winning the Turnbull Cup. It was an exciting final against the Selkirk Steelers. This is the second year in a row the Terriers have claimed the Manitoba Junior Hockey League championship. The sold-out crowd of 1,322 enthusiastic fans saw with delight the Terriers bring home the victory.

However, the Terriers will not be resting on this major accomplishment as they will now begin their preparations for the next challenge, attempting to duplicate their 2005 ANAVET Cup win by beating the Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League champion Humboldt Broncos.

The Terriers claimed the MJHL top spot after defeating the Selkirk Steelers. The Terriers took the best of seven series four to one, giving the fans a celebration of a near clean sweep to the Turnbull trophy. The Steelers, though, can go home with a little bit of satisfaction knowing that they were the only team to beat the Terriers in this year's playoffs.

Portage Terriers' defenceman Drew Ellement was named the playoff's MVP by scoring 13th straight game and Captain Eric Delong had a goal and four points to lead the way in the final.

Riley Nixdorf scored the championship clinching goal, a repeat of his spectacular accomplishment last year. As well, goaltender Bryan Mountain's outstanding performance indicated that he is well on his way to being the top goaltender of the post season.

Head coach Blake Spiller also deserves credit for his strong leadership, team motivation and game strategies which have been a successful recipe to this year's Terriers championship. Congratulations, too, to the many committed sponsors, dedicated volunteers and loyal fans.

In closing, I would like to wish the very best to the Terriers in their ANAVET Cup series. They're representing Manitoba against Saskatchewan's best. As an enthusiastic season ticket holder, I look forward to celebrating in the next couple of weeks.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Cameron Canart, Justin Minoletti, Drew Ellement, Darren Miller, Brenden Walker, Tyler Moore, Ryan Audino, Dylan Kelly, Rob Roteliuk, Kajon McKay, Eric DeLong, Phil Letkeman, Brentt Becker, Ian Campbell, Luke MacInnis, Carson Rowat, Donnie Glennie, Eddie Friesen, Cory More, Kyle Fischer, Riley Nixdorf, Bryan Mountain and Matt Krahn.

* (14:30)

Dwight Solon

Ms. Jennifer Howard (Fort Rouge): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the remarkable career of a very special man, my uncle, Dwight Solon, who is with us in the gallery today. Dwight will retire as the director of Motor Carrier Enforcement Programs on April 17 after 42 years of public service.

My uncle started working for the Province as a teenager, earning \$11.25 a day. Early years were highlighted by work on northern roads connecting the new city of Thompson to Lynn Lake. He stayed in a camp 20 miles north of Thompson with his co-workers and every day they had to build a fire to thaw their lunches and make tea from melted snow. It is apparently on this trip that he learned to love Spanish onion and peanut butter sandwiches.

Dwight has seen many changes in his five-decade career, having served under seven different premiers. His first fleet vehicle was an American Motors Hornet that came without a radio and required new shocks every couple of weeks. He has worked with fathers and sons. He has seen the role of

traffic inspection evolve from a mostly seasonal job to a year-round position that includes protecting the province's infrastructure and stopping the illegal transport of contraband.

Dwight has had a very successful career, but dedication to friends and family and community has made him a success at life. He's been an excellent uncle. He took me to my first rock concert, Tom Cochrane and Red Rider. He sponsored annual birthday shopping trips for the latest pair of jeans. Despite a somewhat squeamish side, he helped take care of me in the hospital as I recovered from many surgeries.

Mr. Speaker, it's rare in this Chamber that we take a moment to thank the thousands of public servants who protect our safety and care for our families. In celebrating my Uncle Dwight's contributions today, I hope we can also pay tribute to all the men and women serving Manitobans every day. Thank you.

Garden Valley School Division Educational Facilities

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Mr. Speaker, as the MLA for Pembina, I am very pleased that, after many years of lobbying, Garden Valley School Division will be receiving a new middle school and a new high school.

As the Garden Valley School Division has increased its enrolment by more than 21 percent since 2005, new schools have been required in the region for quite some time. These new schools will allow students to feel safer and more comfortable in school which, in turn, will lead to a more effective learning environment.

Many people have worked very hard to make this project happen. Members of the Garden Valley School Board have been in full support of the construction of the new schools in the school division. People throughout the community have signed many petitions and lobbied for new schools in the Garden Valley School Division. It is through their commitment to the school division that the new schools will be built.

A safe and modern school with enough space for all students is required for students to reach their full potential. I strongly believe that after these schools are built our children will be able to learn in a more student-friendly environment. They will feel more comfortable at school which will lead to an all-around better education.

Mr. Speaker, these new schools cannot be completed soon enough, as the Winkler area continues to grow at a rapid pace. Hopefully, the schools will be completed on schedule and we will have a new middle school in 2011 and a new high school in 2012.

I know that the students and the staff of the Garden Valley School Division are very excited to some day move into a modern, safe, healthy and environmentally friendly school, and I am glad that they will have the chance to do so. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Lincoln School Noodles 'n' Notes Fundraiser

Ms. Sharon Blady (Kirkfield Park): I rise today, Mr. Speaker, to share with the House an exciting event which took place on March 25 at Lincoln Middle School. Lincoln's ninth annual Noodles 'n' Notes dinner and concert, presented by the Lincoln Parents' Arts Committee and the Lincoln Arts staff, was a wonderful evening of food, entertainment and fundraising that demonstrated the passion, organization and talent that our community embodies.

Noodles 'n' Notes is the chance for the students at this arts-based school to perform for friends and family, and the chance for friends and family to enjoy performances while sitting down to a pasta dinner.

For the past two years, I've had the pleasure of enjoying this evening from two perspectives. I started the evening in the kitchen with energetic parent volunteers preparing salads and spaghetti, which was then brought to guests by a team of efficient and enthusiastic grade 6 servers. I then joined my family to enjoy the meal while listening to performances by Lincoln's stellar grade 7 concert and jazz bands, string ensemble, choral, dance and improve groups. A recent addition to Noodles 'n' Notes has been the rock band, which performed this year using the speaker system purchased with funds raised at last year's concert.

Mr. Speaker, in keeping with tradition, this year's performances were lively and professional, and the students' passion and talents were given opportunity to shine for the whole community.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate and acknowledge the staff, students and parent volunteers for making this year's Noodles 'n' Notes another fun and successful event, raising over \$2,000 towards arts programming.

Special thanks to Mr. Kevin McCorrister, the head of the Arts department, and all of the Arts staff for their energy and organization, and for shaping Lincoln students into top-rate performers.

The Lincoln Parents' Arts Committee also deserves recognition for organizing parent volunteers and donations for the event. Wonderful examples of community co-operation came from many local donors, including neighbourhood favourite D-Jay's Restaurant and the delicious dessert cupcakes made by Sturgeon Heights Culinary Arts students.

Mr. Speaker, it is these kinds of events that embody the spirit of our community. Thank you.

Winnipeg Airports Authority De-Icing Program

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of a constituent, I wanted to be able to express a concern and ask for the three individuals in particular—the Premier's office, the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Transport—to be aware of, which I believe that they are already, of an incident that occurred at the Winnipeg Airports Authority and Air Canada, where Air Canada at one point had its own de-icing program, from what I understand, and WAA for some sort of consolidation of sorts, which had a fairly significant impact on a number of employees at the airport, in particular, individuals that did work with Air Canada.

I just want to take this opportunity to be able to share the concern of loss of jobs, and the potential impact that this could have in the years ahead, in terms of de-icing of planes, in hopes that the three ministers that I've pointed out will at least be able to give some attention to it. I would be more than happy to share the name of the individual that brought it to my attention if requested to do so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Portage la Prairie, are you up on a point of order?

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker I would like to ask for leave of the House to include a complete roster of the 2008-2009 Portage Terriers after the conclusion of my private member's statement in *Hansard*.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House for the honourable Member for Portage la Prairie to add the roster of the Portage la Prairie hockey team to be put on at the end of the speech that he has already made? Is there agreement? [*Agreed*]

We will now move on to Orders of the Day. Oh, the honourable Government House Leader.

House Business

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): On House business, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: On House business? Okay.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to announce the following committee meetings. The Standing Committee on Crown Corporations will meet on Monday, May 4, 2009, at 6 p.m., to consider the annual reports of the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission for the fiscal years ending March 31, 2005; March 31, 2006; March 31, 2007; and March 31, 2008.

Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations will meet on Monday, June 1, 2009, at 6 p.m., to consider the annual reports of the Manitoba Hydro-Electric Board for the fiscal years ending March 31, 2005; March 31, 2006; March 31, 2007; and March 31, 2008.

Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations will meet on Thursday, June 25, 2009, at 6 p.m., to consider the annual reports of the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation for the fiscal years ending February 28, 2006; February 28, 2007; and February 28, 2008.

Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations will meet on Wednesday, July 8, 2009, at 6 p.m., to consider the following: annual reports of the Workers Compensation Board for the years ending December 31, 2006, and December 31, 2007; annual report of the Appeal Commission and Medical Review Panel for the years ending December 31, 2006, and December 31, 2007; and five-year plans of the Workers Compensation Board for 2006 to 2010, 2007 to 2011, and 2008 to 2012. Thank you.

* (14:40)

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ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

BUDGET DEBATE

(Fourth day of debate)

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

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): As I recall, I ended off yesterday talking about the Interlake. I'd just like to clear the record. Last night it was brought to my attention by the Member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) that I was saying nice things about him. Mr. Speaker, I've never said derogatory things about the Member for Interlake at any time, not knowingly. Yesterday, as far as saying nice things about him, the one thing that I did say was that it would be nice if he would pay more attention to the member that's in the constituency next to him, the Member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler). If he would pay more attention to him, he would probably not be sitting in the back bench. So I did say some nice things about him. I have to admit that I did.

However, back to the Interlake and the cattle: the Interlake flooding last year was a serious, serious situation, and it cost many people their livelihood. It cost them their farms. I said yesterday and put on record that it was nice to see that there was money flowing in to the Interlake. There's no question that it's needed, was needed, and it was certainly needed last fall. It was needed when we knew what the magnitude of the economic crisis was from the floods and the fact that there was a shortage of hay.

Unknown to maybe a lot of the members in this House, because they're not agriculturally based, the Interlake is primarily cattle country. That's the type of industry that will grow the best up there. There are also some other things like fishing, but they need the water for the fishing. They don't need it for the cattle industry. That keeps the communities growing. That keeps the equipment dealers selling equipment; it keeps them fixing equipment. It keeps people in rural Manitoba.

Unfortunately, before any of this money came forward—and there was not even talk of bringing any of this forward—producers and the banks ended up making decisions. Those decisions, I might say, were disastrous to many of the farm families. What it did was took a lot of people out of school. When these families go broke and when their farms are sold, we end up with less people in the schools, less need for teachers, less need for a lot of the other amenities in our rural area. That money should have been flowing last year. It should have been there so that those people had that opportunity to stay there.

I will say, in the budget, that there are things that we certainly agree with, and that's the riparian tax credit. The one issue that does arise from this particular tax credit is the fact that the concerns are that the program is very, very difficult to access. These problems have been pointed out to the minister responsible, and it doesn't seem that there's been any effort made to address these concerns. So I suspect that, even though this is an excellent tax credit that would help clean up our country, help clean up our waterways, it's not being able to be accessed, and so then there's definitely no movement going forward on this.

One of the things that the provincial government continues to do in this new budget is they continue to bring in more regulations, more environmental regulations. Every time they bring in these regulations, there is no concept of what that

regulation is going to cost the primary producer that has no means whatsoever of passing that on.

There need to be regulations to look after the environment. We have no problem with that. At the same time, there has to be a way to pay for these, and it's not in the budget. There's certainly nothing there. We see more inspections and more recordkeeping requirements. However, we've noticed the recordkeeping requirements that have come with this budget are lax as well. In fact, one of the comments that's been put forward by one of the local papers, or one of the papers in the province, is that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) has a new theory on relativity. That theory I'd like to put on record: that you can bring in less money, spend more money and still have a balance at the end of the year.

Mr. Speaker, the budget contained a long overdue commitment to increasing funding for rural economic development and initiatives and enhancements to the Rural Entrepreneur Assistance program. We applaud that. We applaud anything that's going to help rural Manitoba. That's where we have a lot of people that we need to keep out there. We need those people out there, but I have to point out also at the same time that, while we're promoting something of this nature, what we have done is pulled a lot of people from rural Manitoba back into the city.

Years and years ago, in another time, Mr. Speaker, when the government realized that rural development was terribly, terribly important, what they did is they created decentralization. So what we have now is pulling the people back in, pulling them back in. We're taking away the rural development that was there. We're taking it back in, and we're trying to promote a program, but maybe there are not the people out there for the uptake of that program. You've got to try and train a whole bunch more people to go out and do something that was already out there. It just doesn't seem to be the right way to go. They've wasted a lot of money in doing this, I think, and also, at the same time, haven't done justice to the rural areas.

It's been a shell game, this whole budget, Mr. Speaker, and I would like to point out there are some other highlights perhaps that I don't think will work in the long term. The tax incentive grant is not a sustainable grant in long term. We're seeing school divisions now that are struggling to make sense of the convoluted funding formulas that have been put forward and mixed messages from the government

on education. We're seeing now where school boards are ignoring any of the leadership from the minister, and I'm not sure that he has a plan going forward. He certainly hasn't shared it with us.

We agree that education is one of the most important things for our young people, both Native and non-Native. We see that there's a separation at grade 3. That should never happen, that should never happen, but there is a separation at that level, and I'm wondering if the minister is going to put something in a budget to deal with that. It's important that the Native and Aboriginal students have the ability and the facilities to stay up with the same pace that we have with the rest of our people in the province. It's important to these people. It's important to the well-being of this province.

*(14:50)

Child and Family Services, Mr. Speaker, has been a—it can only be described as a disaster in the last year and a half. It's been a disaster. We've heard nothing but bad, bad stories in this House. We've seen bad stories in the newspapers. We were hoping to see something come forward in the budget that would alleviate this. It's not an issue that you can just throw money at.

But the money that's going there needs to be directed properly and we don't see that happening. Manitobans are outraged that the NDP government's misguided priorities—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable member's time has expired.

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Healthy Living): I am very excited to put on the record some reality now about what are the facts about budget 2009.

But, before starting that, I'd like to welcome our two new members, the Member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead) and the Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie). I know that they will—

An Honourable Member: On this side of the House.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: On this side of the House. I know and I'm very confident that their contributions they're going to make to the province of Manitoba will be meaningful for all of us.

Right now in Manitoba, in 2009, it is turbulent times for us economically and with the rising flood water. But what budget 2009 provided for us was

steady, balanced, and, most importantly, a foundation for us to deal with these challenging times. What is most important about this budget is that it is a budget for all Manitobans no matter where you're living: rural, northern, urban, whether you're living in Tuxedo, whether you're living in Fort Garry, whether you're living in Brandon, Thompson. It's for everyone and that is very important. We cannot lose faith in that.

I know one of the exciting parts for me after we have a Throne Speech or a budget speech is to rush home and to watch the news and look at the paper on the following day and see, what are the other people thinking about it? I knew it was a strong budget. I had a lot of confidence.

But the third-party endorsements that came rushing in on budget 2009 were incredible—*[interjection]* Would you like me to list them for you? I will. I can even read some of the headlines. I think they're very important. *Winnipeg Free Press:* "Business Applauds NDP for Entrepreneurial Spirit" was a headline. *The Globe and Mail:* "Manitoba Tables a Balanced Budget." Dave Angus, the president and CEO of the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce: We were quite happy with today's budget.

Well, there's more. Evelyn Jacks from Knowledge Bureau said: The message is to young entrepreneur, is consider Manitoba as a place to do business regionally, nationally and internationally.

The list goes on and on. Chris Adams from Probe Research provided us with positive reference. He said: The Finance Minister (Mr. Selinger) is one of the very few provincial Finance ministers in Canada to put forward a balanced budget without cutting social services.

And there's more. TD, CIBC and the Bank of Montreal all provided us with support.

I am proud to be part of a government that has taken a provincial approach to address the uncertainties, while decreasing taxes, has maintained social spending.

You see in this budget a lot of references to stimulus opportunities and ensuring that the valued social programs are still being provided. Economically, our stimulus is included with our infrastructure strategy around building new schools and health-care facilities. Today I had the privilege of participating in the announcement for the emergency at the Victoria General Hospital.

I have attended announcements, also, in Steinbach, where we have recently opened a new stroke prevention clinic, as well as a personal care home in Neepawa. There are opportunities around social housing—\$160-million investment to provide housing—roads across Manitoba, in the south and in the north, as well as recreation.

A very important, fundamental piece of our economic stimulus package is the education and training programs, programs around apprenticeship, around our colleges, around our universities, but also, which is equally important, is the increase for adult learning centres, the job readiness, making sure that those opportunities are being provided and the jobs are available, to ensure that jobs are available for Manitobans.

The work that we've done with business: the reduction, elimination, of the business tax; tripling the value of the MIOP loans. These provide opportunities for business to continue to address the hardships, to continue to provide the quality of service that they have, and provide job opportunities.

We also have the social stimulus that has happened within this budget. There is the Manitoba youth crisis centre in Thompson, the Magnus Centre in Winnipeg, family resource centre, the ability to address the issue of poverty. These stimuli, whether they're economic or social, make a big difference for Manitobans across the province.

It's very exciting to see that this is truly a healthy living budget. It's inclusive. It's holistic. It's balanced, and provides a continuum of opportunities for Manitobans. Around Healthy Living, there are chronic disease prevention initiatives which have been supported by this government for a number of years and will continue to be supported. We have a number of community representatives who come together and celebrate the importance of wellness for their communities. I want to put on the record some of the great work that has happened: Gods Lake Narrows, cooking classes for traditional foods for youth; Wasagamack, bulk food buying co-operative; in Winkler, physical activity for caregivers with their young children; Brokenhead, stress reduction workshop; Swan River, community kitchens for families and improving healthy eating as well as community gardens.

Mr. Speaker, through the Chronic Disease Prevention Initiative, we're getting the message about community, identifying what the issues are and coming up with solutions and encouraging and

creating a momentum to deal with chronic disease and, ultimately, to provide for healthier communities.

There's been a lot of reference to diabetes, and we are very familiar about the issue of diabetes in Manitoba. That's why we've worked with all of our partners, other levels of government, not-for-profit organizations and have constantly made investments around prevention, education, and management for people with the diagnosis of diabetes.

Some examples of our prevention initiatives are through the Chronic Disease as well as the new Healthy Living activators which have been hired across all regional health authorities in Manitoba where they will work together with community partners around Manitoba In Motion, Chronic Disease Prevention, and promote Healthy Living services for their communities as well as for our province.

*(15:00)

Mr. Speaker, these are vital, important programs which our government has supported, encouraged, and rallied behind. The prevention of diabetes has to be a priority. We know the social, the human, and community cost that is being faced by it.

Another point is that we need to provide chronic disease management support for people with the diagnosis of diabetes already, and that's why we have the Regional Diabetes Program. We were the first jurisdiction to provide dialysis on First Nations communities, and we have continued to show that commitment. Along with the dialysis units providing the necessary treatment, individuals receiving that treatment closer to home, we also have a strong education component and prevention component around cooking, physical activity. We also have our foot-care program which the intention is to continue to work and to train individuals around foot-care practice to ensure that they continue to have good circulation in all of their limbs.

We also have the retinal screening program which has been very successful.

Around mental health and addictions, I have referred to the Magnus Centre investment in Winnipeg as well as investments in Thompson. The Magnus Centre will be a state-of-the-art facility which will bring mental health organizations as well as addictions agencies under one roof. Together we will be able to provide a state-of-the-art service for individuals and their families facing addictions. It will be a one-stop where they will come in for their

assessments. They will receive treatment as well as residential and out-patient and aftercare. There'll be close linkages with the communities as there will be outreach as well as education for other agencies and service providers in Winnipeg.

This is very exciting. Once again, budget 2009 expressed our commitment in providing that service. We know the social and personal impact of addictions and mental health issues in Manitoba. Something that we need to and have dealt with and will continue to through our interventions, here within Winnipeg, with the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, with the development of the Magnus Centre, but also for the work that we're doing in rural and northern areas.

The midwifery program is an important program on a number of fronts: one being the education and training that's being provided through the University College of the North; secondly, by the service that they're being able to provide to families in northern communities, southern communities that comfort during one of the most important times in a family's life, when they're having a child.

The poverty strategy, which is referred to in budget 2009, is very important. It provides opportunities, training, homes, sense of security that we will look after all Manitobans.

The environment is not forgotten either in budget 2009, and we cannot deny the impact on the environment in healthy living—clean water, clean air.

For older Manitobans, we have lots of opportunities through the Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat, and, again, working with our many partners in ensuring that services are being provided.

Our housing initiatives—that range of housing which is being offered from independent living to supported living and then personal care homes.

Budget 2009 talks about the investment to the Neepawa Personal Care Home, which is a model for many other communities to follow. Municipalities came together, identified the issues, came and worked with government to develop the plan.

For seniors that are living in their own homes, we have a very successful program that is called SafetyAid, that works between Justice and Age and Opportunity. What it provides is that sense of security for older Manitobans. They will come into the home and they will provide evaluations around physical and personal safety and give suggestions

around lighting, locks, carpets, rugs, whatever needs to happen for injury prevention, and ensure that safety.

The Primary Caregiver Tax Credit, which has been very well received across Manitoba, provides financial resources to individuals who are providing care to their loved ones, whether it's from taking them to the hospital, driving them shopping, to appointments, providing daily care for them, it is making a difference for many people.

We also see benefits in the budget 2009 for Healthy Child. We released the Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder strategy. This budget continues to show our commitment to addressing this issue that is preventable and providing prevention, education, diagnostic as well as intervention for individuals and families who are dealing with this issue.

We also have the interest and the ability in budget 2009 to support the development of family resource centres in co-operation with our very successful community schools program. This will provide opportunities for families to come into the school. The school is a hub for your community. It's a community development issue. It's a social issue. It provides information and provides parenting support to individuals. These are all very important initiatives which we're involved in.

I'd like to spend some time on our commitment to northern economic development. It happens through construction of roads. It happens through the training opportunities through UCN and our other First Nations and Aboriginal and Northern Affairs partners. You see it with the construction of the east side road, the opportunities around the east side for tourism, the community economic development opportunities for First Nations people. It's a very exciting time.

As well, as the support for the Manito Ahbee Festival, which has become nationally acclaimed for the opportunities that it provides to support and promote Aboriginal culture, dance and music, something that we have to be very proud of.

One of the other pieces that happens around the northern economic development strategy are the bursaries that we provide to young people to seek post-secondary education. I think something else that needs to be referred to is providing a sense of hope and opportunity for young people that are living in the north. This happens in a variety of initiatives, recreation initiatives, with our partnership with the

Winnipeg Aboriginal Sports Achievement Centre. We are seeing the involvement and realize the importance of involvement with recreation in northern Manitoba. It's providing that hope and opportunity.

We need to keep working together. We need to continue to make these investments. By making these investments to Manitoba, we will continue to see the benefits for all Manitobans.

It's exciting when we talk about budget 2009, but many families are filled with uncertainties. What budget 2009 does, is provides some certainties about what families can expect economically and what social programs that they can benefit from.

One piece that I haven't referred to yet is our child-care strategy. Child-care strategy is an important piece that helps support families, helps provide structured educational opportunities and early childhood development, while ensuring that parents can go to work knowing that their children are well cared for. This is an important stimulus for our province.

* (15:10)

We need to celebrate the work that goes into the creation of a budget. I listened to my colleague, the MLA for Fort Rouge, who spoke so eloquently about her uncle and her uncle's accomplishments. I was brought to tears as I listened to her refer to his commitment to making this province a great, great place to live. He truly was a frontier; he was a pioneer in what happened.

When I think about the budget process, there were many dedicated people at all levels in government who supported the development of this budget, who gave of their time freely, who sat and made those difficult decisions while balancing the needs of Manitobans, and that cannot go unmentioned. We have a lot to thank the people that we work with.

Budget 2009 continues to make investments economically, socially, around our health infrastructure, our education. Once again, budget 2009 proves that we are fiscally responsible, that we can make that balance between economic and social needs and that we are builders and we are doers. We are working with all of our partners in all of the different areas of Manitoba to ensure that Manitoba continues to be the great province that it is to reside in.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Mr. Speaker, I don't know whether I should say I'm pleased to stand and add some comments to those that have already been put on the record from this side of the House on the budget 2009, or whether I should say that I do so out of duty and because I've got a concern about where this government is taking our province.

Mr. Speaker, when I look at an article that was in the *Brandon Sun* on Thursday, March 26, one of the issues there was that Saskatchewan, in its budget, came in 2009-10 fiscal year with a surplus of \$425 million. Days later, when the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) of our province put his budget forward, he made the statement that we were the only province in western Canada that came in with a balanced budget so far.

I don't know where the Minister of Finance in Manitoba was, but obviously he had completely missed the Saskatchewan budget. After he had been questioned about it by the media, he said, well, their budget isn't really balanced. Now for someone who has just re-invented what the balanced budget term means, he now is going to pass judgment on other jurisdictions about what their budgets are in terms of being balanced or not balanced.

Ms. Marilyn Brick, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

Well, Madam Acting Speaker, to be honest with you, I would rather live in a province that's got \$425 million of surplus than a province where we are trying to create a surplus by bringing in all of the revenues from our Crown corporations to prop up the deficit that we have in our operating expenses as a government. That's a deceitful way of trying to send a message out to Manitobans about what the real financial situation in our province is.

I recall back in the years of the Pawley administration that year after year they would come in with budgets that would not only show deficits, but would tax ordinary Manitobans to untold limits, to the point where Manitobans really got tired of being taxed year after year. They finally, with the help of Mr. Walding, ousted the government in mid-term because they could no longer tolerate the kind of approach that was being taken by that government with regard to the finances of our province.

Madam Acting Speaker, it was entities like the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation that in those days saw increases, double-digit increases. Manitoba Hydro—if you counted up all of the taxes that were added onto Manitobans, I believe there was

something like 122 new taxes and fees that were hoisted upon Manitobans by the government of the day, because they could not keep their hands out of the cookie jar, if you like, in terms of spending taxpayer dollars. We're seeing that return by this government, because if you look at budget 2009, and you go to the section that talks about the increases in fees and increases in fines that Manitobans will pay if they are caught speeding on the highways, or if they have to go and get services provided by government, whether it's at the MPI office or whether it's in another government office, those fees are going to go up dramatically. Who pays those fees? It's ordinary Manitobans.

Now, Madam Acting Speaker, I just heard the Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross) in her remarks, comment on the child-care programs that the government had put into its 2009 budget. Once again, this is a re-announcement. It's not something new. So this government reaches back into announcements that it's made in the past, brings them back into their budget, and says, well, here we go again, look at all the great things we're doing for Manitobans. It's no different than the dialysis unit that was announced for the Russell hospital. This is my own home community, and this is the fifth time that we have seen this announcement made, either in a Throne Speech or in a budget speech.

Well, this year we've even seen a little bit of activity out in that area because while the snow was still covering the ground, they brought in some equipment and moved the snow off the area where the new building is going to be constructed. Now, since then, we've seen no activity. They could have saved themselves a few dollars by waiting till the snow melted and, perhaps, then beginning the activity, because they haven't started anything there anyway.

So, Madam Acting Speaker, I don't know what kind of a game they're playing with that particular announcement, but Manitobans and people in that community are really getting tired of announcements and re-announcements being made, budget after budget, or Throne Speech after Throne Speech.

Madam Acting Speaker, the 2009 budget hasn't laid out any sort of plan for Manitobans. We really don't know where this government is taking this province. We know that in 2008 this government relied very heavily on transfer payments that were generated from other provinces who were operating on their own revenues and then they had to, in fact,

pay equalization fees to help Manitoba to be able to meet its demands with regard to its financial obligations.

How long does this Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) think that we can continue down this path, because the day of reckoning is coming?

An Honourable Member: Slippery slope.

Mr. Derkach: We are on a slippery slope.

Now, Madam Acting Speaker, we can continue to hope that nothing will change, but the reality is the world is changing. The economics in all jurisdictions of this country are showing that, indeed, the bountiful transfer payments that we, as a province, have been receiving, over the course of the last nine years, are coming to an end. They are going to be diminished. Now, this year, they were maintained at the status quo, but that's not going to be the case down the road.

We were looking, I think, as an opposition party and as Manitobans, quite eagerly to having the Minister of Finance show us the plan that he was embarking on to ensure that, indeed, we were going to wean ourselves off of the transfer payments that we have become so accustomed to. But that didn't happen, Madam Acting Speaker, in budget 2009, and we don't have a plan for the future in terms of where this government is taking this province. I'm wondering where we're going to be a year or two from now when, in fact, the transfer payments are going to shrink. They're going to shrink substantially. What is the government going to do then? What is the Minister of Finance going to do then? He hasn't got a large surplus. He hasn't got a large kitty that he can reach into and take money out of. The only places that he can really go to then are Crown corporations. The only Crown corporation that is really showing the way in terms of doing some revenue generating is Manitoba Hydro. Now the government can't take the credit for what Manitoba Hydro is doing because it's a Crown corporation. What the Manitoba government has been doing is been robbing that corporation of its ability to meet its obligations.

Madam Acting Speaker, so ratepayers are now becoming two-time taxpayers, because not only are they paying the rates for Manitoba Hydro, their rates are being increased because Manitoba Hydro now has to prop up a government because it can't stop its spending habits.

* (15:20)

We all understand that in a time of economic recessionary circumstances that governments have to come to the help of citizens by injecting money into public works projects across the province, but we haven't got a lot of hope that this government is going to put its money where the priorities really need to be.

I speak about that because I come from the rural part of the province where we have seen a deteriorating infrastructure in rural Manitoba over the course of the past nine years. If you look at our sewage systems in our communities, they are deteriorating and they are not being replaced. We have water systems across our province where communities are under boil-water orders because they are not having money coming forward from Infrastructure to be able to address some of those water issues that we have out in rural Manitoba.

Madam Acting Speaker, yes, we have environmental issues as it relates to the city of Winnipeg and the dumping of raw sewage into the Red River which flows into Lake Winnipeg. Yes, we talk about saving Lake Winnipeg. One of the biggest polluters of Lake Winnipeg is the city of Winnipeg, and, yes, we have to address that issue. But there are other issues across this province that have to be addressed and this government is ignoring them. They're putting them off for another government to deal with, and another government will deal with them.

Madam Acting Speaker, when we ask about assistance for those kinds of projects, what we hear from this government is a pointing of fingers at the federal government because they are saying that it's the federal government that should be coming forward with their money and then we'll follow in with some of our cash, as well. I can tell you there are communities out there that are waiting, projects that have been—I guess that have had orders put on them by the department of environment, by the Clean Environment Commission. In order to be able to upgrade those facilities, they are awaiting funds from this government, and yet there are no announcements being made in that regard.

It's curious, too, Madam Acting Speaker, that the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers), who is trying to put on this good face about being the good steward of the land, has put in orders about things such as sewage ejectors in rural farm communities. Now, in a rural farm community, let me tell you that in my area you have about three or four people per

square mile. Now, this Minister of Conservation says that it's really important that, in those sparse populations, you take the big hammer out and you tell them that they shouldn't have an ejector system. Yet, across the line in Saskatchewan, if you were to consult with the government there, the department of conservation there would tell you that the only systems they allow in rural residences are ejector systems, because through the anaerobic process the pathogens are neutralized. If you go to an underground system, a field system, those pathogens are never neutralized, and so they do find their way into our streams and into our water systems. So I wonder whom our minister is consulting with and whom he's listening to.

The other thing he did was he said, well, we have to put all these regulations in on rural dwellings and on cottage country. Yet he's the minister who allowed for cottage development along lakes like Lake of the Prairies, for example, and did not enter into any agreements with neighbouring municipalities to allow for that sewage effluent to be disposed of. So we have cottage development going on and there is no place for that sewage effluent to be disposed of, and yet it is the government who is the developer of those cottage development sites. When private developers have to have agreements in place with communities to take the effluent, we have a government that is ignoring all of that, and yet it is the one that's crowing about environmental stewardship and environmental care of our water systems and our sewage systems, Madam Acting Speaker. What hypocrisy. The Minister of Conservation seems to be getting away with this each day that he sits in this House.

So, Madam Acting Speaker, if they want to put their money where their mouth is, they need to start investing into infrastructure projects that really impact positively on Manitobans. Infrastructure projects like the upgrading of sewage lagoons in communities, water systems in communities. Yes, our highways and communities are important, not just for our major cities in Manitoba, but, indeed, for our populations outside of the major cities as well.

I want to talk a little bit about education, because education is still the key component of a society. It is the one aspect of our society that if we want to live in a modern world and make sure that we compete with the modern world, we have to invest in educational opportunities for our youth.

The Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) has come out with a decree that states that school divisions cannot increase their taxes to their residents. Now, Madam Acting Speaker, on the surface this seems to be a good policy, but if you're going to make that kind of a policy, you better make sure that you have the funding to be able to shore up what money would be raised from local taxation. That is just not the case.

I can tell you that, in my own school division, one school is going to be decreasing its staff population by eight teachers, and yet, Madam Acting Speaker, if the reality of the ratios were lived up to, they should have an additional two or three teachers, rather than reducing by eight teachers. Because this minister has said, you cannot raise taxes, the school division has had no choice but to decrease their costs. One of the areas that they looked at decreasing costs is at increasing the student-pupil ratio in their school and, indeed, increasing the costs of running their operations.

So we're going to watch with eager anticipation as to where this is all going to lead. Is the minister, in fact, going to start putting fines on those school divisions who have to increase taxes, or is he going to convince his Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) that, indeed, he erred in his projections of costs across this province and where additional monies will have to be funnelled into education in order to keep our systems current?

He can do this for a couple of years and get away with it, but in the long term, Madam Acting Speaker, the kids are the ones who are going to suffer. The quality of education is going to suffer. We are not going to be very competitive when it comes to having our students compete with other students in other jurisdictions. The proof of the pudding is already there. If you look at the grade 12 results in Manitoba, and compare them to other jurisdictions, we fall to the bottom of this ladder.

An Honourable Member: You're wrong.

Mr. Derkach: Now the Minister of Education says, wrong, so I'm going to challenge him to put on the record and to table the evidence that shows different, because we can table the evidence that shows that Manitoba grade 12 students are not competing with other jurisdictions—and other jurisdictions.

The minister says that that's wrong, so I'm going to ask him to put his documents on the table to show

that, in fact, my statements are wrong, and then I will accept what he is—[interjection]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Brick): Order.

Mr. Derkach: —proposing from his desk. I await eagerly, and when he speaks, he will, indeed, be able then to table the evidence that shows that, in fact, I am wrong. Madam Acting Speaker, if I'm not wrong, I guess he'll have a job to do in apologizing to Manitobans for being erroneous.

The other part of this budget that was completely omitted or ignored, a sector of Manitoba, was the agriculture sector. I live in an area where agriculture is very important. Agriculture is still a major engine in the economy of our province. It is the major engine in the economy of our province, Madam Acting Speaker. It generates something like 80 percent more than Manitoba Hydro does in the GNP of our province. So it is a fairly important contributor to the economy, yet in our budget we saw no mention of agriculture. There was no innovative thinking about where we should be leading this province in terms of agriculture, or how we could support the agriculture industry. We know that there are problems in agriculture. One of the areas that is facing enormous problems is the whole livestock sector. Yet the minister came up with nothing as it relates to agriculture in terms of supporting that industry and ensuring the sustainability of that industry.

* (15:30)

If we were to compare what this budget does for agriculture to what happened in Saskatchewan or Alberta, Madam Acting Speaker, you would think that we are completely absent of agriculture. In Saskatchewan, not only did they announce significant increases in budgets for agriculture, but they announced specific programs to help the livestock sector in Saskatchewan. They did the same in Alberta. The only province that ignored its livestock sector was Manitoba.

Madam Acting Speaker, we have a minister who wrings her hands when she talks about the importance of agriculture and how important agriculture is to our province, yet she does nothing in terms of supporting this industry.

Last night, when I was at the dinner with my colleagues at the Manitoba Pork Council, what was interesting to note was that I think, outside of two government members, there was nobody there from government at this banquet. Of course, it's an

agriculture thing, so I didn't expect any of the urban members from across the way to be there, but I was proud to sit at a table where at least six of my colleagues were sitting, and there were additional colleagues at other tables at this dinner in support of this industry, Madam Acting Speaker, an agricultural industry that feeds this province.

What was interesting at this dinner last night was the donation that was made to Winnipeg Harvest from the Manitoba pork producers. And these are individuals, these are citizens who understand their responsibility, not just to rural Manitoba but to Manitoba as a whole. I'm sure that they left significant dollars here in the city of Winnipeg over the course of the last few days at their annual meetings. And the only, lonely souls from the government side of the House who were at this banquet were the minister herself and the Member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) who was there. *[interjection]* You know, I would ask the Minister—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Brick): Order.

Mr. Derkach: I would ask the Minister of Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick) to brush the hair out of her ears and to listen, because she would have heard me say that there were only two members of the government side of the House at the dinner.

Now, Madam Acting Speaker—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Brick): Order. Can I please remind members that we have loges that they can go to if they would like to have private conversations. Thank you.

Mr. Derkach: Madam Acting Speaker, at one time in Manitoba, we had a very active rural development department, and it was staffed by people who were dedicated to the cause. They were knowledgeable, they were creative, they were innovative, and Manitoba was a leader when it came to rural development programs. Well, I have to say that today that department has been decimated completely by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Initiatives (Ms. Wowchuk), completely decimated. As a matter of fact, a lot of the staff have left, and they are now working for the government in Saskatchewan, where they are bringing Saskatchewan back into recognition of rural development issues. And many of the programs, as a matter of fact, that were running very successfully in

Manitoba are today being launched in Saskatchewan and are going to lead the way in this country in terms of ensuring that that part of the country at least has a rural economy that is vibrant and is active and is contributing very actively to the rest of the province.

We once had that in this province, but today we have taken a back seat because this government doesn't understand the importance of the rural economy. It doesn't understand that a balanced economy is one that makes the city strong and the rural strong—doesn't upset that balance. And, Madam Acting Speaker, yes, when I talk about rural Manitoba, I'm talking about rural and northern Manitoba, because they are rural. They're not urban.

So, Madam Acting Speaker, I think this government has done a great injustice to many people in this province, citizens of this province who contribute very much to the economy, to the social fabric of our province, and to the culture of our province. This is a government that has not only ignored it through its Throne Speech and its activities in its various departments, but it's ignored it largely through budget 2009. A year ago the government also talked about how it was going to lower the income taxes for Manitobans and increase the threshold in terms of tax exemptions for Manitobans over the course of five years. Now, in this budget 2009, that whole concept was absent. There was nothing there. When the minister was asked about it yesterday, he said that, oh well, we've reduced taxes in so many areas in this province for families that we'll continue to do that. He completely ignored to reference the issue that he had talked about a year ago, which was lowering individual taxes for individual Manitobans over the course of five years and increasing the threshold for tax exemptions.

Now, Madam Acting Speaker, I notice that my light is on. It's starting to flash. Well, let me just conclude by saying that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) cannot mislead Manitobans through his supposed definition of balanced budget. Manitobans know better. They understand fully what a balanced budget is, and no matter what this minister says, the proof is in the pudding.

Our debt as a province is increasing. Opportunities for Manitobans throughout this province are not increasing, and we are seeing some false hope that is being presented by this government because we want to carry on the operations of government based on transfer payments rather than

our own source revenues. Rather than putting our own house in order, we are simply relying on the good fortunes of other provinces to balance our budgets or, indeed, to fund the operations of this government. It's a sad day for Manitobans, and that's why, Madam Acting Speaker, this side of the House will not be able to support budget 2009 in any way because the minister failed to present a plan that will show the direction for Manitoba through these tough economic times that we are living through, not just in Manitoba, but throughout the country of Canada.

With those remarks, I thank you for the time.

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): It is my pleasure to rise in the House to give my response to the budget speech and to give my unequivocal support for this 10th consecutive balanced budget. This is truly an achievement, in particular, at this time in history when the entire world is in economic chaos that we have governments collapsing such as the government in Iceland. We have Alberta, which the members opposite spend so much time lauding, this year running a budget deficit approaching \$5 billion, Madam Acting Speaker. For us here in Manitoba to achieve this a 10th balanced budget, which is balanced, I might add, according to generally accepted accounting principles. We had to make changes in times past to conform to advice given to us by the Auditor General and we have done so.

This is truly a balanced budget and it's the 10th in a row. I really want to acknowledge the good works of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger). He's second only to none other than the great, legendary Tommy Douglas, an NDP premier in Saskatchewan, who ran 14 consecutive balanced budgets in his time in office. So I would anticipate not too, too long from now, in our fourth mandate, that this Minister of Finance will break that historic record set by Tommy Douglas so many years ago.

*(15:40)

I look to members opposite in comparison and I've already drawn a parallel to the government in Alberta who have imploded so quickly. They've gone from a balanced budget one year to almost \$5 billion in deficit this year. I think back to the 1990s. Here is the god of the Conservative Party here in Manitoba, Gary Filmon, who, I think, set a Manitoba record for the biggest budget deficit in the history of our province, which was not in the billions of dollars like

the Alberta budget is today, but approaching a billion dollars. I believe it was \$700 million to \$800 million in deficit which is 15, 16 years ago. Take that in perspective. That would be, in today's terms, in the billions of dollars. So they like to think of themselves as the great leaders in fiscal management but the record speaks otherwise—[interjection]

Yes, Madam Acting Speaker, the Member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar) reminds me of Brian Mulroney, another Conservative god, although somewhat fallen from grace of late, here. I understand the current Prime Minister has fallen off of his Christmas card list, but he, too, ran huge deficits.

We only have to look south of the border to the recently departed George W. Bush who created this crisis that the world is in today, the fiasco in conservative management in that country, the height of irresponsibility has brought that country and the entire world to the brink of economic collapse. We're talking a parallel to the Dirty Thirties and this was all brought upon us, upon the world, by the ultra right-wing conservative government of George Bush. So that's what the world has come to under conservative management.

This province is like a beacon globally in the sense that we have managed to continue to balance our budgets and I think it has a lot to do with the leadership that we have had by our Premier (Mr. Doer). I know we have focussed on infrastructure since the very beginning. Since we came to office, this government has focussed on rebuilding this province after having been neglected for more than a decade by members opposite. Things were at such a state that this government came to power and that is the reason that we have remained strong over three election terms is the fact that we have invested wisely into our economy, into our infrastructure. We have been a building government from day one, and what a coincidence that now, the world, the whole world has woken up and is now following the examples set here in Manitoba by the NDP government to focus on infrastructure as the route out of this economic chaos that the country is facing.

Can you hear me, Madam Acting Speaker? I don't know, the peanut gallery is getting louder and louder over there. It reminds me of the Muppets. Do you all remember the Muppets show? Those two old guys that sat up in the gallery, Waldorf and Statler, well, there it is before us today. Bear with me

fellows, bear with me. I'll try and get it all on the record here.

On a more serious note, Madam Acting Speaker, I want to acknowledge some people and when I look at—*[interjection]*

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Brick): Order. I'm going to ask once again and I'm going to remind once again members if they wish they can take advantage of the loge to have conversations.

Once again, the Member for the Interlake.

Mr. Nevakshonoff: Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker, and on a more serious note, as I look at you, I look at the mace before us, and it's my understanding that our Sergeant-at-Arms, Garry Clark, is not feeling that well. I just want to say, on behalf of all of us, I think, here in the Legislature, that we've appreciated his service over the years and we hope for his return, but, on behalf of all of us, our best wishes to him.

I do also want to acknowledge a couple of members who left our Chamber here. Of course, Oscar Lathlin is no longer with us, and I want to acknowledge his good service over the years on behalf of the people of The Pas. I know it's been said before, but his crowning achievement, I think, was in his last election when he succeeded in winning every poll in his constituency. That was the depth of the appreciation that his people had for him, and we have high hopes for the new Member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead). I'm sure that he will follow suit in Oscar's footsteps.

I want to congratulate the former Member for Elmwood, the honourable Jim Maloway, who has now moved on to the theatre in Ottawa. We also acknowledge and congratulate his replacement in this Chamber, the former federal member for Elmwood-Transcona. Right? Thank you.

Now, Madam Acting Speaker, when we speak of balanced budgets and how the economy is managed, we look to members opposite once again and how they did things. How they did things, when they were in office, was they sold off their capital assets in order to balance their budgets and anybody—

An Honourable Member: Our capital assets.

Mr. Nevakshonoff: That's right; our capital assets, the capital assets of the people of Manitoba.

I speak about the Manitoba Telephone System that was doing well in this province. We know that,

should we ever leave office here, that the rest of the Crown corporations—Manitoba Hydro, first and foremost—would be on the chopping block, which is another reason I think that the people of Manitoba will retain us in the days to come.

But I look to the MTS sell off, which is what it was, and I have to draw a parallel for members opposite to something that occurred back in Russia many years ago. I was actually in Russia at the time, and I think of the sell off of the oil sector, the privatization of the oil industry, which was probably the biggest corporate rip-off in the history of the world. This was a trillion-dollar asset in the hands of the people of Russia and how it happened—the sell off to organized crime is what it was, sell off to the mafia—was that the Russian government issued stock certificates to each citizen of Russia. They issued 15,000-ruble stock certificates, and they were supposed to use those stock certificates to buy into the Crown corporation, the oil industry.

Well, Madam Acting Speaker, the next day the mafia was on the street buying up these stock certificates for 20,000 rubles; 25,000; 30,000 rubles. It didn't really matter because they were running at 1,000 percent inflation at the time. But, in very short order, the Russian mafia, the gangsters in that country, had managed to pick up all of these stock certificates. That's how organized crime took over the oil industry in Russia. Now you have more billionaires per capita in the city of St. Petersburg than any other city in the world.

That's exactly what happened with the MTS in this province here. I remember when it happened, and all of us here, I'm sure, do. There was a maximum of—what was it—\$1,500 in shares that you were allowed to buy, as I recall. I remember because my Uncle Cubby, a good Conservative, and his nephews were running around trying to convince people to buy up these shares of MTS, which they were allowed to buy in the second round to an unlimited amount.

So, in the first round, you only had your 15,000 rubles, or your 1,500 shares here in Manitoba. In the second round, the rules were off the table and the corporation, in very short order, fell into the hands of these people across the way here and their Conservative friends. They stole the MTS, the Crown corporation, from the people of Manitoba. They are no better than Russian mafia gangsters when it came to something like that. It was despicable. It remains despicable, and you will

remain there for years to come as a result of that criminal act.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Brick): Order. I will ask all members to watch their language as they're making their speeches before the House. Thank you.

Mr. Nevakshonoff: Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker. The Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) was making disparaging remarks about the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives (Ms. Wowchuk) just a few moments ago and I want to take him to task a little bit in that regard.

* (15:50)

They say that we're doing nothing for agriculture. It's hard to get a question out of them in question period about agriculture. I know because I watch very closely, and quite often it's left to me to get up in this Chamber. They've got their six or seven questions. Two-thirds of their caucus are rural members, and, yet, do they put questions on the topic of agriculture? Every second or third day, maybe. I know that because I get up every day that they do not and put a question on behalf of farmers. They are speaking out of both sides of their mouth in that regard.

I look to the livestock sector and I look to my constituency. We have gone through some difficult times there. Mother Nature has not co-operated with us. We have experienced extensive flooding last year, and this Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) stepped up to the plate. When it came to helping farmers in the Interlake, she stepped up to the plate. She came out there. We declared a disaster in late August and we put this freight assistance program on the table. We had more that we wanted to put on the table, a number of things. We wanted feed assistance; we wanted tax deferrals for herd dispersals; we wanted forage restoration programs.

But agriculture in Canada is a dual responsibility between the federal and the provincial governments. Everything is cost-shared 60-40, so we needed the agreement of the federal government in order to put these programs in place. Did we get that? No, we didn't, and I'll tell you why not, because the Prime Minister of this country was so full of political chicanery that rather than governing this country, he was attempting—well, it's hard to put into words what he's attempting. I do know that he passed legislation declaring—establishing a fixed election date and then, low and behold, called an election. As I recall, in the

midst of this political crisis—or this agricultural crisis in the Interlake—they had nothing better to do than call an election after they'd passed legislation saying they would never call an election. That's exactly what he did.

I stand corrected. It wasn't him that actually called the election, it was the Governor General that called the election. That's what he told the people. So the hypocrisy boggles the mind, Madam Acting Speaker.

So, what happened? We have this election. They were returned with the minority government. Did they learn their lesson? Did they learn their lesson and realize they had to govern in co-operation with all parties because they're in a minority situation? They did not, Madam Acting Speaker. They put out this economic statement—call it what you will. It was an attempted coup d'etat is what it was, and some of the proposals in there were positively archaic, to say the least. When I look to, I think, pay equity for women was one of the things that they were going to set back in their economic statement. A disgraceful act, to say the least. They wanted to take away the right to strike in the public service. My goodness. Are we going back a hundred years? Obviously, that's where Mr. Harper was intent on going.

So these types of actions, so on and so forth, triggered a parliamentary crisis is what it did. Rightfully so, because we're not led by a dictator in this country as much as they are prone to go in that direction. So we had this economic crisis. The government of the day was forced to take the very unusual act of proroguing the Parliament and it wasn't until February that they finally, finally got their feet back on the ground and started to actually govern this country. It was at that point that, finally, the programs that were delivered in the Interlake—declared just last month—finally came into being. So that's the reason that we experienced this delay, despite what that Conservative wannabe in the Interlake, Garry Wasylofski, who sought to unseat me in the last round despite his infantile comments in *The Interlake Spectator* to the contrary. So I correct him here in this Chamber. His behaviour and his comments are substandard, to say the least.

We haven't stopped there. We haven't stopped lobbying for farmers in the Interlake because that helped the livestock producers, which is fine, but the other side of the coin, of course, are the grain producers. They were hard hit as well. The heavy rainfalls in the areas of Fisher Branch and Arborg put

those people in very dire straits. We continue to go to Ottawa to ask them to consider some type of programming to help these people. To date, we've been unsuccessful to the point where we've lost patience and we finally made our declaration ourselves. Just a couple of days ago, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs (Mr. Ashton) came out to Arborg and announced that we would be increasing disaster financial assistance payments from roughly \$670,000 to \$3 million, and if it has to be more, he'll consider that as well. We will go to Ottawa and we will ask them to cost-share. They will be given an opportunity and we hope that they agree to that because the grain producers need help, too.

So members opposite, instead of shouting at me, you should be shouting to the Conservative members of Parliament, such as James Bezan, that the grain side in the Interlake needs help as well. So, if you want to yell, you can go and yell over the telephone to James Bezan. I don't know where he is, but tell him that our grain producers need help in the Interlake, too. Thank you very much.

I look to a number of other things in this budget that is of great interest to me. The Minister of Infrastructure (Mr. Lemieux) has been putting a lot of effort into the creation of CentrePort, which is the ultimate in infrastructure projects. This will put Manitoba in the very centre of this continent, from a trades perspective, which is where we are, geographically. This is something that is very encouraging.

I have always had a keen interest in the Port of Churchill. I've spent a good part of my life up in northern Manitoba in the area of Flin Flon. I think there's great potential for the Port of Churchill. This CentrePort will be a component of that.

I look to the Arctic Bridge as a good example of that. Working with the Russian federation, we have two bridges, actually, under contemplation. We have a marine bridge between the Port of Churchill and the Russian northern port city of Murmansk, on the Kola Peninsula, which is on the east side of the Scandinavian peninsula.

But there's also potential for an air bridge, as well, between the city of Winnipeg here, where all this infrastructure is going into place, and another Russian city, the city of Krasnoyarsk which, coincidentally, is located just to the north of India, just to the northwest of China. These are the world's two largest markets. For us to try to capitalize on this, to try and get a position there, I think, is good

works; will be part of our legacy in the years to come. The Minister of Infrastructure is to be complimented for persevering on this file.

Members opposite were ranting and raving a day or two ago; they wanted it all done now, but it takes time, it takes planning, it takes proper investment. That's what we're doing. That's what we've always done as a government. That's what we will continue to do as a government to the end of this term in office, and the next, and the next after that.

There are a whole range of issues I could discuss in terms of infrastructure. I could talk about roads and highways, how we have quintupled our budget from what it was when members opposite were in charge.

I recall, when we were elected, we did an analysis of our highways in this province. What we learned was that if we'd continued to spend at the rate the Conservatives were spending, that we were faced with a systemic collapse of our highways infrastructure in this province. That's how negligent they were in their duties. A systemic collapse is what we were facing. So we have put the investments into our highways and we will continue to do so.

We've put our investments in our schools. I look to my own constituency and I could list every school that's been addressed by this government: new schools, new boilers, new roofs and so forth. Another thing the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) has done, which I take my hat off to, is put a moratorium on school closures, which members opposite—these schools would be going down one after another if they were in power. That's how their friends on the school boards would like to do it. That's not going to happen while we're in office, Madam Acting Speaker.

* (16:00)

On equalization payments, they continue to put the false information on the record that Alberta is paying or Ontario is paying. That's not the case, Madam Acting Speaker. Equalization is part of the Canadian covenant, and it's each individual that pays taxes to Ottawa. I don't care if they're from Alberta, from Manitoba, or from the Northwest Territories; we're all Canadians in this country. That is the essence of these payments, and for them to suggest that Alberta is losing money, somehow, that's not the case. It's entirely disingenuous, and it's just typical of members opposite to spin this disinformation, and so on and so forth.

My light is blinking. Madam Acting Speaker, I know other members would like to speak and I'll respect that. So I thank you for listening.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I appreciate you turning the light on. The Member for Interlake, it's the first bright light I saw go on over there in the last 30 minutes of hearing him speak. Sometimes it's worth trying to correct the record, and sometimes it's better just to leave words that are so foolish stand on their own because it's so patently obvious for those who read that how far off base the Member for Interlake was.

I wouldn't want to give advice to his boss, the Premier (Mr. Doer), but perhaps after referring to the Prime Minister as a dictator, he may want to be left off that next lobby trip to Ottawa when the Premier goes hat-in-hand begging, as he often does, for more federal transfer payments, when on the one hand he tries to speak positively about the federal government, but then has the Member for Interlake call the Prime Minister a dictator in a House such as this.

I know it must be difficult for the Premier to decide, from day to day, who should be members of his Cabinet. I would give him this advice, while I would love to see the Member for Interlake in Cabinet just simply for our own political benefit, I don't think that that should be let loose on the people of Manitoba after hearing a speech such as that.

I want to begin by congratulating the new members here in the Legislature, both the Member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead) and the Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie). Despite the fact that we represent different political parties, it is still noteworthy when a member is elected to the Legislature and it's still worth those congratulations. It is one of those times when we put aside partisan behaviour.

I know I heard the comments from the Member for Elmwood, I think he said he had never voted for a budget in his past political career. I can inform him that he's voted against much better budgets than this. So I look forward to seeing his decision when the vote takes place. I know that he might have second thoughts about his voting decision.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Also, the pages, I'd like to welcome them back as they continue to do their work here. The table officers and the two new table officers, that have been introduced to this House already, welcome

them. They do a good job of service for each of us here as MLAs.

The Member for Interlake was suggesting that one of the previous speakers had said that the government had done nothing for agriculture in the last number of years. In fact, I think, probably, the context that that comment was that the government has done nothing positive for agriculture in the last number of years. In fact, the government has done a lot of things to agriculture and done a lot of things about agriculture, but almost none of them have been positive. You only would've had to visit the Pork Council AGM yesterday, and in the previous days, to learn the many things that this government has done in agriculture and how negative they've been to that particular sector and other sectors. In fact, had this government come in, in 1999, and done nothing about agriculture, not even thought about it, we'd probably be in a better position than we are today, simply because almost everything they've done has been negative against the industry—increasing regulations, ensuring that it's harder and harder to farm, shutting down farming in certain industries and in certain areas altogether. So there's been nothing positive that has happened from the agriculture sector.

I want to also commend my friend, the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik), on the work that he's done in preparation and response for our party on this budget as the lead critic for Finance. I know that he's put in a tremendous amount of work and analysis in trying to pull back the curtain on some of the numbers and some of the things that this government has tried to hide behind. He's done a good job, I believe, of informing us, his colleagues and Manitobans of the true details behind this particular budget.

When we look at how this government is reacting to issues of finances and a variety of other issues, we can tell that they don't have a systemic and a laid-out plan, Mr. Speaker. They simply seem to lurch from issue to issue. It's stunning to me that the government seems to have been shocked and surprised by the fact that there is an economic downturn.

I've heard various members in this House talk about what triggered the economic downturn, but they still seem to be surprised that we're in the midst of one. I mean, the fact that, I think, economists and others have been saying for years that eventually you're not going to have the same level of growth

that North America has experienced in the last seven or eight years. During that time, you have to prepare for an inevitable downturn, regardless of how that downturn happened. You look back on the economic history and see a lot of different reasons why economic downturns have turned. Some of them have been sparked by the stock market, others by real estate, others by commodities such as oil.

So there are a lot of different reasons why economic downturns can come about, but they always come about at some point. The job of a good government is to prepare for those economic downturns during the good times and this government simply didn't do that. It continued on its way from 1999 up until the last year to believe or, at least, to try to convince itself that there would never be a time when own-source revenues would be restricted, that there would never be a time when federal equalization and transfer payments wouldn't grow at the level that they've grown over the number of years, that there would never be a time where they'd have to make difficult decisions. Well, those times are here. This is the moment that the government now is seeing, that it wasted opportunities, wasted that ability over the last number of years to prepare for exactly this time.

You can see it in a lot of the different ways the government makes the decisions that it does, Mr. Speaker. For example, there has been discussion over the last couple of days, and certainly last year, about the vote tax that the government brought in, about this government's desire to try to take money from taxpayers who are voting in an election and have that money put directly into their political party. This is something that was debated hotly here in the Legislature last spring, where hundreds of Manitobans came here to this building and thousands of others expressed their disappointment by the government's decision to try to take money from them publicly as a result of a vote that they cast, and put it into a political party's pocket, even if they hadn't supported that particular political party. I think that most individuals in Manitoba, if you had talked to them, if they were polled, would say that contributions to political parties are important—it's part of what puts the grease in the gears of the democratic system—but that it needs to be done responsibly and voluntarily, that it shouldn't be done through the application of a person's vote that then triggers public money going into a political party that they may not have supported.

Now, when this legislation was brought in about a year ago, Mr. Speaker, it was entirely foreseeable that at some point during the life of the legislation there would be an economic downturn. There would be a time when the economy wasn't as strong as it may have been a year ago or the year prior to that, because we all know that there are going to be ups and downs in the economy. Yet the government didn't seem to consider that. Now, in the last couple of days, they've said well, we're not going to take the vote taxes this year, we're not going to speak about years in the future. But they're just not going to take it this year and it might look down in the future.

They're lurching from decision to decision. There is no laid-out plan. There's no basis of principle that this government actually stands on—

An Honourable Member: Are you going to take the money for Elmwood and The Pas?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, and see this is the challenge that we have, Mr. Speaker. The minister—

An Honourable Member: This is the challenge, eh?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, the challenge is that the minister doesn't understand; that's the challenge not just in her own portfolio, but in complex issues that deal with finances. She seems to want to get lost in the numbers.

Hers is the party that has said that they're not getting enough public support. We all know that there is public support already within the electoral system. Nobody that I know of, other than the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) and her cohorts, were asking for more money. It wasn't enough, and why wasn't it enough? Because they were having a difficult time going to—whether it's agricultural producers or going to other people that they might represent in sectors and selling their ideas. When they went to these individuals, obviously, they were being told we don't support your ideas, and so we're not going to give you money.

* (16:10)

So I suppose that they gathered into a cabal into some room somewhere, the NDP strategists such as they are, and said: Well, if our policies are so bad that it's preventing Manitobans from giving us funding, and preventing our party from getting the funding that we need to run a political party, how are we going to get that money? Somebody must have come up with the idea: Well, let's apply a levy of

such on each individual vote and then, whatever the vote count turns out to be, we're going to give each political party X amount of dollars.

Well, you know, isn't that just the NDP way? They don't want to work for it. They don't want to actually have to go and try to sell their ideas. *[interjection]* Well, I mean, I think that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) has been in a parallel universe where she's been missing the debate that's been going on for the last year on this issue. We aren't taking the money. We told you a year ago that we weren't going to take the vote tax. We told you that there is enough public money in the system right now and there doesn't need to be any more. Only her own party, only her own party yesterday said, well, we're not going to take the money because there might be some economic hardship that people were feeling, and so they got a little sheepish about it.

What's the difference here is a matter of principle versus a matter of timing. We have stood on the principle that there shouldn't be any more taxpayer-funded support for the system. The government is saying it's a matter of timing. We don't agree with the same principle, our timing is off. We're going to wait until either the food banks aren't being used any more, or until somebody—nobody else who is suffering, or whatever that should be, and that really should be their goal. That should be their goal. Their goal should be that they're not going to be taking that tax. I don't think they should take it ever, but at least until there's any individual who doesn't need that money more than the NDP.

I might make a suggestion, you know, instead of coming here and throwing across barbs, whether it's the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) or the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk), they may want to decide to develop policies that are sellable, that people might go: You know, we actually want to have that particular policy in place so we'll donate to a political party voluntarily. You're not going to have to take it from me through the administration of a vote tax. We'll actually willingly give you our political donation. But that would take some work. That wouldn't be easy. You'd actually have to come up with these ideas and do it on your own. Clearly, that's something that the government doesn't want to do.

I listened also, you know, very intently to the debate that went on around Bill 38 in this Legislature about a year ago. There were hours and hours of debates, and many, many presenters came and gave

their opinion on what the government was doing by doing away with the balanced budget legislation, and, you know, Manitobans—I give a lot of credit to average Manitobans because they're very astute in terms of what's happening politically. They can see what the government is trying to do long before many of the members of their own government probably knew what was happening. I have no doubt that the Minister of Finance and some of those who are close in the inner circle of the NDP caucus knew full well the intention of Bill 38 and what was coming down the road economically, but I doubt very much that even most of their own caucus knew. Manitobans knew. Manitobans knew full well because they knew the history of this NDP government, and they knew that, if they could get away with running deficits, with trying to call it something else, they would try to do that and so they did. They brought in Bill 38, and one by one Manitobans came to the Legislature, to the steps, to the doors, even some of them came across closed-door signs or, you know, that indicated that they couldn't come in, but they still came in. They still came in, because they wanted to voice their opinion on Bill 38.

What Bill 38 did was say, you know, we're not going to label a balanced budget the way that most Manitobans would label it, where your revenues and your expenses equal out, or your revenues are slightly higher than your expenses. Instead, what we're going to do is we're going to start adding in revenues and different things from Crown corporations to try to make it look like it was a balanced budget. I suspect that for a good majority of the NDP members on the back benches it all sort of didn't make sense at the time; you know, they looked at it and they go, well, it's some sort of change in accounting and it's not going to have a significant effect.

I know full well that the Minister of Finance knew. He knew what would be coming and that there would be difficult economic times and that they couldn't live within the laws of the balanced budget legislation, which is one of the promises, in fact, that they made in 1999.

So they decided to change that legislation. They decided to say, we're going to just make up our own definition of what balanced budget, or what surplus, means so that we can just put that in and then whatever we define it to be is what we're going to call it. So Bill 38 said that you could now put in the revenues from a variety of different sources all over

the place, from Hydro and from Crown corporations. Put their revenues and their profits onto the books, claim it as the government's own, and then you could declare a balanced budget. That's, of course, what they did.

You print it on the budget. You put out the ads. There used to be, I know, a statute in the Criminal Code, I'm sure there still is, Mr. Speaker, statutes related to false advertising. If there was ever a case that might not meet the four squares of the law but would certainly meet the intention of the law for false advertising, it would be the ads that this government has been playing for the last week, trying to convince people that the budget in this province is balanced.

It's clearly an act of false advertising, and I think that most Manitobans can see through that. They can understand that, when you spend more than you're bringing in, it isn't balanced. So all the advertising in the world and all the sort of glitzy ads aren't going to make a difference, I think, for Manitobans who understand very clearly and who understood when they came here to the Legislature and passionately argued through the night that there shouldn't be changes to the balanced budget legislation. Yet that's not enough.

Now we've been warned, of course, that there are going to be more changes to the balanced budget legislation this session that not only did they tear away a tenet of the former legislation but they had to do it again to try to balance the budget this year and going forward. So what's left really of balanced budget legislation. You have something in name, but that isn't working.

The Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) brought forward, I thought, a very interesting comment when he said that Manitoba's net debt is now higher than the combined net debt of the provinces of Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia. I think that's going to be stunning when we go to Manitobans and we tell them individually that the net debt of our province is greater than the combined net debt of the three provinces to the west of that. I think that's something that's going to put it into very clear and stark terms for them where this government has taken the province of Manitoba.

I look at our young people, and I wonder what they're going to think about that when they consider their options about staying in our province, as we all hope that they would, or going to other provinces, whether or not they're going to say, well, here is a

legacy of debt that one generation, ours or another, is going to have to pay off, or whether or not they're going to look at one of these other provinces where the debt is being reduced.

I know the government, you know, when it talks about the budget, there are discussions about Hydro and different things that are happening with Manitoba Hydro, or should be happening, and I think there are reasons to worry even there, Mr. Speaker.

I read with interest the decision of the Legislature of Saskatchewan to vote a resolution fully in support by the Saskatchewan NDP to move their province forward with nuclear power, to not look at hydro-electric power as a means or as a source for generating power for their province. A unanimous vote of the Saskatchewan Legislature, including the NDP, was to proceed towards the development of nuclear power.

I know there are a few different MLAs in Saskatchewan who commented about the decision to look at nuclear generation for power, and they said, well, there aren't really a lot of other options. You know, these are our immediate neighbours to the west, and they're saying there aren't a lot of other options. Yet the NDP government here trumpets Manitoba Hydro, and our neighbours right next to us in the west are saying, we're going to have to go to nuclear power because there are not a lot of other options to look at, with the full support of the Saskatchewan NDP.

* (16:20)

Perhaps one of the reasons that the Saskatchewan NDP voted to ignore Manitoba Hydro and to look at nuclear power instead of hydro-electricity is because we simply aren't at the table anymore when it comes to those decisions that are being made by provinces like Saskatchewan, like Alberta, and like British Columbia. There has already been note made in this House about a meeting that was held by these western premiers and Manitoba wasn't included. We weren't invited, Mr. Speaker, and the Premier sort of shrugged that off as, well, I don't really want to go to another meeting anyway. What's the big deal? So he sort of said, ah, I'm not even going to think about it.

Well, I think he should think about it. I mean, it really is unprecedented to have these premiers from the West exclude Manitoba at a meeting that's being talked about future economic issues. Now where we do get invited is to the crime ones. When there is a

meeting to be discussed about crime, Manitoba is clearly invited to one of those meetings because we have a lot of crime issues. So they make sure that we get invited to those particular meetings, but we don't get invited to the meetings that have to do with an economy or economic issues because they say to us, well, you know, you're a net receiver of equalization and so you're in a different status than we are.

You know, the Member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) stands up and he says, well, we should be proud of the fact that we get equalization because it's a covenant in Canada. His words were that it's a covenant in Canada that we get equalizations. So that's something that we should be proud of. I mean, that's akin to saying that, because we have a variety of social services that we provide as Canadians, because those are our values, we should strive to be on those social services.

I mean, it's absolutely ridiculous to think that the Member for Interlake is proud of the fact that we're getting equalization because that's what the country allows for, I mean, just simply because that's how the Canadian federation has been structured and has been supported over the years, I don't think that that's a reason to try to get that money. You'd think that there'd be some plan in the budget to try to not take equalization payments, which are separate from the transfer payments, I know, which have to do with programming. But equalization is about provinces that aren't doing as well relative to the other provinces in Confederation.

Instead of saying, hey, how do we develop a plan, a 5-, 10-, 15-, 20-year plan, even a 25- or 30-year plan to get off equalization, the Member for Interlake, I'm sure, supported by his colleagues because they all clapped when he said it, said: You know, equalization is a covenant of Canada. We should be happy to take it because it's there. We shouldn't really be trying to get away from it. We shouldn't be trying to better our province. I think that is very, very concerning.

Now, you know, Mr. Speaker, any time when you deal with a budget not everything is negative in that budget, and I do want to conclude by mentioning specifically—I know the capital budget for education which deals with the high school and middle school for the community of Steinbach is a long overdue and an important project. I've said that publicly before, and I will say it publicly now. I believe it should have happened a little sooner, but I'm glad that it's on the books. We look forward to getting it

completed. That's not enough necessarily to sway me to the budget, of course.

You know, when you look at a budget, it's not unlike going to a restaurant. You might not like 95 percent of the menu, and 5 percent of it might be good, but you're not going to keep going back there if 95 percent of it is bad. So I do want to say that there are some positive things in the budget; in particular, I appreciate the fact that those schools are going to be built for the young people that we need there. But, overall, this is a budget that gets a failing grade from Manitobans, gets a failing grade from those who are going to be left to pay the debt and the legacy of debt in the years to come. Thank you very much.

Mr. Drew Caldwell (Brandon East): Mr. Speaker, it's always a privilege to rise in the Legislature to put a few words on the record on whatever issue that we debate in the certain circumstances that causes us to rise here, but today we are in the midst of the budget debate. It certainly is, as I said, a pleasure to rise and provide a few words contributing towards this debate.

Before beginning my remarks, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my constituency of Brandon East for their support over the years. Brandon East has had a long and proud history in this House. Since its creation in 1969, it has returned a New Democrat MLA every single election, and it's a record that we're very proud of in Brandon East.

My predecessor, Len Evans, who is a mentor and good friend of mine, has always been supportive in giving me advice and good counsel on representing the constituency. This is my 10th year here, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Evans served for 30 years before that. We two are proud to represent a constituency that is fearless in its activism, fearless in speaking its mind and always proud to stand for people who often are without voice: people who are disadvantaged, people who are affected by poverty, people who are affected by literacy, people who have very little voice. Brandon East is very, very proud to represent such people and to represent them without fear or favour, and represent them proudly.

Mr. Speaker, my colleagues, earlier in this debate, have spoken about the principles that guide our political party: principles of social justice, principles of democracy, principles of equality, principles of community, that we serve all people, all the time. That is something that all of us on this side of the House are proud of. On this side of the House,

we represent north, south, east, west in this province; we represent rural, urban; we represent a variety of ethnic groups in this province; we represent First Nations in this province, Aboriginal people, Métis people, Filipino people, Scots people—people who wear kilts, my colleague from Fort Rouge—Lord Roberts just reminded me.

Mr. Speaker, on that note, I am very pleased to welcome my two new colleagues, the MLA for Elmwood, previously honoured as the dean of the Canadian House of Commons, and the new MLA for The Pas, previously honoured as chief of OCN, who will greatly contribute to caucus debate and will greatly contribute towards the full understanding of this province that the Manitoba New Democrats bring to this House. It's a privilege to have them both here in this House, and I know that they already are making an impact on the thinking of our caucus and how we will progress into the future as a united caucus and a government that represents all Manitobans without fear or favour.

Mr. Speaker, this budget, which is a great budget—my friend Curtis Brown oftentimes says to me, during these budget debates, is this the best budget yet? I won't disappoint him this year by saying, yes, in fact, it is the best budget yet. When confronted with headlines like today, on the front page of *The Globe and Mail*, Canada's national newspaper, it says, and I quote from a headline, "Alberta to post biggest shortfall in its history—Province projects \$4.7 billion deficit this year." We are not doing that in Manitoba. In fact, we are having our 10th consecutive balanced budget, and earlier today in the debate, it was noted that Tommy Douglas, our forebear as New Democrats here, presented 14 balanced budgets in Saskatchewan when he was Premier of Saskatchewan many, many years ago.

* (16:30)

I note that in reality and in fact, New Democrat government and New Democrat budgets far surpass the offerings made by Conservative parties, and that's an historic fact in this country. The myth is somewhat different, the myth is indeed somewhat different, but in fact and in reality, New Democratic governments provide balanced budgets, and they provide budgets that address the real needs and real concerns of all people, Mr. Speaker, not just a privileged few, or not just—

An Honourable Member: Or imaginary friends.

Mr. Caldwell: —or imaginary friends, my colleague from Gimli reminds me, but provide support to all people all the time, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to note that this budget, in fact, continues that record of supporting, with prudence, as *The Winnipeg Free Press* notes, with prudence, supporting the needs of Manitobans of all sectors. We are providing continued investment in health care, continued investment in education, continued investment in infrastructure, continued investment in justice, continued investment in housing, continued investment in social services, continued investment in agriculture, unprecedented and continued investment in infrastructure, continued tax relief at all levels with prudence, with balance. It's a budget that our critics, apart from the partisan meanderings of the opposition across the Chamber, but our critics outside of this partisan place have also noticed that this budget is a very prudent, balanced budget that does benefit the people of the province of Manitoba.

Generally, when I make a budget speech, I review the investments that have been made in my home community of Brandon and, in fact, in western Manitoba, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to note that every single investment, the hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars that have been invested in Brandon and in western Manitoba, every single dollar of those hundreds of millions has been opposed and voted against by the members opposite.

I'd like to remind people that because it's not something that members opposite—you know, I'm the lone New Democrat west of this city in this province. It's not something that the Tory members actually celebrate, in fact, actually misrepresent their position in this House, Mr. Speaker. They like to claim that they are champions for the region, but they voted against every single dollar invested in that region over the last 10 years.

In this budget we've heard that they will be not supporting the expansion and redevelopment of the Westman Lab which is funded for in this budget. They have announced that they will not be supporting the \$160-million investment in affordable housing. In fact, the largest investment in capital for affordable housing in Manitoba history in this budget—\$160 million, they will not be supporting that. They will not be supporting, Mr. Speaker, they will be voting against providing funds for the Memorial Cup in Brandon. They will not be supporting and voting against the renewal of First Street in Brandon, the renewal of the bridges in Brandon, shamefully the renewal of No. 10 highway

south, that runs through at least two constituencies. They will be voting against that investment in our infrastructure and in the infrastructure of rural southwestern Manitoba.

We know because members opposite announced they were voting against this budget no sooner than the budget speech was over, that they do not support investment in southwestern Manitoba. They do not support investment in Brandon, and they have voted against investment in Brandon and western Manitoba ever since 1999, shamefully, because it's not something that they represent when they speak to their constituents in the individual ridings in western Manitoba. In fact, they're quite happy to pronounce their support for the projects that this government builds in western Manitoba, and that opposition opposes every single budget vote.

I think I've got a few minutes here so I think I'll review from 1999 to date some of the capital projects, in fact, that have been voted against by members opposite. I'll start with the famous promise that was made over and over and over again—seven times in 11 years. Seven times in 11 years the Brandon Regional Health Centre was promised to the people of Brandon and to the people of western Manitoba. Seven times it was promised; seven times it was cancelled.

In 1999, the first budget that members opposite voted against provided for the funding of the Brandon Regional Health Centre and the construction of the Brandon Regional Health Centre, a \$50-million budget line item for a commitment that was made and broken consistently, year in and year out, by members opposite when they were in office, and, perhaps, unsurprisingly, voted against when we finally put \$50 million on the table to build that regional health centre, which now is one of the finest regional health centres in Canada, Mr. Speaker. The health centre, again, that was voted against, the funding that was voted against by members opposite.

Following quickly on the heels of the Brandon Regional Health Centre, a small project and modest project, but a project that was very much needed in Brandon, Neighbourhoods Alive!, which has provided several millions of dollars into redeveloping the core area of the city of Brandon, redeveloping commercial business storefronts, redeveloping low-income housing, redeveloping parks and children's playgrounds, redeveloping neighbourhoods, residential neighbourhoods in the historic core—central core of the city of Brandon. It's

made a huge difference in the quality of life for people in my constituency, investment that can be seen, literally, in the neighbourhoods of Brandon, which was voted against by members opposite that first budget year.

There was also, Mr. Speaker, a \$15-million investment in the Agricultural Centre of Excellence at the Keystone Centre. Members opposite like to state how much they support rural Manitoba and support the agricultural economy in our province and support—*[interjection]* Exactly. It's what they say in the coffee shops, that they support rural Manitoba. \$15 million for the Agricultural Centre of Excellence in Brandon voted against by members opposite in the budget following the 1999 one.

Mr. Speaker, we're proud on this side of the House to create the first MRI suite—magnetic resonance imaging suite—for diagnostics, health-care diagnostics, serious diagnostics for people suffering from a wide range of health issues. We put that in a budget following the 1999 budget—2000-2001 budget, I believe—first time in Manitoba history to have an MRI unit outside of the city of Winnipeg. Members opposite voted against it. They apparently didn't want an MRI unit to serve the people of Killarney, the people of Deloraine, the people of Melita, the people of Brandon, the people of Minnedosa, the people of Virden, the people of western Manitoba's region. They voted against providing that MRI unit to Brandon.

Quickly on the heels of that, they voted against the replacement of the ambulance fleet in Manitoba, penalizing and negatively impacting every single rural community in the province of Manitoba. Every single rural community in the province of Manitoba has had its ambulance replaced since we've been in office. Members opposite voted against providing the funding for that replacement of the ambulance fleet.

Moving along, Mr. Speaker, the Health Studies Building at Brandon University. The first major investment we made in the infrastructure of the Brandon University campus for Aboriginal counselling and for nurse development, the development of health-care services and the training of health-care professionals in Brandon through the Health Studies Building. Members opposite, following hard on the heels of eliminating a thousand nurses in the province when they were in office, then they voted against providing funding to actually train nurses in western Manitoba. That capital project was voted against, oddly enough.

Moving from Brandon University, I'll get to Assiniboine Community College, the largest investment in college campuses in the province's history, but before I get to Assiniboine Community College, I want to get to the Brandon School Division and, in fact, school capital projects throughout western Manitoba: gymnasiums, school expansions, even temporary classrooms. Every single dollar voted against by members opposite, so any school development in Virden, any school development in Souris, any school development in any of the communities in western Manitoba, the funding for that was voted against by members opposite. In Brandon, I could think of the Neelin High School expansion, gymnasiums at J.R. Reid, gymnasiums at Linden Lanes School. Capital projects that are going to be part of this budget and have been announced by my colleague, the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) for this fiscal year: roof replacement at Crocus Plains, roof replacement at Green Acres School, all voted against by members opposite. All voted against by members opposite.

*(16:40)

At Assiniboine Community College, Mr. Speaker, something that I am particularly proud of in Brandon, the monumental redevelopment of the largest collection of heritage architecture in this province, the former BMHC site, which now is emerging as Canada's most beautiful and substantive college campus. We have invested several million dollars in the Manitoba Institute of Culinary Arts at Assiniboine Community College, which is now recognized as the centre of culinary arts for Canada, voted against by members opposite. Voted against by members opposite.

This past year—and construction is taking place right now—when you drive down 1st Street in Brandon, the girders in the superstructure are now up and the building project continues apace as we speak here right now, the \$45-million Len Evans Centre for Trades and Technology which will double the number of students able to participate in trades and technology training in Brandon, Manitoba. A huge, huge contribution to high-wage, high-skilled jobs in western Manitoba for young people, voted against by members opposite. A \$45-million project that directly assists businesses in western Manitoba, voted against by members opposite.

The twin bridging of the Assiniboine River that my good friend and colleague from Brandon West likes to poke me in the ribs about in terms of the

construction. Well, the construction has been a little slower than was originally announced. The construction has been long awaited. It wasn't undertaken in 11 years when members opposite were in office. There wasn't a bridge built in Brandon during their time in office. In fact, I don't think there's ever been a bridge in Brandon constructed under a Tory administration. As I reflect back on the 1st Street bridge and so forth, it was Len Evans that built those bridges, but those bridges are being built at a \$17-million cost. They're going to be state-of-the-art spans, voted against. Those dollars were voted against by members opposite. The reconstruction of the intersection of 1st Street and Victoria, a major, major intersection impacting two major senior citizens complexes in Brandon, the Conservative opposition voted against providing the dollars to redevelop that intersection.

They voted against the repaving of 1st Street this last year. They voted against the repaving of Richmond Avenue. They voted against the repaving of 18th Street through the city of Brandon. Every single dollar that has been invested in infrastructure in Brandon over the last 10 years has been voted against by members of the Conservative opposition. They don't like to say that. They don't like to remind people in Brandon that they're opposed to all these developments. In fact, quite the contrary. Again, I'll add, Mr. Speaker, I'll repeat: quite the contrary. In the coffee shops of western Manitoba and the coffee shops of Brandon, they like to say how much they're doing for the region, how much they support the college, how much they support the university, how much they support the building of infrastructure, the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway, the building of public schools, the building of health-care education.

But what is the record, what is the record? In fact, the record is voting against every single dollar that has been invested in health-care infrastructure. Voting against every single dollar that's been invested in our education system; voting against every single dollar that's gone into the construction of the No. 10 highway, the Trans-Canada Highway, the streets of Brandon, the bridges of Brandon; voting against every single dollar that's gone into providing increased police protection in Brandon; voting against every single dollar that's provided increased fire protection services in Brandon; voting against every single initiative and every single dollar that's been invested in western Manitoba. The

members opposite have opposed it and voted against the funding of those projects.

That's a record that we take to the doorsteps in Brandon. It's a record that is, in fact, reflected in the *Hansard* of this province. It is reflected in the voting record of members opposite. They are opposed to investing in Brandon. They are opposed to investing in western Manitoba. The record is clear. The record is on the books. The record is, in fact, a fact, Mr. Speaker, and I am proud to stand with people of conscience and people of good will and people of integrity on this side of the House that believe in investing in this province and believe in investing in Brandon and believe in investing in western Manitoba. We will continue to invest in Manitoba as long as we hold office.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): I do appreciate the opportunity to enter into the discussion over the 2009 provincial budget as brought forward here by the minister. It's certainly nice to give the Member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell) his time in the sun, here, while he's with us today.

Mr. Speaker, I do look forward to getting out to Brandon this weekend, hopefully, Friday night, partake in the Brandon Wheat Kings game there. They're busy in a series with Medicine Hat right now. The Wheat Kings, of course, are up two games to nothing. I believe they have a home game tonight, so we'll certainly wish the Wheat Kings all the best and hope to be there on Friday night where we'll have a good Progressive Conservative previous candidate, and probably a future candidate, sing the national anthem there. I'm sure he'll be there and look forward to seeing the Member for Brandon East there. Hopefully, the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) will be there as well.

I'm not sure where the previous member for Brandon West is these days. I don't know if he's spending any time in Brandon or not. I guess he's now employed by the provincial government, so I'm not sure what his role is with the government, what kinds of payments he's making or what kind of contribution he's making to the province and what his role is in terms of our budget these days. So we'll be certainly looking forward to hearing about his whereabouts and his activities within the province.

I do, Mr. Speaker, want to recognize and congratulate the two new members that have just been recently elected to the House. The Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie), certainly, has joined with

his presence here in this week. It's good to see him here, as well as the Member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead). I certainly welcome those two members to the Legislature and certainly listen with intent to their discussions on the budget and some of their past history. I'm sure they'll bring some life to the Legislature over the next few years.

I do want to mention, as well, our Sergeant-at-Arms. We certainly miss Mr. Clark's presence in the Chamber. We do, on this side of the House, wish him a speedy recovery and hope he's back here to fulfil his capacities as sergeant fairly quickly. We do know we have some very capable people that have been able to fill in for him in the short term, and we look forward to their presence here in the next little while as well.

Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour for me to represent the great constituency of Turtle Mountain. Now we know before the next election or during the next election there will be some changes in the ridings, in the constituencies. That will pose some challenges for many of us, obviously, getting to know new people, new municipalities, new towns we'll be dealing with. But, certainly, this past election—I just want to make note the previous member for The Pas was successful in winning all of his polls in that particular riding, and that's certainly a major accomplishment. I do want to say, from the outset, that I was also successful in capturing every poll in Turtle Mountain. It certainly gives you a deal of satisfaction that you know when you go to a community you have the support of those communities.

Mr. Speaker, just to follow the Member for Brandon East, and he did point out himself that he is one of the—well, the only New Democratic member in southwestern Manitoba. That's certainly something that he should be—*[interjection]* and I'm sure he is lonely and he'll be watching over his shoulder that, at next election, one of the few New Democratic members outside of the city of Winnipeg.

* (16:50)

Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the deliberations on the budget here in the last couple of days and certainly hear some of the accolades coming from the government. I will give them credit. I will give the government credit. They have been able to spin this budget to Manitobans. They are leaving Manitobans with the perception that everything is rosy in Manitoba, and this provincial

budget, this budget, is a balanced budget. Well, we know for a fact on this side of the House that this budget is not balanced.

We look at other provinces. We look at the Province of Alberta. Now, obviously, they just brought forward a deficit budget. They understand what a deficit budget is. If you spend more money than you're taking in, it's called a deficit budget. They can admit that. They can admit they have a deficit budget.

The Province of Saskatchewan is going to have a surplus. Now they're actually going to take in more money than they're spending—surplus budget. The NDP here, Mr. Speaker, are going to be spending more money than they're taking in. Most people recognize that as a deficit budget. It's pretty clear. If you're running up your credit card, if you're borrowing more money from the bank, that's not a balanced budget. We know for a fact what's happened here in the last few years; the provincial government has been running up the mortgage of the province. They've increased the debt here in Manitoba to the tune of over \$2 billion since taking office in 1999.

Now we look at other provinces. We look at Saskatchewan. They've actually taken and reduced their debt. Their debt is down to somewhere in the neighbourhood of about \$4.5 billion. So they've taken the approach, when times are good, the economy is rolling along in a pretty positive manner, take the time and pay down your expenses, pay down your mortgage. You do have to pay service costs on that mortgage. You have to service that debt. So they recognize the fact that in good times you should be paying off your debt. This government doesn't recognize that.

They've taken the other approach. They continue to spend more money than they're taking in. As a result, we've got a \$21-billion debt for future Manitobans here in Manitoba. Now this government talks about investment, and we're all in favour of investments. When we look at investing money, we want to see some results for that money, results for that investment. So they've been using the term, I think, investments, pretty loosely. They can spend money, we know that. They can certainly spend money. You look at what they've done in the last nine years.

The provincial budget back in 1999 was \$6 billion. The budget that they produced this year is over \$10 billion. You can imagine the size of the

increase in spending they've taken on. Even with that extra spending, they're not generating the income that their spending creates. What they have been very fortunate in over the last few years is that the Government of Canada has been there to support their spending habit. We're getting almost 40 percent of our entire provincial budget from the federal government.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when you look around the country, you see what's happening in Ontario, you see what's happening in Alberta, and those are the provinces that have historically supported transfer payments to Manitoba. So the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) and this government should be well aware of what's going on in other provinces, because it doesn't look like those transfer payments that Ottawa's been giving Manitoba are going to be sustainable into the future. That's a very serious situation.

I just want to report on a couple of third-party comments that we've seen as a result of this budget. First of all, from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, he kind of sums things up pretty straightforward here. He says: If you like high taxes and high levels of spending, you'll love budget 2009. Spending has increased by 69 percent since 1999. It's time for a serious review of the government expenditures.

Here's another one from CFIB, Mr. Speaker: The NDP budget is a shell game that boggles the mind—boggles the mind. It's a shell game, it's a shell game. That's what it's done. This is a complete sham as a budget, and it's a shell game.

Manitoba families are here not getting any tax breaks at all. You know, there was a promise back there in last year's budget that we were going to see some relief from income tax in Manitoba. This budget does not show any future relief for income tax.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is a one-trick pony. It's a one-trick pony because this government has refused to take a look at the future.

Now let's look at a province like New Brunswick. New Brunswick's faced some pretty tough economic times in the past, but they brought forward a budget and said, you know, okay, we've had some tough times in the past, but we're going to look forward to the future. You know, we've been dependent on Ottawa for years, too, but we want to get past that. So they brought forward a plan for the

future for New Brunswick and the people of New Brunswick. They want to get out of that dependency from Ottawa for federal transfers.

This government in Manitoba has refused to bring forward any kind of future policy, programs or vision for Manitobans. That's typical NDP style. Let's not set the bar too high; let's not give Manitobans any expectations. No, let's not do that. As a result, now, the government can say, well, you know, there are no real expectations here in Manitoba. We're okay. It's steady as she goes here and our economy's doing fine. But the reality is we've missed tremendous opportunities in the last few years, tremendous opportunities, especially, I believe, in rural Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, we're going to see this budget and this government withdraw money from the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. We have about \$700 million in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. Look at our neighbours in Alberta. They have a \$7.7-billion fund. So, in this particular year, when they recognize that they're going to have a little deficit, they have a really huge—they've got a huge fund to draw from. They've got a huge fund to draw from. Our province, here, doesn't have those kinds of resources tucked away. So we're going to see a withdrawal from that just in order to try and balance the books.

We also see—[interjection] That's the thing. Why not be upfront with the Manitobans? Tell them that, yes, we're actually going to be spending more than we're taking in; this is not a balanced budget. But oh, no, we have—there's an article in here, too. You know, the *Brandon Sun* is saying, and some of the other people are saying, the minister—it's in regard to comments made by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) himself. You know, he talks about how we view balanced budgets differently than they do in Saskatchewan. Well, you know, that sounds like Enron accounting to me. How can you have one province saying, you know, we know what a balanced budget is; we know what a surplus is, and the province next door says, oh, no, we don't do our accounting that way? We've got a different definition

of balanced accounting. Well, I guess if you don't like the rules, you bring in some different rules and change the rules a little bit to your liking so it doesn't look as bad when you have to go to the banks and borrow some money to make sure you've got a balanced budget.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing that really disturbs me, and it kind of helps put things in perspective of where we are in Manitoba versus where the western provinces are here in Canada. The minister likes to use the term net debt. Okay, this time I'll talk about net debt. I'll go with his term. We know the total debt is about \$21 billion when you factor in all the debt, including Crown corporations. But the net debt—let's say the net debt is over \$11 billion here in Manitoba. We look at British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan have a total of 9 million people there, and their combined net debt is actually less than ours here in the province of Manitoba. We have 1.3 million people in Manitoba and we have more net debt. This is net debt we've got to talk about for each man, woman and child in Manitoba. For every man, woman and child in Manitoba, it's almost \$10,000 of net debt for every man, woman and child in Manitoba. Now, if you look at the total debt, that figure is almost twice as much as that, almost \$20,000 of debt per man, woman and child in Manitoba.

We know when you have debt, you have to pay interest on that debt. The only thing that's really saving this government right now is that we have relatively low interest rates, so that our debt-servicing costs are—they're high; we're probably \$700 million—[interjection] 860? \$860 million of interest we pay each year just to service the debt in the province—

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again in front of the House, the honourable Member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Cullen) will have 15 minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, April 8, 2009

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