Fourth Session - Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 18, 2010

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Madam Clerk (Patricia Chaychuk): It is my duty to inform the House that Mr. Speaker is unavoidably absent. Therefore, in accordance with the statutes, I would ask the honourable Deputy Speaker to please take the Chair.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

Multiple Myeloma Treatments

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Health Canada has approved the use of Revlimid for patients with multiple myeloma, a rare, progressive and fatal blood cancer.

Revlimid is a vital new treatment that must be accessible to all patients in Manitoba for this life-threatening cancer of the blood cells.

Multiple myeloma is treatable, and new, innovative therapies like Revlimid can extend survival and enhance quality of life for the estimated 2,100 Canadians diagnosed annually.

The provinces of Ontario, Québec, British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Alberta have already listed this drug on their respective pharmacare formularies.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

That the provincial government consider immediately providing Revlimid as a choice to patients with multiple myeloma and their health-care providers in Manitoba through public funding.

The petition is signed by L. Hes, C. Furgala, J. Froese and many, many others.

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

Medical Clinic in Weston and Brooklands Area

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

Community-based medical clinics provide a valuable health-care service.

The closure of the Westbrook Medical Clinic has left both Weston and Brooklands without a community-based medical clinic.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the provincial government to consider how important it is to have a medical clinic located in the Weston and Brooklands area.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is signed by P. Bruneau, M. Flint and A. Flint and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Waste-Water Ejector Systems

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Manitobans are deeply committed to protecting the environment and the safe–and they want to be assured provincial environmental policies are based on sound science.

In early 2009 the provincial government announced that it was reviewing the Onsite Wastewater Management Systems Regulation under the environmental act.

Affected Manitobans, including property owners, municipal governments, provided considerable feedback to the provincial government on the impact of proposed changes, only to have their input ignored.

The updated regulations includes a prohibition of the installation of new waste-water injectors and the elimination of waste-water injectors at the time of property transfer.

Questions have been raised about the lack of scientific basis for these changes, as a Manitoba Conservation official stated in the October 8th, 2009 edition of the *Manitoba Co-operator*, we have done a specific study? No.

These regulatory changes have a significant financial impact on all affected Manitobans.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Conservation to consider immediately replacing the recent changes to the Onsite Wastewater Management System Regulation under the environmental act on hold until such time the review can take place to ensure that they are based on sound science.

To request the Minister of Conservation to consider implementing the prohibition on waste-water injector systems on a case-by-case basis as determined by environmental need in ecologically sensitive areas.

To request the Minister of Conservation to consider offering financial incentives to help affected Manitobans–property owners adapt to these regulatory changes.

Sent on behalf of S. Kroeker, N. Kroek, N. Dilts and many other fine Manitobans.

Multiple Myeloma Treatments

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Health Canada has approved the use of Revlimid for patients with multiple myeloma, a rare, progressive and fatal blood cancer.

Revlimid is a vital new treatment that must be accessible to all patients in Manitoba for this life-threatening cancer of the blood cells.

Multiple myeloma is treatable, and new, innovative therapies like Revlimid can extend survival and enhance quality of life for the estimated 2,100 Canadians diagnosed annually.

The provinces of Ontario, Québec, British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Alberta have already listed this drug on their respective pharmacare formularies.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

That the provincial government consider immediately providing Revlimid as a choice to patients with multiple myeloma and their health-care providers in Manitoba through public funding.

And this is signed by R. Erasiuk, I. Doll, G. Doll and many, many others, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mount Agassiz Ski Area

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

For several decades, the Mount Agassiz ski area, home to the highest vertical between Thunder Bay and the Rocky Mountains, was a popular skiing and snowboarding destination for Manitobans and visitors alike.

The operations of Mount Agassiz ski area were very important to the local economy, not only creating jobs, but also generating sales of goods and services in area businesses.

In addition, a thriving rural economy generates tax revenue that helps pay for core provincial government services and infrastructure which benefits all Manitobans.

Although the ski facility closed in 2000, there remains strong interest in seeing it reopened and Parks Canada is committed to conducting a feasibility study with respect to the Agassiz site and future opportunities in the area.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the appropriate ministers of the provincial government to consider outlining to Parks Canada the importance that a viable recreation facility in the Mount Agassiz area would play in the local and provincial economies.

And to request the appropriate ministers of the provincial government consider working with all stakeholders, including Parks Canada, to help develop a plan for a viable, multiseason recreation facility in the Mount Agassiz area.

This petition is signed by J. Horkey, V. Baker, R. Koshowski and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Deputy Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the Speaker's Gallery where we have with us today the 2010 tour guides Lori Darragh, Marina Goodwin and Geneviève Freynet, who are accompanied by Vanessa Gregg, manager of the visitor tour program.

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Manitoba Hydro
Wind Energy Contract Costs

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): With hydro rates on the rise for Manitoba families, many ratepayers are asking questions about the way this NDP government is mismanaging Manitoba Hydro. One of the questions that has arisen is in connection with contracts awarded recently through public-private partnerships with American companies.

I want to ask the Premier if he can identify for Manitobans, for ratepayers, how much money on the Pattern deal is going to the United States, to Pattern Energy, and how much money, of ratepayers' money, is going to Minneapolis on the main contract.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Hydro has gone on the public–Hydro, Madam Deputy Speaker, Hydro has gone on the public record and indicated that the power purchase agreement with the company providing wind power in St. Joseph is likely the lowest in North America and that it will generate substantial benefits to the farmers in that area in terms of the land rents paid, where the towers go, as well as the other payments for use of that territory for wind generation.

***** (13:40)

So it is probably the most cost-effective deal done in North America on a power purchase agreement, and it was done quickly enough to take advantage of the last remaining amount of the federal incentive of 1 cent a kilowatt hour, which has now been phased out in the most recent federal budget.

Mr. McFadyen: Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, the process is many years in the making. There were many bidders, including Canadian- and Manitoba-based companies, and in the end, the contract went to an American company, Pattern Energy. The main general contract has gone to another American company, and questions are arising as to how much ratepayers' money–the people who're working hard every day here in Manitoba paying their hydro bills–how much of that money is going to San Francisco, to Minneapolis and to other American companies under this contract?

We're very happy to see support for local municipalities and jobs in Manitoba, but the amount of money that is flowing to American companies based in San Francisco and Minneapolis is a legitimate question for Manitoba Hydro ratepayers.

Will they be open and transparent about the terms of this public-private partnership?

Mr. Selinger: Hydro, themselves, were the ones that 'priorized' this operation as being the most cost-effective one to enter into an agreement with, and they decided among all the bids that were available which would be the most cost-effective supplier of wind power to their system. And they are the ones that negotiated the power purchase agreement. And they believe they have the best power purchase agreement in North America for the purchase of wind power in Manitoba with very substantial benefits flowing to the local agricultural community, the landowners down there, as well as the municipalities and school divisions in terms of factors.

It is a $345-million project for which there are very significant substantial benefits to the local landowners, the municipalities, as well as the school divisions.

Mr. McFadyen: Madam Deputy Speaker, the–or the current chair of Manitoba Hydro, Mr. Schroeder, indicated at committee that he met 26 times a year with the member for St. Boniface when he was the minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro. We know that this minister also directed Hydro when it came to transmission-line routing decisions and has micromanaged many other aspects of what happens at Hydro.

We also know he was involved–Hydro ministers have been involved directly in the awarding of these contracts to American companies. And I wonder why the Premier can't provide a direct response.

How much ratepayer money being paid by Manitoba Hydro ratepayers is going to the American company, Pattern, in San Francisco? How much is going under the general contract to Minneapolis before money trickles back into Manitoba, which we support for the benefit of workers and municipalities,

but we want to know how much is being skimmed off the top by the American companies that got the contracts.

Mr. Selinger: Madam Deputy Speaker, one should never confuse the misleading preamble of the member's question with reality. The reality is, is that Manitoba Hydro, through their own processes, have decided that this was the best offer that they could acquire in terms of building wind power in Manitoba. They negotiated the power purchase agreement. They were the ones that ensured that they got best value for the money. The corporation is very capable of doing that. They have very skilled staff to do those kinds of things.

There are also very substantial benefits for the local municipality, for the local school division, for the local landowners on this contract, which will generate up to 138 megawatts of additional clean wind energy power in Manitoba. It will provide rural economic development in the province at a time of recession. It will generate 225 construction jobs this year. It will have another 200 indirect jobs, and there will be $38 million of benefits available to landholders and $117 million–

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The honourable minister's time has expired.

Mr. McFadyen: And we are always–

Madam Deputy Speaker: On a new question.

Mr. McFadyen: –very supportive of Manitoba workers and Manitoba landowners benefiting under agreements and initiatives that provide those sorts of benefits.

What we have concerns about, Madam Deputy Speaker, is the lack of transparency in terms of the awarding of the contract to Pattern Energy. They have privatized the ownership of the windmills to an American company. They have then entered into a power sale agreement that is going to result in ongoing operating losses to the ratepayers of Manitoba Hydro, and they have forced Hydro to advance the money to the American company in order to get the project off the ground.

I think the least he can do is be open and transparent with Manitobans about the terms of those agreements. How much ratepayers' money is going south of the border before some of it makes its way back to southern Manitoba?

Mr. Selinger: Madam Deputy Speaker, I–again, for the record, Hydro has themselves said this is probably the best power purchase agreement entered into by any utility in North America to acquire wind power–

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Just want to remind all honourable members that we are in front of the viewing public here, so I'm going to ask for some decorum in the House.

The honourable First Minister has the floor.

Mr. Selinger: They believe it is probably the best deal in terms of a power purchase agreement. They identify $345 million of investment, $95 million up front, and that includes $38 million in landholder payments and $117 million in provincial and local taxes over the life of the agreement, plus 225 direct jobs and 200 indirect jobs.

This was a project that they worked on for a long time. They identified the criteria under which they selected the successful bidder, and they 'priorized' all the bids that were made and decided that this one was the most advantageous one from the point of view of purchasing power. And this is what Manitoba Hydro does, it makes these decisions based on their mandate.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. McFadyen: The numbers the Premier has just laid out suggest that it's only a fraction of that money that's being expended by Manitoba Hydro ratepayers that is actually coming back to the Province of Manitoba after it flows south.

I want to ask the Premier why he's so concerned about openness and transparency. We put in two FIPPA requests to get information, both of which were denied by this government, by Hydro, by the Hydro minister. The news release that we did receive says, and I quote: Terms of the power purchase agreement and construction term alone were not disclosed. End of quote.

I want to ask the Premier: What are they trying to hide from Manitoba ratepayers?

Mr. Selinger: Again, Madam Deputy Speaker, Manitoba Hydro entered into the agreement for the purchase of this power. They have said publicly they believe it is the probably best agreement in North America for the purchase of that power in terms of the cost per kilowatt hour. We have indicated we have supported them in following their own due

diligence process on bringing this new form of energy into Manitoba, the marketplace, the wind power.

We have supported it because of the substantial rural economic benefits that are available. We have supported it because it diversifies the portfolio of clean energy that's available to Manitoba Hydro. We have supported it because of the tax benefits that will be generated for both the local municipalities' school divisions, as well as the Province, and not least of which, for the jobs which it creates at a time when the economy was struggling all over North America. Wind power projects had a very difficult time getting off the ground in the last year. I'm pleased that Manitoba Hydro was able to bring this project to fruition and have it launched in Manitoba these days right now.

Mr. McFadyen: Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, if he's so pleased with the agreement that they've entered into with the American company, I don't understand why he's so reluctant then to be open and transparent about the terms of that agreement. We know that there's a sizable loan going to the American company. We know that they have been given private ownership of the generating assets that are going to be built. We know that the main contract has gone to an American company in terms of the work that's under way.

I just want to ask the Premier: Two weeks ago his government put on the Notice Paper, a Bill 33, The Public-Private Partnerships Transparency and Accountability Act; I wonder when can we expect to see that bill, and will they do the right thing and ensure that that bill opens up this Hydro deal so the ratepayers of Manitoba Hydro, whose bills are going up, have a–can see exactly where their money's going? Will he *[inaudible]*

Mr. Selinger: Madam Deputy Speaker, it was just yesterday that the member opposite was asking for us to enter into a broad array of trading relationships all throughout North America. And this tender was open to the best bidders in North America, and Manitoba Hydro 'priorized' who they believed was the most cost-effective provider of the wind power in Manitoba.

Is the member now saying that he doesn't believe that a contractor that's not from Manitoba should've been eligible for this contract? Is he going against his very free-trade principles that he was espousing just yesterday?

***** (13:50)

Hydro has made it very clear they believe they have the best power purchase agreement in North America. They have identified the value of the power–of the private investment that will come into Manitoba: $345 million. They have identified the jobs that will be created: up to 425. They have identified the rents and the taxes that will be available to local people: over $38 million.

This generates jobs. It generates economic development. And–

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

Eating Disorders
Treatment Program Funding

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Health officials are saying that there is no increase in the number of people with eating disorders in Manitoba, despite the fact that they don't even track the number of cases in Manitoba and despite the fact that waiting lists are through the roof.

I'd like to ask the Minister of Health to tell us: How can her department say that there isn't an increase in eating disorders in Manitoba when they don't even track the prevalence of eating disorders in Manitoba?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I'm very pleased to let the House know that there have been substantial investments going on concerning the issue of eating disorders. We've had very good advice from parents and from families that have struggled with this very complex issue with their loved ones. We've made investments in hospital treatment. We've made investments in community, and we continue to take advice from parents, from our experts in the field on how to best assess these programs, how to best track in these programs and how to provide the best possible cutting-edge care for individuals that are suffering with eating disorders.

Mrs. Driedger: The new provincial Eating Disorder Prevention and Recovery centre at the Women's Health Clinic has been inundated with people wanting to get in for treatment. They have had a waiting list since March and no one can get in until August. The funding for this new program only goes until August, and there is growing fears that this minister plans to cut its funding.

Can the Minister of Health tell us: Will this funding be extended, or is this program on the chopping block?

Ms. Oswald: I'm very happy to say that in 2005 Manitoba Health and Healthy Living at that time formed a provincial working group on eating disorders, and it was from that working group, comprised of a panel of experts that gave very, very good advice, that this program that she references, the new provincial Eating Disorder Prevention and Recovery Program, began operating as a pilot. I'm very pleased to inform the House that the anecdotal reports from this pilot are very, very positive. We're seeing very good results.

We have extended funding to that program to broaden the evaluation, but I can tell the member that, contrary to the fear that she tends to spread, that we are committed to continuing this program or an amended version of the program that will be enhanced.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Honourable member for Charleswood, on the second supplemental.

Mrs. Driedger: Madam Deputy Speaker, the second phase of funding for the home program hasn't been announced. This program is needed to improve accessibility for those living in rural and remote areas.

Elaine Stevenson, who lost a daughter to an eating disorder, says that Manitobans shouldn't have to be on death's door before they can get care in this province.

So I'd like to ask the Minister of Health to tell Elaine and others: Will funding for the home-care aspect or the home program be announced soon, or is this program on the chopping block? Can she give some reassurances to those people that are really working hard on these programs that this funding is all in place in the future?

Ms. Oswald: And I'll say to the member again that, contrary to her proclivity for talking about programs closing–we all remember the journey prior to the election about the Grace ER and the kinds of fear that she inspired in seniors in that department, wholly inappropriate–I can let the member know that it is because of the incredible strength of character and insight of people like Mrs. Stevenson that we got advice about that community program, and that's why we're evaluating it. That's why we're continuing to commit to funding it or an amended version thereof to make it better, and that's why we're committed to continue to listen to these parents, who arguably have more insight than any other on what is the best possible opportunity.

We're not going to scare people for political–

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Low-Speed Electric Vehicles
Government Support

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Northland Machinery in the town of Carman continue to work towards a pilot project for low-speed vehicles, or LSVs, within the town of Carman. It seems the only hurdle remaining is this government.

Despite a multitude of press releases from the NDP claiming to be reducing greenhouse gases and being more environmentally friendly, there is little meaningful action happening in the real world. LSVs are an effective way to reduce the carbon footprint. However, this government seems to contend to drag their feet in approving a pilot project for the town of Carman.

Madam Deputy Speaker, what is the Minister of Innovation, Energy and Mines waiting for?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Innovation, Energy and Mines): Madam Deputy Speaker, I am very proud to be a part of a government that has identified technology and identified clean energy as priorities for a provincial government, which is why we have the world's best nutraceutical–world's best agricultural centre, and the Richardson nutraceutical centre started under this government. That's why we have wind power in Manitoba, started under this government. That's why we have the biodiesel mandate, started under this government. That's we have the ethanol mandate, started by this government.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I just want remind all honourable members that I do need to make a ruling if–in terms of what the speech is that is here in the House, and I am having some trouble hearing all honourable members so I am going to ask for decorum in the House.

Mr. Chomiak: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. That's why we're looking at hybrids and that's why we're looking at plug-in electrical cars in Manitoba. And that's why we're going to do a pilot project that allows manufacturers of vehicles to have the opportunity to test their vehicles, just like every other

manufacturer in the world, including American manufacturers, and Japanese manufacturers are coming to Manitoba to test their vehicles.

Mr. Pedersen: Madam Deputy Speaker, Northland Machinery's using the American Custom Golf Cars, which are registered with Transport Canada. And this is similar to one such as the ZENN car, and other jurisdictions in Canada have already approved these types of projects.

The only holdup seems to be this government. Even the member for Radisson (Mr. Jha) is having–is being stonewalled by his own government on an environmentally friendly car, so I can understand why I am, too.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when is this minister going to bring in his colleagues from Infrastructure and Transportation, Manitoba Public Insurance, get them together and finally get this environmentally green project up and running? Northland Machinery in the town of Carman are ready to go. Where is this minister?

Mr. Chomiak: Madam Deputy Speaker, we are not only working with Northland vehicles. There's other manufacturers in Manitoba that are also looking at electric-powered vehicles to pilot on Manitoba roads.

In addition, Madam Deputy Speaker, virtually every single manufacturer of electric or hybrid vehicles are testing their vehicles, not just in Manitoba, but at our northern Thompson testing centre, the only one of its kind, I believe, in Canada and possibly North America, that tests all weather conditions for these vehicles.

In addition, Madam Deputy Speaker, we have several projects out with respect to both plug-in hybrids and hybrids themselves that we are testing in Manitoba.

So I'm very proud to be part of an innovative government, Madam Deputy Speaker, that's looking at the future–not backwards–forward with electricity, clean electricity, not backwards to the age of coal, as members opposite seems to imply.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Just prior to recognizing the honourable member for Carman, I want to remind all honourable members that we do have school groups in the gallery. We are in front of the viewing public. So I am going to ask for some decorum in the House.

The honourable member for Carman, on his second supplemental.

Mr. Pedersen: And I think these young students would certainly enjoy running the American Golf Car in Carman if they were given a chance.

Madam Deputy Speaker, The Climate Change and Emissions Reduction Act lets the Province make regulations allowing the use of zero-emission and low-speed vehicles. The same bill also allowed for the creation of an advisory board to recommend ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from passenger cars. And just this morning the Premier (Mr. Selinger) was speaking about the Commuter Challenge, and I quote from him: We encourage Manitobans to take an important step towards a greener province by using cleaner, healthier ways to commute. *[interjection]* My point exactly. Apparently, it's all talk and no action, because they won't let us use these cars in Carman.

***** (14:00)

Environment Canada recently released national inventory report–reveals that Manitoba has seen greenhouse gas emission levels rise. Madam Deputy Speaker, we have an opportunity here to take some vehicles off the road and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Why does this government continue to drag its heels?

Mr. Chomiak: The member's question is inaccurate in a number of–and I'll try to correct it.

First off, Madam Deputy Speaker, low-speed vehicle standards that are monitored by Transport Canada are not allowed in some instances and we're working very diligently to try to change those Transport Canada standards. I call them the Bombardier standards but I don't want to get into federal-provincial discussions.

In addition, this was the government that received the reward from *BusinessWeek* magazine as having the best greenhouse gas reduction program in the world–the province of Manitoba.

It is in this province, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we put in place the first wind farms in the province of Manitoba, the biodiesel mandate, the ethanol mandate, all greenhouse gas reduction procedures, closed the coal-fired plant at Selkirk, closed the one in Brandon, and hope to close others in the rest of the world because of our export–

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

New West Partnership Agreement
Provincial Exclusion

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Madam Deputy Speaker, the New West Partnership, signed by the three western provinces of Saskatchewan, Alberta and B.C., is beginning to have an effect on businesses in a very real way. A trucking firm in my constituency that wants to expand its operation and facilities is now contemplating to moving their operations to Saskatchewan as a result of the news that Manitoba is not of a signatory to the New West economic partnership.

Madam Deputy Speaker, can the Minister responsible for Trade, explain why his government is prepared to sacrifice growth in western Manitoba businesses by not participating in this critical economic agreement, leaving Manitoba in the dust?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): I say, Madam Deputy Speaker, I think the member opposite is completely missing the point in terms of trucking regulations. We met with the government of Saskatchewan when the key elements that came out of that meeting was a commitment to harmonize trucking regulations. We have a meeting in Brandon as a follow-up with the provincial Minister of Transportation of Saskatchewan, and we're moving on the ground, both in terms of existing regulations, in terms of the southwest in the oil industry, and in terms of overall trucking regulations.

So what the member should be saying back to the firm in his constituency is this province is working with Saskatchewan to harmonize trucking regulations. That will make a real difference to his trucking firm.

Mr. Derkach: Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, I think the companies on the west side of this province have a message for this minister. And that is, unless Manitoba is prepared to sign on to the New West Partnership economic agreement, more companies are going to leave this province and look to the west for opportunities, and that is going to take jobs, it's going to take economic prosperity out of this province and especially the west side of this province.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to ask the minister why he is prepared to put companies like this in jeopardy of moving out of this province with his government's reluctance to get onboard and to ask Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia to become a partner in that New West economic partnership?

Mr. Ashton: The member opposite, who I know lives in western Manitoba, was also part of a government for 11 years that couldn't manage to have a joint meeting with the Saskatchewan Cabinet. This government has met with the Saskatchewan Cabinet. We have committed to harmonized trucking regulations.

What I would suggest the member do, by the way, is support those efforts. We are working with the government of Saskatchewan on harmonizing the trucking regulations rather than fear mongering in terms of something that's got absolutely nothing to do with it.

He knows, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we have a series of trucking regulations that can and will be harmonized. That's going to make a real difference for trucking. And, in fact, I would suggest that he suggest to the trucking company in his area they may be looking at an expansion once we get that harmonization of trucking regulations in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Derkach: Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, I know the minister's memory may be selective and maybe it's getting a little bad, but he should recall the days when we were working with the United States and with other jurisdictions across this country to put free trade agreements in place, and, this is the party that fought every step of the way against that kind of initiative.

Madam Deputy Speaker, companies like Pioneer Grain crushers, along with Louis Dreyfus, have moved their operations to Saskatchewan because this government would not put a position on the table that was competitive with Saskatchewan. These are multimillion-dollar operations, and in the terms of J.R. Richardson, a company that was born right here in Manitoba.

And I want to ask the minister, just like Viterra moving 1,500 jobs out of this province, I want to ask this minister why he's prepared to allow this government to take away the competitive advantage that Manitoba businesses had by not signing onto this agreement.

Mr. Ashton: Madam Deputy Speaker, not only are we harmonizing trucking regulations, but since this government came into office we have quadrupled the expenditures on the highways capital program. So,

for example, Highway 16 and Highway 1 are state-of-the-art highways which ensures that we can have trade with western Canada, not like the neglect we saw under the members opposite. And that member opposite who travels Highway 16 on a regular basis should be ashamed of the shape that he left that highway in after 1999.

We're fixing the highways and–

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Just prior to recognizing the next honourable member I just want to remind all members in the House that we are in front of the viewing public, that people are here because they're interested in our parliamentary procedures. So I'm going to ask for some decorum from all members in the House.

Agriculture Industry
Supply Management Commodities Quota Tax

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Madam Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Transportation reminds me of John Henry, another day older and deeper in debt.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the federal government continues to invest in agriculture in Canada to build a strong and competitive industry through research and develop so that today's producers and family farms can compete globally.

Madam Deputy Speaker, can the Minister of Agriculture tell the producers in Manitoba's supply management sector why he wants to tax them to satisfy the NDP's out-of-control spending?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Prior to recognizing the honourable Minister for Agriculture I want to remind all honourable members that everyone in this House is an honourable member.

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you very much, and I appreciate your help in getting the members opposite to focus on this question. Yet again this week it's been asked again by this member I don't know how many times now and I've told the same answer every time, that we are speaking with the supply managed groups. We had meetings as early–as late as yesterday, again, to talk with them about this measure.

Madam Deputy Speaker, my commitment has been very clear with this sector management–with the supply sector, and that is that we're not moving forward without speaking with them, without a number of meetings. Our officials are meeting; I intend, and I have committed to each of them to meet again in the future, and those continue.

Mr. Graydon: Madam Deputy Speaker, we know by the minister's own admission that he has little direct knowledge of agriculture in general and supply management in particular. He just doesn't get it. The federal government gets it though. They realize that agriculture is a core economic driver.

The federal government is rolling out programs that enhance and guarantee the family farm's survival. They're ensuring that top quality food producers–products produced by our farmers end up on the dinner tables around the world.

Madam Deputy Speaker, can this minister explain to consumers why he wants to tax milk, chickens, eggs, and a whole list of other foods to help pay for his uncontrolled spending?

Mr. Struthers: Madam Deputy Speaker, I would think that for once the member should stand up for Manitoba farmers instead of defending his cousins in Ottawa who haven't got the foresight or the commitment to farmers to stand up for the Canadian Wheat Board.

If members opposite were actually committed to the family farm they would come out to–come to their federal minister and say, don't gerrymander the polls. Don't gerrymander the lists of voters that are going to take place in the election coming up too. You can be for the farmer and you can be for democracy all at once.

***** (14:10)

Mr. Graydon: Madam Deputy Speaker, and this is from a minister that wants to tax children. They want to–he wants to tax milk. He wants to tax eggs. He wants to tax all the dairy products. This is what we have for a minister today, and he's doing that with federal money coming in by bucketsful, $4.4 billion.

The Agriculture Minister was told–

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Just remind all honourable members that we need to be able to hear the questions and the answers.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Agriculture Minister was told by his colleague to cut 10 percent and find 10 percent savings in his budget. Acting like Robin Hood, the minister took off for rural Manitoba to seek for bounty. He raised licensing fees. He hiked Crown land fees and he

taxed quota transfers, all measures that hurt the family farm. He never looked within his department for better management of spending.

However, unlike Robin Hood, rather than help those in real need, this minister takes from the hardworking farm families and gives proceeds to the less needy, like for stadiums and those such things.

Madam Deputy Speaker, will the minister stop this senseless taxation of family farms and stop–start–

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Struthers: I think it might be a good time to introduce some facts to the member for Emerson.

I don't know what Robin Hood would think of this, but we took out of Growing Forward, in '08, $322 million and gave it to farmers. We took in, in 2009, '08 and '07–*[interjection]* We gave them $165 million through the targeted advance payments to hog producers, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I just want to remind all honourable members that, first of all, every time I stand up to call the House to order, I'm taking time away from question period. So that's not advantageous to anybody.

The other thing I just wanted to say, was that we are in front of the viewing public. So I'm going to ask, once again, for decorum from all honourable members.

The honourable Minister for Agriculture has the floor.

Mr. Struthers: Yes, thanks, Madam Deputy Speaker. To continue putting some facts on the table for the member for Emerson: hog assistance loans in 2008, $50 million we gave to hog farmers; ruminant assistant program, '08-09, $15 million to Manitoba farmers; BSE loans and income assistance, $145 million to Manitoba farmers. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I think the member from Emerson just has it backwards.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Just prior to recognizing the honourable member for River Heights, I want to remind all honourable members that everyone in this House is an honourable member and people should be addressed either by their constituency–members should be addressed by their constituency–or ministers by their title.

Burntwood Regional Health Authority
Quality of Medical Care Inquiry

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Sharon McIvor was misdiagnosed 21 times by 13 doctors over 17 months in the Burntwood region. I table her story.

Quality problems in the care of Joan Saunders, Ann Kacuilis and Felicia Stone are building a case that the NDP has a worse standard of care in northern Manitoba than in the rest of the province. There hasn't been a permanent pediatrician, for example, in Thompson for a long time, and won't be for months. Northern health care appears, at times, to rival that in Somalia or sub-Saharan Africa.

I ask the Premier (Mr. Selinger): Will he act today and call a full inquiry into the quality of health care in the Burntwood region?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Madam Deputy Speaker, I'd say, first of all, I feel absolutely certain that this member is aware–and that most members are aware–that if there are allegations concerning care from particular doctors that there's an obligation to report this to the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and I know that the member knows that.

Secondly, I would let the member know that Burntwood currently has 24 full-time physicians, uses a number of locum specialists, that a pediatrician has signed an offer and is going through an assessment process. The physicians working in our northern communities, Madam Deputy Speaker, are physicians we can be very proud of. I'm surprised the member would suggest otherwise.

Mr. Gerrard: Sharon McIvor could not get a family doctor. This morning the NDP turned down legislation which would have provided for accountability in the delivery of heath care, and now the Minister of Health is trying to blame the doctors when the problem is a lack of provincial standards, the lack of spreading of best practices and lack of access to family physicians, as Sharon McIvor found.

It's time that the NDP stopped jeopardizing the health of northern Manitobans and admitted that they're delivering poor quality health care to 46,000 Manitobans in the Burntwood area. It's time we had a full-scale inquiry.

I ask the Premier: Will he call this inquiry today?

Ms. Oswald: Madam Deputy Speaker, and, again, I would say in the case of specific allegation–

allegations concerning treatment from specific doctors, that is the role of the college and physicians and surgeons as a self-regulatory body. And they hold a very important role.

Further, I can say to the member that we know that work that's being done in Thompson now at their clinic with the advanced access model that is, Madam Deputy Speaker, the ability for individuals to receive appointments on the same day, the day that they're ill. The new way of doing business is working extremely well in Thompson and continues to go forward as it expands around the rest of the province.

And, thirdly, as we continue to invest in the education of our young people in our northern residency program, we know we're going to continue to have expert care–

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Health-Care Services
Children's Surgery Statistics

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Deputy Speaker, this Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) spends more money, more tax dollars, has more propaganda than any other Minister of Health in the history of the province of Manitoba.

In reality, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Health has failed Manitobans on many different accounts. I want to bring one of those accounts before the Legislature right now. Through freedom of information, I requested what is the number of surgical procedures that children under the age of six are receiving and to give us a sense of how bad it's gotten in the province of Manitoba.

Madam Minister, when your government took office, there was 1,677. Virtually every year since then, it has gone up year after year–virtually every year. Today, in 2008-2009, it's 2,679.

Madam Deputy Speaker, my question to the minister is: Explain that one, will you?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Madam Deputy Speaker, the–both members from the benches opposite that represent the Liberal Party have suggested today there is inadequate health care being provided in Manitoba. And yet, they voted against the budget that put 60 percent of all the additional resources in this year's budget into the health-care budget. They voted against a budget that put more young Manitobans–

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The honourable First Minister has the floor.

Mr. Selinger: Thank you. They put–they voted against resources to put more young people in medical school, including recruiting more people from northern Manitoba. They voted against resources for northern people to enter the nursing profession and allied health professions. On every single count of a resource measure that would make a difference for northern Manitoba–

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The honourable minister's time has expired. The honourable member–

Time for questions–oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Mary Ellen Clark

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Madam Deputy Speaker, local sports teams provide an outlet for youth to stay active, connect with each other and to build athletic and teamwork skills that will last them a lifetime.

This is especially true in rural Manitoba, which is why I'm pleased to stand today and recognize Mary Ellen Clark who's been named Manitoba's RBC Local Hockey Leader.

***** (14:20)

Nominees for the award are singled out for their community leadership and their positive impact on hockey. Mary Ellen has been a vital presence in the Neepawa Natives rinks for years and has given her time in many different ways. She is both the lottery co-ordinator and the billet co-ordinator for the team and takes three or four billets every year herself.

Ryan McLaughlin, a Neepawa Natives board member, nominated Ms. Clark for the award which is recognition that without it–without her in the hockey program, Neepawa would not be the success it is today.

As the chosen local hockey leader, Mary Ellen Clark will join 13 other hockey volunteers who will be recognized in a ceremony at the national Hockey Hall of Fame on June 16th. She will also receive a trip for two to attend the ceremony in Toronto, a signed Team Canada jersey and $10,000 to be donated to the local hockey club. Mary Ellen has chosen to continue giving back to her community by donating the money to the Neepawa Natives.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is volunteers like Mary Ellen Clark that make Neepawa a thriving community. Hockey is not the only way that Mary Ellen is part of the life of Neepawa. She serves as a palliative care co-ordinator. She's been a member of the Brandon University Board of Governors. She is a member of the Inner Wheel women's group associated with Rotary Club and was recognized by the Brandon YMCA's Women of Distinction Awards.

Mary Ellen's commitment to improving the lives of others crosses all boundaries. She is an inspiration and a role model for all of us. I want to congratulate Mary Ellen Clark on being named a Local Hockey Leader. She is an outstanding woman and Neepawa is lucky to have her. Thank you.

Sonny Lavallee

Mr. Frank Whitehead (The Pas): Madam Deputy Speaker, this week marks the celebration of Aboriginal Awareness Week, and in light of this important event I would like to recognize a very deserving individual in my community of The Pas, Sonny Lavallee.

Sonny has spent his entire life in The Pas and is known for his dedication to the community through volunteerism. As a Kinsmen he is regarded as a leader who promotes service to others, fellowship, family values and cultural pride. While Sonny has given years to the Kinsmen he is better known for his passion for the Northern Manitoba Trappers' Festival, a week-long celebration of the diverse cultural heritage of northern Manitoba citizens held annually in The Pas. After almost 30 years of sitting on the board of directors, his name is virtually synonymous with the festival, and Sonny is the first to volunteer when any task needs to be completed. Friends and fellow volunteers often speak of his concern for the betterment of the festival and his desire to raise the profile of The Pas through improving and spreading the word of this unique event.

Last year Sonny spearheaded a campaign that brought the popular comedian and political satirist Rick Mercer to the festival where, to the delight of the community members and organizers, Mercer joined them in such events as moose calling, even, you know, in flour packing and tea boiling and so forth. Madam Deputy Speaker, he even rode his dogsled team through Tim Hortons, there, for a cup of coffee while he was in The Pas. It was a great success, and through Sonny's efforts, The Pas found itself in the spotlight.

Madam Deputy Speaker, last year he was awarded the annual Citizen of the Year tribute from The Pas citizens. I am proud that Sonny has been given the respect he deserves and that his achievements have been recognized. He is truly an ambassador for my community of The Pas.

Thank you, Sonny, for your devotion to and enthusiasm for helping to create a vibrant community in which we embrace each other, our culture and our heritage.

Lana Krieser

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Madam Deputy Speaker, it is a rare opportunity when one can stand in this House to mark the achievements of a true hero, someone who selflessly puts their own life at risk to save another. Today, I am grateful to have the opportunity to recognize Lana Krieser, a hero who courageously and endangered her own life to save a young boy who was trapped under a live power line.

On a school camping trip last year in Riding Mountain National Park, Lana pulled an incapacitated and convulsing Linden Racette, a student at George Fitton School, from under a downed hydro-electric line. Lana's quick thinking and bravery saved his–saved this boy's life, who escaped with third degree burns on his back and serious burns to his face, legs and hand.

I am pleased to say Linden has made a full recovery and has returned to school.

In recognition of her bravery, Lana has been named a recipient of the St. John's Ambulance Gold Lifesaving Award, with risk, which will be presented to her at a ceremony by the Honourable Philip Lee today at Government House.

Lana Krieser, an employee at George Fitton School, was nominated for the award by the school's principal, Gail McDonald. This prestigious award is only given to those very few who have gone beyond what is normally expected to try and save someone's life, administering first aid knowledge and skills where a clear danger to their own life exists.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to thank Lana Krieser for her heroism and quick thinking in an incredibly trying situation. Her actions saved a life. I also wish to, again, congratulate Lana in

receiving the St. John's Ambulance Gold Lifesaving Award, with risk.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Dennis Strom

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): Madam Deputy Speaker, economic diversification and innovation are the lifeblood of single-industry communities. We, in the north, have greatly benefited from Mr. Dennis Strom's ingenuity and drive over the past 37 years. This spring, Mr. Strom retired from his work in regional economic development, and I would like to pay tribute to his ideas and contribution to economic diversity in the north.

Dennis is an idea man who has adeptly bridged the gap between proposals and entrepreneurs. He blends science and the rugged nature of life in the north. Dennis conceived and spearheaded many unique projects that have gone a long way to creating employment and stimulating economic growth in several communities. These projects have led to a remarkable and distinctive career.

In the late 1970s and early '80s, Dennis promoted the harvest of Precambrian wild rice in Manitoba, which was previously thought impossible. Like a gold rush, this successful project unleashed a small stampede of growers and led to a processing plant in The Pas. His initiatives still bear fruit today.

In the early 1990s, he explored non-timber forest products, which led to a Northern Forest Diversification Centre run in conjunction with the University College of the North.

More recently, he set in motion a geothermal project that has the capacity to combine the benefits of a surface greenhouse and enough heat to power a building such as a local hospital. He also worked ardently on an aerospace project in an old mine site, a fishery, an underground greenhouse, a medical marijuana operation, a wild-mushroom export initiative to Japan and numerous others projects.

Dennis is a true northerner. We appreciate his dedication to making our northern communities more economically viable places in which to live. On behalf of all northerners, Dennis, thank you for your visionary contributions to the north and may you have a happy and well-deserved retirement.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Morden Manitoba Day Celebrations

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): On May the 12th, 2010, Manitoba celebrated its 140th anniversary as a Canadian province.

I was pleased to attend the birthday celebration in Morden where many people, including schools, businesses, senior groups, day cares, and the general public took part in the festivities. The party began at 11 a.m. with performances of local and school bands, choirs and drama groups on the Corn and Apple stage. It concluded around 8 o'clock in the evening.

Some of the other activities that took place in downtown Morden included a play space for kids, a market area, and a Manitoba mural was created through the Pembina Hills Arts Centre, depicting Morden's strong cultural sector.

As a special treat for Manitoba's birthday, guests were served up a slice of apple pie, one of Morden's favourite desserts. I had the opportunity to sit in the dunk tank to raise money for the new skate park in Morden–and I got wet.

It was on May the 12th, 1870, that the Manitoba Act received royal assent and Manitoba officially became the fifth province in Canada. Manitoba is a province that embraces a diversity, as we are represented by a variety of ethnic and cultural groups. Although we are relatively small in population, Manitobans should be extremely proud of what this province has accomplished in its short history.

Manitoba has become a leader in many areas including human rights, the arts, sport, manufacturing and agriculture. The work that Manitobans have put into this province has gone a long way in promoting our province in Canada and throughout the world. We also have much to look forward to in the years ahead and as I am sure that Manitoba will become an even stronger province because of the dedication of the hard-working people.

On May the 15th, Morden was one of 63 Manitoba communities to take part in the World's Largest Social. The community of Morden hosted not one, but two socials at the community centre. One featured the oldies band, After Eight, and the other one was a ska and reggae band called Skavenjah.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to thank all Manitobans for their participation in what turned out to be an exceptional 140th birthday celebration and I hope that all Manitobans will get the opportunity to participate in Manitoba Homecoming 2010 events that are taking place throughout the year. Thank you.

***** (14:30)

ORDERS OF THE DAY
(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Deputy Government House Leader): The–I'd like to indicate that–I'd like to ask that the House become resolved into Committee of Supply to deal with the Minister responsible for Tourism, Culture and Heritage, followed by the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) and followed by Bill 31–once concurrence, which I understand should be something like proceeding till about 4 o'clock, occurs.

So resolve the House into Committee of Supply, to be followed by second debate reading on Bill 31.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The House will now dissolve into Committee of Supply to be followed by Bill 31, once Committee of Supply has concluded.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

Concurrence Motion

Madam Chairperson (Marilyn Brick): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. The committee has before it for consideration the motion concurring in all Supply resolutions relating to the Estimates of expenditures for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2010.

On May 13th, 2010, the Official Opposition House Leader (Mr. Hawranik) tabled the following list of ministers of the Crown who may be called for questioning in debate on the concurrence motion: Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk), Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism (Ms. Marcelino).

These ministers–we will start off with questioning for the Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): I would like to ask the minister a few questions with regard to Bipole III and the environmental impact that's being done right now. I'd like to ask the minister if she would be willing to put on the record her thoughts with regard to Bipole III.

I had written the minister several months ago and asked her for her thoughts and her opinion with regard to some comments that have been made by my constituents, in particular Charles Travador, who indicated, and I'll quote, has said: That it seems inconceivable that a province that we are told that has relatively limited tourism opportunities and infrastructure would consider taking a much more longer route for such a high-impact transmission line through some of the most scenic areas in addition to going through more productive agriculture land.

I'd like to ask the minister if she has an opinion with regard to the Bipole III tourism challenges that will definitely have an impact on that region and especially Mr. Travador's property?

Hon. Flor Marcelino (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism): And I thank the honourable member for the question.

I fully support the government's program to pursue the Bipole III on the west side of the province, and, as for the east side, we're–my department is very supportive of the opportunities and possibilities that are available once ecotourism is in place in the east side.

Mrs. Rowat: It's interesting because when I had a conversation with Elijah Harper, who met with some members of our caucus and also with an agriculture group, or a northern agriculture group, he had indicated that he was very concerned about the east side being discluded from the bipole production. He was very concerned and indicated that he believed that the individuals who would be utilizing the ecotourism would be very concerned about the quality of life that his people were actually experiencing and would probably have a different opinion if he was able to have them realize the significance of having the bipole go down the west side.

So I'm wanting to know what the minister's opinion is with regard to tourism and the impact that the west-side bipole will have on the tourism, the agritourism businesses on the west side. Do you have an opinion on how that will affect the west-side residents who have agritourism opportunities that will be put, obviously, off the map by this project?

Ms. Marcelino: Personally, the east side of the province will benefit greatly from the UNESCO heritage site. It will be a gem of an opportunity that Canada would be listed in this very prestigious body as our boreal forest is something to be really very proud of and very good for the environment, and there would be enormous opportunities for ecotourism in the east side and then that–

Mrs. Rowat: The ecotourism on the east side is significant but she seems to have very little regard or understanding of the significance of the agritourism on the west side of the province.

Mr. Travador made another statement and he said, and I'll quote, that it baffles and angers me that one minute we are being encouraged, rightly, to understand the importance of the balance between farming and wildlife and the importance of the environment, conservation and tourism, and then the next minute we see a proposal that appears to have scant regard for any of these considerations.

Can the minister comment?

Ms. Marcelino: I would beg to disagree that our department has not given consideration to the west side as far as tourism is concerned. We have very active partners in the west side as well, and I would be very interested in speaking with your constituents–*[interjection]* I'm sorry. I would be very interested in having a dialogue with your constituents as far as tourism on the west side is concerned.

Mrs. Rowat: Well, what I'll do is I'll bring to the Legislature tomorrow, or even walk up to her office today, a copy of the letter that he has written to her. I had written to her and, actually, she failed to respond. She referred the letter on to the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) or the minister responsible. So the minister had an opportunity well over six months ago to have a dialogue with my constituent and her office blew him off, as far as–you know, bluntly.

So, you know, I guess my question is for the minister. If you really do have a concern for the constituents on the west side, you know, I think that the minister has an obligation to put in writing, you know, her opinion with regard to the policy of agritourism and, actually, her interest in supporting what Mr. Travador has been trying to tell this government is, actually, a very narrow-minded and wrong decision of putting the bipole along the west side of this province.

Ms. Marcelino: I would like to revisit that letter and if that letter were referred to another department, I fully believe that the contents of that letter is appropriate for referral to that department.

***** (14:40)

Mrs. Rowat: I'm just going through my file to find the letter, and I actually will get it to the minister this instant.

But I want to know what the minister thinks with response to a resolution that was submitted by the R.M. of Minto–that's the Rural Municipality of Minto–which takes in a significant part of the west side bipole, one of the routes. And they've put a resolution for opposing the proposed route of Bipole III, route A, along the west side of Lake Manitoba.

Can she give me her opinion when–of what she believes is a signal from the west side and municipal leaders that they do not agree with the position that her government is taking?

Ms. Marcelino: I would tell the member opposite that I'm not familiar with the location you're saying, so I couldn't make any comment as of now. I would like to look at that material first.

Mrs. Rowat: What I will do is I will also provide for the minister some background information from Charles Travador, which I know her office has, but I will submit it to her again. But I would like to know if the minister would commit to coming out to Minnedosa and meeting with Charles Travador so that he could give her a personal tour of the vicinity that Bipole III is on–is the considered on the west side, and then actually have a tour and a visit with Mr. Travador so she can see first-hand, you know, the beauty and the concerns that he has raised with regard to Bipole III coming down the west side.

Ms. Marcelino: The highway to Minnedosa and Russell is–are one of the most beautiful highways in this province, if you were to ask me. I find that place very beautiful and I would request the proponent, the–Mr.–the gentleman you were referring to, to please write me a letter so we could check the availability in my calendar.

Mrs. Rowat: And I just had a thought. You know, the minister would have a copy of that letter in her file, so if she would just get her staff to pull the letter out from the mailbox that said, please refer to the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk), she can

actually have a chance to look at that letter and respond directly to Mr. Travador. And I believe that that would probably be the quickest way to respond to the issue.

So what I'm getting from this conversation is that the minister does not actually know much about the west side of the province, and really doesn't know much about the agritourism project or the initiative that the minister is–was referring to. So, you know, I think she best come and visit the area and have a first-hand experience of what Mr. Travador is talking about, and then we can have a further discussion.

But, you know, it's very disappointing. Obviously, the minister, you know, I give her credit–she is interested in having a dialogue with my constituents. I don't know where this went sideways but, obviously, we'll make sure that the minister does have an opportunity to have a discussion with Mr. Travador and Cindy Murray and many of the others within the constituency who have some very serious concerns with the decision of the government to put the road along the west side.

I have another question with–that reflects the minister's–

Madam Chairperson: The minister was looking to respond.

Ms. Marcelino: I would like to respond to your statement that I'm–you were referring me as not familiar with the west side. That's correct. I am not familiar with the west side for now, but slowly I'm doing my–I'm trying to learn as much or trying to reach as much geography as I can with the limited time that we have while in session.

However, with the southern part of the province, I'm quite familiar and very proud of the wonderful tourist places that we have here.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mrs. Rowat: And, again, if the minister would like, I can help co-ordinate a visit with Mr. Travador and some of the others in the constituency, so she can have a visit along that way.

I have another question with regard to a project that Manitoba Culture has funded. It's a project that receives money from this minister's department and the project is a reality show that's made out of Toronto. It's called *House Poor* and it's a show that–I saw it on TV not that long ago with my daughter, and it was on the reality network or the Do-it-Yourself Network, or whatever it's called. And it was a really interesting show but it's hosted in Toronto. The only way you can participate in this show is if you live in the Toronto area, and it's called *House Poor* and they do renovations in homes in Toronto.

Can the minister indicate to me why at the end of the program the Manitoba government's logo would be situated on the end of that program?

Ms. Marcelino: I would have to inquire with our partner on film, sound and music. I'm not familiar with that particular program.

Mrs. Rowat: But I would like the minister to take this question on notice and get back to me.

It's interesting, my 14-year-old noticed it right away. She says, why would Manitoba's logo be on the end of a Toronto program? And the only way that you can get on this program is by living in the Toronto area.

So we're funding–provincial dollars are going into a program called *House Poor*. Which is kind of an interesting title, considering Manitoba is in the situation that we are and that we're paying for a program that is being developed in Toronto–only way you can participate is in Toronto, and it's government money going into this. Again, you know, I'm just wondering. It sounds like another Burnaby bakery to me. But, if the minister can, you know, find the information for me, that would be great.

Ms. Marcelino: For sure, we'll look into that.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): If the minister is going to be visiting western Manitoba, I certainly will make myself available and I'd like to show her some of the provincial parks we have in that area as well. I think it might be worthwhile for her to have a look at some of those great resources we have there.

My question is in regard to the ecotourism on the east side. I know there has been some discussion this afternoon and there was some discussion this morning in terms of the Manitoba Hydro resolution.

The government has indicated that the ecotourism is going to be quite substantial once the UNESCO World Heritage site is developed. I'm just wondering if the minister and her department have undertaking an analysis of what ecotourism is going to occur there, and what the financial implications will be to the ecotourism on the east side of the province.

Ms. Marcelino: That is very seriously looked at and we have organizations and partners who are doing the work already in that region. EAST Inc., as well, the–it's also a tourist–I'll get you the full name of the organization. So there is–being looked at.

Mr. Cullen: I would appreciate if the minister would share the information that they have–your department has put together so far, and any other agencies that have put together information to date and what other projects are under way at this point in time, so we can have an understanding of what information is going to be put together and when those dates will be. You know, when that project will be finalized, so the kind of the dates and the analysis would be available. Would the minister provide that to us?

Ms. Marcelino: We'll certainly do.

***** (14:50)

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Just to follow up a little bit on the questions that have been posed to the minister just now.

In looking at the bipole going on the west side, can the minister indicate whether the analysis that has been done on the west side includes all aspects of tourism? Or were there just specific reviews on ecotourism and agritourism? Or is there actually an overall, broad study that looked at the effects of tourism on the west side of Manitoba, if a bipole were to go down that side?

Ms. Marcelino: That would be an area that I would be seriously looking at. Right now, the conversations is on the west side is for Bipole III, the transmission line, and I'm not involved in any tourism-related undertaking. So I'll look into that.

Mrs. Driedger: I guess that's my point exactly. Shouldn't that be part of the analysis of a west-side bipole? That, before you make your decisions, you would be looking at the effects of that line on the west side, and from your department, from this minister's department, it would be around tourism in that area? So why isn't that part of the analysis that is going on before the decision is made about where to put the line?

Ms. Marcelino: There are several analyses being made, and Hydro is the chief body that does that. So we would–you would–you might want to check with–I might want to check with the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) on that, who's responsible for Hydro.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister really doesn't seem to understand the genesis of the question and her responsibility as a Minister for Tourism, and that's a little bit disconcerting because the–you know, the west side has a lot of tourism and a lot of tourism opportunities, and for her to be, you know, sloughing off the responsibility to the–to Hydro to be doing an analysis of tourism seems a little bit odd to me.

So I'm concerned that the minister is shirking her responsibility as a Minister for Tourism in this particular area. And, you know, there's a lot of chirping right now coming from the member from Lord Roberts who seems to have some noise to make. *[interjection]* Well, I'm told it's–there's a lot of chirping from the minister from Riel, as well, so I'm not sure why they are interfering at this point. This is not their portfolios, you know, and the Minister of Culture can certainly handle her own questions.

But can the minister tell us why she would be referring us to Hydro when she's responsible for tourism in Manitoba?

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Altemeyer): Just before recognizing the honourable minister, the architect of this marvellous building did have the foresight to think that we might want to talk to each other on the sides, and they built loges, and they are available should you need them.

Ms. Marcelino: Thank you, Mr. Acting Chairperson. I wouldn't be delegating the analysis of tourism-related activities to the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk). I got the–or I made that statement because analysis, so far, on the Bipole III were mainly done by Hydro. But anything related to tourism, it will be our department, and it's not to be relegated to the Minister of Finance who is also responsible for Hydro.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, if it's the responsibility, then, and the minister agrees, and it is her responsibility in Tourism, then why wouldn't there be something proactively happening right now in terms of just including, in the analysis of where the line goes, the effects of tourism?

Like, you know, she's saying it is her responsibility. Why isn't she directing some kind of a broad analysis of how that west line will affect tourism down the west side of Manitoba?

Ms. Marcelino: With no specific area delineated yet, that our department is aware of, I don't think we will be dealing with it at this time because of the–not knowing where it will be, only knowing that it's on

the west. But, definitely, Travel Manitoba, as well as other partners in the tourism industry, will certainly be consulted or be–it will be part of the discussion and planning once we know where the line is.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate what she envisions in terms of ecotourism on the east side? Her government has talked a lot about the opportunities for that. Can she just tell us what the vision is, her government's vision is, for ecotourism on the east side?

Ms. Marcelino: I thank you for the question. Our government is very proud that First Nations are leading the way to bring a World Heritage site to Manitoba and Ontario, and the World Heritage site proposal was put forward in 2003 by Accord First Nations and Manitoba, our government, is committed to this First Nation-led initiative.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister didn't really answer the question. In terms of ecotourism, what would we expect to see happening on the east side?

Ms. Marcelino: Once the UNESCO World Heritage site is confirmed, and it's being actively–being sought actively as we speak, there'll be enormous possibilities of tourism and tourism-related activities and even centres in the east side. So, that alone would be very significant once it's in place, once the designation is in place.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister has only sort of–

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Altemeyer): Order. I need to be able to hear the question.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister has been actually very vague with her answer, but she talks about centres being there. How are people supposed to access these centres, then?

Ms. Marcelino: As you see, there's a very aggressive roads and bridges program with this government and plans of an all-season road in the east side will help in making all these projects and plans, one of which is at least 125 sites were considered by Parks Canada, and proposals are in place for this. And our vision is to protect 40,000 square kilometres of boreal forest in Manitoba and Ontario through the First Nation-led UNESCO World Heritage site lead. And on December 1st, we received the Canadian Boreal Award from the Canadian Boreal Initiative for our efforts, once, and this is already announced and people will certainly be very interested in visiting the boreal forest on the east side once we have the designation, and the tourism generated by that title or by that recognition is simply enormous.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister indicated there were 125 sites. Could she just expound on that a little bit?

Ms. Marcelino: Parks Canada has considered 125 sites. I don't have the complete list but there is a tentative list of this and we'll try and get it for you. I don't have all–this list. It's a tentative–and we're on–we're being considered as one of the top contenders for World Heritage status.

***** (15:00)

Mrs. Driedger: If the Parks people have designated 125 sites, how are people supposed to access these sites? Are there roads or are they fly-in? Like, how do people actually get into this area?

Ms. Marcelino: There would certainly be roads built for that and, as of now, it would be–I think it would be best answered by our Minister for Infrastructure (Mr. Ashton). But there's certainly a plan, an overall general plan for tourism in the east side.

Mrs. Driedger: So, can the minister indicate–because she's really off base with the–you know, the comments that her government has been making about, you know, the disaster that roads are going to cause in this UNESCO site. The hydro line can't go there because, you know, it's a UNESCO site but, yet, she's indicating that there's going to be a massive road network through there. How can a road network work there, if a hydro line is going to be so disruptive?

Ms. Marcelino: I'm sorry, I didn't get the question. Which roads will be disruptive–on the east side, west side?

Mrs. Driedger: The minister has indicated there's going to be a mass of road connections through the UNESCO park, so that people can get to these 125 sites. And that is what she's put on the record now. So I'm asking her, seeing as her government has been so adamant that, you know, this is a site that shouldn't be–it's a pristine site, we shouldn't have roads or hydro lines–why, then, is she now indicating that we're going to have this massive roadway through this park?

Ms. Marcelino: I would like to correct that statement. I didn't say massive. There will be roads–because it will have–there has to be roads. But the pristine status of that area will not be disturbed by roads. In fact, it would make the world see the place,

that heritage site, with those roads, but they're not massive.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister's indicating there's going to be roads to the 125 sites. That's a lot of roads.

Ms. Marcelino: There are sites considered, are planned. How they will be reached–could be reached by canoeing through that site, or by roads, but I didn't say that those 125 sites will be connected by roads.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, I think some of the comments the minister made earlier did indicate that there would be a number–quite a large number of roads running through this UNESCO World Heritage site to be connecting these various sites and roadways so that people can access the UNESCO site. And, I mean, they do have to access it somehow. And, you know, if we want people to see this park, there has to be an easy way to access.

And, you know, the minister is certainly indicating that we're going to have a number of roads, which is really contrary to the vision put forward by other members of her government. So does she have discussions with, you know, with the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and with her Cabinet in terms of her vision with the UNESCO site versus their vision that they're putting forward?

Ms. Marcelino: About the roads–again, I would like to correct. It's never in my mind because that's not what it is–for the massive roads. The roads that will be built are necessary, and they're not superhighways or 8-lane highways. Those roads are necessary for access, and some sites may not be accessible by roads, but by other means like canoe. So I would like to impress on the member that it's never–it was never my statement that there'll be massive roads.

Mrs. Driedger: So just so I understand clearly, I think the minister is indicating that her word of–her use of the word "massive" meant we're not going to see, like, big super highways or, you know, large highways into the area or multiple-lane highways, but there will be a road system that goes throughout the park so that people can access the World Heritage site. Am I accurate in that interpretation?

Ms. Marcelino: Yes. There'll be roads and maybe there'll be other ways other than road to access a particular site. We don't have the full picture yet. It's still a plan. But definitely there'll be some roads, but as I mentioned earlier, it's not a massive highway.

Mrs. Driedger: Tourism, certainly, has a lot of great potential in Manitoba, and I was surprised at the end of Estimates where the minister was indicating that most of our tourists come from within Manitoba, that we're not attracting, you know, huge numbers of–percentage-wise–from other provinces or other countries.

Can the minister tell us, you know, what kind of analysis has been done in terms of looking at this reason that so many Canadians aren't choosing to come to Manitoba, that we're basically having to rely on our own people within the province to visit the province? Like, what analysis has there been done about why there's such a low percentage of other Canadians coming here, other countries or Americans?

Ms. Marcelino: I don't have the actual graph here with me, but that particular graph that I have somewhere shows that there's no–that the tourists coming from other parts of the country, other provinces, other cities, are less than what's from within the province. And I think that's a very good testament to the people in Manitoba, that before visiting other places, they would want to visit their own province.

But definitely the number of tourists coming from the United States and other parts of the country, while reduced from previous years, is still enough to make the tourism industry such a very high economic driver for the province. I will give you–I'll give you the graph. I'll relay to you the graph later on.

But it's very encouraging that a good number of tourists are from the province, yet there's a very healthy visits as well from non-Manitobans.

Mrs. Driedger: I do have the percentages from the Estimates, and I know the minister indicated at that time that 81 percent of tourists from–or that come to Manitoba live within Manitoba, 12 percent are from other Canadian provinces, 6 percent U.S. and 1 percent international tourists.

How does Manitoba compare with other provinces in terms of a similar breakdown?

Ms. Marcelino: I would check with my figures on that. I don't have with me a comparative analysis right now.

Mrs. Driedger: The–when the minister is going to be providing that information, could she also provide all of the information she already committed to back

in the time we were doing Estimates? I still haven't received any of that information that she said she would get to me at that time.

***** (15:10)

Ms. Marcelino: As we speak, all those information are being collected, and fairly soon you'll be getting them. I've checked on them myself, and it's being gathered.

Mrs. Driedger: And I thank the minister for that.

When we were in Estimates, the minister indicated that her special assistant was Kathie Currie. Her executive assistant was Sarah Jean Padrinao, and she said that's all. Can the minister indicate, then, who Shannon VanRaes is? I understand from an Order-in-Council of April 7th that a Shannon VanRaes is appointed as communications outreach co-ordinator within Culture, Heritage and Tourism. Is that a political position or is that a bureaucratic position?

Ms. Marcelino: I'm not familiar with the status of that appointment, being a recent one. I'll look into that.

Mrs. Driedger: The–we've been bringing up a number of questions and concerns lately around the issue of FIPPA. And there's more and more occasion where this government is charging us for information, and it amounts to thousands and thousands of dollars for something that should be quite readily available in many departments, especially since, you know, they've all been audited or they've had their annual reports. And I know even the minister, the other day, in a scrum had indicated that she thought that some of these expenses seemed pretty high.

You know one example was University College of the North needing to charge or wanting to charge $12,000. I had another one for, you know, something like $4,000 for Diagnostic Services Manitoba just to provide restaurant, you know, information. Can the minister explain why we're starting to see such an increase from her government in terms of us having to pay to get information that we shouldn't have to pay for, that it should be readily available?

Ms. Marcelino: I would like to make a correction. At that interview I had the other day I didn't make any judgment or I didn't make any statements judging that the fee being charged was excessive because I do not know the particulars.

If on its face value it appears large, I could have said, yes, it's large, but I won't make any judgment that it's excessive because I'm not aware of what's involved, what is being asked, what documents are required and how much staff time will be needed to use it–or to obtain those information. So I just want to let you know, I would not have made that statement.

Mrs. Driedger: Does the minister think it's appropriate for her government to be charging us for information that should be readily available? You know it is taxpayers' money. That is not unreasonable to be asking for travel information and restaurant information. That's been a common practice over many years. Why is her government now putting a price tag to those FIPPAs?

Ms. Marcelino: Universities are bodies other than government offices. They're not controlled by the government. They have their own boards and then they will–they have their own FIPPA chairperson, and those will have to be addressed by those people concerned, and our government cannot interfere in telling them to charge or not to charge. Those are independent bodies.

Mrs. Driedger: Those bodies, though, get taxpayers' money. That's how they are funded–with taxpayers' money. Does she not feel that her department has some ability to show some leadership in this and lay out an expectation that this information should be readily available?

Ms. Marcelino: Under the act, there is the process, and if the person who wishes to obtain the information finds it that–having–that he or she is having difficulty with obtaining those information, the Ombudsman can be accessed. However, for those independent bodies, those independent bodies also are–the department would assist, if need be, if such bodies would need help in understanding the act. But for us to dictate what should and should be given, with or without any fee, no, there is a process to be adhered to.

Mrs. Driedger: I would indicate to the minister that I think what we're seeing, though, is an abuse of the process. When her government refuses to give information or decides to charge for it, to put that hurdle in front, that is really, I think, an abuse of the process.

The Ombudsman does not have an ability to force anything. The Ombudsman can make a recommendation and that's it. So it's a very costly

process but it does start to make this government look like they're hiding information or trying to hide information. And, because it's happening more and more often, it's becoming obvious that there's something at play here.

Diagnostic Services Manitoba is under the auspices of the WRHA. They should be providing information and they have put huge price tags–you know, $8,000 just for two particular FIPPAs. And, basically, it looks like what they're trying to do is prevent information from getting out.

You know, when we're hearing rumours out there about all of these people, in various entities around Manitoba, taking advantage of very expensive restaurants and nice wine, I could see why this government might want to hide and bury that information.

So is the Minister of Culture not concerned about what really appears to be coming more and more an abuse of the process?

Ms. Marcelino: As I have stated earlier, there is a process and our department, which is in charge of this act–in no way are we dictating that fees or no fees be charged. It's the body, the independent body, that decides if a fee or how much fee is required for the FIPPA request that they have received.

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

So I–your question that our government is charging is incorrect because it's not our government that is charging those fees. It's those independent bodies that are charging the fees.

Mrs. Driedger: I notice the Finance Minister is there coaching the Minister of Culture, trying to put her comments into her mouth.

The minister doesn't seem to understand that we're talking about taxpayers' money and there has to be a level of accountability and transparency. And what's happening right now is that is being buried.

And I see that the members for Riel (Ms. Melnick) and Lord Roberts (Ms. McGifford) are still sitting there chirping in their seats. They seem to have a lot to say about this.

But there is a growing concern that this fortress mentality that this government has been building over time, is, you know–they're trying to control the information more and more so that, you know, they can really have this fortress mentality that information is so totally manipulated. But the minister doesn't seem to understand that we're talking about taxpayers' money.

Why is it that, you know, she can indicate that–

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Chairperson: Order. I just want to remind all honourable members that we do have the loges if they wish to have private conversations.

***** (15:20)

Mrs. Driedger: Well, we're glad to see that the member for lord Robertson is at least awake right now and speaking up.

But, you know, when we are talking about these entities, I mean, they are entities that are–entities that are funded by taxpayers' money, and this government has more of a responsibility, I think, than what the minister seems to understand in terms of ensuring accountability and transparency. And she doesn't seem to understand that with her comments. So I'm not sure what more I can say because they're certainly abusing this FIPPA process, and it's very costly to everybody involved. But it sure entrenches this fortress mentality that this government is moving towards.

Ms. Marcelino: I would like to tell the honourable member that I do understand taxpayers' money. And I do understand that our government cannot interfere with an independent body, and that there is the FIPPA act that–and there is a process in it that has to be adhered to.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate why there was a cut to the services we were getting–the Conference Board of Canada had an e-library service, and they sent an e-mail around saying that they received notice that the government of Manitoba has cancelled its full e-library subscription to the Conference Board of Canada, and that would be through this minister's department. And it's been good for doing research for all of us in, you know, in government whether it's, you know, us as MLAs or even the bureaucrats, and the Conference Board supplied information like Canadian economic trends, provincial economic trends, international economic trends, travel and tourism sector trends, human resource management, organizational excellence, governance, risk management, corporate social responsibility. They were all very valuable ways of doing research. Why did this minister–and I know they've cut–she's cut her budget. Can I ask her why this particular area was cut?

Ms. Marcelino: Our budget for libraries–e-libraries, have not been cut, and we have retained all those funds for the libraries. And why Conference Board of Canada–I'm not familiar with it and I'll look into it. But our services to Manitoba libraries were not cut.

Mrs. Driedger: I was indicating to the minister that overall there has been a cut in her department spending which, you know, is one of the areas, I guess, where we're seeing that was slashed a bit in order to try to make up for many years of overspending by her government. So this is one of the areas now that we have seen cut.

I'd like to ask the minister to tell us what her department is doing in order to address the challenges that Assiniboia Downs is having right now in terms of tourism. They're indicating that the track future is in jeopardy without more money. And that is a major tourism attraction in this province, and a lot of people enjoyed going there. And, you know, for the last decade, they've been struggling, and I'm wondering if this is on the minister's radar screen or if any discussions are going on in her department about what is needed to strengthen Assiniboia Downs.

Ms. Marcelino: First, I would like to respond to the statement made by the member about cutting budget that– as a result of overspending.

The cut in budget that our department is facing– the reduced figure were in staff and not in programs. We have opted to keep some positions open and not fill it with personnel at the moment to save on some– to get the funding in order. But they're not for programs or services, they're just a cut in staffing. And about Assiniboia, we haven't heard or spoken to this body, and this is something that we'll be checking out.

Mrs. Driedger: In the Estimates book, the line for Culture, Heritage and Tourism programs actually shows a $1.2-million program cut, and I believe in the Estimates the minister did confirm that. So why is she now saying there's no program cuts when several weeks ago she did indicate that there are program cuts in her department?

Ms. Marcelino: Before responding to that query, if the member would like more information on which department to refer the question on Assiniboia Downs, I think you would have to speak with the minister responsible for Sports.

As for the program cuts that you were asking, what I meant that–we didn't have any cuts were in existing programs and grants to programs. We didn't cut those grants to programs.

Mrs. Driedger: For the minister to try to slough off the Downs to another department really concerns me because this is a major tourist attraction in the province. Is she not sitting down with other ministers in her department or at her Cabinet and having discussions about what can be done to strengthen what is going on at Assiniboia Downs? They are indicating right now that the future of the track is in jeopardy, and yet we've got the Minister of Tourism that doesn't have a clue what's going on with this. How can she be so out of the loop considering this a major tourist attraction?

Ms. Marcelino: First, I would like to tell the member that there were no communication or even requests for a meeting from this organization since the time I assumed this portfolio, so I'm not familiar at all with this organization and, besides, it's under a different department. So for me to look into this when it's somebody else's department is I don't think proper. However, for–if–for its tourism value, I would be interested in looking at it.

Mrs. Driedger: Would the minister then be willing to take some leadership and bring together members from her Cabinet that all should be involved sitting around the table–and maybe it is a Cabinet meeting– where they're talking about the significance of the Downs? I mean, we do it with Healthy Child Manitoba and bring together all types of ministers under one committee to look–and they all have different portfolios, but they're all focussed on the health of a child. So it works; there's a model there that works.

Why isn't this government–seeing as this has been a big issue that's been percolating for a long time, and the minister is saying nobody's called her for a meeting is a bit mind boggling because, surely to goodness, this has been discussed at a Cabinet meeting. What is happening within her government then, that the Minister of Tourism is totally left out of any discussions about Assiniboia Downs?

***** (15:30)

Ms. Marcelino: This organization has not approached our department and this organization is more related to another department, and if I'm not aware of–and I'm not aware of communication

happening between Assiniboia Downs and another department. There might be some–

Madam Chairperson: Order. Okay, the–just prior to recognizing the honourable minister, once again, I just want to remind all honourable members that we do have the loges if they wish to have a conversation.

The honourable Minister for Culture, Heritage and Tourism has the floor.

Ms. Marcelino: As I–thank you, Madam Chairperson. As I was saying, the–there could be conversations happening with other departments but not with our department yet, because it has not been brought to our attention.

Mrs. Driedger: Can I ask the minister if she'd be prepared to undertake an initiative to chat with whichever ministers in her government are dealing with this issue so that, in fact, there can be a cohesive approach to what's happening?

The–and this shouldn't be new information for this minister, especially as the Minister of Tourism, because the–there's some really serious problems right now with the Downs. That whole track–the future of that track is in jeopardy, and would this minister, maybe as the head of tourism for the province, take it upon herself to say, you know, this is–and it is–it's a major tourist attraction.

So she needs to be in there. She needs to be involved and she needs to have a strong voice in making that a good tourist attraction. So, as the Minister of Tourism, would she be willing to, you know, take more of a leadership role, bring together all the people in her government that need to get together to try to save the race track?

Ms. Marcelino: I will be delighted to speak with any minister who–who'll be handling this file. Anything that relates to tourism, I'd like to be involved.

Mrs. Driedger: I thank the minister for that response, and I'm finished with my questions.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): To the Deputy Premier.

An Honourable Member: Which one?

Mr. Schuler: Sorry, the Deputy Premier and Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk). I–my question is in regards to a–

Madam Chairperson: Order. Just one moment.

Mr. Schuler: My question is to the Deputy Premier and Minister of Finance. It has to do with a constituent of mine who's having difficulty with subdividing a piece of property. His name is Bob Crockett, and I'll lay it out for the minister.

They want to cut off a lot for a family member to help with the farm. It's ag-related breeding of thoroughbred horses; they currently have eight. They believe this is within the guidelines for the ag-preserve policy they already have, and it's a substantial investment in the ag-related area. They have livestock, barns, hay sheds, et cetera.

The lot they are requesting is not nor ever has been tillable ag land; it is a treed yard site. So, what–they're not asking for agriculture land to be taken out of workable ag land and be developed. It's a treed site and they want to split it off and put a house on it. And they don't understand how a ag-preserve area can allow a division of land, 80 acres of produced land. So you can subdivide an 80-acre land to be cut off and put a house on the land and thus take valuable farmland out of production, but not allow a lot to be subdivided–of non-productive land–in the same ag-preserve area when it is for that purpose of ag use.

So, basically, they want to take a piece of land that is really of no agriculture value; it's a treed lot; they'd like to put a house on it for family members to help with the farm. Can the minister tell us, is there a possibility for that kind of a consideration to be given by either the municipality or the Province?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Finance): Although this doesn't fall under Finance, I'd be–I would be happy to look into it for the member if he could provide details of the specific situation. There is a Provincial Land Use Committee that's made up of deputy ministers of various departments, and those–when a application for a subdivision is made, it is reviewed by that committee of deputy ministers. And I believe that there can–you can have a sub–the member said 80 acres. I that think you that you could have a subdivision of 40 acres. You can have smaller subdivisions. You can have subdivisions when it is within the family if the–if–supposing there's a retiring couple and they want to stay on the land, that can be done. But, if the member would give me the details, specifically, I could have someone check into it.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): And I just wanted to continue on with the questioning from yesterday with the Minister of Finance when it has to do with expenditure assumptions. To do the

assumptions over the next five budgets, it looks like the increase in expenditures over the five year for the economic plan–the percentage increase over the fives years is just under 9 percent total. And what we know is that from the last 11 years that this government has been in power, the expenditures have increased some 80 percent in 11 years. So here we've got 80 percent in 11 years and only just short of 9 percent in five years.

Does the minister believe that this 9 percent is realistic considering that in the last 11 years they've increased their expenditures by some 80 percent?

Ms. Wowchuk: The member is well aware that economic times have changed and there is tremendous pressure on all governments right across the country. All governments have had to look at how they can maintain services and continue to make investments, and we've–and we recognized that we were in the same position. That's why we put into place our five-year plan, and we made assumptions and, certainly, we have signalled that the next few years are going to have to be–we're going to have to be very cautious on what kind–how we move forward. And we have made assumptions on the kind of spending we will be able to do. We've made some assumptions on what kind of growth there will be. But the member is right. That's the assumptions we've made about the amount of increase in spending there will be in the next budget.

Mrs. Stefanson: The minister mentioned yesterday as well, when we were talking about other reporting entities who came out with their projections for the next five years–their revenue projections and their expenditure projections, well, their revenues which would be what we'd be looking at mostly right now with–to do with the five-year plan. And the government reporting entities revenues came up with a rise, and this is in the government–the budget books–a rise by 3.2 percent average annually between 2010 and 2014-15. And I know that the government is looking at a forecast rise by an average of 3.5 percent annually.

What would be the difference based on the same economic conditions, everything else? Why would the government reporting entities be looking at only a 3.2 percent increase in revenues on average over that five-year plan, as opposed to the government's core operating budget of an estimated average annual increase in revenues of 3.5 percent?

Ms. Wowchuk: The government reporting entities have their financial people there and they have their projections and they make projections as to where their revenues will be. Those are provided to government and then they are built into the budget. The government looks at the information provided by the federal government, looks at information provided by the conference boards of Canada and at banks and the kind of projections that we think we will see for growth, and that's how we've come up with our number.

***** (15:40)

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, it seems that the government reporting entities are coming out with a number that's a little more conservative than the government of the–than the government–the core forecast for core government revenue. And, you know, the minister indicates that she said that the plans would be based on the same projections, or similar projections, she said, I believe. And, if that is not the case, if there are differences in projections for government reporting entities with respect to–and then with the core government revenues, then what are those differences?

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, you know, lotteries corporation makes projections on where–based on what their sales have been, they make projections. The liquor commission makes projections on what they anticipate their sales will be. Hydro makes projections on what they think their sales will be. They go according to those.

We make our projections based on the information that we get from the federal government. And I would encourage the member to look at what the federal number of growth is, because their projections are far higher than ours. I think that we have taken a very conservative number as far as growth goes. But, so we take our–those reporting entities look at their records and look at what their projections will be as to what kind of revenue they will generate. And we look at the numbers that are provided to us by the federal government, Conference Board of Canada, banking institutes.

And, of course, we look at our population growth. We look at the money that we are putting into stimulus. We know that, for the amount of money we're putting into stimulus and creating some 29,000 jobs with a very low unemployment rate, that we will see some additional revenue as a result of all of the activity in Manitoba.

So the two–two are quite different. But they do–they–so they have used a little lower number. We

have used a higher number than the reporting entities, but our number is also lower than what the federal government has projected.

Mrs. Stefanson: And if we look at the expenditures again, and we did talk about this briefly yesterday that the core government expenditures–the–in the five-year economic plan are expected to rise on average annually by 1.9 percent during this five-year period. And, again, if we look at the increase in expenditures, first of all, just the core government expenditures for next year alone–we talked about this yesterday–are 5.2 percent increase.

If we look at health care alone, that's roughly around a 5 percent increase for next year. And I'm just wondering if the minister could indicate–we know across the country, and we did talk about this a little bit in Estimates, that health-care expenditures are on the rise, how was–what kind of projections are made in this–in the five-year period for increases in health-care expenditures over the next five years?

Ms. Wowchuk: If you look at the five-year plan, you can see what the projected expenditures are for '10, '11, '11-12, '12-13, '13-14, and there is very small growth. And that means–and we are predicting that there will be very small growth in core government spending until we come into balance. But we are also recognizing that we will have to run a deficit in–for–until 2013-14 and come back into balance in '14-15, because we want to maintain those services that people look at as being very important. And we want to continue to invest in the infrastructure that we have set out in our plan.

So we know that, as we have said in the budget speech, that there–this–that we are going to face some challenges, but we are going to also have to manage within those numbers for us to come out with the–at the end of the–in the '14-15 year budget at–with a back to a net–out of a deficit.

Mrs. Stefanson: And, again, I would indicate to the minister that, in particular, in the area of health, expenditures are on the rise. In the government's expenditures for health care for this year, they're looking at a percentage change over last year's budget of 5 percent. Is that something–are they expecting that 5 percent to continue throughout the five-year economic plan? Is that–what are the projections for the estimates of expenditures over the next five years within this five-year plan?

Ms. Wowchuk: Madam Chairperson, we have spelt out the projected expenditures over the five-year plan. Yes, we did put the majority of our money into health care this year, and, as a result, some departments have had to have reductions and some projects have had to be delayed. And we will continue to work in that fashion to ensure that we're protecting front-line services. We will never go to the proposal that members opposite want, and that is to balance everything in one year and reduce services.

We have put in place–plan in place where we can spread it out over time, maintain services and continue to support the services that the public wants, but the next five years–four years will be challenging because the amount of–we are not projecting to have that much increases, but, you know, economies turn around. There is–these numbers are projections, and, hopefully, we will see some additional growth, and that will give us some additional room. But right now these are our projections, and we are predicting a very small increase in expenditure over the period of time of our economic plan.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, what the minister must be saying, then, and because she is looking at an average annual increase and overall expenditures of 1.9 percent, on average, over the next five years, and when they're looking at a 5.2 percent increase this year alone, then that means that other years, to average it out to the 1.9 percent, there's going to be significantly less, if not negative. They're going to be cutting.

And I think that the–you know, the minister if she is really true to her word with respect to this–these projections and this 1.9 percent increase, then other budgets within the five-year plan must be–there must be significant cuts somewhere. And I think–you know, unless this is unrealistic, and I think the minister can't have it both ways. And I think she's trying to, and that's what she's trying to say, that she won't make cuts here and everything else. But, if she's true to the plan here in her budget books, then that is not the case because that is not sustainable, and you can't have a 5.2 percent increase in one year and say that you're not going to cut in other years.

So I'll leave that at that, but I did want to ask the minister if she could provide records with details on a 29,000 direct and indirect jobs that are identified on page 1 of the Manitoba Budget Address, the month these jobs will be created, the type of employment, whether it's part–and part-time or full-

time, and the industries in which these jobs will be created.

Ms. Wowchuk: Madam Chairperson, I do want to take a minute to respond to those comments, to indicate to the member that we have put in five–place a five-year plan because we do not want to see those front-line services cut. We want to be sure that we can continue to do stimulus. We know that, under the–a plan that the members opposite would have, we would have had dramatic cuts this year. We would've had–because their plan would be to balance every year, and if that happened, we would have not been able to have a shortfall. We've made a decision that we will have a shortfall and spread the hurt over five years, but we will continue to stimulate the economy and continue to keep people working.

***** (15:50)

We have made projections. We have, this year, had to delay some projects. We have had to have reductions in some departments, and we will deal with that as we move forward. My hope is that our projections are off and that we will, indeed, have more money, and we will be able to continue to provide those important services to people. But we have a commitment and we will have to find a way to reach these goals that have been set out in this five-year plan. And I believe that Manitobans have said that they want us not to take all the hit in one year and lay people off and shut down facilities. They want us to keep the nurse at the bedside, the teacher in the classroom, the police officer on the street, and that's what we're doing.

With regard to the specifics of the member's question about where those jobs are that are referred to in the budget, I will endeavour to provide her with that list of information.

Mrs. Stefanson: The reality is that the minister is looking at an increase in expenditures next year alone of 5.2 percent, and we're looking at an increase in health care. We look at–we're looking at an increase in interest rates, so if we're looking at debt-servicing costs, those will go up as well. If we're looking at not cutting in health care and maintaining the services there, those will increase as well. So I'm wondering if the minister can indicate what will be cut from the budget in future years in order to be able to pay for those services.

Ms. Wowchuk: We talked about interest rates yesterday, and what I had indicated to the member opposite is that I have a lot of confidence in the Finance people, and they have done a very good job of securing long-term money. We believe that we would be able to continue a good portion of the money that we need at–on the average about 5 percent, and that's what we've built into this budget over this five-year period. Just, by the way, the money has been borrowed and the way it's been invested, I think–I'm confident in that.

And I don't anticipate cuts in health care. If I know that the member opposite, if she was a Finance minister right now, she would face those kind of pressures because it was her government that said that we should balance in one year; we shouldn't change the balanced budget legislation and we would feel the hurt all in one year. That's not our style. Our view is that you maintain those services. You maintain the spending in health care, education, training, apprenticeship, and take–work over time to come back into balance.

The member asks about next year's budget. We are–this, we have this year's budget in place. Very soon, we will begin the process of putting our next budget together because that's how long it takes. You start very early to work on next year's budget and that process begins after the first quarter, so we'll see what the projections are in the first quarter and then we will make adjustments. It's very–you can't say today what will be tomorrow, and my hope is that we have economic growth and revenues increase so that we can continue to provide those very important services to Manitobans.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, again, the minister's statements just don't add up. And, you know, obviously, if they're looking at maintaining what she's talked about in her five-year plan, unless the plan is to run even larger deficits than are indicated in the book over the next five years, then it's not sustainable. The expenditures for debt-servicing costs, the expenditures for health care, if the minister says she's not going to cut there, I ask the minister, well, then, what will she cut back on in the budget because, unless she's going to just increase the deficits over those years and maintain expenditures where they're at for the next five years, then–and increase those debt, then those numbers will change and those deficits will become much larger over the next five years? So is it her plan to then run larger deficits or is it her plan to look at ways of–or what are the areas that she will be cutting?

Ms. Wowchuk: If the member will look at page 10 of the five-year plan in the budget book, she will see

that our projected shortfall for this year is 545 million. Next year, our projection is 448 million. Then it goes to 345 million, then 146 million, and then, in '14-15, we come back into balance with a surplus of 185 million. That is the projections that we have made based on the advice of our financial analysts, based on the anticipated growth that we will have in this province, but, you know, I anticipate that we will have some growth. But, certainly, because we didn't go down as deeply as–we didn't have the decline that other jurisdictions have had, we–our economy will grow–will not grow as quickly, but we do anticipate growth, and those are the numbers that we have projected as to the shortfalls we will have over the period of this downturn in the economy.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, again, the numbers just don't add up if you're looking at an average annual increase over the next five years as part of this plan of 1.9 percent. Yet the first year of this plan there's a 5.2 percent increase in expenditures than other years. You know, in order to average that out to come to a 1.9 percent over those five years, you know, I mean the minister can then run–you know, have a 5.2 percent increase this year, you know, 5.2 percent increase the following year just prior to an election and then, all of a sudden, you know, have to come up–if she's going to stick to this plan, she's going to have to cut somewhere, and so, again, it just doesn't add up. And so–but I know the minister–in terms of Bill 5, can the minister just indicate, does she have an estimate of the number of cottages there are in Manitoba right now and how many she–how many cottagers she believes to sign up to her plan under Bill 5?

Ms. Wowchuk: I don't have the number of cottages here with me, but, certainly, the number of cottages has grown tremendously under this government's administration because we recognize that Manitobans truly do enjoy cottage country, truly do enjoy the lakes, and we made a special effort to develop more cottage lots. And those have been taken up at a tremendous rate, and so there are more cottages and so we've–we don't know how many will take this up. I anticipate that it–we were looking at this–we were looking at probably some of our seniors who might have a home and also have a cottage who might find the increased tax a problem for them, so we followed a model that's been used in another jurisdiction where you can defer your taxes on your cottage in order that you don't face those pressures, and, of course, the act allows that the municipality where they are won't face the burden because we will put that money in place for the tax deferral, and, then, when a decision is made to dispose of the cottage, then those taxes will have to be paid. But the specific number–I can't give you a specific number.

Once the–I think once we go through the first year of the act and we get some sense of what the uptake is, we can share that information, but right now it's another tool that will be there for those people who have seen an increase in their values, and, you know, and everybody knows that cottage values have gone up tremendously in the last couple of years and, for some people, this extra cost can be a burden.

Mrs. Stefanson: I wonder if the minister, when it comes to income taxes that are paid for a one-income earner of $60,000 a year, can the minister confirm that Manitoba–that that Manitoba taxpayer would pay more than every other province with the exception of Nova Scotia, P.E.I. and Québec?

***** (16:00)

Ms. Wowchuk: What I will confirm for the member is that, when you look at our taxes and our cost of living, Manitoba is among the lowest, and, in fact, Saskatchewan, in their budget speech, talked about the comparison of personal costs and taxes and said that Manitoba was in a better situation. But if–I think the member talked about a single-earner family with a 60–with four in the family earning $60,000. When you take into consideration personal costs and taxes, Manitoba is the second lowest; only Prince Edward Island is lower than we are.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I think if the minister were to look at a Manitoban last year earning $60,000 a year versus this year, not only are they the highest taxed west of Québec, but their cost of living actually went up by $781 for that family of four earning–with a single earner of $60,000 a year. Could the minister confirm that?

Ms. Wowchuk: Madam Chairperson, if–when you compare jurisdictions, you have to look at all things. You have to look at auto insurance. You have to look at child care, price of electricity, gasoline tax, health premiums, heating costs, mortgage costs, child benefits, property tax, provincial income tax. You look at all of those–retail sales tax and telephone charges.

When you look at all of those and you look at a person that is a single earner–a single-earning family in the 2010 comparison, Manitoba is the second

lowest of all other jurisdictions, with only Prince Edward Island being lower when you compare all of those things.

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, well, that's not what I asked, Madam Chairperson, but I did ask the minister–compared to last year, could she confirm that a single person making $30,000 a year, the costs are up. The cost of living is up by $207 this year.

Ms. Wowchuk: Madam Chairperson, when you look–take everything into consideration, there are certain categories where there have been some increases, but when you look at the whole package of what an individual will pay in comparison to other jurisdictions, then Manitobans do have an advantage.

I've said to the member that I've given my answer, and I'm waiting for another question.

Mrs. Stefanson: Yeah. I just have a question with respect to the Fitness Tax Credit, and the Fitness Tax Credit identified on page C-2 of the budget applies to young adults, ages 16-24. The Throne Speech, however, didn't specify that the credit would be limited just to young adults.

And I'm just wondering if it's–if the tax credit has been scaled back for some reason, and what was the rationale behind the age 24 cutoff?

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, the tax credit was for a lower age the previous year, and now it's being expanded to the age of 24. And it's a gradual process. Eventually, I'm hopeful that we can move that higher, but just as the member indicated, there are financial pressures and you can only move in so many areas. But the tax credit last year was for a lower age and now we've expanded it to–it was to 16 last year, and we've expanded it to 24.

Mrs. Stefanson: Has there been a financial analysis as to what the costs are associated with that, not just for the one that's been announced, but for an overall Fitness Tax Credit for all Manitobans? Has there been an analysis? The minister said they're doing it sort of in increments, and so I'm wondering if there's been an overall analysis as to the cost of that.

Ms. Wowchuk: Yes, there has been.

Mrs. Stefanson: Could the minister share that figure with us?

Ms. Wowchuk: If you look at the–page C-2 that the member just referred to, we said there would be a revenue–a loss of revenue of $0.3 million. That would be because that service was taxed before. It won't be taxed now and, by expanding it, there is a loss of revenue of about $300,000.

Mrs. Stefanson: Yeah, my ask was not on what's in the budget, but it's the overall, if you–the minister indicated that there had been analysis on what that Fitness Tax Credit would be if it was extended to all Manitobans, and I'm wondering if she can share that figure with us.

Ms. Wowchuk: I don't have that number in front of me, but certainly we can look at it. But, of course, the department did do an analysis and we looked at how much it would cost to apply to everybody and how much it would apply–cost to apply here. And I can give the member an indication, at a later date, as to what it would cost to expand it to everyone, but I don't have that number here.

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, and I thank the minister if she can endeavour to get me that figure; that would be helpful.

And, I think, in the interest of time, I think that's all the time we have today, although, of course, we do have many more questions for the minister, but we will do that at another time.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairperson: It has been moved by the Government House Leader (Mr. Blaikie) that the Committee of Supply concur in all Supply resolutions relating to the Estimates of Expenditure for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2011, which have been adopted at this session by a section of the Committee of Supply or by the full committee.

Shall the motion pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Voice Vote

Madam Chairperson: All those in favour of the motion will please say aye?

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

Madam Chairperson: All those opposed to the motion will please say nay?

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Madam Chairperson: In my opinion, the Ayes have it.

Formal Vote

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, recorded vote.

Madam Chairperson: A recorded vote has been requested. Call in the members.

The question before the committee is, it has been moved by the Government House Leader (Mr. Blaikie) that the Committee of Supply concur in all Supply resolutions relating to the Estimates of Expenditure for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2011, which has been adopted at this session by a section of the Committee of Supply or by the full committee.

Division

A COUNT-OUT VOTE *was taken, the result being as follows: Yeas 31, Nays 21.*

Madam Chairperson: The motion is accordingly carried.

Committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Committee Report

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Deputy Chairperson of the Committee of Supply): Madam Deputy Speaker, the Committee of Supply has adopted a motion regarding concurrence in Supply.

I move, seconded by the honourable member for Transcona (Mr. Reid), that the report of the committee be received.

Madam Deputy Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable member for Wolseley, seconded by the honourable member for Transcona, that the report of the committee be received.

All those in favour–and so ordered.

I will do it one more time.

It has been moved by the honourable member for Wolseley, seconded by the honourable member for Transcona, that the report of the committee be received.

All those in favour, say aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

Madam Deputy Speaker: And so ordered.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Voice Vote

Madam Deputy Speaker: All those in favour, say aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

Madam Deputy Speaker: All those opposed, say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Madam Deputy Speaker: In my opinion, the Ayes have it.

***** (16:20)

Formal Vote

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Official Opposition House Leader): A recorded vote.

Madam Deputy Speaker: A recorded vote has been called. Call in the members.

The question before the House is: Shall the report of the committee be received?

Division

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

Yeas

Allan, Altemeyer, Ashton, Bjornson, Blady, Blaikie, Braun, Dewar, Howard, Irvin-Ross, Jennissen, Korzeniowski, Lemieux, Marcelino, Martindale, McGifford, Melnick, Nevakshonoff, Oswald, Reid, Robinson, Rondeau, Saran, Selby, Selinger, Struthers, Swan, Whitehead, Wiebe, Wowchuk.

Nays

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

Madam Deputy Clerk (Bev Bosiak): Yeas 30, Nays 21.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

***** (16:30)

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Bill 31–The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

Madam Deputy Speaker: As previously agreed, the House will now move on to second debate of Bill 31.

The honourable member for Carman.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Madam Deputy Speaker, certainly welcome that rousing applause to begin the debate on Bill 31, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, otherwise known as BITSA.

And this debate would–is certainly different this year in that they have brought in some further legislation within this bill which is not–knowing had ever been done before and that they are going to put the final nail in the coffin of balanced budget legislation.

And this–they started out a few years ago on this, and despite the former premier, Gary Doer, saying that he would–they would never get rid of balanced budget legislation, well, Gary Doer is gone, and now so is balanced budget legislation. So we know where the agenda is on this current government in terms of they have no interest at all now in balancing budgets for this province.

And the–this amendment started in 2008. They've made substantial changes to the balanced budget legislation in 2008 and eliminated the Province's requirement to balance the core budget on an annual basis. The changes in 2009 reduced the mandatory debt repayment amounts for 2009 and 2010 years. And, if memory serves me correct, if it wasn't for the opposition, they wouldn't have made any debt repayment. We forced them into making a small debt repayment.

The changes that are proposed in Bill 31 now just further erode the original balanced budget legislation under this bill, under BITSA, which should only deal with the implementing the budget tax statutes. This bill now will further erode the original balanced budget legislation. There is no requirement for the Province to balance its books until 2014.

In addition, once the Province returns to a positive summary budget balance, the deficit years will be excluded in the four-year rolling average that is used to determine ministerial pay reductions. So the net result is that instead of taking a 40 percent pay cut–which would've been under the original balanced budget legislation, and they would've taken a 40 percent pay cut for multiple deficit years–now they've–the salary reductions will, for Cabinet ministers, will be for 20 percent in each year and will return to normal much sooner. If they had kept the original balanced budget legislation, there would have been much a higher penalty to the Cabinet ministers and to the government for their financial mismanagement.

And I think it's important to note that this–these deficits by this government is a deficit of choice. There are other provinces, the federal government included, has decided to use deficit financing to stimulate the economy; however, this Province has sort of latched onto that idea that they can use deficits to finance their financial mismanagement.

But it's by choice; it's not because of needed job creation within the province that the–Stats Canada recently revealed that Manitoba's GDP declined by only 0.2 percent in 2009. And Manitoba's fared very well compared to other jurisdictions, and that certainly is no credit to this government; it's to the agricultural community, to the manufacturing industry within Manitoba. It's our diversified economy that's helped pull Manitoba through much better than other provinces in–and in–is comparison perhaps to Ontario where they have a such a large car–automobile manufacturing presence, and it was such a large influence on their economy that, when that business ran into trouble, that certainly affected all of Ontario.

And this bill–they should have–there should be a separate bill, and we've asked that a separate bill be introduced to deal with balanced budget legislation on its own. This is trying to hide it through and it's trying to ram it through under–to remove balanced budget legislation under a bill that's–that it was never designed for this. There is a process; the budget's introduced, and then BITSA is used to implement those tax statutes within the budget.

So, to have this separate–to have these–gutting these balanced budget law within the BITSA is really a sad day for Manitoba. And we know that this government has this penchant for spending. They–we seen it many, many times overall. There's–if they truly wanted and felt the need to balance this budget, there are many ways that they could do this. The enhanced driver's licence: they spent $14 million on a system that nobody wants in Manitoba, or very few

people have wanted and have applied for, and a very cumbersome method in which you have to apply for. There's–they should have listened; they should have taken note that people didn't want this. Instead, they forced this program through and wasted at least $14 million.

We know that they're forcing the City of Winnipeg to remove nitrogen from waste water. There are–they have not listened to the Clean Environment Commission on this that–and to the many scientists that believe, that truly believe that removing nitrogen will actually be to the detriment of Lake Winnipeg in–in that–in the algae growth that happens in Lake Winnipeg, and they're forcing the City of Winnipeg to do this, and it's going to cost the province an extra $350 million.

And, of course, there's Bipole III and this disaster that this government has made of Bipole III. We know that we need–a third transmission line for hydro-electric generation, transmission of the power to the southern markets from where it's being generated. There is no dispute about the need for Bipole III. However, it–the way that this government has done it is just a disaster for Manitoba. We know that it's going to cost 1.7 billion. We thought 640 million was bad enough, and now we realize that it's going to be over $1.7 billion extra to build the transmission line for the existing power that's being generated.

***** (16:40)

We know that we need that third transmission line to maintain reliability, but what you're doing by putting this line on the west side, you're bringing it into all kinds of–because of the extra length in the line, you're bringing it susceptible to all kinds of bad weather because it's a longer line. You're coming through agricultural areas and, in particular, in–that I know of, in my constituency, where this line is proposed to come through, and we wait with bated breath to see when Hydro will finally announce their route, final selection route for Bipole III.

But you're coming through some of the best agricultural land in Manitoba, and we have a wide diversity of crops being grown. We have irrigation projects in existence now and we have a great deal more potential for irrigation. Every year we're seeing irrigation expand in our area, and that will not be able to happen anywhere within the vicinity of this bipole line.

We still have concerns and the minister has still not answered my questions that I have on the order paper that show up every Wednesday. I have a number of questions pertaining to Bipole III in terms of land, purchase of the easements of the land through our area, through our farmland and land.

They haven't answered what will happen if there is no agreement between Hydro and the landowners. Will Hydro resort to, or the provincial government because Hydro's not able to, will the Manitoba government resort to expropriation to force their way through on this? What kind of compensation are they looking at for their land? We also want to know, and relatively speaking for a rural area, this is fairly densely populated, and how are you going to run this transmission line through there without going over top of residences and yard sites? And we have a great deal of concern on the effect of this.

And all this points to just poor thought on the part of the government. They have not considered these questions. Obviously, the minister doesn't want to answer because I have not received answers back to these written questions on the Order Paper, and I certainly would hope the minister will take the time to answer these because my constituents continue to ask all the time where this line is going to be and where it will be located. They're concerned and I know that there's some land transactions in my constituency that are now on hold waiting to see where this line will actually be, so this is a real concern in my area.

It's interesting, I was–when I was in the House this afternoon to listen to the Minister for Tourism (Ms. Marcelino) speak about the proposed World Heritage site on the east side, they keep telling us that they can't build a hydro line down the east side because of boreal forest, and yet the minister claims that they're going to build roads into–so that people–massive roads, if I remember the direct quote, that will take people–so that people can go to the World Heritage site to visit. And, yet, if you can build roads and bridges through the boreal forest, surely you can build a hydro line, which is much less intrusive on the biosphere that's within the east side.

And then we don't even–they don't even want to talk about the boreal forest and the sensitive lands that are on the west side of Lake Manitoba. They will be coming through there and it's just–there is no good argument for this. There's no argument that they've put forward yet to justify this huge, huge expense.

And this morning in debate of the resolution from the member from Brandon West, the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) was talking about sales to Saskatchewan. And I know I've talked at length to the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen) because I believe he's still on the Hydro board about what is this–tell me about this sales to Saskatchewan idea that they keep talking about, and the Minister of Finance this morning said that, well, we'll just build another converter station. You know, like, we're going to spend a billion dollars for $8-million-a-year's worth of sales.

So try and pencil that. I hope Manitoba Hydro's aware that they are going to be forced to do this. I'm sure it will affect their costing of hydro rates in the future. I hope the Public Utilities Board gets to consider this when they're dealing with hydro rate increases because all of a sudden now you've got another billion dollars worth of capital expenditures in there. And if it is warranted, if you can make it pay, then we're all for it, but let's see the numbers first before they use this as another excuse to run down the west side of Lake Manitoba instead of the east side of Lake Winnipeg, where this line should actually be.

This government is, with their obsession to spend and gutting the balanced budget legislation, or balanced budget law, through this particular Bill 31, it just shows how out of step this government is with not only within Manitoba but within western Canada. The western partnership agreement which was signed by B.C. and Alberta and Saskatchewan, they're going to harmonize regulations both in–for instance, as in trucking regulations, manufacturing regulations, professional and trades people will be able to work anywhere within this larger area of Saskatchewan, Alberta, and B.C., and the idea is is to make less regulations, to make it less onerous for people and business to do business.

And the trucking regulations alone, they're talking about a harmonized regulation so that trucks and drivers can travel that entire area under one set of regulations instead of the chaos that's out there right now in the trucking regulations, and, unfortunately, Manitoba's getting left behind on this. We kind of see it's becoming like the island of Manitoba because Ontario and Québec are working on similar regulations to work within that region and it only makes sense that we work within the region of western Canada. Of course, we continue to trade across Canada, and we continue to trade in the U.S. It always has been important; it always will continue to be important. But it's all about being competitive and if your business cannot be competitive within your region, then you're in great trouble.

And it's as I said, I feel like we're becoming the island of Manitoba here and the relationship–and the comparison becomes–you look at what's happening in Greece these days. In the country of Greece the financial upheaval from government overspending and not–overspending but also borrowing well beyond their means, and then they're turning around and asking the other European nations to bail them out and yet there's resistance from within the country to stop their spending and stop their financial mismanagement. And there's a lot of comparisons to be made to Manitoba right now with our dependence on the federal government, ultimately, the other provinces of Canada, for our transfer equalization payments. And this government is not clueing in that we cannot be an island on ourselves and depend on other jurisdictions to bail us out, to supply money for us, to be able to carry on as they've done.

Whenever we ask questions about–in question period of the ministers, about various programs and particularly things like justice and health and the answer's always back is about how much money we spent. We've spent x number of million dollars. What we're really after here is not how much money you spend but it's how well you spend it and what the results are of spending that money. And there is–with this government, it's always about the money spent, never about the results and it's unfortunate. It's an unfortunate way to carry on business. In private business, you cannot do that. Many of us have experience from that in private business that you have to be viable. You have to make money in the long run. You cannot depend on other sectors to keep bailing you out and unfortunately, this government doesn't understand that. They only want to continue to spend on their ways.

***** (16:50)

As I said earlier, this is a deficit by choice. This is not required. They have set out in their budget plan for the next four or five years here, they're talking about deficits for the next number of years. They're also using some rather interesting signal projections as to what their budget is based on. First of all, they're basing this on transfer and equalization payments remaining the same over the next four years.

And I think the signals are very clear coming out of British Columbia, Alberta. Ontario is no longer

considered a have province, that they will not be contributing to the equalization fund, so to base your budget on an equalization payment that will remain the same in the next four years is very unrealistic. So that's going to make a large draw down on the taxpayers' abilities here in Manitoba. It's going to increase our deficit and, ultimately, increase our debt. The other side of this is that their budget projections also include the interest rate remaining flat, and, by all accounts, the bank of–the Governor of the Bank of Canada, a Mr. Carney, has certainly been putting out the signals there that interest rates will not remain flat. Interest rates will indeed begin to rise and if–for those of you who happened to be in business through the early 1980s, this is something that we will–some of us will never forget.

And, when you talk about interest rates, the early 1980s always come back to–as vivid memories for some of us, and although I can say that I didn't survive the Dirty Thirties, I certainly survived the dirty '80s with the interest rates. And that's always put a bit of a caution in my own financial management, just having lived through that era of high interest rates, and we certainly hope that interest rates never go back to that 20 percent plus is what we were back in the very early 1980s.

But, with the economy the way it has been, inflation is beginning to show. With the price deflation that we've seen in the last number of years, and then we could be looking at some serious inflation and the way you curb inflation is to raise the interest rates. It has worked in the past, and that's what will happen again in the future. And, Madam Deputy Speaker, this is–I really feel that this government is either not aware of this or unwilling to face this, and their whole budget is based on just borrowing more money.

And, if they think they can borrow their way out of debt, they're in for a rude surprise on here, and, in fact, it's the taxpayers of Manitoba that will ultimately pay the price on this because it will be the taxpayers that will pay the price. And we've already seen the beginnings of this. Every possible fee and licence and fine, they're increasing. They're inventing new taxes or levies, whatever the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Struthers) wants to call it, it's a tax on food, while he's somewhat vague about how they will implement this.

But the threats were coming through very clearly from the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) last week, saying that, you know, if the supply-managed commodities don't like this, well, we'll just cut back on the staff in there and we'll make them pay for their own. And that's ultimately–so now you're going to tax food products–the poultry, eggs, and milk products–and then you're also turning around and threatening them with less support than what you already have.

We know that the Ag budget was cut drastically this year. The Rural Initiatives is paying for things that have no bearing at all on rural initiatives and are instead enforcing the regulations that this government seems intent on putting in. When you look at agriculture, the regulations that this government has put in have nothing to do with food safety. They have no real scientific impact on the environment, and what it's doing is creating hardships within our agricultural sector just trying to keep up with the regulations and the paperwork. And, at the same time, it does not make agriculture more efficient. It does not create cheaper food. We're in a world economy on food and we have to be able to compete with outside interests, agricultural producers from around the world. And, again, it's that island-of-Manitoba mentality that this government has seemed to form that they can tax and they can charge fees on absolutely everything with no justification for what they're doing.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, this bill, BITSA bill–and implementing–implementation of new taxes and that from the budget is certainly not good for an economy irregardless of whether you want to say that we've, you know, missed the major part of the recession. Certainly, we weren't hit nearly as hard as provinces like Ontario. The U.S. states were very hard hit and continue to be very hard hit. We've seen the housing debacle down in the U.S. and, to a large part, we have missed that here in Manitoba, but it affects our manufacturers here. There are a lot of markets have slowed down and have dried up for our manufacturers, so we need to take a cautious, cautious approach to the budget and to tax management in this province.

And this budget, this BITSA bill is certainly not cautious by any means because it's full bore ahead with spending, full bore ahead with increasing debt, and that is not a good way to go for Manitobans. We're going to see Manitobans and Manitoba businesses look elsewhere if–when the tax regime becomes that much more onerous on them, and we're already hearing out of the Westman area of Manitoba that they're making business decisions now based on the western partnership agreement.

They're going to look at what's available in the western provinces, beginning at the Saskatchewan border, and they're going to compare that back to what is available here in Manitoba. And businesses are very fluid. They really can move despite, you know, a person's loyalty to the province; you still have to run that business and that business needs to make economic decisions. So we're going to see–I believe that we're at the point now where we're going to see–while many other areas of Canada, possibly the U.S., start to pick up, start to gain some strength, we're going to continue to see–Manitoba's going to go the other way because we're going to–we're so dependent on other areas of Canada, both for our income in terms of transfer and equalization payments, but also from businesses deciding–making their decisions on where to go to where they can make the best dollar for their businesses.

And Manitoba is not providing that environment for these companies. We need to–what they could have done and what they should have done out of this, with this budget, and with the budget in particular, is provide some stable growth for the province. It's not a matter of how fast. The priority on this government has been to how fast we can run up the debt and we don't care about how it gets paid off. Instead, what this government is after is protecting their vested interest by trying to promote this idea that they alone can save the economy, and that's just not right. We know that it's business, in particular small business, that is the driving force of the economy, and what they're doing here is penalizing businesses, whether they be in manufacturing, whether they be in agriculture. They're penalizing these businesses that will ultimately provide–

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order, when this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have two minutes remaining.

The time being 5 p.m., the House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 18, 2010

CONTENTS

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