

Third Session - Thirty-Eighth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
Official Report
(Hansard)

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Eighth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
AGLUGUB, Cris	The Maples	N.D.P.
ALLAN, Nancy, Hon.	St. Vital	N.D.P.
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	N.D.P.
BRICK, Marilyn	St. Norbert	N.D.P.
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CULLEN, Cliff	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
CUMMINGS, Glen	Ste. Rose	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard	Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary, Hon.	Concordia	N.D.P.
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	P.C.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	P.C.
HAWRANIK, Gerald	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
HICKES, George, Hon.	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LATHLIN, Oscar, Hon.	The Pas	N.D.P.
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	La Verendrye	N.D.P.
LOEWEN, John	Fort Whyte	P.C.
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MAGUIRE, Larry	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	N.D.P.
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McGIFFORD, Diane, Hon.	Lord Roberts	N.D.P.
MELNICK, Christine, Hon.	Riel	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	P.C.
MURRAY, Stuart	Kirkfield Park	P.C.
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	N.D.P.
OSWALD, Theresa, Hon.	Seine River	N.D.P.
PENNER, Jack	Emerson	P.C.
REID, Daryl	Transcona	N.D.P.
REIMER, Jack	Southdale	P.C.
ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Rupertsland	N.D.P.
ROCAN, Denis	Carman	P.C.
RONDEAU, Jim, Hon.	Assiniboia	N.D.P.
ROWAT, Leanne	Minnedosa	P.C.
SALE, Tim, Hon.	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
SANTOS, Conrad	Wellington	N.D.P.
SCHELLENBERG, Harry	Rossmere	N.D.P.
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield	P.C.
SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	N.D.P.
SMITH, Scott, Hon.	Brandon West	N.D.P.
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	P.C.
STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon.	Dauphin-Roblin	N.D.P.
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	N.D.P.
TAILLIEU, Mavis	Morris	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, March 9, 2005

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

Highway 200

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Highway 200 is paved from Winnipeg to the Canada-U.S. border except for approximately a 10-kilometre section between highways 205 and 305 which remains unpaved. School buses, farm equipment, emergency vehicles and local traffic must travel on Highway 200 which is dangerous, if not completely impassable, during wet spring weather and other times of heavy rainfall.

Due to unsafe conditions, many drivers look to alternate routes around this section when possible and time permits. The condition of the gravel road can cause serious damage to all vehicles.

Insufficient traffic counts are not truly reflective of the traffic volumes because users tend to find another route to avoid this section. Traffic counts done after spring seeding, during wet weather or during school recess are not indicative of traffic flows.

Maintenance costs for unpaved highways are high and ongoing. It would be cost-effective to pave this section.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Lemieux) consider paving Highway 200 between highways 205 and 305 to ensure a smooth, safe and uninterrupted use of Highway 200.

Signed by Melanie Waddingham, Doreen Murray, Glenn Ginn and others.

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

Provincial Road 355

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

The unsafe conditions of PR No. 355 from the western edge of Minto municipality to PR No. 270 (including the hill out of the Minnedosa valley), poses an undue risk to Manitobans who must travel on this roadway.

The steady stream of traffic on this stretch of PR No. 355, which includes automobiles such as "B" train semi-trailer tractors, mail delivery vehicles and school buses, make the roadway in its current state dangerously impassable.

Continued expansion of the regional economy in livestock development, grain storage and transportation and the proposed Mohawk Plant, puts additional strain on PR No. 355 and creates further safety concerns for motorists.

PR No. 355 experiences an increased risk in traffic flow during the spring season when there are weight restrictions on surrounding provincial trunk highways.

For several years, representatives of six municipality corporations, as well as an ad hoc citizens' group have been actively lobbying the provincial government to upgrade and reconstruct the stretch of PR No. 355 at issue.

Manitobans and visitors to the province deserve a better rural highway infrastructure.

We petition the Manitoba Legislative Assembly as follows:

To request the Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Lemieux) to consider upgrading PR No. 355 from the western edge of the R.M. of Minto to PR No. 270 (including the hill out of the Minnedosa valley).

To request the Premier of Manitoba (Mr. Doer) to consider supporting the said initiative to ensure the safety of our Manitobans and all Canadians who travel along Manitoba highways.

Signed by Heather Duncan, Graeme Duncan and Doug Baker.

* (13:35)

Minimum Sitting Days for Manitoba Legislature

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

The Manitoba Legislature sat for only 35 days in 2003. In 2004, there were 55 sitting days.

The number of sitting days has a direct impact on the issue of public accountability.

The Legislative Assembly provides the best forum for all MLAs to debate and ask questions of the government and it is critical that all MLAs be provided the time needed in order for them to cover constituent and party duties.

Establishing a minimum number of sitting days could prevent the government of the day from limiting the rights of opposition members from being able to ask questions.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba to consider recognizing the need to sit for a minimum of 80 days in any given calendar year.

Signed by Francis Pineda, Rey Operana, Cel Mendoza and others.

Westman Area Physician Shortage

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for the petition:

The Westman region serving Brandon and the surrounding area has been, and will continue to be, periodically without the services of an on-call pediatrician.

As a result of the severe shortage of pediatricians to serve the Westman area, Brandon and area women with high-risk pregnancies as well as critically ill children are being forced, at even greater risk, to travel to Winnipeg for urgent medical attention.

The chiefs of the departments of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Family Practice and Anesthesia at the Brandon Regional Health Centre have publicly voiced their concern regarding the potentially disastrous consequences of the shortage.

Brandon physicians were shocked and angered by the lack of communication and foresight on the part of the government related to retention of a local pediatrician.

The Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) has stated that Brandon has to put its best foot forward and recruit its own doctors.

Doctors have warned that if the current situation is prolonged, it may result in further loss of services or the departure of other specialists who find the situation unmanageable.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To strongly urge the Minister of Health to consider taking charge and ensuring that he will improve long-term planning efforts to develop a lasting solution to the chronic problem of pediatrician and other specialist shortages in Brandon.

To strongly urge the Minister of Health to treat this as the crisis that it is and consider consulting with front-line workers, particularly doctors, to find solutions.

To strongly urge the Minister of Health and the Premier of Manitoba to consider ending highway medicine now.

Signed Carolyn Ramage, Christine Jefferies, Tiffany Minchuk and others.

* (13:40)

Ambulance Service

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

In May 2004, 46-year-old Peter Krahn suffered a heart attack while exercising in East St. Paul and was pronounced dead just under an hour later after being transported to the Concordia Hospital in Winnipeg. Reports show that it took nearly 18 minutes for an ambulance to arrive for Mr. Krahn.

The Interlake Regional Health Authority claims that 21 minutes is an acceptable emergency response time, whereas the City of Winnipeg uses a benchmark of 4 minutes.

Ambulance coverage for East St. Paul is provided from Selkirk, which is almost 25 kilometres away.

The municipalities of East St. Paul and West St. Paul combined have over 12 000 residents.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the provincial government to consider providing East St. Paul with local ambulance service which would service both East and West St. Paul.

To request the provincial government to consider improving the way that ambulance service is supplied to all Manitobans by utilizing technologies such as GPS in conjunction with a Medical Transportation Co-ordination Centre (MTCC) which will ensure that patients receive the nearest ambulance in the least amount of time.

To request the provincial government to consider ensuring that appropriate funding is provided to maintain superior response times and sustainable services.

Signed by Robyn Unruh, Connie Scarth and Larry Scarth.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs Second Report

Mr. Daryl Reid (Chairperson): Mr. Speaker, I ask for leave to present the report of the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave? [*Agreed*]

Mr. Reid: I wish to present the Second Report on the Standing Committee of Legislative Affairs.

Madam Clerk (Patricia Chaychuk): Your Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs presents the following as its Second Report.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense?

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Meetings:

Your main committee met on the following occasions:

Thursday, December 2, 2004, at 10 a.m. in Room 254 of the Legislative Building

Tuesday, December 21, 2004, at 1 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building

Thursday, March 3, 2005, at 9:30 a.m. at 1023 – 405 Broadway (in camera)

Your sub-committee met on the following occasions. All meetings took place in Room 1023 – 405 Broadway:

Thursday, January 6, 2005, at 10 a.m.

Monday, January 31, 2005, at 1 p.m.

Tuesday, February 1, 2005, at 10 a.m.

Monday, February 7, 2005, at 2 p.m.

Wednesday, February 9, 2005, at 9 a.m.

Thursday, February 10, 2005, at 1 p.m.

Matters Under Consideration:

Recruitment and Selection of the Children's Advocate

Recruitment and Selection of the Ombudsman

Committee Membership:

Substitutions made prior to the December 2, 2004, meeting:

Hon. Mr. Mackintosh for Hon. Mr. Smith

At the December 21, 2004, meeting, your committee elected Ms. Korzeniowski as Chairperson.

Substitutions made prior to the December 21, 2004, meeting:

Mrs. Taillieu for Mr. Eichler

Ms. Korzeniowski for Mr. Reid

Mr. Schellenberg for Mr. Nevakshonoff

Mr. Santos for Mr. Martindale

At the March 3, 2005, meeting, your committee elected Mr. Reid as Chairperson.

Substitutions made prior to the March 3, 2005, meeting:

Mr. Schellenberg for Hon. Mr. Ashton

Mr. Reid for Ms. Korzeniowski

Mr. Aglugub for Hon. Mr. Doer

Mr. Altemeyer for Hon. Mr. Chomiak

Mr. Goertzen for Mr. Murray

Mr. Eichler for Mr. Loewen

Mr. Dyck for Mr. Eichler

Mr. Loewen for Mr. Dyck

Motions Adopted and Reported:

Motion adopted at the December 21, 2004, meeting

THAT a sub-committee of the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs consisting of:

Kerri Irvin-Ross

Greg Dewar

Kevin Lamoureux

Kelvin Goertzen

Daryl Reid, as Chairperson

be struck to establish the selection criteria, the advertisement, conduct the screening and interviews and provide to this Committee their recommendation of the appointment of the individuals to fill the positions of the Ombudsman and of the Children's Advocate.

Sub-Committee Report

At the March 3, 2005, meeting, the sub-committee reported that it had met in camera on Thursday,

January 6, 2005, at 10 a.m., Monday, January 31, 2005, at 1 p.m., Tuesday, February 1, 2005, at 10 a.m., Monday, February 7, 2005, at 2 p.m., Wednesday, February 9, 2005, at 9 a.m., and Thursday, February 10, 2005, at 1 p.m.

The sub-committee reported that one hundred and fifty-eight applications were received for the position of the Ombudsman, and from these applications, interviews were held with six (6) candidates. Interviews were held on February 7 and 9. Following from these interviews, on February 10, the sub-committee agreed to recommend to the Standing Committee of Legislative Affairs that Irene Hamilton be the nominee for the position of the Ombudsman in Manitoba.

Items agreed to at the March 3, 2005, Meeting

Your committee has agreed to make its report to the Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council with the recommendation that Irene Hamilton be appointed as the Ombudsman for the Province of Manitoba.

** (13:45)*

Mr. Reid: I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Fort Garry (Ms. Irvin-Ross), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 15—The Emergency Measures Amendment Act

Hon. Scott Smith (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism (Mr. Robinson), that Bill 15, The Emergency Measures Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, this bill authorizes the Province to enter into agreements with other jurisdictions regarding emergency planning and providing assistance during emergencies. It deals

with the qualifications of people from other jurisdictions who provide emergency assistance in Manitoba as well as a liability for their actions while being in Manitoba.

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

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today James Sesak, who is the president of the Transcona Historical Museum Board, Sheryl Kolt, who is the curator and also Kimberly Hiebert, who is the collections registrar and interpreter. They are the guests of the honourable Member for Radisson (Mr. Jha), and also the honourable Member for Transcona (Mr. Reid).

Also in the public gallery we have from River West Park School 18 Grade 9 students under the direction of Mrs. Jennifer Saunders. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger).

Also in the public gallery we have from Riverton Collegiate 25 Grade 11 students under the direction of Mrs. Tammy Einarson. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for the Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Budget Speech Residential Property Taxes

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, this NDP government should be very, very embarrassed by the budget that they brought in yesterday. On Monday, in this Legislature, we introduced a motion of urgent public importance about the crisis facing our rural agriculture cattle producers. We debated that and, in fact, after that we passed an all-party resolution unanimously, sponsored by the government, talking about this issue on why there should be action supporting our cattle producers in rural Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, 24 hours later they introduced a budget, not one mention of BSE, not one mention in the document. This NDP government was—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition has the floor.

Mr. Murray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This year there has been \$470 million in transfer payments. In the foreseeable future that will map out to some \$300 million per year. Over and above that, this NDP government is getting \$1.7 billion in health dollars for 10 years and another \$180 million for child care for over 5 years. Lots of revenue in this province.

What this Premier failed to do, Mr. Speaker, was he failed to make Manitoba competitive. He failed to offer a long-term solution to make Manitoba a have province, and he completely failed with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to eliminate the education tax off of residential property and farmland. Clearly, this Premier could have announced that it could have been done in one year, or at least he could have announced that it could have been done in two years and then a plan to attack the business portion. Why did this Premier miss the opportunity that Manitobans are waiting for?

* (13:50)

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I would refer to page 1 of the budget. We recognized the setback cattle and ruminant producers are experiencing following the recent U.S. court decision to keep the American border closed. Through ongoing commitment to repositioning the livestock industry strategy, we will continue to support our producers. We will work closely with our provincial and federal counterparts and the U.S. government to normalize trade and push for outcomes based on science. I suggest the Leader of the Opposition read the budget. It might help him and inform him in the tirade he introduces every time he asks a question in this House.

Mr. Speaker, the budget has been received—
[*interjection*]

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are very early into Question Period. The members who wish to ask a

question, the ministers who wish to reply, will have ample opportunity. Right now the honourable First Minister has the floor, and we need some decorum.

Mr. Doer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also recall on Monday, the member opposite was calling on the government to put more money into the rainy day fund. Check, that happened in this budget. He asked us to keep our commitment on tax reductions. Check, that has been kept in the budget. He asked us to follow both the balanced budget legislation and the GAAP accounting procedures. Check. I expect the members opposite will vote for this budget.

Child Care

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, we have seen massive increases of revenue that would have provided this NDP government to do once-in-a-lifetime opportunities here in Manitoba. They could have detailed a long-term economic strategy to make Manitoba more competitive. They could have done what Manitobans are asking this Doer government to do, and that is to eliminate the education tax off residential property and farmland. Unfortunately, that opportunity was lost.

Mr. Speaker, even though the NDP government is going to receive some \$180 million from Ottawa over the next five years for child care, parents and child care workers woke up that morning after the budget wondering what it is that this NDP plan is going to be. What are the wages going to be for those child care workers? How many more spaces are there going to be? Will there be a tax credit for stay-at-home parents?

Why did this Premier, when he had the opportunity, not introduce a plan so that child care parents and child care workers could better plan their futures? Why did he fail to do that?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): The would-have, could-have, should-have party across the way raised taxes on farmland when members opposite, sitting on the front bench, were in the Cabinet. They know that. That is why their heads are down, Mr. Speaker. They should be ashamed of themselves. We have lowered the tax on education taxes on farmland by 50 percent. They should be voting with farmers to lower the taxes instead of playing politics in this House.

Mr. Speaker, I need no lectures from members opposite. I remember tabling a Treasury Board document when I was the Leader of the Opposition, written by Jules Benson, that said we will put \$10 million more in the budget for child care, and we will cut that and borrow through lapsed funding as a deliberate budget strategy. We have thousands more spaces here in Manitoba. We have more people being trained. We have \$5 million in the enabling vote and on top of that every dollar from the federal government will flow to one of the best child care systems in Canada.

Municipal Revenue Sharing

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, what we are clearly hearing from this Premier is they do not have a can-do attitude; they have a can-spend attitude. That is what we hear time and time again from this group.

This NDP government thinks they know how to spend Manitobans' hardworking tax dollars better than they do, Mr. Speaker. That is the unfortunate part. With the level of increased revenues we have seen coming into the Province this year, the unprecedented level of revenue, and knowing of the revenue that is coming in the years to follow, the missed opportunity is that this NDP government did not lay out a plan for a new deal for municipalities.

The City of Winnipeg has a \$2-billion infrastructure debt. They need to increase, in the City of Winnipeg, their infrastructure spending by more than \$100 million a year. They cannot do it alone. Why is it that this Premier, when he had the opportunity, did not introduce a plan that would deal with municipalities in a revenue-sharing opportunity? He had the opportunity and he failed to deliver. Why?

* (13:55)

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased municipalities have recognized, for the first time in 10 years after former Minister Ernst froze the transit operating grants to the municipalities, that we have increased the transit grants dramatically for Winnipeg, for Brandon, for Flin Flon, for Thompson.

We have a revenue-sharing agreement with municipalities that is the second best in Canada, and it is actually the best in Canada when you consider

the factor that social assistance is carried by the provincial government. Another new deal for municipalities, going to a one-tier social assistance system, is a social assistance system that has reduced the number of people on social assistance by 33 percent since we have been elected in terms of the employable numbers.

Let me read some comments made by independent financial analysts. The Scotiabank: "Much as Manitoba's economic development is focussed on staged improvements that yield a considerable cumulative impact over several years, tax reduction both personal and corporate represents one aspect of the strategy. A main plank of this province's economic plank is fiscal repair. Manitoba continues to chip away at the direct debt of unfunded pension liability and direct debt. As a result, its net debt relative to GDP has declined from 33 percent to 21.5 percent this year."

I could go on. I know they cannot handle the truth, Mr. Speaker, but every tax promise we have made, we have kept. Every one.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Lac du Bonnet.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have recognized the honourable member for Lac du Bonnet. He has the floor.

Budget Speech Government Deficit

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, the NDP government has had a once-in-a-lifetime increase in revenues of \$524 million this year alone. The NDP lost an opportunity to pay down the debt of this province, but chose to spend it all and then some by increasing the net debt of the province by another \$359 million. Why does the Minister of Finance not stop his reckless spending and pay down the debt?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, when we came into office, the contribution you were making to paying down the debt was \$75 million. In this budget it is \$110 million. It is a dramatic increase over when you were in office. Our debt-servicing costs were 7.5 percent when we came

into office. They are now at 3.3 percent, less than half of what you paid when you were in office.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I would like to remind all honourable members when putting a question or answering a question, please put it to the Chair.

Mr. Hawranik: Mr. Speaker, the net debt of the province will be increased by \$359 million this year, in spite of the Finance Minister's statements that he balanced the budget and he paid down the debt. How could Manitobans believe that the NDP have paid down the debt and balanced the budget when by the government's very own numbers, the debt increased by \$359 million?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has failed to understand that we have reduced the debt-to-GDP ratio from 21 percent to 15.8 percent since we have come to office. We have grown this economy by \$10 billion since we have been elected.

Mr. Hawranik: Mr. Speaker, the Finance Minister has thrown so many numbers out in this House that even he is confused by his numbers. The NDP government has a long history of increasing the debt of this province. The NDP has increased the net debt of the province by more than \$3 billion since 1999, a record that even Howard Pawley would be proud of. You have increased the debt of every Manitoban this year by almost \$350 in a year in which revenues are at a historic high.

When will the NDP stop their uncontrolled spending and come up with a realistic plan to pay down the debt?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, our debt-to-GDP ratio is down. Our economy has grown by \$10 billion or 33 percent since we have come to office. I remember the member opposite crying for a new school in his area. We built that school. Now he does not want to pay for it.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

* (14:00)

Mr. Speaker: Order. I recognized the honourable Member for Tuxedo. I am sure she appreciates the applause, but the longer it goes the fewer questions we are going to get.

Budget Speech Government Deficit

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This NDP government lost an opportunity yesterday to provide hope for the future of young people in Manitoba. Yesterday this NDP government had a choice between paying down the debt, which they chose instead to increase by some \$359 million, and feeding their spending habit. Naturally they chose the NDP way: spend, spend, spend.

Does this NDP government not recognize their reckless spending habit is mortgaging the future of young people in this province?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Members opposite do not understand the difference between using a credit card to pay for your groceries—what they did when they ran deficits in the nineties—and having expenditures, having investments in things like hospitals, schools, roads, infrastructure, clean water and improving our Hydro. When we built Limestone, they complained about it. It paid itself off in 10 years, and it has generated profits for this province ever since. The assets in this province, Mr. Speaker, are worth \$23 billion in replacement costs. These members do not even know what that is worth.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, if this government had the opportunity to take candy from a kid, they would not hesitate. Welcome to NDP Manitoba. We, on this side of the House, recognize the burden the NDP government is placing on our children's future, and we will not stand by to let this happen without a fight.

Will the Minister of Finance come clean today to Manitoba's youth and admit that their spending habit will mortgage their future in Manitoba?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, when we came into office, the members opposite had ignored all the advice they received to deal with the pension liability for school teachers and civil servants. It had grown to \$3 billion. We put the first plan in place to deal with that liability which had grown for over 40 years. We have started funding that plan. The bond rating agencies have seen our debt pension liability plan. They have increased our credit ratings. I put a lot more confidence in an improved credit rating than the nonsense coming from the members opposite.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, the NDP seems content to mortgage the future of Manitoba's children. We are not. For every \$1 in tax savings in this budget, the NDP spends \$4. They had an opportunity yesterday, a real opportunity to provide more meaningful tax relief to Manitobans. Yet, they chose not to.

Mr. Speaker, why does this government continue to refuse to admit that they have a spending problem that will mortgage our children's future in this province?

Mr. Selinger: Perhaps the member would examine the facts. The proportion of the provincial economy occupied by the provincial government expenditure is about 18.7 percent, virtually the same as when they were in office. Our contribution to this economy has remained stable. The difference is we have made strategic investments which have grown this economy by \$10 billion in the last six years.

Budget Speech Rural Initiatives

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, people in rural Manitoba are surprised that this government is almost insulted that we would question their spending priorities. They barely mentioned agriculture, rural Manitoba and BSE in this budget.

Mr. Speaker, a missed opportunity to put in place a plan. Where is the plan for rural Manitoba to restore the economy that is currently floundering?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): I am quite surprised, Mr. Speaker. He must be listening to different rural Manitobans than I am because the rural Manitobans that I am listening to are quite impressed that they have seen this kind of increase in an agriculture budget, a budget increase of 19.4 percent. When you look at the reductions in taxes, \$20 million will be available for farmers because we have made the decision to reduce the farm education tax in this province, an investment to increase the supports for farmers under the programs that they have asked for such as CAIS, and for a commitment to invest in slaughter capacity in this province.

Mr. Speaker, this government has worked with rural Manitobans and will continue to work with

rural Manitobans. I hope we can have their support as we try to get through this difficult time that farmers are having.

Mr. Cummings: Mr. Speaker, rural Manitobans are saying where is agriculture. Everywhere, but in the budget. From Keystone Agricultural Producers, we will support a plan, but that is what budgets are about, a plan, a vision, a direction, some hope that they will deal with the problems that are being faced with in rural Manitoba as we speak.

Madam Minister, there are a lot of young rural Manitobans that want to know if they have a chance. Do you have a plan?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, an increase of a budget of 19.4 percent is a significant increase and sends a very strong message to rural Manitobans that we are there with them. We have been with them. We have programs in place. The member talks about young farmers. I hope he will recognize the program that we put in place through Bridging Generations to help the next generation of farmers get started that they did not support.

Our government recognizes the importance of this industry, and we will continue to work with the industry. I hope we can have the support of the members opposite to vote for a budget that puts 19.4 percent more money into agriculture than there was previously.

Mr. Cummings: Mr. Speaker, the title of this ministry is Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives. This minister and this government are miserably failing to live up to that title, let alone respond to what is needed in rural Manitoba at this time in our history. We are looking for a plan. We are looking for some vision.

For the minister to simply say, "Well, I have got \$20 million." That is a nice piece of money, but where is the plan? What direction, what leadership are we getting to deal with the initiatives that have been going begging in rural Manitoba? She cannot even convince the farm leaders of this province that they care about agriculture. Where is the plan, Madam Minister?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, if the member wants I can start bringing out some documents. We did a discussion plan. We put forward Destination 2010.

We have done a reorganization of the department in order to address many of the issues that are out there. Yes, we have added food. We have added rural development, and we are looking for opportunities with the producers and people of rural Manitoba to have more economic growth in rural Manitoba.

We are looking for ways and are putting staff in place to work as the industry has asked us for. They may not listen to the industry, but when we were doing this reorganization we consulted with the industry. They helped us put a plan in place. I hope the members opposite will recognize that the industry was part of this plan, and work with us to help rural Manitoba rather than just being critical.

Auto Theft Reduction Strategy

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, over the past six years the current NDP Minister of Justice has sat back and done nothing as record levels of murders have taken place in the city of Winnipeg, as two new outlaw motor gangs have set up in the province and as auto thefts have increased to 13.5 thousand every year in this province.

Yesterday, the Minister of Justice missed another opportunity to address these very serious issues, instead announcing that someday there will be another announcement. After six long years, why has this Minister of Justice not been able to address these very serious issues?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I suggest that the honourable member must have mixed up his file papers, Mr. Speaker, and started reading a Conservative budget. Ours addressed many, many issues related to justice. I am very pleased with what is in the budget.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, if this minister wants to table a plan on auto theft, table a plan on gangs and table a plan on guns on our streets, I would be happy to see it.

This week a newspaper in Surrey, B.C., reported that auto thefts had decreased in that area by 20 percent as a result of aggressive bait-car programs. The staff sergeant for that area said it was a phenomenal decrease in auto thefts.

* (14:10)

Mr. Speaker, other areas of the country are getting a handle on this serious social problem, but this Minister of Justice for six years has put out meaningless news releases and has said stay tuned for future announcements. We cannot afford any more lost opportunities. What is his plan to deal with auto theft in this province?

Mr. Mackintosh: Which reminds me, Mr. Speaker, of how auto theft increased I believe it was 400 percent under the watch of members opposite in Manitoba. That also reminds me of five election promises made by the members opposite in the '95 election campaign to deal with auto theft, and we cannot discover how they moved on any single one of them. Having said that—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Mackintosh: So close to the bone, Mr. Speaker.

Unlike members opposite, we have been working hard to reduce this and deal with this stubborn epidemic that grew out of their negligence, but we are determined to bring down those numbers. I understand that today, unfortunately, the federal government has decided that it will not be a robust partner in this. We will do what we can in this province at least.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, it is ironic that the government is happy to take the federal government's money but wants to blame them when it comes to something they could do on auto theft.

Last year alone, the increase in auto theft in our province was more than the total number of autos stolen in 1990. In Saskatchewan, there was a 33% reduction in auto theft over the last couple of years. They did it by identifying and classifying offenders, and then ensuring the probation officers had the resources to follow those offenders. On the issue of auto theft, other jurisdictions have become doers. Our government has become ditherers. What is your plan?

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, I sense some veiled attack on policing efforts in this question. I want to remind members opposite that the crime of auto theft can be dealt with by way of immobilizers, but also in the short term, must be dealt with by way of effective measures to make sure that those auto thieves who are threatening the safety of Manitobans are brought

to justice. We are working with law enforcement, with MPI. We are working with community agencies on a comprehensive strategy.

I might remind members opposite, when they had an opportunity to deal with a triple-digit increase in auto theft, they ordered a bunch of signs for our parking lots to remind people that they should take efforts to reduce the risk of auto theft. They went and put them into the Woodsworth Building. They went and put them into storage. They did not even deal with the promises they made to the people of Manitoba. We are dealing with this issue, and people are dealing on this issue with us. Thank you.

Education System Funding

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, yesterday was an opportunity to reform an archaic education funding system and take the tax burden off property owners. I would like to ask the Minister of Education this. Why did he leave this whole education funding system in such a mess? Why did he let this one opportunity, this golden opportunity, slip through his fingers?

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to stand on our record on school funding. I am reminded daily why members opposite wanted history out of the classroom as a compulsory subject, because it holds people accountable.

The history of the members opposite's announcements, wonderful announcements, of 2% decrease, 2.6% decrease, 0, 2% decrease, maybe they need a math lesson as well, Mr. Speaker. We have been funding education at the rate of economic growth. We promised to do that every year. We have done it for six years. This year was an announcement, the second-highest increase in education funding in real dollars in 10 years, and, by the way, the highest announcement was also under this government.

Mrs. Driedger: I would remind the minister that he is only funding 56 percent of education operating in Manitoba in the first place. Mr. Speaker, by not taking full responsibility for education funding, the NDP is forcing school boards to do their dirty work. They are washing their hands of their problem and blaming school boards for raising taxes.

I would like to ask the Minister of Education this. Why is he offloading education funding to school boards and making the school trustees the villains when he in fact has that responsibility?

Mr. Bjornson: An analysis of the FRAME budget, and I suggest my critic take a look at the FRAME budgets over the last few years. From 1990 to 1999, Winnipeg School Division had an increase of 53.2 percent. From 1999 to 2004, a decrease of 5.9 percent. Turtle Mountain, a 49.4% increase from '90-99, and here it has been a decrease of 11.9 percent.

We delivered on our promise to reduce the education support levy once again, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, a very good announcement for farmers, \$20 million and the 50% reduction on farm property as well as their ESL reduction, as mentioned yesterday, \$30 million. Those are real numbers, real facts. We are a government that is committed to education.

Mrs. Driedger: So far all of the draft education budgets that have come forward have asked for a tax increase from property tax owners. There are almost a quarter million Manitobans right now up in arms about the NDP's piecemeal approach to funding education.

I would like to ask the Minister of Education this. What is he going to do about this growing tax revolt? Where is his plan? Where is his leadership to deal with education funding in this province and to take it off the backs of property owners?

Mr. Bjornson: Mr. Speaker, we fund 71 percent of the true cost of education including capital. My critic referred to our capital plan as a shell game. In a shell game, let us take a look at our three-year capital plan. Look under shell No. 1. Oh, \$45 million; shell No. 2, \$45 million; shell No. 3, \$45 million. That is not a shell game. Members opposite in their capital plan were like let us make a deal. Had you chosen door No. 2, we would have built the Brandon hospital, but you chose a door that gives us \$16.8 million in capital funding for the entire school system in Manitoba.

Budget Speech Health Research

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, the investments made through the Manitoba Health Research Council are the centrepiece of the

province's support for leading-edge health research. Yet, I table today analysis which shows that the provincial budget for the Manitoba Health Research Council, as a proportion of the total health budget, has shrunk by more than half over the last 15 years. Health research drives the change, improvement and accountability in health care which we so badly need.

I ask the minister responsible for the Manitoba Health Research Council why he is showing so little support for health research and for the change, improvement and accountability which it provides to health care.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Energy, Science and Technology): Mr. Speaker, the member talks about research spending back 15 years when he was a member of the federal government and was significantly underfunding the health care system.

I notice that in the last several years, several million dollars, in addition, have gone in and have been leveraged into health research in Manitoba, the nutraceutical centre, the Richardson centre, St. Boniface Hospital, the Asper centre, biodiagnostics and the list goes on and on and on. We have leveraged money both from our partners in the federal government who have been co-operative in this regard in the last several years, as well as from private sector firms, as well as matching money from provincial contributions that have increased overall, not decreased as the member has implied.

Budget Speech Sport and Fitness

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, the facts as I have tabled them speak for themselves. The budget for the core program for providing health research in this province through the Manitoba Health Research Council has decreased by half in relative terms over the last 15 years and this government has done nothing to correct that. We need, as well as looking at change through research, to be looking at change to investing in wellness, in fitness, in prevention. Yet, this year's budget put forth is only \$11 million compared to \$15 million in 1996. That is 0.3 percent of the health care budget or 40% less for sport than the percentage it was in 1996.

Is it any wonder that Manitoba youth are not as fit as they should be? The government has shown a crass disregard for investing in sport and prevention.

I ask the Minister responsible for Sport why his government has not done any better.

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister responsible for Sport): I am very happy to report that, in fact, for the first time in a number of years, Sport Manitoba will be receiving 5 percent of a promised 10% increase.

* (14:20)

Mr. Gerrard: It is a sorry day when a 5% increase still leaves this government 30% below what the Sport budget was in 1996. The fact is that, on relative terms, we should be looking at sport and fitness as prevention of sickness, of improving health and that budget should be the front edge of investing in improving health. Yet, that budget has not increased anywhere near what the health budget has done for looking after people who are sick. So, we all know we should be investing in health and wellness, and yet this government has failed miserably. This government can do better.

Mr. Robinson: Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to report to the Member for River Heights, the tremendous efforts that the sporting community have put in finding more innovative ways to make our fellow Manitobans healthier; activities such as the bilateral initiative that we have engaged with the federal government on give people in remote and northern communities that do not ordinarily have opportunities to get involved in recreational opportunities, trails initiatives, recreational trails.

Let me repeat to the member that the 5 percent I indicated was a promised 10% increase back in the 2003 election. We will achieve that 10 percent probably next year, Mr. Speaker.

Mining Industry Investment Opportunities

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): Mr. Speaker, the Manitoba government has been working hard to support our Manitoba mining industry and mineral exploration across our province. Can the minister responsible for mining inform the House how the mining industry generally and other bodies rank our province as a place for exploration and investment?

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report to the House that I had

participated in the Toronto Mining Convention. It is a good convention where all the mining industry gather to talk about what is happening in the industry, et cetera. I am pleased to report to this House today two important things were reported. One was that there was an excellent article in *The Financial Post* that said we have lots of exploration. There is diamond exploration and mineral exploration at record levels in the province.

I am also pleased to report to the member and the entire House that the Fraser Institute this year reported Manitoba No. 1 in mining policy and No. 3 in the entire world. We have a great mineral potential. We have a great industry, and it is providing good employment and excellent growth. We should all be proud of those people in this industry.

Budget Speech Competitive Tax Structure

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): Mr. Speaker, once again the minister has proven to everybody in this House the only question he can answer is the one he knows ahead of time.

For the sixth year in a row the Business Council of Manitoba, which represents 65 000 employees and over \$25-billion in sales, has urged this government finally to make this province competitive. Once again, this Finance Minister has chosen to ignore them. Mr. Speaker, the briefing from the Business Council of Manitoba indicates that Manitoba is uncompetitive on virtually every level. In fact, even with the reductions announced yesterday, Manitoba is uncompetitive with Alberta and British Columbia based on corporate tax rates. Saskatchewan does not have a payroll tax. B.C. does not have a sales tax.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Minister of Finance if he could explain to the Business Council of Manitoba, who have been successful in growing small businesses to very large businesses, why he refuses to make Manitoba competitive.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, according to evidence we have here, since '99, corporate profits have gone up \$2.6 billion to \$4.15 billion, an increase of 60 percent. Corporate profits have never done so well in this province. This economy has grown \$10 billion. We reduced taxes

for the first time since the Second World War, something you did not have the courage to do.

We have doubled the threshold for the small business rate. We have reduced by 50 percent the small business rate. We have increased the capital gain. We have increased the deduction for capital from up to \$5 million, something you never did before. This year the Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit has a refundable portion, never done before in the history of the province.

Speaker's Ruling

Mr. Speaker: I have a ruling for the House.

The time had expired for Question Period, and I have a ruling for the House.

During the Throne Speech debate on Wednesday, December 1, 2004, a point of order was raised by the honourable Minister of Water Stewardship (Mr. Ashton), regarding comments spoken in debate by the honourable Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler) that appeared to be a reflection on a ruling just given by the Deputy Speaker. The Deputy Speaker did advise the House that the Speaker should be protected from reflections on his or her actions, and ruled there was a point of order. Subsequently in resuming debate, the honourable Member for Springfield said, "If the shoe fits, wear them," in response to the ruling. The honourable Minister of Water Stewardship then raised another point of order on the subject of reflecting on the Chair, which was also spoken to by the honourable Member for Springfield. Deputy Speaker Santos took the matter under advisement.

I have had a chance to read the entire exchange, including the point of order raised by the honourable Member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faurichou), and the two points of order raised by the honourable Minister of Water Stewardship.

Although at times members can get carried away in the heat of debate, and strong emotions are often expressed by both sides of the Chamber, I am truly troubled by what I read, for a number of reasons. To paraphrase what I had earlier advised the House on that same day after delivering a ruling regarding the report of the Public Accounts Committee, when a Speaker makes a ruling, and if members disagree with that ruling, members have the option of

challenging the ruling, but it is not appropriate to be questioning or commenting on the ruling after it has been given. If members do not like the ruling, they can either challenge it, or discuss it with the Speaker outside of the Chamber.

It is a long-standing practice of this and other Legislatures that it is not appropriate to reflect on the Speaker or presiding officer. This principle is supported by a number of procedural authorities. *Beauchesne* Citation 71(1) states that the Speaker should be protected against reflections on his or her actions. Marleau and Montpetit advise on page 266 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* that the actions of the Speaker are not to be criticized in debate or by any means except by way of a substantive motion. They continue by indicating that reflections on the character or actions of the Speaker, such as an allegation of bias, for example, could be taken by the House as breaches of privilege and punished accordingly. Joseph Maingot in the second edition of *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada* advises on page 253 that any suggestion of partiality or bias on the part of a presiding officer such as the Speaker, a chairman of a Committee of the Whole or a chairman of a standing or special committee automatically shows disrespect and amounts to contempt.

Other improper reflections on the Speaker are also subject to House action. The twenty-third edition of *Erskine May* advises on page 220 that reflections on the character or actions of the Speaker may be punished as breaches of privilege. His actions cannot be criticized incidentally in debate or upon any form of proceeding except by a substantive motion.

There are also numerous rulings from previous Manitoba Speakers, including Speakers Murray, Hanuschak, Walding, Phillips, Rocan and Dacquay which indicate that it is inappropriate to be reflecting on the Chair, and in each case where a member was found to be reflecting on the Chair, the member in question was called upon to withdraw.

I would also like to note for the House that in his comments, the honourable Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler) also said the following: "I do not care what advice you get from the Table in front of you." I take issue with this, because as non-partisan employees of the entire Legislature, they should not be dragged into disputes that occur in the Chamber.

After carefully reading the comments of the honourable Member for Springfield, I do find that his comments did reflect on the Chair and that there was indeed a point of order. I therefore call upon the honourable Member for Springfield to withdraw his remarks and to apologize.

* (14:30)

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Speaker, I withdraw and apologize to the table officers.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not accept a partial withdrawal and a partial apology. The withdrawal and the apology are reflecting on the Chair of the Speaker.

All rulings of the Chair are very serious matters. I ask the co-operation of all honourable members. I need to hear every word that is spoken.

Mr. Schuler: I will clarify that. I would like to withdraw and apologize not just to the Chair but also to the table officers.

Mr. Speaker: That I will accept, and that should conclude the matter. That should take care of the matter.

Point of Order

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Official Opposition House Leader): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: On a new point of order.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, I do this with great hesitation, but this also has to do with how we conduct ourselves in this Legislature. I know it is the government's responsibility to appoint the Deputy Speaker of this Chamber, and as such, when that Deputy Speaker takes the Chair we would expect that, in his role as Deputy Speaker, he would conduct himself or herself in a very impartial and very appropriate manner. We have had some difficulty with that aspect, and that is why we have disruptions of this nature.

I am not pleased about this. I am somewhat embarrassed by this as a member of the House. I would recommend that perhaps it is time the Deputy

Speaker and Mr. Speaker would meet to discuss some of the issues with regard to this matter, and I would be pleased to attend so that in the future, we do not have occasion for this kind of disruption in the Chamber.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable Official Opposition House Leader, I accepted to hear the point of order, regrettably, because any issue that is pertaining to any of our rulings or any of the actions of our chairs, our deputy speakers, our speakers, could be handled in a different format. Also, if there is the process of electing a Speaker or Deputy Speaker, we have Rules Committee, and I think that would be appropriate to address that. Any member that has any difficulty after, not before, after I have made a ruling, my office is always open if they need more interpretation or more clarification or even if a member wants to give me advice on whatever, my door will always be open. Not before I make a ruling but after the ruling has been made.

So, the honourable member does not have a point of order, and I am sure we will be discussing this issue somewhere down the line.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: On a point of order? The honourable Member for Portage la Prairie, on a new point of order.

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): On a new point of order, Mr. Speaker. The ruling that we have received in the House today is indeed one of importance for conduct of members in the Chamber.

I want to say that I was the member that effectively was responsible because it was a point of order that I had raised and the Deputy Speaker at that time did make commentary, which ultimately led to the honourable Member for Springfield's (Mr. Schuler) participation in the point of order debate.

I will say for the record, Mr. Speaker, that the Deputy Speaker did approach me outside of the Chamber and did make an apology for his commentary at that time. I accepted his apology and that concluded the matter on my behalf, and I want to thank the Deputy Speaker for doing so. It is regretful that this ruling had to take place today, but I acknowledge that the Member for Springfield in fact

did take issue with the Deputy Speaker that day and I believe the House has received an apology in that respect. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: This is information for all members of the House. Once a Speaker makes a ruling, there is to be no debate on that ruling. If you are not happy with the Speaker's ruling you can challenge the ruling. That is information for all members.

In the future, I will not be entertaining debate on any rulings that I make because our rules are very clear, that if you are not satisfied with the ruling that a Speaker brings forward, your option is to challenge the ruling. That is the only option and not for further information or further debate. In the future, I will not be entertaining any such action. Just for the information of the House, I am going to follow the rules as laid out in our rules. That is for the information of the House.

Now that should conclude the matter, and we will now go to Members' Statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Ladybug Foundation

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, on February 26, I was pleased to attend an event at the future site of the new Siloam Mission sponsored by the Ladybug Foundation to kick off "Make Change" month in March.

The vision of eight-year-old Hannah Taylor, who happens to be from Charleswood, and the Ladybug Foundation which she founded is, and I quote, "No one will have to eat out of a garbage can; everyone will have a home." Hannah's passion to help the homeless began three years ago when she was only five years of age and she and her mother saw a homeless man eating out of a garbage bin. Hannah was so troubled by what she saw and about where the hungry man would stay that she began painting black and red ladybug jars and took them to her school to collect change for the homeless.

After this life-changing encounter with a homeless person at age five, she has become a passionate advocate for the homeless in Winnipeg and across Canada. Over the last three years, Hannah has raised awareness for the homeless, speaking to and educating thousands of people at numerous

events. Hannah's efforts are credited with directly or indirectly raising more than \$400,000 to help the less fortunate. Several agencies have already benefited from her fundraising efforts.

Hannah is a child whose dedication to helping the homeless is creating awareness for their plight and raising funds for their needs across Canada. By the age of eight, Hannah has become the innocent face of the homeless, seeing their plight with the love and clarity of a child, speaking to politicians, business leaders, students, the media and thousands of others to raise awareness of their needs and raise funds to help feed and shelter them. The ladybug is good luck and is her mascot. With her signature ladybug jars and inspiring passion, Hannah is reaching out across Canada to help her people.

Her message is rich with love, respect and value for her, and I quote, "lost and forgotten homeless. We all have sooo much – we just need to share a little of what we have and care about each other always."

We are proud of Hannah in Charleswood, and we want to wish her all the best with her efforts. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

*(14:40)

Greatest Transconian Contest

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure and pride I rise today to acknowledge a wonderful event organized recently by the Transcona Historical Museum. This event, known as the Greatest Transconian contest, was a huge success and is symbolic of the vibrant community spirit which exists in Transcona. The Greatest Transconian contest attracted so much attention that nominations came to the museum from as far away as Russia and Switzerland.

This contest made a valuable contribution to the community in many ways. It engaged hundreds of members from the community, stimulated interest in Transcona's history and attracted many new visitors to the Transcona Historical Museum. Many families have been brought together as children and grandchildren have taken a greater interest in preserving their family history for future generations.

Transcona is a close-knit community comprised of people caring for each other in good and bad

times; people like Paul Martin, the winner of the Greatest Transconian. Mr. Martin also personifies the spirit of Transcona. Whether it be his service in World War II or his work as Transcona's mayor, he is living proof that when people get involved, great communities can be built so that everyone can enjoy a better standard of living.

I would be remiss not to mention the excellent candidates who comprised the field of the 10 finalists in the Greatest Transconian contest: Rod Black, Bill Blaikie, Joe Blostein, Bill Gibson, Dr. Michael Grace, Dr. Murdoch MacKay, Paul Martin, Russ Paulley, Joseph Teres and Bernie Wolfe. All of them are worthy of their community's recognition.

Mr. Speaker, the Transcona Museum has done a wonderful job of not only recording the history of a community by presenting an event like the Greatest Transconian, the museum has preserved the history and contributed to the future shape of Transcona.

Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure for me to congratulate and thank the museum and its president, James Sesak, the museum's curators, Mrs. Sheryl Kolt and Kimberly Hiebert, as well as the Transcona Historical Museum board of directors, its staff and volunteers. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Kenneth Carels

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, it is my esteemed honour that I rise today to pay tribute and respect to Mr. Kenneth Donald Carels.

Mr. Carels was born in Melita, Manitoba, in 1938, and after working with the Royal Bank in Brandon and Crystal City, he returned home in 1958 to manage the Red and White Store for his father, taking ownership in 1973.

Ken spent a lifetime of dedicated service to the Melita community. He was well known for his devoted and tireless involvement in the town of Melita, first as a councillor from 1971-1980 and then as mayor from 1980-2002. He served as a Manitoba Association Urban Municipality Director from 1978-1982 and as the UMM director from 1982-1998. Ken also served on the Manitoba Hospital Organization, Manitoba Surface Rights Board, Wheat Belt Community Futures, Manitoba Good Roads Association and MARRC, Mr. Speaker.

His community involvement was a large part of his life. Ken was instrumental in having the Blood Donor Clinic come to Melita. Many local organizations had the benefit of his participation. He served as a charter member of the Melita Lions Club, an active member of the Kinsmen, K-40, Chamber of Commerce, curling club, handi-van committee, ambulance, Volunteer Fire Department, Elderly Persons Housing Board, Low-Rental Housing Board, medical clinic, health centre, arena board, Senior Services of Antler River, Southwest District Health Advisory Board, health district board, International Highway 83 Association, personal care home, the Melita Weather Station, Golden Age Centre, Bisons Hockey Club, Westman Communications Group - TV Access Channel, treasurer and trustee on the Melita Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church and Meals on Wheels.

He was a firm believer that his service to the community enhanced family life in Melita. Ken lived his life by the belief that any person can make a difference if they choose to get involved. He got involved and he did improve the lives of many.

In 1993, Ken was honoured to be presented with a commemorative medal marking the 125th Anniversary of the Confederation of Canada. The Association of Manitoba Municipalities, in November of 2004, awarded him with an honorary life membership and on February 27 at the Manitoba Good Roads Association banquet, his wife Ellen proudly received an honorary life membership on his behalf for Ken's years as a director and judge.

Mr. Carels passed away on January 26 of this year. His legacy and contributions to our society will serve as inspirations to us all for years to come. I encourage all honourable members to join me in offering condolences to his wife, Ellen, his daughters, Michelle and Carleen, their husbands, Paul and Mark, his grandchildren, Emily and Alexandra, to his mother, Julia, and other immediate family members. I know that his dedication to his family, his church, his community and the province of Manitoba will always be remembered. Thank you.

Greatest Transconian Contest

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure today to rise to acknowledge a long-time resident of the Transcona constituency, Mr. Paul Martin. As a part of the contest sponsored

by the Transcona Historical Museum, on February 25, Mr. Martin received the prestigious honour of being named the Greatest Transconian. We have members here in the gallery with us today representing the Transcona Museum.

Mr. Martin is certainly deserving of this award. Born and raised in Transcona, Mr. Martin is an extraordinary and courageous man who has devoted considerable time and effort to enriching Transcona's history, as well as making Transcona a fantastic place to live. He is the founder of the Transcona Historical Museum and a former library chairperson.

Today, Mr. Martin continues to be an active member in the community in Transcona. He conducts over 25 non-denominational funeral services each year on behalf of St. Joseph the Worker. He is a member of the Royal Canadian Legion Branch No. 7 where he serves as the padre for the Legion. He also volunteers generous amounts of time to various community organizations.

As Mr. Martin has stated himself, he has a lifelong love affair with Transcona. He has lived in Transcona almost his entire life, except for the period in which he served his country during World War II. As 2005 has been declared the Year of the Veteran, a special commemorative year, it is important to recognize that Captain Martin served in the Canadian Army for six years, taking part in the Battle of Britain and later storming the beaches of Normandy on D-Day.

After peace was declared, Mr. Martin returned to Transcona and used his leadership skills for the development of a better community. Mr. Martin has served the people of Transcona in numerous different capacities, always with utmost distinction. For several years, Mr. Martin was an active councillor and school trustee, and in 1958 and '59 he served as the last mayor of Transcona. During this time as mayor he worked tirelessly toward street paving, mail delivery, elimination of ditches and creation of storm sewers.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate Mr. Martin on being named the Greatest Transconian, and I would like to thank him for his dedicated service to our community. It continues to be an honour to know that Paul is a great part of our Transcona community. Thank you.

Child Poverty Rate

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, it is well known that under this NDP government Manitoba has one of the highest rates of child poverty of any province in Canada. It has come forward on numerous occasions at the Healthy Kids Healthy Futures Task Force meetings where we have heard repeatedly of the need to address child poverty.

Poverty is associated with a lower level of fitness in children, in part because poor children often cannot afford to participate in sports and fitness activities. The budget delivered yesterday provided a golden opportunity to act to address the important issue of child poverty in Manitoba, and to help improve the nutrition and fitness levels of children who are in poor families. With the huge influx of dollars from the federal government, clearly the Premier (Mr. Doer) and his government should be thanking Paul Martin and the federal Liberal government.

There was a major opportunity to act this year by the NDP, but instead, the NDP budget failed to provide a plan of action to address the important issue of child poverty. During the course of the last year, we have witnessed demonstrations in the Legislature which have called for an overhaul of the social assistance program in Manitoba because it all too often provides more barriers than help to those who are poor. During the course of the meetings of the Healthy Kids Healthy Futures Task Force, we have also heard calls for major change to social assistance. Yet, the budget clearly has not heard any of these calls. The NDP appear to have put plugs in their ears and chosen not to listen. They have failed completely to address this important issue of child poverty.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

ADJOURNED DEBATE (Second Day of Debate)

* (14:50)

Mr. Speaker: On the adjourned debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) that this House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government, standing in the name of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Murray).

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to make comments on the sixth budget that was introduced by this NDP government.

Mr. Conrad Santos, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

I will allow the spin doctors from the government side to try to convince Manitobans about this budget, but I want to rise specifically, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to put some comments on the record as to why I think that this budget is a lot of smoke and mirrors and why that there are some specific things that this Doer government had a chance and opportunity of a lifetime, an opportunity of a generation, to make a change in the direction of Manitoba. They had that opportunity and they failed.

I would like to put a little bit of history and context, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I think that as my comments and remarks go forward we have to put a little bit of framework behind my comments. The history of this NDP government is pretty clear. They will introduce a budget in this Chamber by the Minister of Finance, then following that budget introduction there are usually some sneaky user fees that get introduced that Manitobans were not aware of. They did not get mentioned in the budget. They did not get mentioned to the public. The public just finds out about them whenever they have to go and make a purchase on some of their user fees.

Then the third budget that we have in the province of Manitoba, or the actual budget I guess we could say, is when the Auditor General tells the Doer government that no matter what they said over the past three years, they have tried to say that there was a \$10-million surplus, a \$180 million, or a \$10-million surplus, whatever their surplus numbers are, the Auditor General catches them and has to explain to Manitobans, "No, the Doer government has misled you."

In fact, over the past three years what we have seen is a deficit in the province of Manitoba. Last year alone, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that deficit was some \$604 million.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Doer government, this NDP government, of course, like most socialist approaches, look at Crown corporations as if to say, "Well, we own that. That is part of our money." Even though the Crown

corporation is supposed to be arm's-length, they say, "But, one for one and all for one, it is all in one big pot of money."

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is the difference between the NDP and the Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba. It is about ideology. We want to ensure that our Crown corporations are healthy, ensure that they run their own show.

In fact, it was fascinating that it was this NDP Doer government that changed the legislation in the province of Manitoba that was put in place to say that no government, regardless of their political stripe, should ever have the ability to go into Manitoba Hydro in the middle of the night and take out revenue, take out profit from that company and put it into general revenues of the government. That was the law in Manitoba prior to this NDP government.

They got into government and you know the old NDP, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They love that tax-and-spend stuff. They cannot spend fast enough and, unfortunately, what happened was they spent so quickly that they woke up in the middle of the night and said, "Whoops, we are out of money. We have got no money. We need some money. What are we going to do?" Well, one of the Cabinet members probably said, "Well, look at Manitoba Hydro. It is Manitobans' and we own it. What the heck. Why do we not go in and take money out of Manitoba Hydro?"

Somebody would have said, rightly so, I believe, to the Premier of the province of Manitoba, "But, Mr. Premier, that is against the law. There is legislation that says you cannot go in and take money out of Manitoba Hydro, out of their revenues to use for general revenues in the province of Manitoba."

"No problem," said the Premier of the day. "Not a problem for me because really I am an NDPer, and as an NDPer I believe that what is theirs is mine, and so I am going to change the law. I am going to change the legislation to allow me to go in and take money out of Manitoba Hydro because I crave the revenue and I cannot control my spending habit."

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is the context of which we see a budget come into Manitoba yesterday. It is very clear that the Doer government lacks the ability to look at a long-term economic strategy. Why would

this government look at the fact that they had \$524 million in new revenue come in last year? That has to be close to an unprecedented amount of riches and wealth to come into this province, but what did we see happen? What we saw was they ratcheted up the spending to ensure that this was not the government that could control spending. No, this was a government that wanted to ensure that they spent and they spent and they spent and they spent some more.

I find it always interesting when you want to see how well a government is doing, how well they are performing, the old adage is you follow the money. I can tell you, if you follow the money with this NDP government, what you are going to see is that debt has risen in the province of Manitoba under this NDP government.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

How is it possible with all of this revenue coming in that debt would go up in the province of Manitoba? If the Doer government has any legacy to date, and they have been in for six years, but I note always there is kind of a mantra that we hear from the other side, it is kind of that drone that goes on and on and on, they must sit around the Cabinet table and then bring it into caucus and say, "Okay, everybody, all together in unison, 1995 and the federal Liberal government, 1995 and the federal Liberal government."

Why? Because they lack leadership. When there are tough questions, every minister stands up on that side. We hear it all the time. When asked a question about why things are being ignored in Manitoba, why rural Manitoba is suffering, why the mothers in urgent care in Brandon are forced to drive by ambulance into Winnipeg and experience highway medicine, when we ask those serious questions about where Manitoba is going and why there is lack of leadership, and when you are asking that on behalf of real Manitoba people who are suffering under this NDP government, well, the ministers pop up on that side one after another and they go through that mantra: 1995 and the federal Liberal government.

They clearly do not understand that this is their sixth budget. They have been in government now for six budgets. That means that they should provide leadership and direction. They should provide a long-term economic strategy for the people of Manitoba. Of course, their long-term economic

strategy is more VLTs and longer VLT hours. That is what they believe and that is what they have hung their hat on. It is not good enough.

Mr. Speaker, the one thing that this Premier and this Doer government will never, ever talk about, and I should give them warning right now because they may want to close their ears, I am going to talk about the fact that this Doer government has the inability to make Manitoba a have province. Look at them all over there. They are all shutting their ears already. All I am asking, on behalf of Manitobans, the business community, is to do what is right for Manitoba; have the sense that over the long term you can make Manitoba a have province.

An Honourable Member: Oh, yes.

Mr. Murray: There it is, right there, from the Premier. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Sure. That is the problem with Manitoba and that is the problem with this socialist government. They do not believe in making Manitoba a have province.

I can tell the First Minister, because I know he knows members of the Business Council, I know he has talked to people in the business community, the one thing that they are concerned about is that this Premier lacks any economic vision for the province of Manitoba. I can tell you this. I can tell you that Manitobans are proud of this great province we have. They are proud of what kind of province we call home. We are proud of the fact that we have world class curling champions out of this province, but Manitobans are not proud when they watch an NDP government make us fall behind the province next door, Saskatchewan.

Long gone are the days of the previous government that was always out there competing with Ontario and Alberta. Why? Because that government set its sights high. It wanted to be competitive. It wanted to make a difference. It wanted to ensure that Manitoba could sit at a table with Alberta and Ontario and never consider themselves as second class. That was the history of the previous Conservative government.

Under this NDP government, under this group, what do we see? Well, they are just delighted, they are just absolutely delighted if they can make an announcement that we think we are keeping up with Saskatchewan. That shows you how far this lot has

lowered the bar. They are happy to compete with Saskatchewan. I say shame on them because that is not what Manitobans expect of their government. That is not leadership. That is not the direction they would want our province to be going in.

* (15:00)

Mr. Speaker, I would say that I was fascinated to read some of the comments from some of business leaders in the province of Manitoba. It is a great province. It just could be so much greater as my colleague from Wolseley knows. I would say this: When the business community is asked about what they feel about the Province of Manitoba under the leadership of this Premier, they say, "Well, we have the corner on nothing. We have the corner on nothing under this NDP government."

That is the business community trying to say, in a very direct way, to this NDP government, Show us some leadership. Show us some vision. Show us the fact that when revenue comes in to the Province of Manitoba, we are not afraid to say to hardworking Manitobans, "Here, you work hard, you deserve some tax relief. You deserve a break today."

No, Mr. Speaker, that is not the socialist way; that is not the socialist way. The socialist way is to say, "Wait a minute, we are going to make sure that all of this tax revenue comes to the government. We need this money put into the NDP government general revenues." Why do they do that? It is very simple. They do that because they simply do not believe that hardworking Manitobans deserve the opportunity to spend their own money because this socialist NDP government says, "We know how to spend it better than Manitobans."

There is a substantial difference between that socialist NDP government and the way we in the Manitoba Progressive Conservative Party believe. With the unprecedented revenues that we saw come into the Province of Manitoba, clearly there are a lot of people in Manitoba that are in agriculture, people that are property owners that are being punished by the NDP socialist government because they are forcing them to fund education. That is the answer to funding education by this NDP government. The opportunity is for this Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) to take responsibility for funding education 100 percent in the province of Manitoba.

What this Doer government wants to do is to offload all of the responsibility onto the school trustees, and then somehow they want to make them the villains. Well, it may have taken three or four years, and certainly we talked about it in the last election campaign, and to this Premier's credit, he has started to niggle, niggle, niggle away at it, but it is not good enough. You should have done more. You had the opportunity to do more.

You could have taken the education tax off of residential property and farmland in one fell swoop because this Premier—he is famous for this, we know we have heard it before. In 1999, when the previous government came forward with a plan that made sense, it talked about a billion dollars over five years, it talked about tax relief, and it talked about funding education and health care.

What did we hear from this Premier? Where is the money? Where is the money? I have looked high and low. I have looked under desks. I have looked under chairs. I have looked everywhere. I have looked under the Cabinet table. I cannot find the money, Mr. Speaker, where is it? Is it not interesting. Not only did he find the billion, not only did he find \$1.5 billion, he has found \$2 billion in the Province of Manitoba.

What do we see for it? What do we see for it, Mr. Speaker? What is it that Manitobans have to show for the Doer government's \$2 billion additional dollars? Wow, is it not interesting? There goes the Premier again. When we said to Manitobans that it is important to eliminate the education tax off of residential property and farmland, what did the Premier say then? What did this Premier say then? Well, he said, "Where's the money? Where are they going to get the money from? Show me the money. I do not see it." I am glad to see that the Premier is now wearing glasses because maybe now he will know where the money is and he will be able to see the money because the money is there.

What, unfortunately, is not there, and I said it earlier, is leadership. He does not have the political will to do the right thing, to say to our agriculture community and to say to property owners, "Ladies and gentlemen, hardworking people of Manitoba, you have worked hard enough, and it is our responsibility to fund education. So we are going to eliminate the education tax off of residential property and farmland." But they will not do that. They just do not believe in that.

The other thing that I thought was fascinating that we did not hear from this Premier yesterday was a tremendous opportunity to talk to the municipalities about a new deal that would be tied to economic growth. Municipalities cannot do it on their own. Again, this Premier, through socialist NDP ideology, says, "Hey, I know better than everybody else. Why would I trust a municipality? Why would I trust a city to do a better job?" No, I hear, "Spend, spend, spend." That was the other mantra that I forgot when I said '95, federal Liberals; it is spend, spend, spend. That was the other mantra. Thank you, Premier, for reminding me that I forgot the third mantra that you talk about around your Cabinet table.

The fact of life is that we need to have a new deal that is tied to economic growth to help our municipalities grow. It is the only way to make it happen. It is not enough for Big Brother NDP socialist government to say, "We know better. We know how to spend your money better. We do not trust you. We cannot trust you. It is only up to us to make those kinds of decisions." That is not good enough.

Mr. Speaker, the other reason I have very strong concerns about this budget is the fact that they are absolutely ignoring our post-secondary institutions in Manitoba. I know that that is incredible that the premier would laugh at that, but I am surprised that we would not have this Premier going out to the universities and listening to some of their concerns.

I know the member from Brandon, both members in the House from Brandon, I am sure, are prepared to dress up as the Brandon Bobcats and try to go out there on the basketball court, because Brandon University is at risk of losing that team. That is what it has come down to under this NDP government. It has come down to the fact that some of our excellent institutions here, our post-secondary institutions, are suffering under this NDP government because they are not funding them properly.

Can you imagine, Mr. Speaker, under the fact that this NDP government says, and rightly so, that post-secondary institutions, universities should not run a deficit? If this Doer government would only have to follow that same pattern, we would see some changes. But, no, this government has got all sorts of secret doors that they can get money from and raid Manitoba Hydro and the rainy day fund and then

they punish post-secondary institutions and say, "No, you've got to balance your budget and we are going to short-change you and you have got to make the tough decisions."

Well, Mr. Speaker, welcome to the real world, the real world according to the NDP socialist government. I think it is unfortunate when we get the kinds of institutions that we have, clearly coming forward to this Premier and asking simply, "With this unprecedented amount of money that has come into this province, please fund us properly. That is all we are asking for. We are asking to be funded properly." What do they get handed? A big no thank-you. Well, that is unfortunate, and that was missing in this budget.

The fact of life is that this Premier knows that he has got money in the budget to reduce waiting lists. So what did they do? In fairness to our Member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger), who had been asking for this transparency and accountability for this government to put that money in waiting lists, to put it into a position where it is transparent and accountable, the Doer government did that. But what is astonishing, what is absolutely amazing, is that we are six years into this government and they have not got a clue how to reduce waiting lists. They have no plan on how to reduce waiting lists. So how long is that money going to sit in an account while people suffer and wait goes on to have hip and knee replacements?

*(15:10)

Mr. Speaker, I have talked to Manitobans, and I have talked to Manitobans who have been shut out of the Minister of Health's (Mr. Sale) office because he will not talk to them. What are they saying? They are basically saying that we were told that we might have to wait two and a half years for a hip or knee replacement. Well, that is old news. That is old news. Now, under this NDP government, they are waiting up to three years.

That is unbelievable, that this Doer government, who railed against the previous government for year after year after year in opposition, found themselves in charge and have no idea how to provide leadership, zero idea. They have no plan to reduce waiting lists. I am just shocked that, after six years, again, I think I am hearing 1995, Liberal government, spend, spend, spend, coming from the other side.

Mr. Speaker, I would say that the other area that is unfortunate is that the Doer government had an opportunity to ensure, to provide timely access to care for patients, that they would have allowed for the ability of private clinics, privately managed clinics that are publicly funded, to provide better access to care for Manitoba patients. But you know what? Therein lies the difference. Therein lies the big difference, because somehow to have anything to do, like X-ray clinics by the way, X-ray clinics that are privately managed, apparently we do not really want to talk about that, or we do not want to broaden that base because from an NDP ideology that is bad; it is wrong. That would not be a good thing. Forget the fact that it might provide more timely access and care to patients. That does not matter. What is really important is that we, the NDP socialist government, say, "We own the bricks and mortar." That is what they build their reputation on.

I can tell you patients in Manitoba are getting tired of ideology and they are getting more interested in trying to get timely access to care. That is what this government does not understand. Surely, it should be about the patients. Surely, it should be about the patients, not the bricks and mortar. But, under the ideology of this NDP socialist government, it is all to do with bricks and mortar.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the BSE relief and slaughter capacity has been ignored by this Doer government. I find it incredible, as we said the other day, here we were in this House talking about a matter of urgent public importance. Then we talked about the fact that there was an all-party resolution. They introduced a budget the next day, some 24 hours after this debate, without any mention of the word BSE. Shocking, absolutely shocking, and embarrassing to the people of Manitoba, that this Doer government would be so callous as to punish all of the people in rural Manitoba because they do not want to mention and they do not want to support it.

I would say this: If the BSE crisis was happening in the city of Winnipeg and not in ridings that are affected by Conservatives, it would have been fixed immediately. That is the problem with this government. It is all about ideology and politics. They do not care about helping Manitoba farmers. They do not care about families who are suffering.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Murray: What they care about is their own political ideology. I say shame on that Premier for being so obvious and being so political.

Mr. Speaker, we know in this province of Manitoba that what we saw in this budget was nothing to do with justice for people or making our communities safer. I find it fascinating that the Hells Angels moved in and set up shop under this Doer government, and now we see another Bandito gang organization coming into the province of Manitoba. Why not? Because in that underground world you know that they are sending out e-mails saying, "Gangs, come on in. Come on in to Manitoba. The going is good in good old Manitoba. Grow-ops, we got them all. Whatever you want." You know why? Because this NDP government is afraid to provide the police officers with the proper resources to make any difference. They do not want to do that. They are afraid to do that. I do not know why. I have no idea why.

I know this Doer government has said very clearly that they are going to provide 20 more police officers, 20 more police officers. Are those the 20 more police officers that are going to be funded by VLT and casino revenues? That is how this government, despite the unprecedented revenues that we see come into the province of Manitoba, that is what we see from this Doer government. Shocking. Absolutely shocking. There is a growing list of gangs. Crime is going up in Manitoba.

I do not think that there is any—and I know they are going to laugh at this. They probably find it funny, the fact that under this Doer government, under their very nose, under their watch, Winnipeg set a record for the number of murders. History would say the last time there was a record number of murders, when was that? History would say and the facts would show that was under the last NDP government. The last NDP government set a record, and this NDP government beat it. I find it incredible and I find that really unfortunate. I know that talking about gangs gets the First Minister (Mr. Doer) excited. He wants to talk about drugs, but that is the difference between him and me. I will do something about it. He is all smoke.

Mr. Speaker, I would say that in this budget what we saw, which is really unfortunate, and as I said, it is about following the money, and that under unprecedented amounts of revenue coming

into this province, what we see with this Doer government is they are increasing the debt in the province of Manitoba. That is like basically saying the Doer government's legacy is a birth tax. Anybody that is born in Manitoba, right on the top, your tax is going to be so much because the burden of that government was passed on because this Premier did not have the ability to control his spending. That is what this about. This whole debate on the budget, surely, is about unprecedented revenues in and can we control our revenues? The answer is we cannot control our expenditures. We have no ability to control our expenditures.

I know there are many others on this side of the House who are going to speak on this budget. I will give this government a comment. There are probably a couple of things in this budget, frankly, that we have talked about, that this government has looked at and tried to adopt, but in general the philosophy, the importance behind this budget is that the fundamental, underlining of all of the things in this budget is they are increasing the debt and mortgaging our children's future. I say shame on this government for doing that. That is not what a budget should be about. They should be about planning to ensure that our next generation has a better opportunity than we do, not a worse opportunity. That is my concern with this budget because that is what this NDP Premier is throwing to the next generation. He is not throwing them a life raft. He is throwing them a stone tied to their ankles, and that is a shame. There should be more opportunity for those people, not less, and because the debt goes up under this NDP Premier when there are unprecedented revenues coming into the province, I say shame on this government.

* (15:20)

Mr. Speaker, I would like to move this motion, seconded by the Member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik),

THAT the motion be amended by deleting all the words after "House" and substituting the following:

therefore regrets this budget ignores the present and future needs of Manitobans by:

(a) Failing to offer any vision and to reflect the priorities of Manitoba; and

(b) Failing to provide a long-term economic strategy and tax reduction strategy that addresses the fact that Manitobans are now, under the Doer NDP government, the highest taxed west of New Brunswick, and make Manitoba a "have" province; and

(c) Failing to address the debt of Manitoba which has grown under the Doer NDP government, thereby mortgaging our children's future; and

(d) Failing to eliminate education taxes off of residential property and farmland; and

(e) Failing to offer a "New Deal" which will meet the needs of Manitoba's municipalities; and

(f) Failing to provide adequate funding for post-secondary institutions; and

(g) Failing to provide relief for Manitoba's livestock producers and failing to provide for sufficient slaughter capacity; and

(h) Failing to provide for a meaningful review of the operation and administration of Manitoba's Regional Health Authorities; and

(i) Failing to provide a long-term plan for the reduction of health care waiting lists; and

(j) Failing to provide an opportunity for publicly funded health care services in privately managed clinics; and

(k) Failing to provide child care options for parents by failing to support for-profit child care centres as well as not-for-profit centres, and failing to provide a tax credit for stay-at-home parents; and

(l) Failing Manitoba's sick and elderly by increasing Pharmacare deductibles by 20 percent over the past four years; and

(m) Failing to support Manitoba's environment by failing to provide for the long-term sustainability of Manitoba's recycling and product stewardship programs; and

(n) Failing to deal with record numbers of auto thefts and record numbers of murders; and

(o) Failing to provide a plan or strategy to break up existing gangs and prevent new gangs from coming to Manitoba; and

(p) Failing to deal with the high number of grow-ops and labs manufacturing illegal drugs and the proliferation of drugs; and

(q) Failing to acknowledge their raid on Manitoba Hydro contributed to a 10% increase in Hydro rates.

As a consequence, the government has thereby lost the confidence of the House and the people of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Murray), seconded by the honourable Member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik),

THAT the motion be amended by deleting all the words after "House" and substituting the following:—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Speaker: No, read it? Okay.

therefore regrets this budget ignores the present and future needs of Manitobans by:

(a) Failing to offer any vision and to reflect the priorities of Manitoba; and

(b) Failing to provide a long-term economic strategy and tax reduction strategy that addresses the fact that Manitobans are now, under the Doer NDP government, the highest taxed west of New Brunswick, and make Manitoba a "have" province; and

(c) Failing to address the debt of Manitoba which has grown under the Doer NDP government, thereby mortgaging our children's future; and

(d) Failing to eliminate education taxes off of residential property and farmland; and

(e) Failing to offer a "New Deal" which will meet the needs of Manitoba's municipalities; and

(f) Failing to provide adequate funding for post-secondary institutions; and

(g) Failing to provide relief for Manitoba's livestock producers and failing to provide for sufficient slaughter capacity; and

(h) Failing to provide for a meaningful review of the operation and administration of Manitoba's Regional Health Authorities; and

(i) Failing to provide a long-term plan for the reduction of health care waiting lists; and

(j) Failing to provide an opportunity for publicly funded health care services in privately managed clinics; and

(k) Failing to provide child care options for parents by failing to support for-profit child care centres as well as not-for-profit centres, and failing to provide a tax credit for stay-at-home parents; and

(l) Failing Manitoba's sick and elderly by increasing Pharmacare deductibles by 20 percent over the past four years; and

(m) Failing to support Manitoba's environment by failing to provide for the long-term sustainability of Manitoba's recycling and product stewardship programs; and

(n) Failing to deal with record numbers of auto thefts and record numbers of murders; and

(o) Failing to provide a plan or strategy to break up existing gangs and prevent new gangs from coming to Manitoba; and

(p) Failing to deal with the high number of grow-ops and labs manufacturing illegal drugs and the proliferation of drugs; and

(q) Failing to acknowledge their raid on Manitoba Hydro contributed to a 10% increase in Hydro rates.

As a consequence, the government has thereby lost the confidence of the House and the people of Manitoba.

This amendment is in order.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on a point of order?

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: On a point of order.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, earlier this afternoon, the member from Turtle Mountain–Arthur–Virden, I am sorry—made a member's statement in the House and he was not able to conclude his remarks. I am wondering whether it would be acceptable to have his written remarks recorded in Hansard as part of his member's statement.

Mr. Speaker: Order. He is asking for leave. He is asking for leave for Hansard to print it as it is written. *[interjection]* Order, please. For clarification, the honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, I understand that this is somewhat out of the ordinary, but this member's statement was a tribute to a councillor, a reeve, a mayor, someone who had contributed significantly to this province. Certainly, I think extending this to his family would be not only respectful but it also would fulfill all of the contributions that this worthy Manitoban made to our province and to his community.

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

Hon. Steve Ashton (Deputy Government House Leader): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we have shown a fair amount of flexibility in the past in terms of members who have run out of time. I do think, though, the appropriate thing would be to provide some opportunity for the member to complete the statement. There were times when we printed items, certainly in committee, but the general practice with Hansard, particularly in this House, is not to have anything other than what is stated in the House.

So I would say more appropriately that if the Government House Leader was asking for leave for the member to be able to complete his statement, we would be more than happy to do so. I would suggest probably the appropriate time would be tomorrow. In

fact, if it is acceptable to the member, it might be the opportunity then to even read the entire statement on the record, but I think that would be a better way of dealing with this. We are prepared to provide leave tomorrow for the member to be able to read the entire statement.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am hearing two different sides here. To help the process, what I would suggest to the House, and it is entirely up to you, but I would suggest to the House if we revert to Members' Statements, let the honourable member conclude it, and then we come back to Orders of the Day, that would take care of it. We are only talking a couple of minutes here. Would the House be agreeable to that?

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, provided that the statement that is made by the member is not disjointed within Hansard, that it is then put together as one statement.

Mr. Speaker: What the honourable Official Opposition House Leader has just commented on, I will take the responsibility to ask Hansard if they could compile it as one. Once the honourable member has concluded his comments, I would be more than happy to do that. So is the House willing to revert to Members' Statements to deal with this matter? Agreed? *[Agreed]*

* * *

Mr. Speaker: Now we will move back to Orders of the Day, and we are debating the amendment moved by the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Murray).

* (15:30)

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to rise in opposition to the current amendment that is before us and in support of a very, very fine budget. I want to spend a bit of time on some larger pictures. Unfortunately, the Leader of the Opposition has forgotten the years that he may have spent jumping to the pump, because he has forgotten that you have to invest in order to get returns, and when you invest in debt that is sustainable and paid for, either by the fees or by the existing budget, that is not new debt of an unsupported and general purpose nature.

I would like to suggest that maybe the members opposite might want to spend a little time on pages B-32 and B-33 of this very fine Manitoba Budget 2005. The first number that I would like them to take a look at is the net pension liability. Ten years ago, the net pension liability was 7 percent growth. Nine years ago, because the auditor drew to their attention the fact that this pension liability had not been properly looked at, it grew by 17 percent. Then it grew by 7 percent, 7.5 in fact. Now, in the last three years, our pension liabilities have grown by 1.3 percent, 2.4 percent, 2.4 percent. That is because, for the first time since Duff Roblin decided to not pay down pensions and instead to pay for the floodway, which was an honourable choice at the time, but it should have perhaps been reconsidered a few years later. We ran up an enormous and rapidly growing pension liability in this province. Our Cabinet and our Finance Minister has turned that around. We are not only showing the full liability which the opposition never showed when they were in government, we are paying it down in an orderly fashion, and every new employee in Manitoba since last year has now got every nickel that the government owes them in terms of pension claim payments in their pension plan.

Let me move down to net general purpose debt. Let us look at the situation in 1996-97, 10 years ago. Net general purpose debt. The member who is so critical of a number of finance issues from Fort Whyte might want to listen to this; 24% net general purpose debt of our GDP in 1996-97. This year, 15.8 percent, a drop of some 8 percent of GDP in only five years, because when we formed government, it was still an atrocious 20.3 percent. In terms of the whole question of our net general purpose debt as a fraction of our revenues, anybody who has ever been in business, and there are not that many of them over there, but anyone that has been in business, real business, not clipping coupons, will know that one of the tests of the ability to sustain debt is how much your debt is as a percentage of your revenue. In 1996-97, their revenues were smaller than their debt. In fact, their debt was 116.9 percent of their revenues. This year, our debt is only 80 percent of our general revenues, an improvement of some 36 percent. Our debt is lower than our revenue. During their time in government, their debt was higher than their revenue in terms of their general purpose debt.

In terms of the percent of our economy that we have to invest in servicing our debt, the next line

down, when they were in government in '96-97, it took them almost 10 cents on the dollar, 10 cents on the dollar to service their general purpose debt. This year, 3.3 cents on the dollar. When they were in government, they used to say, "We should pay down debt so we would have more money to spend on health care." Well, we paid down debt, and we have more money to spend on health care.

They talk about growth in the economy. In their last four years, this economy grew at market prices by approximately \$3.5 billion. In our first five years, \$10 billion growth, 33% growth in the economy in five years, \$10 billion growth, \$10 billion more circulating in our economy today than there was five, good years ago. So the member of the opposition who claims to be their leader, although it is not always clear from time to time whether he really is or not, the member of the opposition that just spoke seems not to understand that this government has paid attention to every corner of Manitoba and represents every corner of Manitoba.

We put new CT scans in Portage la Prairie. We do not represent Portage la Prairie. We put new hips and knee surgery into Boundary Trails, Mr. Speaker. We do not represent the Boundary Trails area. We do not make decisions on the needs of Manitobans in terms of who is elected to represent a community. We work for all Manitobans, north, south, east, west, urban, rural, poor and rich. This budget speaks to the needs of every Manitoban and I am proud of that budget.

I found it absolutely shameful that the member opposite would say we do not care about farmers because they are all Tories. Well, Mr. Speaker, the farmers in the Interlake, the farmers in Dauphin-Roblin and the farmers in Swan River, I do not care what party they voted for. They are farmers and they need our support. I do not care what party the farmers in Virden voted for, and I do not care what the farmers in Steinbach voted for. They are Manitobans and we will care for all Manitobans. We do not care who they voted for because we represent them and we have their interest at heart. That is why \$20 million is now in the hands of farmers that was going to be in the hands of tax collectors. That is why the reductions in the ESL have now reached \$30 million. That is \$50 million that has been reduced off taxes, and what do they say, you are not doing it fast enough. In other words, we sort of like what you are doing, but you are not doing it fast enough.

Mr. Speaker, this year we did get \$155 million from the federal government in order to attack waiting lists. The members opposite want us to spend it all tomorrow. You know when you are going to attack a complex waiting list like hips and knees, for example, you do not just throw money at it. You have to deal with anesthetists, you have to deal with orthopaedic surgeons, you have to have the operating room time, you have to have the physiotherapy, you have to have the managed wait list, and that is what we have been putting in place for the last year so that we will now be able to do 1000 more hips and knees in the next two years than would have been done without this wait list money.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

We are very proud today to have announced at Concordia General Hospital that, over the next two years, there will be more hips and knees done in Boundary Trails Hospital. There will be more hips and knees done in Brandon, more at Grace Hospital, more at Pan Am Clinic for the simpler procedures, and more at Concordia General Hospital, 1000 more at minimum. We will track, every single month, our progress in regard to meeting those needs for hips and knees.

Now, Madam Acting Speaker, there has been a lot of criticism about doctors. Let me give the members opposite just a few facts. I know the facts are troubling, but perhaps they should at least reflect on them slightly. There are 139 more doctors in Manitoba today than there were in 1999. Fifty-two of those doctors are in rural Manitoba, 52 of those doctors. Three hundred, get the number members of the opposition, 343 students at our medical college have taken loans from the Province of Manitoba in return for service agreements back into the province of Manitoba. This fall the first graduates who accepted loans in return for service agreements will graduate and be out in Manitoba serving Manitobans.

Madam Acting Speaker, we have six more orthopedic surgeons today than we had in 1999. We are doing 20 percent more hips, knees, revisions, hemis, full and partial replacements this year than we did in 1999. We have more work to do on hips and knees. We know that. We have increased the volume by 20 percent already. We are going to add another 1000 over the next two years to bring that waiting

list down and we are going to keep it down after we get it down to an acceptable level.

* (15:40)

Where are we, Madam Acting Speaker, in regard to some questions that were raised by this Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Murray)? He had the, I think, misjudgment to talk about leadership. Well, let us talk about the leadership on this side of the House. For the first time in a decade, we actually have a deal that takes us for 10 years into the future in federal funding for our health care system. I think that any reasonable judgment of Manitoba contributed to that will tell you, other premiers will tell you and other health ministers will tell you, that Manitoba's team at that record achievement in September of this past year of my colleague, the former Minister of Health, the current honourable Minister of Energy, Science and Technology (Mr. Chomiak), our Premier (Mr. Doer) and our team from Manitoba played an absolutely critical role in brokering a fair and long-term agreement to sustain universal health care in this country. That is why, in this budget, that we have \$150 million from the federal government into a trust fund that will allow us to attack waiting lists for diagnostic procedures, for surgery, to attack waiting times for any other forms of therapy which we may need and to improve the health status of Manitobans so that, frankly, they will not need to wait because they will be healthier. So I was very proud of the leadership of our province in the health accord.

Shortly after that, our Finance Minister, who has lead us from 9.9 percent of our expenditures to service our general purpose debt to 3.3 percent of our expenditures to service our debt in five short years, our Finance Minister and our Premier got an agreement on equalization that recognized, finally, that the federal government had been short-changing all of the equalization recipient provinces, including Saskatchewan, by the way, over the past number of years, and that resulted in a one-time improvement to the base of our equalization by over \$180 million this year. That was money that should have been in our revenues. The federal government finally agreed that it should be, and they put it in. We are glad of that, but we have to remember that that is not an annual increase. That is a one-time increase into the base.

So the members opposite, who on Monday want us to spend and on Wednesday want us to save and

on Friday want us to pay down debt have to understand that some of this very large increase that came into revenue this year was one-time money. The increase in our equalization was an increase one year. Next year it does not go up very much at all. The increase coming from the wait list money is one-time money that will end over four years. It will not be there. So we cannot begin to spend money that is not sustainable, and that is why our budgets have increased in a very reasonable and reasoned way over the last few years, with our expenditure increase totals of 1.9 percent, 2.9 percent, one year of 7 percent, the other years of 3, 3.5, 3.6. Not rapid growth, and in fact not much different from the years in which the previous government piled up debt upon debt upon debt.

They had the gall on Monday to confuse debt of a self-sustaining Crown corporation, which is entirely paid for by rates, with the general purpose debt which in 1991-92, this previous government in which some of the members present in the House sat in the Cabinet ran up a \$762-million debt. The largest deficit in Manitoba's history was under the Conservative government of Gary Filmon. The debt that was incurred last year on a summary budget basis was 90 percent Manitoba Hydro because the rains did not come.

An Honourable Member: Because you took \$400 million out.

Mr. Sale: The Member for Emerson (Mr. Penner) is now talking about how we are responsible for the weather, Madam Acting Speaker. He is the same member that thinks we can prevent a flood on the Red River by building a dam on the Pembina River. He has just got a little problem with watersheds among other things.

He is also the member who wanted us to spend, spend, spend, in fact to spend a deficit on BSE. Well, I am proud of the work that my colleague the honourable Member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk) has done on BSE. She has put out over \$100 million in loans. She supported the Rancher's Choice with \$14 million now. She has taken action on CAIS. She has moved on BSE. The member from Emerson knows that all of the box beef is going out into the United States. In fact, our exports of box beef are right where they used to be. Our problem is too many older cows that used to go south for hamburger. We are going to continue to work to have the slaughter

capacity in this province so that problem will go away as well.

Let me move to the question of how many nurses we have in our system. One of the really interesting statistics was that, when we formed government in 1999, 210 young Manitobans graduated as nurses. This year, 753 and it is still going up. Do you know how many nurses left during their time in government: 1586 fewer nurses were practising in Manitoba at the end of the nineties than at the beginning of the nineties. Since 1999-2000, there are 876 more nurses practising in the province of Manitoba than there were at the beginning of our time in government.

We have increased the number of doctors. The previous government decreased the number of doctors. When we formed government, there were only 70 students enrolled each year in the medical college of this province, one of the finest medical colleges in Canada and the college that has trained more epidemiologists and public health and infectious disease specialists than any other university in our country. A proud reputation. They cut enrolment by 15 students. We immediately moved to move the enrolment back to 85. It is up to 87. This year it will go to 93. By the time we finish this term in office it will be 100 students going in every year, with more residencies.

This year, let me tell the House a very important piece of information, this year 81 percent of family practitioners who graduate in Manitoba are staying in Manitoba. That record has not been equalled during all the time the previous government was in office; 81 percent of our family practice doctors are going to practise in Manitoba this coming year. I am very proud of that, and I am proud of the work of our health department and our university to make that possible.

While we are on the subject of the university, I was astounded to hear the leader of the party opposite being critical of our record on post-secondary education. I do not know where he has been. We stood up in 1999 and said, "We will put \$50 million on the table for the University of Manitoba to rebuild the crumbling infrastructure." Madam Acting Speaker, in the engineering department they had to put plastic over the computers because when it rained, water dripped through the roof. I could not believe it.

We put \$50 million on the table and said you have got to match that. The business community of Manitoba, the graduates of the University of Manitoba came forward and said, "We won't just match it, we'll raise four and a half times what you have pledged." They raised \$238 million in total on that capital campaign. The University of Manitoba is now poised to rebuild the infrastructure that crumbled and crumbled and crumbled over 11 dreary, dull and lost years in the 1990s. That is happening today: a new pharmacy building at the University of Manitoba Bannatyne campus, the Brodie Centre, the CancerCare centre, the new university engineering faculty, and the list goes on and on.

We have rebuilt the infrastructure. We protected students from the kind of fee increases that during the 1990s drove their debt ratios to the level where students were starting out in life with more debt than many of us had halfway through our lives.

* (15:50)

Madam Acting Speaker, we capped their debt. We put in bursary programs and we lowered tuition, and then we froze tuition. This budget maintains the fact that we have the second cheapest tuition in Canada. We did not take that out of the hide of the universities. We provided that 10 percent to the university every year. We relieved the universities of property taxation burden, and we grew their funding at at least the rate of growth in the economy. We attracted more research revenue and, to their credit, the university has attracted record amounts of research revenue.

In addition, take a look at Red River College. Red River College, they were going to have 1100 or 1200 students. We have 2200 students downtown learning the newest and best of high technology skills to maintain and grow our economy. Remember about that economy. I just want to say it again; \$31 billion when we took office, \$41 billion today, 33% increase in only five years. In their last five years in the government they did not even manage a \$5 billion increase. We have managed a \$10- billion increase. We doubled, every year, the number of jobs that were created in the 1990s; 7200 instead of around 3400, 3300.

What I think is perhaps one of the proudest achievements of this government is that Manitoba

has always been a welcoming place for people from other nations. We have welcomed the world to Manitoba and today, under the leadership of our Minister of Immigration (Ms. Allan), we are welcoming a record number of new Manitobans. We are welcoming a record number, and we will be close to our goal of 8000 this year and growing to 10 000 within the next year or so. This means that there are more people to work in our economy, there are more teachers, there are more doctors, there are more skilled tradespeople.

Frankly, the richness that is our collective multi-cultural heritage, multilingual, multi-faith heritage is further strengthened by the people whom we have welcomed in the last several years, providing a record growth of employment, a growth of population, and what has that done? It has raised housing prices. It has increased employment. It has increased investment in our companies. That again is why the gross domestic product of Manitoba at market prices has grown from \$31 billion to \$41 billion under this government, this Premier (Mr. Doer), this Finance Minister, who have done remarkable jobs to rebuild the economy that under the previous government had failed to create accurate numbers of jobs, was not attracting immigrants, was losing doctors and was laying off and losing nurses.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

I want to talk, just very briefly, about some of the things that we have done in Family Services and Housing because, as a former minister in that area, I am very committed to the work that is being done by my colleague the honourable Minister of Family Services and Housing (Ms. Melnick) today. We have more than doubled the support we are providing to Manitobans with developmental delay to live in our community, and we are accelerating the rate of moving and finding new homes for people.

During 1999-2000 and 2001 we closed Pelican Lake centre and people said to us, "Oh, those folks will not be able to live in community." There was fear that there would be job loss. In fact, what happened was all the jobs were transferred into providing community supports for those families and individuals and almost all of those individuals maintained and improved their status. One or two were not able to make the transition, but 70 did, Mr. Speaker. I am very proud of the fact that we are not only continuing to support people who are living in

our communities with developmental delay, we have more than doubled the resources to that very important project and we are continuing to accelerate the placement of people in community to support the families who over many years have kept them there.

In child care we have put tens of millions of new dollars into our child care system; 3500 new spaces. You know the member of the opposition that was speaking earlier was talking about child care workers. When we formed government we could not keep child care workers in our system because their wages were so low because the previous government would not support adequate wages for child care workers. We immediately went to the wage scale recommended by the Manitoba Child Care Association, which, by the way, Mr. Speaker, is the strongest and largest child care association in Canada. That is no accident because we supports its formation, and we have the best child care system in the country. We will rival Québec's attainments within the next few years. I am very proud of the work that my colleague is still undertaking in that area of child care.

I want to close my remarks talking about perhaps the most important challenge facing us, and that is the challenge of wellness and prevention. We have talked a lot about what we have done on cardiac wait lists, cancer wait lists and what we are doing in hip and knee wait lists, CT scans, MRIs, the various new therapies, such as brachia therapy in the prostate cancer centre. We have done a lot of really good things, the building of the Health Sciences Centre, Brandon General Hospital, CTs in Portage, Steinbach, The Pas, Selkirk, Thompson.

Mr. Speaker, what we have to do is to try and make sure that the health of Manitobans is so much better that they do not need to draw on those resources as much in the future. That is why a centrepiece of our government has been the Healthy Child program and the prevention of illness in the first place. I will give credit to the former minister of Family Services, the Member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson), who began in a very slight way the secretariat on child health, the Children and Youth Secretariat, but we have grown this into a model program in Canada that has attracted people from North America to say, "How have you made child development such a powerful and central program in your province?"

We did that because our Premier said that the Healthy Child committee should be a committee of Cabinet reporting what seven departments are doing on behalf of children in Manitoba. I am very proud of my colleague, the honourable member from Seine River, the Minister for Healthy Living (Ms. Oswald), who is the chair of that committee now and is bringing more and more leadership and more and more resources to making sure that Manitoba's children are the healthiest they can be and that their growth in their early years means that their potential in their adult years is strengthened.

Finally, we announced that we will be committing very significant new revenues to the prevention and to the improved treatment of chronic disease. There is frankly no excuse for people with type 2 diabetes progressing to renal failure and needing a kidney transplant or dialysis. When people progress to renal failure, it is because their diabetes has not been properly managed or aggressively managed. That is a challenge for our doctors and our nurses, but it is also a challenge for those who have type 2 diabetes to learn as much as they can about their disease and to participate with our health care providers, ensuring that their disease does not progress, that they do not have heart disease and begin to lose circulation and develop bed sores and face amputations and then ultimately the loss of their ability to stay off dialysis.

So the prevention of type 2 diabetes has to be a very high priority because we are now spending \$55 million a year on dialysis, Mr. Speaker. We should not be having to spend that money, we should be preventing diabetes in the first place. We are spending too much money on chronic hypertension which has not been properly managed, partly in terms of what we have done to manage it in the health side but also in terms of the patient side.

So, in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Manitobans have a responsibility to work at maintaining and improving their health status. We have a responsibility as government to give them the tools and the supports to do that. In the long run it is far better to prevent disease, and it is far better to prevent the progress of disease than it is to deal with the consequences. We are committed to prevention. We are committed to lowering waiting lists. We are committed to having the diagnostic resources available when you need them and where you need them, but more than anything else we are committed

to a balanced approach to government, which represents the needs of every Manitoban in every corner of our province.

I take huge exception to the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Murray) suggesting that in any way we make partisan decisions about where things are done or who counts. Every Manitoban counts, every farmer, every baby, every social worker, every businessman, every student in university, every student in our schools, everyone who seeks to camp in a park, everyone who wants to pursue recreation, everyone who wants to invest in our province, every single Manitoban counts to this government, and we represent them all, Mr. Speaker.

* (16:00)

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): It gives me pleasure today to rise to speak on the budget that has just been presented in this House.

I think it is important to note that the government, when they brought this budget, that it is the highest-spending budget that this province of Manitoba has ever seen. It is the highest-revenue budget that this province has ever seen. Yet what we find interesting is that, when revenues rise to \$8.176 billion in the Province of Manitoba, that is an increase of \$524 million in revenues, and when you look at the expenditures of \$576 million in additional expenditures in this province, and you look around in your own communities and you have to say to yourself, "So what has changed?"

Well, what has changed in this province is the attitude of government. The attitude of government has changed dramatically in this province. I remember well in 1999 when we went into the election campaign and we told the people of Manitoba that over the next four years there would be better than a billion dollars worth of increased revenue. What did the NDP do? The NDP said this, they said, "Where are you going to get an extra billion dollars from?"

Well, all I say to you, Mr. Speaker, is that our government, when we were in government, planned well. We planned for those increased revenues. We knew what those increased revenues would be. We told Manitobans that, because those revenue increases would be there over the next four years, from 1999 until 2003, we would put half of that

money into health care and education, of that billion dollars, and half of it we would give back to Manitobans in a reduction in taxes.

Well, let us look at the record, Mr. Speaker, to see what this government has done, this NDP government that was fortunate enough to win the election at that time, but based on a bunch of misinformation that they told the people. What they said at that time, what the Premier (Mr. Doer) of this province, today's Premier, the NDP Premier, said was, "Give us \$15 million and six months and we will fix your health care system."

I was quite taken aback by what the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) just told this House a few minutes ago, when he gave us a diatribe of expenditures that they had made in health care and other areas in this province, bringing the total expenditures in this province to better than \$8 billion, \$8 billion. That is an increase in expenditures of over \$2 billion in five years. How long are Manitobans going to be able to afford those kinds of increases in expenditure? This government is a spendthrift government. Spend and smile is what they have said.

What I also have found interesting in this budget, in yesterday's speech, was that because they had taken virtually all of the money that was left in the rainy day fund, except for \$79 million that had still been left in it, they were now going to put back \$314 million. If that \$314 million would have been a surplus, I would have applauded them. As a matter of fact, I said to the media I was pleased that this government saw fit to put the money back where they had taken it from.

But, Mr. Speaker, I say this to you. I had not looked at the budget when I made that statement to the media. Had I had an opportunity to view the budget, as I have now, do you know what I would have said? I would have said, "What is this government doing?" They went to the bank and borrowed better than \$500 million which they are paying—what is the going rate of interest—probably 5%, 6% interest they are paying, and then they are putting it in a rainy day fund which they will probably get 2 or 3 percent from, maybe 3 at the most, but maybe 2. So they are paying 4% interest, let us say in the neighbourhood of 4% interest, to have the money sitting idly in a rainy day fund. Only governments that do not have a clue of what true economics really means and true financing of

operations really means would do that sort of stuff. They would not, when there is a huge deficit being run up in a given fiscal year, go to the bank and borrow money to put in a rainy day fund. That, to me, is absolutely irresponsible, and that is what that move yesterday was. It was irresponsible.

Have we seen the tax reductions that this minister is now talking about, that this government is talking about? I do not see them. They are talking about a half a percent of reduction on small businesses, and I applaud them. The small business people will be happy that they at least got a half a percent. They talk about a small percentage of decrease in, I think it comes to \$11 a year for the average family in this province, one pack of cigarettes a year, that they are going to now save on reduction of income tax. They are talking now about the kind of programming the business community in this province needs but will not get from this government.

I am going to suggest to this House that, because of the kind of misrepresentation we have seen time and time again on issues, people of Manitoba are becoming fed up. I am hearing more and more at the coffee shop that it is time for change, and I think, had they known then what they know now, the last election would have turned out differently than it did.

I want to talk a little bit about the agricultural situation in the province and the crop disaster much of Manitoba experienced last year. I live in an area of southern Manitoba that has seldom ever seen the kind of devastation we saw last year. Virtually none of our specialty crops were harvested. The beans were left all rotted in the field. The corn rotted in the field, and many of the other crops were severely damaged or destroyed by the huge amount of rain we had last fall during harvest season.

Now, the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) has said they are adding \$20-some-odd million to their budget this year. What I find most interesting is that we have a CAIS program, the Canadian Agricultural Income Support program, in place in this province as well as the other provinces, and yet the CAIS program does not function. Many organizations, KAP, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, the Farmers Union and many others have lobbied Ottawa and the provinces to do away with the deposit requirement that is now in place that requires farmers to deposit a large amount of money,

put it in a bank account similar to what the NDP are doing in this province.

It does not surprise me that the minister refused last week to raise this issue properly when she met with the federal minister and her provincial counterparts. But it requires farmers to put a large amount of money in a bank account, which farmers do not have. They have to go to the bank and borrow this money to put it in an account that just sits there. Those farmers are not able to use that money unless their income trigger drops below their average income. Well, if you have had an average income such as Manitoba farmers have had over the years that brings your whole five-year income cycle to a very low level. You do not trigger any money because your income has to drop even further than it has already dropped last year. This program does not work. Every farmer will tell you that.

* (16:10)

In the case of the BSE, the cattle industry and the ruminant industry that has been so hard hit by border closures, they are telling me that because we have not been able to sell our cattle, our inventories have grown, and inventories have retained value and because their inventory, in some cases, has doubled or more, they are deemed to have had increases in income, yet they have no money to pay their grocery bills. This CAIS program is not triggering. Why is it not triggering? Because it needs some rejigging to make it more receptive to drops in income and to remove it. It needs to have the inventory provision removed because every time you sell an inventory that becomes an income item and therefore will be picked up in the next cycle.

I think this government should pay a lot more attention, and the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) should, in fact, take this message to Ottawa in a much more meaningful way than she has, to try and get the deposit provision that has no place there at all. That would only make government look as if government is contributing more money at the end of the day. That is all. They would even take credit for the farmers' money that would have been drawn out of the account when a trigger is called. I think that is why government wants to leave it in place. That is the only purpose that that serves.

I think we are starting to see the effect now of the rejigging of the Agriculture Department and

the establishment of different levels of offices in different communities. We heard today the announcement that Crop Insurance and MACC, Manitoba Agricultural Credit Corporation, would be joined. I have seen lots of marriages that work well. I have seen lots of mergers that work well, but to merge a bank with an insurance company, it is seldom, if ever, that I have seen that before. Here the government of Manitoba is actually merging its banking operation for farmers and merging it with their insurance scheme.

You have to wonder what is behind that. You really have to wonder what is behind that. Will the Brandon offices eventually be closed? Because that is where MACC is housed, or will the Portage offices be closed? Will they eventually all be moved back to Winnipeg to centralize?

We decentralized. We decentralized government and we were very proud of that. It worked really well. It caused growth in rural Manitoba. This government is centralizing it. It has constantly, very quietly, centralized everything back to Winnipeg.

I say to you, Mr. Minister, that if this merger is designed to eventually move the office and the operations back into the city of Winnipeg, there will be significant electoral pain, I believe, in Brandon and Portage la Prairie and other communities, because they like those fairly well-paid employees to be residents of Brandon and Portage, and certainly we can understand that.

I also want to talk a little bit about the Minister of Agriculture rolling into her budget the tax credit that they have extended to the farm community. I want to talk a bit about that education tax credit that this government has extended to the agricultural community on farmland. Again, I go back to this last election. Our platform was that we would remove entirely the agricultural portion and residence portion on the education tax, on property tax. What did this government say? This government loudly proclaimed, "Where are those Tories going to get the money to pay for the education of the children of this province?"

If you look at today's budget, we said then there would be increased revenues to cover the cost and the NDP Premier laughed at it in front of the cameras. There would not be that increase in revenue. Well, look at what has happened. Look at

how many dollar transfers you have received from the federal government. That is unprecedented, the level of support that this government has seen from Ottawa. Never have we seen that before. The increased revenue stream that we predicted back in 1999 has caused you an income stream that would have covered the reduction, the complete elimination of all education tax on all property. You could have funded the whole thing, but you chose not to do it because you chose to mislead the people of Manitoba, and they believed you. They believed you, but that is over. They will not believe that anymore. That is over. You misled them once too often, and I think it is time that the people of Manitoba really took a hard look at what is going on.

I want to speak a little bit about the transportation budget, because we have constantly heard about the increased spending on our roads and our bridges and those kinds of things. Well, I want to say to you, Mr. Speaker, that there is going to be a meeting at Dominion City, Manitoba, next week, Tuesday, Tuesday following this Sunday.

An Honourable Member: What is the meeting about?

Mr. Penner: There will be a meeting, and we will be talking about a bridge that will be closed at Letellier on Highway 201. It will be closed to traffic. Anything over 16 tons will not be allowed across that bridge because the bridge is about to fall into the river. That is how bad repair it is. They are going to close it to one-lane traffic. Only one vehicle at a time will be able to cross. They will put lights on each end of the bridge and then they will let one car or one truck at a time across that bridge.

Do you know what it means? That the farmer on west side of the river that owns land on the east side of the river will not be able to cross that bridge with his tractor. Because a big four-wheel drive tractor is heavier than 16 tons. And if you put an air seeder behind it, you cannot cross because the one lane will be far too narrow for them to allow that air seeder to cross.

So what are they going to do? I was told this morning by the minister's staff out in our region that they are going to have to take the air seeders around by Morris, which would be a 60-mile trip before they get on to their land, those people that live within a mile of the land that they operate, a 60-mile trip by tractor.

Now, we had this bridge in the budget, and this bridge was slated for rebuilding because the department had said continually, "This bridge will one day fall into the river if you do not repair it." Well, it is about to fall into the river. The deck, it is about time that the trucks will actually fall through the deck in the river.

So I think it is time that this government put its priorities where they should be put. I have not seen a highway or road built south of Winnipeg in all of southern Manitoba in the last three years. There is no road construction. There is no bridge construction. The only road that I have seen finished is the road that we had already built, a bridge across the floodway is Highway 59, and that project that we had put in place, they could not stop it. The 59 highway, you could not stop it, so you finished the four-laning to the plan that the PCs had put in place. And now what are they going to do? Well, they are either going to have to build a bridge at Emerson, or tell farmers, "You are going to have to sell your land on the east side of the river."

In fact, I would like the minister of water to come out to Dominion City on Tuesday night of next week. I have already invited the minister of highways, who said, "I am not coming." The minister of highways told me point blank, "I am not coming." He said, "I will not come to that meeting." He said, "It would be a slaughter." And I said, "It might be." So I think it is time that we looked at doing road projects and bridge projects in this province based on need not based on politics.

* (16:20)

The only criterion in this province to get a road built or a highway built is are you an NDP or are not you. I think 59 highway demonstrated it, because they stopped the project right at an NDP riding. That is where they stopped it. That is where the NDP ends; that is where the highways end. There are no roads beyond NDP country in this province, and I think it is time this NDP government recognizes that its responsibility is to all Manitobans, as it is in health.

Closing all hospitals, the numbers of hospitals, Emerson Hospital, the sign has been gone for three years on the highway. For all intents and purposes, there is no hospital in Emerson. The only thing we have left is an old folks' home and a small, little

clinic. No doctors. I believe there is one doctor comes to Emerson once a day. That is the kind of service these people in Emerson are getting now. They used to have a nice hospital, a 12-bed hospital, seniors home, and what have we got now? That is all that is left.

And these people talk about health care? Increasing health care services? I think it is time we recognize that service in need should be done based on need, not based on what your politics are. I think we have seen far too much of that in this province so far. People are telling me all over the province. We were in Brandon not too long ago and they are telling me, "Based on needs, you get services. Based on politics, you get better services." I think that is a sad statement for any government to base their total planning on. I think we have seen that time and time again.

I want to talk a little bit about the floodway, which is my critic's responsibility now, and Water Stewardship. I looked long and hard, and I know the Minister of Water Stewardship (Mr. Ashton) is sitting right here. I looked long and hard in his budget for a significant amount of money to accomplish the work that he has so loudly said the legislation that they are doing would be needed in force to accomplish the work that they were going to do.

Where is the money in the budget to look at the urban community's needs, to look at their sewage disposal needs, and to ensure that those waters that we dump out of the sewage lagoons and into our river every year, are in fact safe? I cannot understand, when I drive into the city of Winnipeg to do my work here, to sit in this Legislature every fall of the year, about October, the middle of October, end of October, the Plum River is normally dry that time of year unless you get a heavy rain, but about mid-October it starts flowing. You know what flows down that river? It is the sewage lagoons that are being dumped into that river every fall of every year of the towns upstream on that river. That is the only way they can utilize their lagoons. How safe is that water?

You know what is five miles north of the mouth of the Plum River entering the Red River? You know what is five miles north of there? The intake of a water treatment plant at Morris, Manitoba, that treats all the water going west of Morris and through that

whole Pembina Valley water system. They treat the water. They recycle the sewage that is dumped down the Plum River and bring it to drinking water standards. Can you imagine that being done in the city of Winnipeg, if we would dump sewage into Shoal Lake? Can you imagine what the people in the city of Winnipeg would say? Well, that is what we are doing to the Red River. That is by provincial legislative design and that has to stop.

I had to take all of my drinking water out of that Red River, and if the Americans would do that to us, we would holler and scream, but they do not. They do not do that. They do not allow it. All their disposals come through a treatment plant, not like we do. That is why I look high and low under this budget for this minister to meet his commitment, that he would reduce the inflow into Lake Winnipeg by 10 percent, the nutrient level by 10 percent, in five years. Well, there is nothing in this budget that would indicate that they are serious about that. I think it is time that if you are serious about doing it, put your money where your mouth is.

The City of Winnipeg is going to have to spend millions and millions of dollars to bring their effluent up to standard, that now goes into the river. Where is that support? I do not see it in their budget either. I do not see it in the amount of money that is going to be paid to the City of Winnipeg. So I think it is time that this minister, in fact, looks at reality, that this government looks at reality. Do not make promises you cannot keep or do not want to keep. Do not promise people just because there is going to be another election two years down the road that you are going to do these kinds of things when you cannot meet the commitment, when you are not serious about putting the money where it needs to be put.

I want to talk a little bit about the labour agreement that was just announced this morning. I found it very interesting that they would release that on the day that they would bring forward the budget and the morning that we would start debating the budget, trying to hide what they had put in writing, trying to hide it during the debate and the confusion in the Legislature, that the media would be distracted. The agreement says that one third of the employees working on that floodway must be unionized. Must be unionized. One third must be Aboriginal, and the one third that are non-unionized and non-Aboriginal will have to pay the union dues to the unions.

You know what I think this is? I think this is a drafted agreement that will put a huge amount of money into the slush fund of the NDP party. That is what I think this is designed to do, and I think it is about time that the NDP government owns up to this. You know I hate to think of what we are doing here. If I was not living in Manitoba and if I was looking at this from the outside, I might question whether apartheid is alive and well in Manitoba. *[interjection]*

Well, look at what you are doing. Based on colour, you are making the decision. I think that is deplorable. I thought we were all Manitobans. Regardless of what colour, what race or what creed, we are all Manitobans. Government should treat all Manitobans equally. Are we doing that in this agreement? I do not think so, and I think that is unfortunate when governments overstep their bounds in serving the needs of their people, regardless of what colour, or what race, or what creed they are. That should be done, but that is not happening in this agreement. I think it is time that we looked at this.

I want to conclude by saying that if we had ever seen this kind of revenue increase when we were in government we would have not only balanced the budget, we would have managed our affairs in this government. We would have managed the affairs of government in such a way that we would not have the kind of deficits and the kind of debt load incurred, the kind of debt and debt load that this government is incurring, \$2 billion more debt in this budget than we have seen before, \$2 billion more debt over the last four or five years. That is unbelievable.

So, Mr. Speaker, I say it is the responsibility of this Chamber to address these issues and make sure that that kind of overspending and debt incurrence will not happen again in this province of Manitoba.

* (16:30)

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Water Stewardship): Mr. Speaker, before making my comments on the budget, I would like to, given this is my first opportunity since the tragic events in Alberta in which four RCMP officers were so tragically killed in the line of duty, as someone that represents eight communities, that lives in Thompson, that is served very well by the RCMP, I want to put on the record that I have not heard anybody in my own community who has not felt this

directly. I know there are many of the recruits who have come through, in fact, they are posted to Thompson, they are feeling this as if it was a loss of a member of their own family.

I want to put on the record that I respect the work the RCMP does, and on behalf of my constituents we know when we see the tragedy that occurred, we appreciate I think that much more how each and every day the members of the RCMP put their lives on the line to protect our security and to protect our society. I wanted to put that on the record on behalf of all of my constituents.

I also, Mr. Speaker, want to talk about the budget, of course, and I must say I have had the opportunity to speak to a few budgets in the past.

An Honourable Member: How many?

Mr. Ashton: You know, a few.

What I find interesting is budgets tell you a lot about the government. They tell you a lot about the political situation of the day. They tell you a lot about the opposition as well.

Mr. Speaker, I want to put on the record, some of you may recall in the Throne Speech, I put forward the argument that I think is becoming increasing more apparent as we see this session unfold, of how the Conservatives have become the Bush-Harper Conservatives in this province. I outlined the obvious fact that the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Murray) is a big admirer of George Bush. In fact, he indicated to me that if he had a chance to vote he would have voted for George Bush in the last election, how at the last convention the provincial Conservatives proudly proclaimed that they are once again one family. I can just hear the strains of the music "We Are Family" coming from their convention. They have Steven Harper, now, hugging the Leader of the Opposition, the Bush-Harper Conservatives, the Bush-Harper-Murray Conservatives, I guess would be the Manitoba version.

Mr. Harry Schellenberg, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

I indicated some surprise that the members opposite, faced with defeat in 1999, to be faced with an even greater in the last election, would not have

maybe spent some time trying to figure out what happened, and how come they have managed to be so far out of touch with the majority of Manitobans.

Let us put it up front here. Governments come and go and majorities come and go, but it was pretty, I think, unique to see in Manitoba a second-term government increase its majority. You know, you would have thought that somebody over there would have sat down and said, "Maybe we are doing something wrong. Maybe, just maybe, we are not connecting with Manitobans the way they should and maybe we should make an effort to do so."

You might have thought they would at least have assessed the fact that they do not have any seats in northern Manitoba. You might have thought that they would have learned from that and tried to develop some way of reconnecting with northern Manitobans. You might have expected they would have looked at what is increasingly happening across rural Manitoba as well, where, contrary to what the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Murray) talks about earlier, he should check the number of rural members that we have on this side of the Legislature speaking for rural Manitobans.

Indeed, the many areas, you know I look at Portage la Prairie in the last election where safe Tory seats were starting to crumble. Those pillars of support were starting to crumble at Winnipeg. I love driving to southeast Winnipeg and southwest Winnipeg. Little did I know I would be driving in the Seine River constituency and I would be saying to myself, I am driving into NDP territory, you know Fort Garry, NDP territory, St. Norbert. I think we plan on driving even further in the next election and be able to declare that NDP territory. I would have thought there would have been some effort somewhere along the line to reconstruct an agenda that was in touch with Manitobans.

That having been said, I have to admit my Bush-Harper comparison is starting to just erode a little bit. We have just seen the unique spectacle of the federal Conservatives sort of supporting the federal Liberal budget. You do not have to, if you are an opposition party, vote against the budget. I think the Harper Conservatives have shown that. I think they are probably making a mistake, but they tactically understood they would not have much credibility voting against the budget. That was their view so they made that decision. Well, I watched the budget

yesterday, and you could have heard a pin drop on the Conservative benches. I have seen budgets come and go. I have had budgets that were easier to vote for, and ones that were maybe a little bit tougher to vote for. I have even had the unique position of voting when we were in opposition for the government budget. I have had some experience, but I am just trying to run through what members opposite, in a remote sense, have to attack in this budget.

When I think of our visions in this Legislature, I often put myself in the shoes of the average Manitoban. What would they expect from a government? I would say the first thing they expect is a government that is going to represent all Manitoba. I do not see how, in a province of 1.1 million people, you cannot make an effort to represent all regions, all cultures, and all the unique elements of this truly diverse province, one of the most diverse jurisdictions anywhere in the world.

In this budget, you will see things that benefit northern Manitoba, that benefit rural Manitoba and that benefit our cities, as well. I look at that checklist. If you were going to take that inclusivity from a geographic sense, this budget passes the test. I would go even further, because we recognize as well it is not just a question of geography, but we do have people from many ethnocultural backgrounds, many different views shared by different generations, as well. Certainly, the concerns facing young people in this province are different from the concerns facing our seniors. But, again, the budget passes that test. There is a tremendous commitment in here, in terms of tuition fee freezes, in terms of capital, investments in post-secondary and public education for young people. Equally, through the commitment to many of the services that our seniors look to, particularly our support in terms of health and some of our new initiatives, in terms of hip and knee surgery. These are issues of concern to all Manitobans, many seniors, that value these services. I say, is this test met again, in terms of the diversity of this province? Yes.

I then look at prudent fiscal management in this particular case. I want to put on the record that this is really only the second time there has been any significant investment in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. The first time was when the original fund was created when the then government took a surplus, threw it into the Fiscal Stabilization Fund to try and

bring down the printed surplus and then establish the fund. The second time was when the Conservatives in 1996 sold off MTS, dumped it into the Fiscal Stabilization Fund and spent it.

We have built up the Fiscal Stabilization Fund and we did not have to sell a Crown Corporation, we did not have to fix the books, we did the prudent financial thing. We have rebuilt the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. Again, in terms of fiscal prudence, did we decrease our payment down in terms of the debt? No, in this budget, there is an increase from \$90 million to \$116 million. In addition to building up our savings account for a rainy day, we also paid down the debt. Did we stop there? No, we did not. We have done more again to deal with the unfunded pension liability. I say to members opposite, I think, in this particular case, you know, the kind of analogy I would use is a household. Here we have managed to pay down the mortgage. We built up our bank account. We have done the fiscally prudent things to do.

*(16:40)

An NDP government that gets good marks from the bond rating agencies, I tell you, I know members opposite cringe when they hear Moody's or any of the banks that have talked about our fiscal management. But I say, and I will say it on the record, that the NDP government in this province has proven that we can manage the province's finances. In fact, we do a heck of a lot better job than the Conservatives ever did. We did not sell a Crown corporation to pay back the Fiscal Stabilization Fund.

Well, does it end there? It does not end there because, you know, members opposite they like to start a clock in 1999. I mentioned it in the Throne Speech, there is that lost decade, actually 11 years, they do not like to talk about that. I know the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Murray) particularly likes to ignore that Conservative period of time, because if you were to hear them in their budget speeches, and the Leader of the Opposition earlier with his oratory, the great tax-cutters here, the ones so concerned about the average Manitoban, well, I went back, and it is interesting to read the budget documents to remind you of the Tory record and then our record.

I want you to consider this: Was it the Conservative government that reduced income taxes?

No, it was the NDP government. Was it the Conservative government that cut corporate taxes? No, it was the NDP government who cut it for the first time since the Second World War. How about small business tax? Conservatives? No, it was the NDP.

Mr. Acting Speaker, you run through each and every measure, in terms of taxation. In this particular case, we have not only invested in services, we have not only been able to bring down the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, we have also been able to provide tax relief. That is one of my tests, as well, for the average person out there because, I would say, there is not one person in Manitoba that would not say that they want a government that does have a sense of the social and economic needs of Manitobans, but also understands the need to run an efficient fiscal framework and to have affordable government.

So I start looking at these check marks, and a start saying to myself, "How could members opposite not support this budget?" But then I am reminded again that maybe they diverge from the Bush-Harper agenda on tactics. But you know what? If you ever wanted to see how this opposition party has moved further and further to the right, if that was possible, compared to the 1990s, you just have to look at some of the comments we just saw in the budget debate.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I want to put on the record that I want to give the Member for Emerson (Mr. Penner) some credit because I think he has put forward the agenda of the Conservative Party probably more directly and honestly than any other member. I want you to be reminded here that the member has now gone from being Agriculture critic to Water Stewardship critic. That is one of the key environmental portfolios that we have put in place as a government. I would assume that you make a real statement as a leader and a party by who you put in as a critic.

I cannot mention the critic by name. But, you know, I remember a couple of years ago when the Member for Emerson, when he was not talking about raising the sales tax to deal with our fiscal situation, said that climate change is not a problem, climate change is not a problem. Now, you know, there are thousands of scientists saying it is a problem. Now, enough countries in the world have signed the Kyoto plan to bring in the Kyoto Treaty. What was the

position of the Member for Emerson? Hey, it is not a problem—

An Honourable Member: The Flat Earth Society.

Mr. Ashton: I am going to get to the Flat Earth Society in a minute.

I do not think that that would rate you very highly on environmental issues. But, you know, clearly it is a start. You know what is interesting? The same member also likes to talk about water issues.

Let us be up front here. I probably have the easiest job in this Legislature, being the Minister of Water Stewardship, because the vision of this government in terms of Manitoba's water is we want to leave it in better shape than we found it, and we are going to do it.

It starts from the idea that maybe there are some challenges out there, Lake Winnipeg algae bloom, nutrient overload, various areas throughout the province. But what is the position of the then-Agriculture critic, the now watershed stewardship critic, from the Conservatives? He stated, "I believe if we had done testing 20 years ago, our rivers and lakes are cleaner today than they have ever been". The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Murray) has appointed a critic who thinks that Manitoba's water is in better shape than it was 20 years ago. That is incredible. I find that absolutely incredible. Everywhere I have gone in the province, everybody understands the problem except the Member for Emerson (Mr. Penner) and now, clearly, the Leader of the Opposition. Is this the Tory plan? We do not have to deal with Lake Winnipeg because it is in better shape than it was 20 years ago. Is that what they are saying? Or the Assiniboine River or northern rivers and lakes?

Now we have the critic, and maybe that was not the only reason he was appointed critic, referencing before the fact that we have in the newly signed master agreement for the floodway, by the way, I want to put on the record that it was the Building Trades Council that was involved with discussions, the Floodway Expansion Authority, the Winnipeg Construction Association, but we had the member from Emerson call employment equity provisions in the floodway agreement apartheid. Apartheid. Well, I want to put on the record that everyone including, to

their credit, I want to give credit to the Heavy Construction Association which did not necessarily agree with all of the discussions or all the provisions that were being taken, but they supported employment equity. But I want to put on the record that we have had in this province for at least 20 years a commitment to represent the cultural diversity of this province in the hiring of this province. We have employment equity in the civil service, which was maintained by the Conservatives. That includes opportunities for all Manitobans. I want to say to the member from Emerson, shame on the member from Emerson and shame on the Conservatives opposite for showing their true colours and opposing employment equity on the floodway. Our floodway project will have job opportunities for all Manitobans, including Aboriginal people, including visible minorities, including women, including the disabled. We are committed to employment equity and we believe Manitobans are committed to employment equity.

The member opposite should withdraw the insulting reference to apartheid because those of us who fought against apartheid for many decades know what apartheid is. Employment equity is about fairness for Manitobans. We make no apologies for that.

I am just talking about one critic here. We could go through the rest of the benches.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I have said this, members opposite have really staked out this idea. I would say they have run through this strategy before, because I do not think I have heard the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Murray) go through one Question Period where he has not got up and talked about the 1999 election. They are so stuck back in this idea that, somehow, there was like an apparition in 1999 and then again in the last election. The Conservatives always had this natural governing party vision of themselves. They really think that others are not qualified enough or other parties are not good enough. That has always been part of their view. But you know what strikes me about it? This is like their first strategy. It is kind of pretend it did not happen, pretend the election was stolen from them.

But the second thing, I think it is incredible when you look at this, is that what they are essentially doing is they are getting into not trying to bridge out to more people. They are actually starting

to get narrower and narrower, angrier and angrier. They are starting to sound just like the Bush-Harper Conservatives I talked about. We have seen it today. The federal Conservatives. They are not a government, because they are out of touch with where Canadians are at in terms of the economy, in terms of social issues, that angry, exclusionary view of the world.

* (16:50)

I heard the member from Emerson earlier in Question Period yelling about immigration; people were buying farmland. Mr. Acting Speaker, we are proud of the fact that we are increasing immigration in this province. We are proud of that. As an immigrant myself who moved to Thompson, Manitoba, with my family as a kid, I am proud of the fact that Manitoba is a society that is built by a partnership between Aboriginal people and new Canadians, immigrants throughout the world. That is who we are. Maybe the Member for Emerson (Mr. Penner) should kind of remind himself about some of the history, and I am sure his own family's history, because immigration is positive. You know what? We are not only bringing in more immigrants; we have more Manitobans staying here. I mean there is a growth in population.

So, to members opposite, before they tie themselves to this view of the world that says there are only certain parts of the province and there are only certain people in this province that are worthy of consideration, I want to suggest that they wake up to the reality, to the fact that our NDP government not only reflects the diversity of this province in terms of our composition in this House geographically but is committed to its diversity in terms of ethnocultural diversity, in terms of the need for proper representation of both genders, men and women, in all walks of life. We do not just do it on the floodway; we do it in terms of what we do within government. We practise it when we talk about immigration; we practise it with each and every government program.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Might I suggest to members opposite that, and I know, by the way, that they will not listen to this so I am not going to risk giving them any advice here that they will follow up on, but governments usually start with a couple of things. You have certain basic

principles that your party stands for, and in my mind you maintain those principles. What are our principles, Mr. Speaker? I would say we believe in public health care; we believe in a strong public education system. We believe in investing in infrastructure; we believe that is one key role of government. We also believe that you have to have fiscal balance and fairness. We also believe that, at a time especially that we have now when the economy is certainly in a good part of the province showing signs of significant health, you remember those that do not have. You know what? I do not have a single farmer in my constituency, but I am proud to be part of a government that has increased spending on agriculture by 18 percent in this budget. That is showing concern for Manitobans in need.

I want to add to that the many Manitobans who are not faced with a crisis this year or the next year but through reasons of poverty face a lifelong crisis without the kinds of supports that we are seeing in place. I want to say I am also proud to be part of a government that in this budget has significant anti-poverty initiatives. I want to put on the record that we have increased the income assistance rates in northern Manitoba by 20 percent in remote communities to reflect the cost of food. So that is again about being concerned about your fellow person.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know if I can maybe speak just a few minutes before completing my remarks. I am almost afraid that, when you are a second-term government, what I am a bit concerned about is, third-term government, any level. You know, I am not being too boastful because I know what will happen. Members opposite will say, "Well, there you are again. You are boastful, you are boasting." Well, I want to boast a bit.

An Honourable Member: Arrogant.

Mr. Ashton: Well, it is not being arrogant. I want to be humble when I state this. I hope Hansard can reflect the humility in which I say that we have had the strongest population growth in more than 20 years. More youth are making Manitoba home now. Our net migration is up over 1100 in 2004. Do you know how many jobs we have averaged since 1999 in terms of job creation? Mr. Speaker, 7200 jobs a year.

Mr. Speaker, this one is good. Housing starts are up 73 percent since we came into government. You

know what? I represent a lot of homeowners, and there are a lot of people in this Legislature, you want to ask what is the No. 1 barometer of your personal well-being in this province, the average Manitoban will say the value of their house. Guess what? I will not tell you what it was in the 1990s, but since we have been in power, housing values have gone up 36 percent.

An Honourable Member: Put your sunglasses on.

Mr. Ashton: I know. The future is so bright, I need shades, right? I mentioned international immigration; it is up dramatically, and we are going to hit the 10 000 target. But you know what, I talked about homeowners, I talked about young people. What about those businesses? What is investment growth forecast? Mr. Speaker, 7.1 percent, higher than the Canadian average.

I could talk about a lot of other things; \$16 million more for highways. It is interesting. I remember when the Tories, you know, those great friends of rural Manitoba, you know what they spent? As little as \$93 million on highways. So let the Member for Emerson (Mr. Penner) not lecture anybody about highway spending. We have increased it by \$16 million. Mr. Speaker, \$145 million. That is the difference you get with an NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, I could run through the rest of the list, but I think I make my case. Ask average Manitobans what they expect. They expect a government that is balanced. They expect a government committed to economic growth. We are. They expect a government committed to public health. We are. They expect a government committed to public education, public services like our highway system, and they are. They expect a government that is going to represent the broad interests of Manitobans and not get into the divide-and-conquer style of Tory politics, trying to pit one Manitoban against the other.

Mr. Speaker, they see their values as Manitobans reflected in this government. And what I want to say in this opportunity I have in the budget debate is just to remind Manitobans of the fact that when I said before I wanted to boast a bit, I also want to understand it. You always have to be humble in politics to recognize that you represent your constituents, and it is a huge responsibility, and I

want to put on the record that I have had the opportunity to represent people of my constituency for many years, but I have seen more progress for Thompson constituency and northern Manitoba in the last five years than in decades.

In the position as MLA for Thompson, and I think I am boasting again a bit here, but on behalf of the entire community, this year will see the construction of the first personal care home in Thompson, Manitoba, the third largest city. When I go home on the weekends, and by the way, when I drive on Highway 6 this weekend, and I said to the minister of highways, I like when I pull up into Ashern and Grand Rapids and Ponton and back home in Thompson, and you know what they are saying about our highways? Highway 6 has never been in better shape than it has been.

When I look at the training in Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation, the partnership on hydro, and the partnership that is being signed soon with Moore Lake, with Tataskweyak, with York Landing, I see new partnerships with Aboriginal people. Our province, our vision, our northern Manitoba includes a partnership with Aboriginal people. I do not know how anyone could not see the positive elements of this. I am proud to vote for this budget. And I suggest to members opposite you vote against this budget, which I assume you are going to do, and it may feel good for a brief, fleeting moment, but what you are really saying is you are out of touch with the values of Manitobans because this budget reflects the desires and the values of Manitobans. Yes, it is an NDP budget, but it is Manitoba's budget as well.

* (17:00)

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): I will in due course address some comments to the minister's statement, but I would first of all like to preface my comments to the budget debate by extending the condolences from myself, my family and everybody in Fort Whyte to the families, friends and loved ones of the four RCMP officers that were killed in the line of duty so recently. It is something that touches all of us in this House and all of us across our whole community. Just on behalf again of my constituents, I would like to extend our best wishes to those families as they recover from this tragedy, but I also want to let all law enforcement officers know that the constituents in Fort Whyte stand behind them. We realize full well that every day they are putting

themselves in harm's way for our protection, and we commend them for the role they have taken in our society.

I want to touch briefly on one other point because this is the first time I have had to offer my congratulations to Jennifer Jones and her curlers who have won the Canadian championship and are hopefully on their way to winning the world championship. I must inform members of the House that I was fortunate enough to have Colleen work for us back in the mid nineties at Comcheq. As a young woman then, she certainly showed the dedication and spirit that we saw come to fruition in her run to the Canadian championship. Certainly, a very dedicated, intelligent and hardworking young woman, and I am sure that applies to every member of her rink and all those involved, including coaches.

I would like to say though that I am somewhat disappointed that the First Minister (Mr. Doer) did not have the courtesy to invite other members of the House to the presentation of the medal on Monday. I think it was short-sighted and petty on the First Minister's behalf. I will have the opportunity to see Colleen, but I just think those types of celebrations should be open to all members of the House. I think it is important that we show unification.

I am sorry. I said "Colleen Jones." I meant, just correct me, Jennifer Jones. I apologize for that. I think I watch too much curling, cheering her on that week, but Jennifer, believe me, we know who you are and what you have accomplished.

The previous speaker, the Minister for Water Stewardship (Mr. Ashton), put some interesting comments on the record. Unfortunately, none of them are really directed toward the future of Manitoba, and that is typical of what we are hearing from all the members opposite. They want to stand up and rail and rant and rave, but as we saw in the budget, they really have no vision for the future of Manitoba. Just remind us, this minister, and perhaps in the future he might want to limit his comments to issues of which he knows and perhaps stay out of the realm of pretending to be a political scientist. In doing so, I would just remind him that I think it was under his stewardship that he actually took the NDP party to 12 seats in the House.

It is fine. We all know the cycle of politics, and we have to suffer through it. He is here and he was

there when there were 12 and he sat through three terms in opposition, something that I do not think those on this side of the House will be doing.

More to the point, the minister indicated that his party had balanced the books. The NDP government had managed to balance the books, and I quote, "without fixing the books." The important part for the members opposite to understand is he said "without fixing the books," and in fact he said his party, his government, the NDP government was direct and honest about it.

Before I get into the budget, I just want to go back to the Auditor's report of last year. It would be interesting if the minister would actually take the time to read that report, because in there he will find that the Auditor General of the Province of Manitoba has identified that the financial statements, as prepared by the government, presented by the Minister of Finance, and I quote from his report, "are misleading by omission. They provide a misleading picture of the province's financial position and operating results."

In fact, he goes on to say, and the minister went on and on about how they balanced the budget year over year over year. Well, again, the Auditor General identifies for all members opposite, and they should take this to heart, and I quote again from his report, and this is referring to the people of Manitoba: "They are also unlikely to be aware that the net debt increased by \$1.2 billion in '03-04." The net debt increased by \$1.2 billion. That is the type of financial mismanagement we are getting from the Finance Minister, and, more importantly, from the Doer government, and it is something of which they need to take stock.

So, when they get up in this House and try to convince members opposite, try to convince the people of Manitoba that, in fact, they have balanced the books, they should, first of all, read the Auditor General's report. What it states clearly, and I will refer—the Minister of Education is one particularly that is prone to put misinformation on the record. I would just like to remind him that he should look at this because it shows that in 2004 there was a deficit of \$604 million, that in 2003 there was a deficit of \$184 million, that in 2002 there was a deficit of \$10 million.

When the Auditor General talks about debt, he indicated that the debt has, in fact, increased in '04

by \$1.2 billion. I hope the Minister of Education can understand a number that large: \$1.2 billion. It is considerably more than the less than \$30 million he put into capital expenditure last year on public schools. Mr. Speaker, \$1.2 billion is how high the debt increased. In fact, in '03, the debt increased by \$437 million. In '02, the debt increased by \$350 million. In '01, well, here is a break. The debt actually decreased by, get this, \$22 million. But then we go back to 2000, and it increased by \$175 million. So, year after year after year, the Doer government is continuing to pile up debt in the Province of Manitoba.

I realize that the Finance Minister tries to explain it away that, oh, well, we have had to adopt these accounting changes. As a matter of fact, he should take some time and explain it to the Minister of Education, whose only explanation last year for the fact that he could not support the public school system by building schools was that they had a glitch: "Oh, well, we have had a glitch. I do not know what it is. I cannot explain it, but, you know, I know it is a glitch, so we cannot do what we said we would do." Well, perhaps the Minister of Education should take a little more time to read the document.

Now, one thing that the Auditor General also goes on to explain, which, of course, nobody on the opposite side of the House will even dare to touch, is that fact that this glitch that has caused this problem in the construction of public schools in the province of Manitoba was actually a result of the NDP government's refusal to adopt a change in accounting presentation and process that was put forward in 1999. They did not do it until the Auditor General finally caught them and forced them to do it. Where is the Finance Minister on that? He says, "Ah, well, gee, we did not realize we made a mistake." They never would have done it had they not been caught by the Auditor General. I think that is a fact. That is what we see from the NDP government day in and day out on this side of the House. I think it is unfortunate.

Well, the Minister of Industry claims I am wrong. As we saw today, there will be lots more coming the Minister of Industry's way. He and his predecessor have single-handedly managed to dry up venture capital pools in the province of Manitoba. He has to take responsibility for that, but we will get to that another day. Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General goes on to say on page 10 of his report that if, in fact,

the government had followed generally accepted accounting principles—and I would like the members opposite to maybe pay attention to this; they might actually start to get it.

In fact, I will read it. I will quote from the Auditor General's report: "Without the above variations from generally accepted accounting principles, the special purpose operating fund and special funds financial statements would have reflected increased assets by \$2.7 billion, increased liabilities by \$3 billion—again a shortfall—"increased accumulated deficit by \$292 million, increased revenues by \$705 million, and expenses would have increased by \$1.2 billion." That is the problem we have with the NDP government. They absolutely refuse, time and time again, to be direct and honest.

* (17:10)

The minister of water conservation and the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) should actually come to grips with that fact and maybe take that message back to their Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger). Maybe implore him and plead with him, as should the rest of their caucus, to actually come clean and be open, direct and honest. If the members opposite do not like what I have to say, then I would ask them to simply just go sit down with the Auditor General for a little bit because I will tell you he will tell them exactly where it is at.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I have to say that today I have witnessed one of the most ludicrous statements I have ever heard on financial affairs of a province from the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale). For him, in his earlier speech, to stand up and somehow say that the NDP government is managing well because, get this, and I quote from his speech, because "the net general debt is less than revenue." Somehow he tried to explain that he has some incredible business acumen that would allow him to say the two numbers that he quoted are relevant.

Well, I would invite the Minister of Health to sit down with the Finance Minister. Hopefully, he would be able to get it right. Any businessperson who has experience, other than maybe a few on that side of the House, and they would surely tell him that your level of debt and your level of revenue have absolutely nothing to do with each other. The only way that you can justify a level of debt is if you can service the interest payments, not through your

revenue, but through your profit. He does not even come close to understanding that. He somehow thinks—and this is a problem with the budgeting process for the NDP government. They have no understanding of the simplest of financial concepts.

Now, Mr. Speaker, here we have the government which says that the cost of debt is decreasing, and it is, but it has nothing to do with the level of debt going down. It has everything to do with the cost of interest going down, something that this government neither had anything to do with, nor can take any credit for. We all know the cycles. Interest rates go up; interest goes down. There is a cycle in the economy. The dollar goes up; the dollar goes down. Economic growth goes up, we head into recession. The biggest problem, quite frankly, that we see with this budget is the fact that there is no view to the future as to what kind of shape this NDP government is going to leave the people of Manitoba and the finances of Manitoba in when the next recession hits.

Once again, by then I am sure we will have a change of government, and it will be left up to leveller heads in order to do a good job of managing the finances of the Province of Manitoba. Well, I know that is news that the members opposite do not want to hear, but they can rest assured that they are not going to be here forever. As a matter of fact, all that the people of Manitoba know for sure is that under an NDP government, we are one day older and deeper in debt. That is basically the philosophy of this government.

Mr. Speaker, I want to speak directly to some of the statements that the Finance Minister has made in the budget speech because, quite frankly, they are as misleading by omission as the Auditor General pointed out in his report. I will start on page 1, where the Finance Minister says, "Budget 2005 is built on four key pillars," and the first one is paying down the debt. Well, in reality, the debt has not been paid down. Payments have been made against the debt; payments have been made against the pension plan.

These payments were laid out. *[interjection]* Well, thank you. You should clap for the foresight of then-Premier Filmon and his Cabinet who laid out a schedule in the nineties, laid out a schedule and followed it for paying down debt. That schedule went from \$75 million to \$96 million and increased to the point where debt in the province of Manitoba, had it been followed by the NDP government, would

have been eliminated, but, instead, we see this government heaping debt on debt, adding more debt. That is in the Auditor General's statements. They add more debt every year than the payment that they make so, as a result, debt keeps rising.

The minister has the gall to stand up in this House and tell Manitobans that he is paying down debt. I will give him this. He is making a payment against the debt, but the debt as we see in the budget book is rising. So, once again, a statement that is misleading by omission, over and over and over again.

I find it rather interesting too that the third of his pillars is keeping our promise on tax reductions. You slide back into the book where he actually talks to that, and I refer the members to page 17 of the budget speech. It changes. It changes from keeping our promises on tax reduction to keeping Manitoba competitive. All of a sudden, a subtle change, but a very real one.

I would remind all members opposite, and I would invite them to ask the Minister of Finance to share with them the budget recommendations from the Business Council who represents the largest businesses in our province, the largest employers, employs over 65 000 people, accounts for over \$25 billion in annual revenue worldwide. Every year for six years they have told this government to focus on competitiveness, and every year for six years this government has ignored them. They do so at the peril of the economy.

Mr. Speaker, we simply look at the facts, and we find out in virtually every category that from the competitive nature Manitoba is at a disadvantage. With regard to our personal income tax rates, we are at a disadvantage to every other province in western Canada, every other province that we touch. That leads to people fleeing the province, the people setting up trusts in Alberta so they pay lower taxes. It does not do anything to increase the wealth in Manitoba. We see that even with the proposed reductions in corporate taxes in this budget, which, by the way, do not take effect, we are still out of line with other provinces in western Canada. We are in two years going to get down to 14 percent. Alberta is already at 11.75; B.C. is already at 13.5. We are a little ahead of Saskatchewan, but the only reason we are ahead of Saskatchewan is because Saskatchewan

has the brains and the good sense not to have a payroll tax.

My message to the minister and the message from the business community is simple: If you are going to reduce taxes, and you should reduce taxes, do it on the taxes that affect businesses before they make a profit. In other words, get rid of the capital tax. Get rid of the payroll tax because those taxes are imposed on business before that business has a chance to make a profit. That is why the business community refers to those taxes as job killers. This year in the budget, as we see, we have projections that those two taxes are going to be in the neighbourhood of \$467 million. That is the payroll tax and the capital tax, and the minister has not touched them.

I would just remind all members opposite that, in fact, in the last year, they have received an unbudgeted increase from the federal government of \$471 million; \$471 million, unprecedented. That would have allowed this government to eliminate—and I hope they understand—to eliminate not only the payroll tax, but the capital tax, make Manitoba competitive, and help create jobs and stimulate the economy.

Now I know the members are very literal in their translation. I do not want to leave them with the impression that I would suggest that they cut those in one year, but they should have a plan. They do not have a plan in order to eliminate the payroll tax and the capital tax so that Manitoba can become competitive.

There are other interesting statistics that the Finance Minister puts forward in the budget and, you know, again, because I realize most members opposite do not have the patience to go through it in detail, but for their edification and, you know, the Minister of Industry (Mr. Rondeau), I doubt that he even knows this, so I will tell him, but over 94 percent of businesses in Manitoba employ less than 50 people.

An Honourable Member: Are you accurate?

Mr. Loewen: Well, of course, I am accurate. It is in the budget document. The minister, of course, has to ask because he has not taken the time to read it, and I would encourage him to do that. He is obviously not

doing anything on the Crocus file so he might spend his time doing something.

* (17:20)

Mr. Speaker, the objective of this province, the objective of economic policy should be to help those 94 percent. The Minister of Industry (Mr. Rondeau) has the gall to sit here and laugh and chide me to talk about Crocus. There will be lots of time to chide about Crocus. Perhaps he should go out and tell the 33 000 Manitobans who are getting hit and hit hard in their retirement income due to his and the previous minister's total lack of interest in this file. Perhaps he should go out and explain to them what is going on instead of sitting in this House and laughing and making a mockery of it. I would encourage him to do that.

Mr. Speaker, we have 94 percent of the businesses in Manitoba that have under 50 employees. Our objective in terms of economic policy should be to grow the economy and help these businesses grow. What we want is these businesses that have 1, 6, 20, 30 employees, in the future years we want to see them have opportunities to have a hundred employees, to have a thousand employees, to grow in Manitoba, to make their investment in Manitoba, to create jobs in Manitoba, to create wealth in Manitoba, to pay taxes in Manitoba.

There is nothing in the economic policy of this government which encourages that, in fact, exactly the opposite. We hear time and time again from manufacturers, from others involved in business in Manitoba that the reason they are here is because this is their home. But, when they look at investment, when they look at growing their businesses, when they look at expanding their businesses, they look elsewhere to make those capital investments.

One cannot blame them. With this punitive tax regime that we have in the province of Manitoba, one cannot blame them for looking how to grow their businesses outside this province. I am not referring to exports. I am referring to where they build their plants, to where they establish their businesses, to where they hire their employees, to where they pay their taxes on those expansions. Unfortunately for the people of Manitoba, it is not in Manitoba.

But I understand the economic policy of the NDP government. I think it was summed up in the

Member for Interlake's (Mr. Nevakshonoff) first speech in this House, which ranks right up there with the Minister of Health's (Mr. Sale) comments today, where he said in Hansard—and you can check it. I know you were not here, Mr. Minister, you can check it on the record—where he was thankful that there were so many poor people in the province of Manitoba because poor people tended to vote NDP. I mean, look it up in Hansard. What a ridiculous, ridiculous strategic plan for this government: we want more poor people in Manitoba.

The Minister of Family Services and Housing (Ms. Melnick) shakes her head. I will bring her Hansard tomorrow because I know she will not bother to look it up, but that is what he said and that is what is on the record. The minister of highways knows that. He was here, and I hope he was as appalled as I was at that statement. All those ministers ought to be totally embarrassed by his performance in this House.

I would remind members opposite, and I see my time is closing in on me, they received this year over \$551 million in new income, but they did not take advantage of the opportunity to make Manitoba competitive. They did not take advantage to look at the health care system and see what efficiencies could be brought. Instead, they just slam more money at the bureaucracy they have created with the WRHA and others instead of looking at efficiencies, the Romanow report. The members opposite, the Minister of Health loves to go on about the Romanow report.

One of the fundamental tenets of the Romanow report was that in order to solve this health care funding crisis we have to come to grips with the fact that with most health care procedures we have no idea of what they should cost because there is no costing built into the system. It is all just based on the government sets a value and sets it out. Our hospitals have no idea of what it costs them to do a knee replacement, what it costs them to perform cardiac surgery. Until we get into that level of costing, we will not find a solution to this funding crisis.

We have seen, Mr. Speaker, in the last five years that the percentage of budget spent on health care has gone from around—sorry, I just have to grab the figure here. It was down in the low 30% range in the year 2000, and now, in fact, we are seeing that in this

year's budget it is well above that. As a matter of fact, if we look at the number that has been given to us by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), we see that our health care budget now eats up 41.7 percent, and in fact it is actually higher. Once you take out the debt costs, it eats up 43 percent of our total programming expenditures and we cannot sustain that.

The answer is not simply every year to send the First Minister and the Minister of Finance down to Ottawa: "We need more, we need more, we need more." Members opposite must realize that we are the last have-not province in western Canada; nothing we should take pride in. We should not be down going to Ottawa year after year begging for more. What we should be doing is creating an economic opportunity here to grow the economy in Manitoba to make ourselves more competitive.

In terms of government finance, because they talk about it a lot, what we are seeing is that the federal transfer payments have gone as a percentage of revenue, and this is the type of stuff, the numbers I hoped the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) would have put on the record. These are relevant numbers. In the year 2000, the budget indicated that federal transfer payments were at 30 percent. Mr. Speaker, 30 percent of our total revenue came from the federal government. Now that number in this year's budget is up to 34.2 percent, so close to 35% reliance on funding from the federal government. That is not a pass for the future; that is not a plan for the future. We need to grow our economy, and we need to do that by becoming more competitive.

Mr. Speaker, I want to touch on education just briefly in the few minutes that I have left because it is a very critical issue. This is a government that talks about their investment in education. I will just remind the minister, and, hopefully, when he talks about that 35, 35, 35, he will actually spend that—I am sorry, he has corrected me—45, 45, 45. It grows

every half hour. I just hope that he will go through and actually spend that money, and I would hope he would recognize that there are other constituencies out there not necessarily represented by NDP members that deserve spending. Quite frankly, I would remind him that Fort Whyte is the only constituency in the province of Manitoba that does not have a public high school. I would ask him to take that to the public schools board. The request has been in for years and years for construction of a high school in Fort Whyte. It is something that he needs to take seriously.

There are some good things in this budget, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the re-announcement of the Kenaston overpass is a welcomed re-announcement. It should have been built five years ago, but this government's vision was to build a bridge, a footbridge over the Red River as opposed to doing the right thing.

But I want to talk about their funding situation, particularly when it comes to post-secondary education. The members from Brandon need to take account of this. I want to tell this House that I am one individual who benefited from participating in college athletics. It was a tremendous part of my life. I would remind the member from Brandon West that I also have a daughter who is in the university who spent four years in college athletics as well, and it has been a very valuable part of her life. We are about to see the athletic department cut at the university of Brandon because this government refuses to fund it.

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable Member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Loewen) will have two minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, March 9, 2005

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