

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

*Published under the
authority of
The Honourable George Hickes
Speaker*

Vol. LVI No. 21 - 1:30 p.m., Wednesday, March 16, 2005

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 16, 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 Steve Voth, Curt Loewen, Greg Pauls and others.

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

Generally Accepted Accounting Principles

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:

Manitoba's provincial auditor has stated that Manitoba's 2003-2004 budget deficit was the second highest on record at \$604 million.

The provincial government is misleading the public by saying they had a surplus of \$13 million in the 2003-2004 budget.

The provincial auditor has indicated that the \$13-million surplus the government says it had cannot be justified.

The provincial auditor has also indicated that the Province is using its own made up accounting rules in order to show a surplus instead of using generally accepted accounting principles.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the provincial government to consider adopting generally accepted accounting principles in reporting Manitoba's budgetary numbers.

Signed by Ralph San Juan, Abelardo Cabrera, Ronaldo Tiodin and others.

* (13:35)

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 Don Dickson, Theresa Vanuynsberghe, Raymond Verniest and others.

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 George Hucul, Jody Hucul, Corrie Hucul and many others.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Oscar Lathlin (Minister charged with the administration of The Communities Economic Development Fund Act): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table the Quarterly Financial Statement for the Communities Economic Development Fund, for the period ended December 31, 2004.

Hon. Scott Smith (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Trade): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table the following reports of the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission, Third Quarter Report for the Nine Months ended December 31, 2004, as well as the Manitoba Lotteries Corporation Third Quarter Report also for the Nine Months ended December 31, 2004.

* (13:40)

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 21—The Oil and Gas Amendment and Oil and Gas Production Tax Amendment Act

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to move, seconded by the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Trade (Mr. Smith), that Bill 21, The Oil and Gas Amendment and Oil and Gas Production Tax Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur le pétrole et le gaz naturel et la Loi de la taxe sur la production de pétrole et de gaz, now be read a first time.

Mr. Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines, seconded by the honourable Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Trade, that Bill 21, The Oil and Gas Amendment and Oil and Gas Production Tax Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

Mr. Rondeau: Good day, Mr. Speaker. The Oil and Gas Amendment and Oil and Gas Production Tax Amendment Act is an important act. This bill amends two acts that govern the oil and gas industry in Manitoba.

The Oil and Gas Act and The Oil and Gas Production Act are important to our economic future. Mr. Speaker, these bills strengthen the provisions for environmental protection, enhance enforcement,

streamline administration and encourage exploration. These are good acts for our future.

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

Bill 203—The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Amendment Act

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Cullen), that Bill 203, The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Speaker, presently The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Act is required to reduce an income replacement indemnity paid to an accident victim by the amount of any disability benefit received under CPP.

This amendment allows the accident victim to retain rather than have clawed back any money received from CPP as a result of a division of pensionable earnings from the victim's spouse, former spouse, common-law partner or former common-law partner.

Mr. Speaker, this bill died on the Order Paper last session, and I would hope that all members would join me in supporting this that would fix an injustice within the act. Thank you.

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

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today Mr. Kyle Stadnek of Arborg Collegiate. This visitor is the guest of the honourable Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard).

Also in the public gallery we have with us today from Winnipeg Mennonite Elementary School 19 Grade 5 students under the direction of Mrs. Cyndi Sawatzky. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Murray).

Also in the public gallery we have from Oakville School 17 Grade 9 students under the direction of Mr. John Anderson. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faurschou).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Victoria Hospital Maternity Ward Closure

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, prior to the last election, there is a story about the closure of the maternity ward at the Victoria Hospital. The Minister of Health said that he had made his intentions clear that when the report was released, "It is not our policy to close the obstetrics at Victoria." He will not close the maternity ward and says no amount of evidence produced by the WRHA will change his mind.

Mr. Speaker, this Premier has said a promise made is a promise kept. He broke his promise. He is slashing health care services in Manitoba, and he should be ashamed.

Last year, when this NDP government was saying that it was not going to close the maternity ward, there were about 800 babies being delivered. Today they are saying that there are about 750 babies being delivered.

Does this Premier actually expect the constituents of Riel, Seine River, St. Norbert, Fort Garry, in fact, all Winnipeggers, does he expect them to believe that he has to slash health care services because there are about 50 fewer births?

* (13:45)

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is wrong. We are not slashing funding to health care. The funding increase to the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, as I understand it, is over 5 percent this year.

I can go through every year that we have been in office and the funding for the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, the funding for the Parkland Regional Health Authority, the funding for the

Interlake Regional Health Authority, the funding for the Burntwood funding authority, the southeast, the northeast funding authorities, the Central Health Authority, the Assiniboine Health Authority, the Brandon Health Authority, every year, our funding for the first four years has been greater than their funding. They are wrong, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, it is very clear that this heartless Doer government is slashing health care services to Manitobans. In Hansard of April 23, 2004, the honourable member from River East was asking the Health Minister, and I will quote what the member from River East was asking that minister.

The honourable member from River East said, "The Minister of Health at the time said, and he made his intentions very clear that it is not our policy to close the obstetrics at Victoria Hospital. He knew at the time births were decreasing, but he made a promise and a commitment."

Mr. Speaker, this is what the member from River East then went on to ask that Health Minister: "The Premier has said on many occasions that a promise made is a promise kept." The member from River East then asked the Health Minister, "Why is he flip-flopping today?"

According to the Hansard quote from the minister, he said, "Mr. Speaker, I do not know." That is what the minister said of the flip-flop of the Premier.

I am asking this Premier. This area is growing. With Waverley West, it will substantially grow, Mr. Speaker. Why is this NDP government slashing health care services in an area that is clearly going to be growing?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, all areas of Manitoba are growing because we do not have a stagnating economic strategy. I am glad the members opposite are admitting it.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are very early into Question Period. I just want all honourable members just to take a second and have a look up in the public gallery. We have a lot of students here. I am sure in their school they are asked to, at least, give attention to the person who has the floor because if someone is

interested in the question or the answer, they should have the opportunity to hear it. I cannot hear a thing. I am asking the co-operation of all honourable members, please.

* (13:50)

Mr. Doer: As I was saying, the province is growing, Mr. Speaker. In many areas of our communities, we have a growing population, a growing economic base. This is a very pleasant situation for the economy of Manitoba.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Rubin report in 2004 identified the fact that there would be required at Victoria Hospital to bring it to a safe situation a pediatrician 24 hours a day. Subsequent to that, and I did say in the House last year in Hansard that I would await, I had no recommendation in writing when questions were raised by members opposite—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a recommendation from the hospital itself. We have a recommendation from the medical committee that talks of dire consequences and then a further recommendation from the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority.

Mr. Speaker, if this Minister of Health and the Health Department did not act upon the advice of dire consequences for patient safety, if he did not act upon it, the members opposite would be the first ones raising concerns about patient safety. I think that it is appropriate to—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, the only dire consequences in Manitoba is the NDP slashing health care services at the Victoria Hospital. That is the dire consequences that we see under this government.

Mr. Speaker, there was an article in the paper yesterday that said a shortage of obstetricians and family doctors delivering babies at Victoria and a shortage of anesthetists were compromising patient safety. That was an article in yesterday's paper.

Mr. Speaker, this NDP government is slashing health care services because they could not do what they said they were going to do in the 1999 election, in the 2003 election and since then. What they said is they were going to promise to hire much-needed doctors and specialists. That is what they said. If there is a safety patient factor, it is one that this Premier has created because he has not been able to deliver on his promise.

Mr. Speaker, rather than close the much-needed maternity ward at the Victoria Hospital, why does he not for once stand by what he said and hire the much-needed doctors and specialists that we need?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, there are more doctors in Manitoba today than when we came into office, 119 less than in the 1990s, 139 more since we were elected. Those numbers—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, I would quote Doctor Dhalla from last week, I think it was March 12, who said we made major errors in Manitoba when we reduced the medical students' spots in Manitoba, and we are finally starting to see some positive results when we are training and graduating more doctors in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, there is a situation at the Victoria Hospital which has been diagnosed as unsafe by three medical bodies. We have a choice of listening to the medical experts. Perhaps if members opposite listened to medical advice back in the 1990s, we would not have had the situation as we had in the children's pediatric cardiac care. I would urge every—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

* (13:55)

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are going to have some decorum in here. I can hardly hear. We have to have decorum in here. If there is a breach of a rule,

rightfully, you expect me to make a ruling. Rightfully. How can I possibly do that if I cannot even hear the person that has the floor? And the member is not very far from me. I ask the co-operation of all honourable members.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, I would ask all members opposite to read the Sinclair report. I have read the Sinclair report dealing with the deaths, the preventable deaths, at the cardiac pediatric ward of the Health Sciences Centre, at the Children's Hospital. I have read the signals that were produced in that report and were not listened to by the powers that be. I would urge all members to read that report.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

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

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

Earlier in this session, Mr. Speaker, you cautioned this Premier to answer questions or to at least make his answers relevant to the question asked. Every time this Premier stands up in this House and when he cannot answer the question, he goes on about issues that are not related and refuses to address his answer to the question that was asked.

I ask you to once again ask this Premier, as you did previously, to make sure that his answer is relevant to the question that is asked, Mr. Speaker. Oh, and by the way, that, in essence, will help the decorum in this House.

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

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the way that decorum can be helped in the House is some attention to the matters of order, to decorum. What we are hearing is repetitive calls, rudeness from members opposite. They ask a question. Surely they can have the courtesy to have an answer.

Mr. Speaker: Order. On the point of order raised by the honourable Official Opposition House Leader, the question raised was to the relevancy of the

answer from the First Minister. We do allow leaders' latitude. The question was on health care, and the answer I was hearing from the First Minister was pertaining to health care. So the honourable member does not have a point of order.

The discussion about decorum, I think it is incumbent upon all members, all members to make sure that we do maintain decorum in this Assembly. We have the viewing public, we have guests in the gallery, and we have especially the students who come all the way here to learn a lesson about democracy and the workings of this Manitoba Legislative Assembly. I am sure each and every one of you would like them to leave here with a positive attitude. I ask the co-operation of all honourable members.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: Was the honourable First Minister concluded in his comments? The honourable First Minister had the floor.

Mr. Doer: Yes, and just to conclude, Mr. Speaker, I think it is incumbent on all members of this Chamber if they have not read the Sinclair report to please read it and heed the lessons that are contained within that report for members of all political parties and from all constituencies.

Victoria Hospital Maternity Ward Closure

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, I would suggest there would probably be more decorum in this House if the Premier (Mr. Doer) would live up to his promises that he makes.

The former Minister of Health said, and I quote, "It is not our policy to close obstetrics at Victoria," and went on to say that no amount of evidence produced by the WRHA would change his mind. The Premier said, "A promise made is a promise kept." Can the Minister of Health tell the women of south Winnipeg why he broke his promise?

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): In the years 1994-95 and '97-98 and years in between, there were about 2000-2100 births in Victoria General Hospital. Over that period of time, Mr. Speaker, the south end of Winnipeg has grown significantly. South St. Vital, southern Fort Garry, the eastern part of St. Boniface, they have all grown significantly and yet doctors

have chosen to have their patients deliver increasingly at St. Boniface Hospital and Health Sciences Centre, decreasing by 66 percent the number of births at Victoria General Hospital.

When the medical committees of those hospitals and the WRHA tell us that the continuing situation is unsafe and that there may be dire consequences for trying to maintain it, we have to go with patients' safety every time over what our hearts might want to do. Our heads have to be ruled by patients' safety.

* (14:00)

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, the former Minister of Health said, and I quote, "We want a community option for women with respect to maternity." Where is the community option for women in south Winnipeg now?

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote from the letter that our Deputy Minister wrote back to Doctor Postl when we learned of the crisis that he brought forward. "As you develop the plans for the women's health program at Victoria General Hospital," he writes, "as you develop these plans, it would be helpful to include stakeholders in consultations on a new approach to women's health at Victoria General Hospital. These consultations should begin immediately and include staff, patients and community members. The location of new services at Victoria General Hospital such as midwifery and the mature women's program should also form part of these discussions. Having an option for women who wish to give birth in a community hospital continues to be a goal of Manitoba Health." I will table these letters.

Mr. Speaker, we will continue to work to provide a community option and safe action—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: If there continues to be a community option, then why did they close the wards? This is ridiculous. Mr. Speaker, this NDP government promised not to close the maternity ward at Victoria Hospital. It is this government's failure to recruit and retain health care professionals that forced this ward to close. Is the NDP government's solution to dealing with their inability to manage and staff hospitals simply to close wards?

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, message to the opposition; 139 more doctors are today practising in Manitoba

than there were in 1999. In 1999, there were 116 doctors less practising in Manitoba than there were in 1990. Message to the opposition; today there are 879 more nurses registered at our nursing registry than there were in 1999. Message to the opposition; during their time in the 1990s, there were 1584 nurses lost to the profession. We are increasing the medical school. We have increased nursing enrolment. We have increased training for LPNs. We will continue to build the medical personnel in this province.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I would like to, once again, after I do not know how many times, ask all honourable members for their co-operation. I need to be able to hear the questions. I need to be able to hear the answers. Also the members and the guests we have in the gallery and the viewing public would like to hear the questions and the answers. That is why they come down and that is why they tune in. I, once again, ask the co-operation of all honourable members, please.

Victoria Hospital Maternity Ward Closure

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): Mr. Speaker, sadly the closure of the maternity ward at the Victoria General Hospital is a story of safety compromise, safety compromise by chronic and systematic underfunding of the maternity ward by this government. What this government does not tell us is that in 1998, when there were over 2100 births, there were also over 18 beds. They now budget for 800 births and only fund 8 beds. In 1998, citizens and mothers and families in south Winnipeg could go to the Victoria General Hospital knowing that they would be able to deliver their babies safely.

Mr. Speaker, what has happened? What has this NDP government done to make this situation unsafe today? It was safe in 1998. Why has it become unsafe on your watch?

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, first of all, the hospital does its budget on the basis of the volume of patients that they are seeing in their orthopedic area, in their general surgery area, in their maternity area, in psychiatry and general medicine. They present the budget to the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. It is not the other way around. That is the first thing.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I would just like the member opposite who was elected somewhat more

recently than perhaps others over there, to remember that it was, I believe, in 1996-97 or 1997-98, that they closed the obstetrics ward at Grace General Hospital because the volumes were low.

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, once again this minister's comments are irrelevant. This is a minister who is taking action based on a recommendation from a doctor, a bureaucrat of the WRHA who is leaving for B.C. He is not even going to be here.

Mr. Speaker, the Romanow report was clear. In order to solve the health care crisis, this minister has a responsibility to listen to the front-line workers, to listen to the nurses who staff that ward and deliver these services day in and day out. They have a solution. They have a number of solutions.

I would ask this minister to explain to them, and to explain to everybody in this province, why he refuses to listen to the solutions provided by front-line health care providers. The member should go to the hospital. He should have the courtesy to meet with the nurses and listen to the solutions they can provide him to keep this ward open, to keep these services available.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, first of all, Victoria is my community hospital, and I had my gall bladder out there this past July. My daughter was born at Victoria Hospital. When my middle son compressed the fracture in his back, he was treated at Victoria Hospital.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. If this is going to continue, maybe we should recess and get our thoughts back together, because we cannot hear. I mention again, if somebody breaches a rule, you expect me to make a ruling. How can I do that when I cannot even hear the person that has the floor? Let us have some decorum in the House. I ask the co-operation of all honourable members. The honourable Minister of Health has the floor.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, the Victoria General Hospital perinatal, morbidity and mortality committee, which as far as I know is a committee of a number of doctors including staff that are being referred to by members opposite, made the motion which sent a memo to Mr. Ray Racette, the president and CEO, and to Duncan Scurrah, who is the Chief

Medical Officer, indicating their profound concern about patient safety in regard to the births at their own hospital.

This was not our decision. It was not our wish. It is a medical decision based on recommendations from the board of Victoria, the medical committee of Victoria and the medical committee of the WRHA, Mr. Speaker. We must listen to their advice. Other governments have failed to listen to medical advice in regard to patient safety and too many people paid a penalty for that failure.

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, only this minister would have the gall to compare his gall bladder operation to birthing services for women in south Winnipeg.

The matter is simple. In five years, with the growth in that area, you are going to have to rebuild the maternity ward in that hospital in any event. Why do you not just do the right thing now? Get down there tomorrow. Listen to the nurses. Get the viable solutions. Get the proper funding. Have the proper number of beds in that hospital and keep the ward open. Do as Romanow suggested, sir. Go there and listen to the nurses and do it soon.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, I think if you look at the statistics for the city of Winnipeg over the last 10 years, you will see that the fastest growing area of Winnipeg was the southwest quadrant. During that same time, women and doctors who have chosen to use Victoria Hospital as their place for birth have plummeted by two thirds, 66 percent, and it is still going down.

So, Victoria Hospital, like Health Sciences and St. Boniface Hospital, serves people who choose to have admitting privileges there and who use that hospital. Doctors and their patients have chosen overwhelmingly to move to Health Sciences and to St. Boniface. The rapid growth in that area of the city, in fact, as a city we have had fewer births over the last 10 years, and we are able to accommodate those births at the two tertiary care facilities that we have.

* (14:10)

Victoria Hospital Maternity Ward Closure

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Manitobans and women in Winnipeg are not going to buy that

argument from the Minister of Health, Mr. Speaker. When the government funds 18 beds and reduces that funding to 8 obstetrics beds, that means fewer women can go to Victoria to have their babies.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health this week, yesterday, showed absolute disdain for the front-line workers at Victoria Hospital, mostly women, when they had to find about the closure of their unit where they worked on the radio.

Mr. Speaker, my question is very simple to the Minister of Health. Did he show the same disdain to the Member for Riel (Ms. Melnick), to the Member for Fort Garry (Ms. Irvin-Ross), to the Member for Seine River (Ms. Oswald), to the Member for St. Norbert (Ms. Brick), the women in his caucus? Did he show the same disdain and did they find out on the radio?

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, yesterday afternoon the vice-president of nursing for WRHA met with the nurses at Victoria Hospital. We understand that this is a difficult time for any professional person who is working in this setting, and I regret that they did learn from the radio station. It was not our plan. It was not WRHA's plan. It certainly was not respectful of the front-line workers, and we have conveyed that concern. I believe that they do deserve the respect to have that kind of meeting prior to those sorts of things becoming public. It was not our choice to have it happen that way.

Mrs. Mitchelson: The last time I heard, the buck stopped in the minister's office, the Minister responsible for Health.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister of Health what consultation he had with the Member for Riel, the Member for Fort Garry, the Member for Seine River, the Member for St. Norbert, the women in his caucus who represent that area of the city of Winnipeg. What consultation did he have, and what was the advice that they gave him before he made the decision to close obstetrics at Victoria Hospital?

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, the members of the constituencies named have, themselves, met with members of the Victoria General Hospital. They met with Mr. Racette. They met with other professionals there. They are fully apprised of the issues because

they do their constituency work, and they represent their constituents very well.

Secondly—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Once again, I am asking the members for their co-operation. I do not know what I can say. I do not know how many ways I can say it. I need to be able to hear the questions. I need to be able to hear the answers. If someone breached the rule and I did not act on it, you would be the first to jump all over me, and rightfully so. I accept that, but I need to be able to hear the person who has the floor.

Once again, I am pleading with you this time. Once again, I am asking for your co-operation. If you are not interested in the questions and answers that is entirely up to you, but I need to be able to hear the questions, and I need to be able to hear the answers. So, once again, I am asking for the co-operation of all members, please.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, I believe that all members should have at the forefront of their minds the safety of patients. That has been the concern that has been expressed to us. It has been expressed to various members of our caucus by people in the south end and responsible at Victoria General Hospital. We believe that, above all things, patient safety has to be the deciding consideration no matter what we might like to do. We will continue to have a community birthing option, and we are working to have the mature women's program and a midwifery option in south Winnipeg. We are committed to seeing women still able to have that community option, but we are overall committed to patient safety first, second and last.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Speaker, I cannot figure this out. They are going to take obstetrics away to bring it back again someday. What sense does that make?

My question is for the Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Oswald). I wonder if the Minister of Healthy Living could indicate to us what consultation she had with her Minister of Health and with her colleagues that represent Fort Garry, St. Norbert and Riel. Were they brought into the discussion around the closure of obstetrics at their community hospital? Did they agree with the

Minister of Health's decision? What is her position? What consultation did she do with her colleagues?

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, as is the case with, I think, all women who have been mothers or who are planning to be mothers, the safety of their newborn, the safety of their own health and the quality of the services that they can count on with assurance is at the forefront of their minds whether they are going through their first pregnancy or whether they are a grandmother. They are concerned about patient safety. That is what has been raised here, the ability of our medical system to ensure that every mother and every newborn has the best possible outcome to that birth process. When the doctors and the administration of our health system tell us we are moving into territory that is risky, then we must act. Governments that fail to act in those kinds of situations can, I think, be held very accountable for that failure. We will not fail in that regard.

Victoria Hospital Maternity Ward Closure

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, safety is, indeed, an issue on this topic. For years, I was a nursing supervisor in labour and delivery and on the maternity ward at St. Boniface Hospital. I know, for a fact, there were times when the maternity beds at St. Boniface Hospital were full. I also know that a few years ago the maternity beds at the Health Sciences were full, and they were almost prepared to send labouring moms to Saskatoon.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister of Health, when the beds at Health Sciences and St. B are full, where will moms who are in labour, where will they go when those beds are full and the safety valve at the Victoria Hospital is no longer there.

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): When I was told of this problem, Mr. Speaker, one of my first questions was are you absolutely sure that we have the capacity to make sure that no woman will be put at risk because of a capacity issue. I have been assured both by the current director, Doctor Heywood, and by the director and CEO of the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, that there has never been a time in Winnipeg when all of the maternity wards were full and when there was such a crisis. I have been assured that this will not happen,

and I will hold the system accountable for that assurance.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, I know for a fact as a nursing supervisor that those situations have happened. A few years ago there was a doctor that was so concerned that all the beds in this city were full that she called a news conference with me to deal with this very situation. She was afraid that there were moms and babies put into danger. I will tell you what is going to happen. If they are not flown to Saskatoon, moms who are already in the hospital are going to be discharged too early, and they are going to be put at risk because they are not ready to go home.

I would like to ask this Minister of Health this. How many moms are they prepared to put at risk by too early of a discharge from hospital?

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, the member, as a nurse, will know that over the last 20 years women have been able to move home much more quickly because of dramatic changes in the practice, in the health practices, in the ability of our communities to support moms.

That said, Mr. Speaker, no woman and no baby will be put at risk by this government. We will accept medical advice. We will move to strengthen our services. We have increased funding by 6.3 percent this year to our health care system. There are more doctors. There are more nurses. There are extended-practice nurses. We will repair the damage that was made when 1580 nurses left our system, 119 doctors left our system during what is described as the dark days of the 1990s.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, I know of a mom who was sent home too early from a hospital and her baby was not ready to go home. They were kicked out anyway because there was not enough room at the hospital for incoming moms. That baby got very, very sick at home. It does happen. I do not know if this Minister of Health has ever held a dead baby in his arms. As a nursing supervisor on maternity I have held a dead baby in my arms, and I would not wish that on another human being ever again.

I would like to ask this Minister of Health if he will guarantee that this closure of a maternity ward at Victoria Hospital will not put moms and babies in this city at further risk.

Mr. Sale: I would say to the member opposite, if she has a particular incident, I ask her to do what we have always asked members to do. Bring it to my attention in a way that I can do something about it, and I will find out what the circumstances were.

Secondly, there were babies who died in the 1990s in the cardiac unit because warnings were not heeded. We do not want that to happen again, Mr. Speaker, ever.

*(14:20)

Victoria Hospital Maternity Ward Closure

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, since '99, there has been \$1.3 billion more spent on health care on an annual basis in this province. With all that money flowing into health, why can this NDP not keep the maternity ward open? The money is there. I ask the Minister of Finance why has he not, and the members from St. Norbert, Riel, Fort Garry and Seine River, why have they not spoken up and forced the Minister of Health to keep the ward open.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I think we should be clear on what the member opposite is asking here. He is asking for a political decision to be made against the advice of health professionals.

Members opposite may have the arrogance to assume they know more than the health professionals. We do not. We listen to our health professionals, and we do what is in the interest of patient safety.

Mr. Hawranik: In spite of record high revenues, the maternity ward at Victoria General Hospital is closing. A vote for this budget is a vote to close the maternity ward at the Victoria General Hospital.

Is the Minister of Finance going to force the members from St. Norbert, Riel, Fort Garry and Seine River to vote for this budget and close the maternity ward?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the member can answer his own question. If he was so lucky as to be the Minister of Finance, would he force the Minister of Health to ignore medical advice? Would he force

the Minister of Health to ignore the advice of doctors? If he did, he would be negligent—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Selinger: —and he should never be elected again.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Hawranik: —to support the budget tomorrow. On this side of the House, we cannot vote for a budget that closes the maternity ward at the Victoria General Hospital. We cannot do that.

I ask the Minister of Finance how can the members from St. Norbert, Riel, Fort Garry and Seine River vote the closing of the maternity ward by voting for this budget.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, they complain about too much spending. Then, when they get up today, they want more spending.

There will be better health care because we have trained more nurses. There will be better health care because we have trained and retained more doctors. There will be better health care because we put more money into all of our facilities, but we will not ignore medical advice. Members opposite may think that they know better than the health professionals. That is why they are in the opposition.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: Is the honourable Member for Carman up on a point of order?

Mr. Denis Rocan (Carman): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is it a point of order?

Mr. Rocan: I am up on a point of order. I contemplated on a matter of privilege, Mr. Speaker, but I think this issue should be able to be resolved in an easy, forthright manner.

Mr. Speaker, your job is extremely difficult, as I know. You make reference this afternoon about

decorum in the House, having to hear questions and answers.

Mr. Speaker, when you make reference to decorum and you talk about the young children in the gallery, I am not reflecting on you, Sir, but when we talk about decorum, certain things do apply, and the one thing that irks me here today is that I have just noticed the Member for Wellington (Mr. Santos), who has sheathed his knife.

Now when we start carrying weapons in the Chamber, Sir, I find that of grave concern. Now this is a part of your responsibility through the Sergeant-at-Arms. I do not believe this is a place for anybody to sheath a knife. I could understand a letter opener. I can understand a toenail clipper. I can understand these things, but when you start sheathing a knife, I have a problem because a knife is quite visible, Sir. I am asking you, Sir, in a manner in which you can resolve the situation, I would be ready to accept that.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised, if the honourable Member for Wellington, any member in the Chamber, has a weapon, please give it to the page or to security. For the clarification—here, bring it here. For the information of all honourable members, the honourable Member for Carman has an excellent point. We do not allow weapons of any kind into the Chamber, and in the future I hope we never have to address this again.

Children in Care Shelter Safety

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, knives in the Chamber, guns in apartments under Child and Family Services supervision, all this should not happen.

Last month, Preston Martin, a young boy who had been in the care of Child and Family Services, was shot to death by another child in the care of Child and Family Services. The tragic event occurred because there were children in unsafe conditions with access to a sawed-off shotgun. Both of the boys involved in this tragedy were from northern Manitoba but they, like countless others, were shipped to Winnipeg because of a severe lack of services in the North.

I ask the Minister of Family Services this. How many spaces are currently available in places like

The Pas, Moose Lake and Flin Flon for a child like Preston Martin if he were alive today and needed help?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, again, we are dealing with a very serious situation and must respect the seriousness of this situation. The Province funds 32 of the 68 beds currently available in the North. Again, we are looking at the roll-out of the Child Welfare Initiative.

Another initiative that we have is the needs assessment. Currently we are assessing the needs of children in care throughout the province, the resources that they will be needing and the locations in which they will be needing it. When we get the report on that we will be looking at how to better provide services for our children in care throughout this province.

Mr. Gerrard: But how many beds are available today? I suspect that there are a lot more than 58 children needing help.

I would ask this. One year ago the Child Advocate gave this government a scathing report, making 67 recommendations around major problems in the CFS shelter system. A major concern of the Child Advocate was the practice of placing children in care in unsafe neighbourhoods. Putting children in care in unsafe neighbourhoods was deemed totally unacceptable because of the criminal activity, the gang activity, the drug trafficking and the adult sex trade in such places.

I ask the minister this. How many children in her department's care are still living in unsafe neighbourhoods because she has not acted to prevent it?

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Speaker, as minister, I accepted the report of the Children's Advocate. We immediately struck an implementation team. That implementation team reviewed all of the recommendations. The recommendations were prioritized. We are working through those recommendations one by one.

Again, I want to refer to this government's approach of working with the people of the First Nations, through the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry Child Welfare Initiative that had not been worked on

during the first 10 years of its completion through the nineties. This is a process that can take a considerable amount of time, Mr. Speaker, because when you work in real consultation and when you work towards common goals—

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for River Heights.

*(14:30)

Mr. Gerrard: A moment ago, we had the Premier (Mr. Doer) saying they closed Victoria maternity beds in one day because it was deemed unsafe, but this minister in one year has not acted.

Mr. Speaker, how many more children will die because this minister does not act to ensure children in CFS care are placed in safe neighbourhoods? Millions of dollars were provided by the minister's department to B & L Homes to look after vulnerable children. With all that money, did B & L Homes put Preston Martin in an unsafe neighbourhood?

I ask the minister this. Did she ever issue a directive to B & L Homes to stop putting children in unsafe neighbourhoods?

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Speaker, as I hope the member well knows, we cannot discuss individual cases in the House. That is actually against The Child and Family Services Act. We have a signed service purchase agreement with B & L Homes. We have reinstated the Quality Assurance Program that, unfortunately, was cancelled in the late nineties.

We have also brought back the Agency Accountability Unit to monitor. We are also, as I had mentioned a few moments ago, going through a needs assessment throughout the whole province, Mr. Speaker.

We are very concerned about children in care in this province. We are working very closely through the Children's Advocate's report, through the recommendations, to ensure that we are doing everything we can to place children who are in care in safe areas.

Mr. Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: Is the honourable member up on a point of order?

An Honourable Member: Yes, I am, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I am quite troubled by the incident that occurred in the House today.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very serious issue to us and I think to all members of the Chamber. Not to wish to debate this in this forum, I am wondering if it would be possible for the Government House Leader (Mr. Mackintosh), myself and yourself, as Speaker, to adjourn for 10 minutes to discuss this matter because I do believe this is a very serious issue.

Mr. Speaker: What matter?

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, I am speaking about the matter that was raised as a point of order by the member from Carman. I do not think I need to elaborate much more than that.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): It is my understanding that the matter has been dealt with, but if there are further matters on the mind of the member opposite, I think we should arrange some time perhaps this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, when it is your time to leave the Chair.

An Honourable Member: You want to have a debate?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. For a suggestion, a point of order, matters of privilege are very serious. So the request was to recess the House for the Speaker and the House leaders to meet. If the House is willing, I would be more than willing to meet with the House leaders pertaining to this. If it is only the three of us, we have members to fill the Chair to keep the business of the House running at the same time while we meet because I do not know how long the meeting will go. It could go five minutes, it could go an hour, it could go three hours. I do not know. The request came from the honourable Member for Russell. I would ask the honourable members if that would be acceptable to the House. The honourable Member for Russell was getting up for a clarification.

Mr. Derkach: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I do not want to get into this in the House. I think it is a matter that

we need to discuss in your Chamber, but if we allow the House to continue, that means that the Deputy Speaker takes the Chair. To that extent, I am asking that there be an adjournment of the House for 10 or 15 minutes to deal with this matter.

Mr. Speaker: For clarification of all members, this specific incident involves a specific member. We have other deputy speakers. I would not at this point ask the member that is involved in this to take the Chair until this gets resolved. I would request one of the other deputies to do that. The reason I suggest that is that way the House could continue functioning while we have our conversation, and if there is a result the House has to deal with, then I will come back from that meeting and put it to the House if that is what it warrants.

Order. The honourable member for Russell still has the floor if he chooses.

Mr. Derkach: Well, Mr. Speaker, I do not want to prolong the debate, but this is a serious matter. We only have one Deputy Speaker who has been appointed. We have acting deputy speakers, but in the case of running the House, in my view, we need to pause and put this matter to at least a preliminary discussion because of the severity of the issue. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Inkster, on the same point of order?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): On the same point of order, Mr. Speaker. We, too, in essence see the very seriousness of this issue as you have when you quickly acquired the knife that was in question. I support the Opposition House Leader, suggesting that we in fact recess, primarily because I would add to his comments that my Leader has asked that I be present for that meeting. I am the first one scheduled to speak to the budget motion, so I would not be able to be in attendance at that meeting.

Mr. Speaker: Well, according to our legislative guidelines, I was only offering some advice to the House, but the request was to ask for a recess, and it is my obligation to put it to the House. It is up to the House to decide, but I was just offering some advice for some alternatives, but the request has been made to ask the House if the House is willing to recess for us to go to a meeting and, to be fair, if it is allowed, because I really do not know how long it is going to

take, that we would agree to ring the bells for one minute prior to assembly to be fair to the members.

Is it the will of the House for us to recess until we have this issue resolved? Is it the will of the House? *[Agreed]*

There has been agreement, so the House will now recess. We will reconvene at the call of the Chair. I cannot put a time limit to it because I do not know how long it will take, but the members be aware that the bells will ring one minute prior to the House reconvening. Okay? So this House is now recessed.

The House recessed at 2:39 p.m.

The House resumed at 3:01 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Order. We will reconvene the House.

Time for Oral Questions had expired and, next, we will move to Members' Statements.

* (15:00)

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Child Sexual Exploitation

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, I am sure all of my honoured colleagues will agree that, regardless of political affiliation, we all value the safety and well-being of children. We want our children to live without fear from sexual predators who would lure or exploit them. I am proud to say that many dedicated individuals in Canada are fighting to protect young people from sexual exploitation. I was one of them for 12 years as a volunteer, then as executive director of Child Find Manitoba.

On February 18, I was invited to hear Deborah Palmer share her experiences as a child-bride survivor and a child's rights advocate. Ms. Palmer, a one-time member of a polygamist community in Bountiful, B.C., spoke about how at 15 years old, she became the sixth wife to a 57-year-old man and stepmother to his 32 children, most of whom were older than her. Ms. Palmer left Bountiful with her eight children after 34 years and now speaks out to

educate the public. Among Ms. Palmer's suggestions for change, she encouraged the creation of networks of support for survivors and educating children about their choices. I want to thank and applaud Ms. Palmer for her courage in telling her story and her commitment in working with other survivors.

Mr. Speaker, this event was also host to an important, first real step to real, meaningful change. A panel was held to discuss the federal Bill C-2, attended by Vic Toews, Manitoba's Attorney-General, Judy Wasylycia-Leis, David Matas and Anita Neville. The issue of raising the age of consent from the current age of 14 years old to 16 years old was debated. I feel that the federal bill is weak and fails to protect children. I was also very disturbed to hear the Liberal government representative on the panel dismiss many of these concerns.

Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate and express my gratitude to Beyond Borders, Child Find Manitoba, Soroptimist International of Winnipeg, United Nations development fund of Manitoba, the Council of Women of Winnipeg and the Provincial Council of Women of Manitoba, all of their staff, volunteers and supporters for organizing this event and their continued fight against child sexual exploitation. We can and should make a difference in the lives of children. They have a right to be safe. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before I recognize the honourable Member for The Maples, I just wanted to update the House. We had a meeting in my office, and we need to get further information, so we will be having a further meeting. When the decision is made, we will bring that to the House for the information of all honourable members.

Seven Oaks General Hospital

Mr. Cris Aglugub (The Maples): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to congratulate Seven Oaks General Hospital for being chosen as one of Canada's top 100 employers for the year 2004. I want to extend my welcome to the chief executive officer, Mr. Mark Nesar, chairman of the board, Mr. Bob Minaker and Mr. Doug Chervinski, the chief human resource officer from the Seven Oaks General Hospital. They are here today in the public gallery.

Seven Oaks General Hospital was one of only two Canadian hospitals which placed in the top 100

employers list published annually by Mediacorp Canada. Last year's placing is the result of good cooperation between board members, management and staff working to provide a healthy and friendly work environment. The hospital was built in 1981, and will be celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2006.

Mr. Speaker, there are also a number of initiatives that made Seven Oaks one of Canada's top 100 employers. This includes an on-site workers' wellness program and health centre, an active social committee, an employee newsletter and an atmosphere that encourages staff career training through career development assistance and bursaries.

The hospital also recently opened a new on-site day care for children of employees working at the hospital. Employees are also encouraged to volunteer for local events and participate and fundraise for local charities.

Mr. Speaker, Seven Oaks General Hospital is an important institution in our community. It provides emergency and essential medical services, not only for the residents of The Maples, but also for the surrounding community in the northwest part of the city.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the chief executive office, Mark Nesar, for his leadership and congratulate the dedicated staff of Seven Oaks General Hospital for making the hospital one of Canada's top 100 employers for 2004. As the MLA for The Maples, I wish them continued success.

Victoria Hospital Maternity Ward

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): Mr. Speaker, it is a sad day, a sad occasion today when I rise to put some words on the record regarding the deplorable situation of seeing the closure of the maternity ward at the Victoria Hospital. This is a community hospital, a hospital that does continue to provide tremendous service to families and individuals in south Winnipeg, and it is very unfortunate that expectant mothers and their loved ones and spouses will not be able to rely on the excellent services that have been provided in the past by the Victoria General Hospital when it comes to giving birth.

It is a situation that has been brought about by the lack of vision of the NDP government, by their

lack of the ability to see the need in this region of the city to fund this maternity ward properly. This is a promise that was made prior to the last election by this government, by their Health Minister. I find it particularly disturbing that less than two years after they made that election promise, they have decided to allow a bureaucratic decision that was made without any consultation with the front-line workers, without any consultation with the nurses who operate day in and day out in this ward.

Mr. Speaker, this government has demonstrated clearly that they have no vision for the future. This is the fastest-growing area in the city of Winnipeg. It is being filled, the houses are being filled, with young families, the people who are expecting to raise their families in the community, to have larger families and to have more babies. Unfortunately, now there will not be a service provided to them in this community with regard to their needs for maternity.

Mr. Speaker, this is a slap in the face and an insult to all women in Manitoba, to all women in this region. I would urge this government, I would urge the member from Fort Garry, the member from St. Norbert, the member from Seine River, the member from Riel, even the member from St. Vital, whose constituents have used these services in the past, to stand up for these individuals within their caucus, to bring that message clearly to their Cabinet that the maternity ward at the Victoria Hospital should be kept open.

Immigration

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today and offer a few comments and share some stories with my colleagues here in the House about the success of our provincial immigration strategy and how that is reflected in my constituency of Wolseley.

As you may well be aware, Mr. Speaker, immigration, internationally to our province, has doubled since our government took power in 1999. I have had the enormous privilege of attending numerous citizenship ceremonies recently, where people from all over the world, multiple countries, multiple regions within countries, have come, not just to Canada, but have chosen Manitoba and Winnipeg as their new home to raise their families and to have their careers and to build community.

* (15:10)

Just over the weekend I attended a remarkable celebration with the Sudanese community, which was celebrating the peace accord signed in Kenya in January of this year, ending a decades-long civil war that saw two million people die and millions more displaced. Many of those people, of course, were directly affected by that conflict and all of us applaud the work that they have done to reach peace between the different factions. Now many of them, I am sure, will look forward to the opportunity to return home, and many others will stay here and support their countrymen back home with every opportunity that they can.

Immigrants have a long history in our province, Mr. Speaker, as we all know. They bring so many talents, so many skills and so much energy to our province. I think we are all indebted to them for choosing us as the place where they want to live. I also want to commend our provincial Immigration Minister for the outstanding job that she is doing making Manitoba a national leader on the immigration front. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Teachers' Pension Benefits

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, day after day I receive many letters, e-mails and calls from teachers from all over Manitoba. Teachers have made a major contribution to our province, educating our children and preparing them for their future. Yet for days, months and years, the NDP government has refused to meet with Manitoba teachers to resolve a number of outstanding issues with their pensions.

Mr. Speaker, a teacher wrote to me recently, "I have never regretted the countless hours of my personal time and resources I have devoted to teaching. In return, all I have ever really expected was to be compensated and treated fairly by my employer."

He goes on to say, "I am writing you to request you encourage the provincial government to address the concerns over teachers' pensions. I am aware that teachers are retiring earlier and living longer and that changes need to be made to maintain pension benefits. I am prepared to support an increase in teachers' premiums to help ensure the plan remains healthy. I ask that the provincial government address teachers' concerns regarding the pension, and also

take an active role, taking the necessary steps to ensure a healthy teachers' pension for the future. Education is the cornerstone of a vibrant and healthy society. How can we expect to attract our best and brightest into the teaching field if we do not provide adequate compensation?"

Mr. Speaker, this teacher goes on to hope that the government will act on this issue as soon as possible. As MLA for River Heights and Leader of the Liberal Party, I call on the government to act in response to the teacher's concerns.

I would add, Mr. Speaker, that he goes on to say, "I am sorry that I work in the River East Transcona School Division, which once was on the cutting edge of my profession and where teachers were treated with respect. As you may be aware, River East Transcona School Division is now three years behind in settling our contracts."

It is not a good situation. It needs to be addressed. We deplore that we have a government which has not been addressing teachers' issues adequately.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

ADJOURNED DEBATE (Seventh Day of Debate)

Mr. Speaker: Resume debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) and the proposed motion of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Murray), in amendment thereto, and the proposed motion of the honourable Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), in amendment thereto, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Inkster, who has 29 minutes remaining.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to be able to stand and give a few words in regard to what, I am sure, there is just not enough time adequate to give the type of speech I would like to be able to give, but, at the very least, put a few words on the record in regard to concerns that I have with respect to this budget.

Mr. Speaker, the very first point I would like to emphasize is the fact that, when this government had taken office, the amount of money that government

was spending at that time was in and around \$6 billion. In six relatively short years, we have seen government spending increase by over \$2 billion. What I have found is that, when you talk about that size of money, it is pretty hard for most people to comprehend just how much money that really is.

In a discussion that I have had with a couple of people, Mr. Speaker, what I had found was, in an attempt to try to get a better sense of just how much \$2 billion is, I went and looked at our revenues and where does the government get its money from. I used this as an example in Question Period. I added up what most Manitobans are very familiar with, those being our general revenue taxes such as, our No. 1, the individual income tax. That is a considerable amount of money, so I put that one to the side. It does not even match that \$2 billion. It falls well short of the \$2 billion in itself. So, if the government needed to raise \$2 billion, even the amount of income tax it is collecting today would not come close to meeting that amount of money.

Well, what about the other sources of revenue that government collects, Mr. Speaker? If you were to take the retail sales tax, the gasoline tax, the alcohol tax, the tobacco tax and all the money that we generate out of Manitoba Lotteries, and you were to add it all up, you will still find it does not hit that \$2 billion that this government has spent in excess of how much money it was spending back in 1999.

Mr. Speaker, in my view, that is a phenomenal amount of money. I do not believe Manitobans, as a whole, really have an understanding of to what degree this government spends money. I discussed the issue with my leader and the first comment that came from my leader was, "Well, spend, spend, spend all this money, but where are the results?" What are the tangible results that we see when you see that kind of expenditure?

You watch Question Period today, or you see the issue of the Victoria Hospital. That is an important issue to me, because back, I guess it would be in 1998, there was a lot of controversy with the Seven Oaks and the Misericordia. There were huge rallies. There were rallies inside this Legislature and there were rallies inside our communities to save community hospital facilities.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chomiak, or I should say the member from Kildonan, I withdraw the name.

The member from Kildonan, the former Minister of Health, stood side by side with me, whether it was in the communities, or whether it was inside the Legislature on the stairs, and we addressed thousands of people over a relatively short time span. We talked about the importance of community, hospitals and delivering services into those communities. So, I look at it and I say, "Well, look, as a government they have spent over \$2 billion since 1999, and today they want to close down obstetrics in one of these community hospitals." I cannot help but reflect, in terms of what would be the then-Minister of Health, or not the then-Minister of Health, the then-critic, the former Minister of Health, the member from Kildonan, would have said if he was still in opposition, let alone the Premier (Mr. Doer), when he was Leader of the Official Opposition.

They would never ever have accepted a government closing down the obstetrics in the Victoria Hospital. I met with all sorts of professionals and bureaucrats within the health care system. I heard all sorts of arguments as to why certain things should be done. Well, Mr. Speaker, it was a decision by the government of the day for the Seven Oaks Hospital to keep emergency services open. This government is very much aware of that issue. This government should be doing what is right in dealing with the obstetrics at the Victoria Hospital.

The current Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) and the Premier (Mr. Doer) say, "Well, things have changed and it is a safety issue." If they would have put in place the plan to ensure that things would have been good, we would not have those safety issues today. In fact, if they were strictly safety issues, why not deal with the safety issues? You do not have to close down obstetrics. The sad thing is that this government knows that. If this government wants, this government can have obstetrics at Victoria Hospital.

Let there be no doubt that this is a decision by this government to close down obstetrics. It has absolutely nothing to do with safety—absolutely nothing to do with safety. They are buying hook, line, and sinker recommendations which go against the whole concept of community hospitals.

* (15:20)

That is the debate that we were having back in 1998 when I was standing side by side with the

member from Kildonan advocating for the benefits of community hospitals and criticizing the government of the day back then, Mr. Speaker. How things have changed. Where was the member from St. Norbert that has been pointed out, or Fort Garry? Why were they not saying something? This facility should be there, and the government is wrong in closing it.

What I am asking them to do, is to reflect in terms of the thousands of people who came to the Manitoba Legislature back in 1998 when they advocated the importance of community hospitals. It is wrong for them to close down the Victoria obstetrics, and it is not too late to reverse the decision.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

The Conservatives reversed it when it came to Seven Oaks. They saw the light on that. Why does the member from Kildonan not go to the Premier, the Minister of Health? Why does the member from St. Norbert, not go to the Minister of Health? This is a bad decision, and it is a decision that has to be reversed. It is either you believe in community hospitals and community health delivery, or you do not.

I can tell you if you do not reverse the decision, I would suggest to you that you will see postcards coming to your government in the future. You will see public meetings on this issue. The public, as a whole, supports community hospitals and does not support the action that is being suggested by these bureaucrats or the action that this government has taken in supporting a recommendation that carries no credibility whatsoever, Madam Acting Speaker.

The other issue that I wanted to address is when we talk about that \$2 billion, we talk about crime in our communities, and I have raised this issue. So much money, where are you spending it? Where are the results? I raised it during Question Period, whether it is child prostitution, automobile theft, gang issues. It is a litany, a litany of things.

Crime is getting worse in the province of Manitoba, and all this minister has to say is that we will have more police officers. Madam Acting Speaker, more police officers is not the answer. We need to support our current police officers. If the

Minister of Justice (Mr. Mackintosh) were to talk to some of our police officers, possibly off the record, you will find that is, in fact, the case. Get them out of the courtrooms. Free up the paperwork. How does someone who is 16 years old steal 15 cars and not have to do any time whether it is in a juvenile home or it is in some sort of foster care facility? *[interjection]*

Do not blame Ottawa. The member from Minto wants to blame Ottawa. Manitoba is the worst. There is no province that even comes close to the province of Manitoba, and there are other provinces that have the same sort of social situations that we have. You cannot constantly blame Ottawa, and that is the problem with this government. They have a problem. Every issue that portrays any sort of negative light whatsoever, the first response of this government is that it is Ottawa's fault. Blame Ottawa. When it comes to vehicle theft in the city of Winnipeg, over 13 000 last year, take the responsibility. The blame is not Ottawa. Sure, Ottawa could be doing some more things, but so could this government.

This government is failing Manitobans. It is not dealing with crime. Giving 20 or 22 or 23 more City of Winnipeg police officers means very little when you look at the larger picture and in the larger picture that \$2 billion-plus of additional expenditures since 1999 has done absolutely nothing.

Let us move on in terms of accountability. This is a Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), who has misled, intentionally misled Manitobans, Madam Acting Speaker. This is something in which the provincial auditor has indicated. That is the truth. It is not necessarily my words. The provincial auditor has indicated that the government, by failure of omission is not allowing—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Korzeniowski): Order, please.

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines): Madam Acting Speaker, the member in his speech, I overheard the words "intentionally misled." I understand by *Beauchesne* that those words "intentionally misled" are inappropriate and unparliamentary, and I would like the member to withdraw those to make sure that we have appropriate decorum within the House.

Mr. Lamoureux: In order to be able to continue with my remarks, I will withdraw any remarks that the minister feels might have been inappropriate. If I can continue, Madam Acting Speaker, the provincial auditor—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Korzeniowski): Thank you for your withdrawal. Please continue.

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Acting Speaker, this government, the Doer government has given Manitobans the impression that we had a \$13-million surplus in 2004.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

The provincial auditor has said that we had in excess of a \$600-million deficit. That is a pretty huge gap, and the provincial auditor is saying it is a gap of integrity, and there is no integrity in this government. When you talk about the difference, the provincial auditor also indicates that even the MLAs and others, maybe, have not done the job that they should have done, that we should have been doing more to try to make Manitobans aware of the fact that we did have a deficit, not a surplus.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I give tremendous credit for the Auditor to be able to make a report of this nature. I am sure it would not have been easy, but it is an apolitical office. It is interesting when we had the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) the other day stand up and during questions and answers indicate that, well, the budget numbers that he had in his document were not necessarily properly allocated. Well, I do not even have to read between lines. If that is the case, what we might have had before us last year was a budget that was a falsified document. There is no credibility within that document.

Mr. Speaker, there is a question of integrity. What is the most important thing? The responsibility this government has is presenting an accurate budget inside this Legislature. One has to question the value of this minister's ability to be able to bring in a budget that has any credibility whatsoever.

These are not issues, as I say, that come from me or the Manitoba Liberal Party. These are issues that the provincial auditor raises, and I share the concerns, because, in my opinion, I think the majority of Manitobans believe that the government has given them all sorts of wonderful things. They

have given tax breaks and all this kind of stuff and there is a surplus, and we do not necessarily need to be worried.

Well, Mr. Speaker, nothing can be further from reality. In reality, when the economy is doing well, you do not go and spend \$2-billion plus and expect that there are not going to be any long-term ramifications if the economy starts to turn downward. That \$2 billion, I do not know how you can justify it. You know, members of the Liberal Party often accuse me of being a little too far to the left. Well, I can appreciate that, because, you know what, one of the comments I said is that it is interesting how a New Democratic government can give corporate tax relief when we have so many children in poverty.

*(15:30)

They say, well, Kevin, you had better not say that, so I do not know if I can get Hansard to retract that. The point is, Mr. Speaker, that this is a government that tries to give a totally different image. The perception is so out of whack with reality. It really and truly is. You would think things are wonderful in health care. You have given so much more money on health care, you would think that everything was rosy in health care, but yet they are closing down obstetrics and the bureaucracy of health care has grown by tens of millions of dollars. You are pumping money into bureaucracy, that is no make up. You are probably talking about \$150 million in total in six years. At the same time of pumping into the bureaucracy, you are closing valuable community services. We dealt with the crime issue. It is so far from reality and that is the reason why I find it is so difficult to be able to support a budget of this nature.

Mr. Speaker, I know there are many, many things that I would welcome the opportunity to speak on, but in order to ensure that more members get to speak, I think the consensus is that we try to go for 20 minutes, so I can go for a few more minutes. Well, thank you.

Mr. Speaker, the other issue that I want to talk about is one that I have raised in the past and it is related to immigration. The Provincial Nominee Program is a great program. It is a program that was set up by a—

An Honourable Member: By a Liberal government.

Mr. Lamoureux: That is right. Actually, Jean Chrétien established that program back in 1998. Manitoba was the second, I think, province that came up with the program. Mr. Speaker, it has done wonders. It really and truly has made a difference in the province of Manitoba. You know, the government initially indicated that it wanted to get 10 000 people, immigrants, coming, and every year, now this year, and they might have even started last year, they now said, "Oh, yeah, we still want 10 000, but it is not for a few more years before we will get that 10 000." Well, there is no excuse other than that you are choosing not to have more immigrants. It could be very easily accomplished, in terms of getting those immigrants.

I have one constituent who has a niece, who is a female, obviously a female, a niece who is a doctor in the Philippines, and she is married to a doctor who would like to be able to come to Manitoba, who want to set up home here in Winnipeg, but because they are on the work restricted list, they cannot under this program. I have another nurse who is here on a visiting visa, and, again, she cannot come here. Why? Because it is on the work restricted list.

We have a Minister of Labour and Immigration (Ms. Allan) who really does not understand the concept in terms of what it is that she has to do in order to be able to get some of these health care professionals and others. The most successful immigrants in the province of Manitoba are those that come under family reunification sorts of a program. All we have to do is exempt those family members, allow brothers and sisters that have the education and the skills to be exempt from the work restricted list. We will get more doctors coming. You know, it is ironic that they are saying the obstetrics are being closed because of safety issues. Well, are there enough obstetricians? There are all sorts of doctor requirements. Well, I am telling you, if the Minister of Labour and Immigration really understood the work restriction list and the benefits of expanding, we could see more people coming to our province. We do not have to wait till two years from now.

When this government campaigned back in 1999, they did not say 10 years from now, or 8 years from now, we will get the immigration numbers up to 10 000. They implied that it was going to be virtually happening overnight, and they have the tools. Jean Chrétien gave the government the tools in

order to get those numbers up. This government has chosen to put it off. Why? I am not too sure. I suspect it is because, with the one exception, the member from Thompson, maybe the ministers of Labour and Immigration really did not understand some of the intricacies of the program or they did not have the political will to make it happen. In fact, I have one nurse who went to Becky Barrett while she was minister to try to be able to come under the PNP program and was not able to do so.

Mr. Speaker, communities in the province of Manitoba are growing at a great rate in good part because of immigration and policies on immigration, but there is so much more that we can do. There are going to be good things in every budget. If you spend \$8 billion there have to be some good things. If they are going to spend \$8 billion, there better be some good things, but also there is so much room for so much more improvement. In such a short period of time, we are able to show this government ways in which it can really make a difference, and we ask the government to start off by being more accountable. It is not good enough for a Legislature to be sitting 35 days in one year, 55 days in another year. That is not accountability. That is avoiding accountability.

On the issue of accountability in terms of the Legislature sitting, I will suggest that you are avoiding accountability. On the issue of financial accountability, it does not even have to come from me, it is coming from the provincial auditor. You are avoiding fiscal accountability. There is an accountability gap in this province, and that is primarily because, I think, through the years in opposition, the now-Premier (Mr. Doer) learned the best way to try to guide a government through a mandate in order to avoid problems. Do not sit. Why sit? If you sit you are in the Legislature, and by sitting in the Legislature that means there are Question Periods. If we were not sitting today, how much of an issue would the Victoria Hospital have been? If we were not sitting, what about the many other issues that are brought up.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

I believe that is an intentional attempt by this government to avoid accountability. That is the reason the Doer government does not like to have sitting inside this Legislature. That is the reason I believe we need to change the rules that are going to

take into consideration that we better sit at least a minimum of 80 days. I am not asking anything different than what the Premier asked when he was the Leader of the Opposition, when members of this group sat outside in the Rotunda, here, having a mock Question Period because they were frustrated with the lack of days of sitting inside this Chamber. Maybe I should share the picture for those of you who might not be aware of who was all involved, but there were a good number of the people that are here today. Hopefully, we will see better accountability. We will see more sitting days. We are going to see more integrity inside future budgets including this budget.

I take great pride in the fact of being a member of the Manitoba Liberal Party under a great leadership, and the Manitoba Liberal Party is going to do its part in ensuring there is accountability, not only inside this Chamber but outside this Chamber. We are not going to let this government off the hook, and we are going to do what we can to make sure there are going to be post cards coming regarding the closure of the Victoria Hospital. We are going to make sure there are going to be petitions. We are going to make sure there are going to be public meetings. All three in opposition to what this government is doing, because it is either you support community hospitals, and if you do, you better reverse this dumb decision that is being made, or get ready to be replaced in the next provincial election.

Point of Order

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Korzeniowski): The honourable Member for Wellington (Mr. Santos), on a point of order.

Mr. Conrad Santos (Wellington): I normally carry, along with my pens and pencils here, lots of them, a child's scissors, a spoon, still here, and a paring knife. This afternoon, I could not find my child's scissors.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

I could not use my spoon to cut a piece of paper, so the best thing I could do, subconsciously, is use my knife to cut the piece of paper to make a bookmark. That is my behaviour. If I offended any sensibilities of the House or its members, or any convention or rules of the House, I humbly apologize to everybody. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

* (15:40)

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable Member for Wellington (Mr. Santos), it is not a point of order; it is just rising for clarification of his actions.

The honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on a new point of order?

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, as much as I accept the apology of the member from Wellington, this does not conclude the matter under our meeting in your chambers. I would anticipate that we will continue to meet on this matter and try to address it in a global sense.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, there is willingness to continue. Order. I do not want this to turn into a debate because we are dealing with issues and I have listened to the House leaders, but I will listen to the honourable Member for Fort Whyte.

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order, I appreciate the member from Wolseley and his apology to the House, and I accept it—

Some Honourable Members: Wellington.

Mr. Loewen: Wellington, I am sorry. I would just like some clarification in going forward because the member indicated that he normally carries the paring knife in his pocket. I would just like some assurance that procedure and that behaviour will stop.

Mr. Santos: Mr. Speaker, to satisfy the member and anybody's sensibilities I may have innocently offended, I am not going to do that.

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

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): On the same point of order. Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Mackintosh: Given the Member for Wellington's remarks and his explanation and his

assurances for the future, and I think, too, it is a reminder for all members there are issues of perception here that are important. In our view, that should conclude this matter.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on the same point of order.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, I believe there is still an outstanding issue that we need to discuss in your chamber, and I think we undertook to do that in good faith. I would expect that you would be calling us back in order to be able to conclude the outstanding matter.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, the honourable Member for Inkster, on the same point of order?

Mr. Lamoureux: On the same point of order, Mr. Speaker. I, too, was under the impression that we would indeed be reconvening before any sort of decision was going to be made.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member does not have a point of order. Let us say it is a dispute over the facts. Right now I am going to be going back to Orders of the Day, and I will get the process underway. I will ask one of the co-chairs to take the chair, and I would like to see the House leaders in my office.

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that you give me the opportunity to put a few words on record regarding the sixth balanced budget in a row under the balanced budget legislation.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

I want to congratulate the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) for a very fine budget indeed. It is a broad-based budget. It represents, reflects all sectors, all regions, all peoples of this province. I think it is a budget whose hallmark is inclusivity. It is not narrowly focussed. I am at a loss to explain the opposition's attempt to turn a silk purse into a sow's ear.

I think it is a very fine budget, and it contrasts most sharply indeed with the Tory budgets of the

nineties. Those were budgets that were characterized—most of them had deficits, but they are also characterized by being very focussed and not being inclusive, being exclusive, and focussed on their core constituencies and not all Manitobans. I find that in their budgets in the nineties, there was barely an awareness of working-class people, labour, immigrants, lower-income families, northerners and Aboriginal people. It just simply was not there in stark contrast to our budget. The first point is that we aim at inclusion; they seem to aim at exclusion. The Tories simply do not represent, and neither do the Liberals represent, all parts and aspects of Manitoba. When I take a look at our caucus, and I do not want to brag, but I guess I cannot help but brag a little bit, I see a caucus that has six people in it that were not even born in this country, so, obviously, we can reflect the interest of the immigrant community.

We also have five very competent and capable women Cabinet ministers. Now that is not gender parity, Madam Acting Speaker, but it is certainly heading in the right direction. It is a good sign and it is a good signal.

I think our budget reflects the aspirations, the needs and the desires of most Manitobans, and if I can go back to our own caucus again, apart from the language of Inuktitut, in our own caucus, members understand or can speak the following languages, and I am sure I am missing a few: English, Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali, Urdu, Russian, Ukrainian, Greek, Low German, German, Dutch, Filipino, French, Cree, Spanish and probably others. I think that tells you that we do not just represent a narrow sector of Manitoba; we represent all of Manitoba.

I think, also, that all people in this province feel comfortable in our party and I think they feel comfortable with this budget, which reflects the needs and the desires of Manitobans. I am at a loss to see some of the arguments that members of the opposition make, particularly against great events like the floodway construction. Objections they make and innuendo that is being slung across the floor about forced unionization, which is not true. It is simply not true. When I see that, I see those, not only when members of the opposition speak about the budget but also when they ask questions, there is a shrillness, there is a tone that is a tone of anger and a tone of bitterness, and I can only come to the conclusion, along with the member from Thompson, that there is more to it than just the budget.

Yes, we could hear a pin drop when the budget was put forward because the Tories, I think collectively, could hear their minds spinning, and I could hear their minds saying, "There goes our next election." I think that was the real reason why, the shrillness and the anger and the bitterness. It is nothing to do, I think, with the budget. It is a realization, I think, the realization they have that this is indeed a fine budget and it is doing the kinds of things that they should have done but never got around to doing in the 11 years that they were in office. I tell the members opposite, do not despair. All parties, all governments, all rules come to an end, even dynasties. Even Ralph Klein will go down the tubes, as Davis did. Even the great Tommy Douglas, the greatest Canadian of all, his government came to an end. Your turn will come, you will be a lot older, but your turn will come. You have to respect the electorate. If you do not respect the electorate, then I think Manitobans, the electorate out there, will not put you in office.

I will tell you something. If you want to represent that electorate, you cannot narrow the base of your party, you cannot take that far right attitude. The member from Thompson calls it the, what is it, the Harper-Bush alliance. You cannot take that point of view because that removes from your party, and I am giving you some advice, that removes from your party the Progressive Conservatives, the Red Tory, you know, that element with a social conscience. When you do that, you further restrict your base. I am trying to help you guys.

An Honourable Member: Do not give them any advice.

Mr. Jennissen: I am giving you advice, so you have to be careful.

When you go to that Republican right, you know, the Newt Gingriches, both Bushes, the Reagans or the Rush Limbaughs, on and on and on, the Stockwell Days, the Harpers, that is not the Canadian way. That is not the Manitoba way. I am not saying it does not represent some members opposite. It sure does, I mean they have adopted the Republican right. They are strangely quiet now about that country south of us which used to be their Eden, strangely quiet now that BSE has hit us and the softwood lumber issues, the Americans' attack on the Wheat Board and fisheries and so on. The saviours out there are not necessarily our saviours. I think

they are finally realizing that and finally realizing that the Yankees are canny traders indeed, and if you want to negotiate with them, just hang on to your wallet.

They have two problems over there: their narrow focus, and it is becoming more and more narrow as they adopt the extreme right, the Republican right; and also their presumption, and the presumption is the divine right of kings, that they have the right to rule. Somehow or other, only Tories are fiscal geniuses. They forgot that Tommy Douglas balanced every budget he ever had. They forget that, and they think by divine right, they should rule. That is the anger. You listen to some of the tones in here, and it is a bitterness. How dare the people of Manitoba vote in a New Democratic Party government? Well, Madam Acting Speaker, they did, and it has been a great government, and this has been a great budget.

* (15:50)

Of course, when you see your election chances going down the tubes, as the Tories must be seeing, it bothers them. I guess I would not want to be in the boots of the Opposition Leader in the next election, because very likely, I mean, I am not a prophet, I cannot predict, but I presume, very likely, he is going to have to come home and shake his head and say, "Honey, I shrunk the party once again."

That is not a pleasant scenario, Madam Acting Speaker. I understand that, but I am giving them advice. I am saying get rid of that right-wing nonsense you have adopted from the far-right Republicans in the United States. Open up to all Canadians and you might have a chance. Respect Manitobans, respect them, respect Aboriginal people, immigrants and working-class people. Stop your anti-union rhetoric, and then things would improve also.

Again, Madam Acting Speaker, I am giving them some advice. Also, in the past, you made some serious mistakes. To rebuild the trust of your party, the Tory Party, you are going to have to work hard at it. People have not forgiven you for the sale of MTS. I remember in 1996, I believe it was, I asked then-Premier Filmon: "Do you have any plans for selling MTS?" He said, "No, we have no plans for selling MTS." Several weeks later, MTS was sold. I think that speaks volumes. No plans to sell MTS, yet they sold it. I think it is a shameful chapter. If you couple

that with the vote-rigging scandal that reached the highest levels of the Tory Party, then I think you have a tone out there that creates, I guess, an atmosphere in which people say, "We do not quite trust these guys."

Now it may be unfortunate, and I am sure there are very many innocent people involved who had nothing to do with this, but still it is out there, and I think that has to be worked on. You have to build the trust again of the Manitoba people.

You were the people who sold MTS. You claim to be the fiscal geniuses. You were the people who went out then and bought Centra Gas. Centra Gas has lost money every year and this is no strategy for economic development; that is, sell low and buy high. That is the way you did it.

So you have reasons to be angry. You have indeed reasons to be angry because the New Democratic Party obviously, in this government and in this budget, has stolen your thunder. This Finance Minister has done a wonderful job. He has done the things you talk about: cut corporate taxes, cut business taxes, cut personal income taxes.

Yes, the opposition was a could-have, would-have, should-have party. You claimed to support health care and education, but you are always and continually at war with teachers and with nurses. We know that. That is the history of your party. You fired a thousand nurses. You reduced the number of spaces in medical school. You even got involved with this SmartHealth initiative, which was another boondoggle, and you wonder why people vote you out of office. You have to change those things. You screwed up education. You screwed up health care. We are trying to straighten you out.

Madam Acting Speaker, when the members opposite say there is nothing in this budget, I would like to differ with them a little bit. When I drive north, it is a long eight-hour drive, I drive downtown to get out of town, and what do I see? The new MTS building, a place where the new Hydro building will be established, the Red River Campus downtown. I drive on Highway 6, which is in better shape than I have ever seen it in the almost-10 years that I have been here. I drive into Flin Flon on a new road partially completed, soon to be fully completed, past a shopping mall that was not there when the Tories were in power. So nobody can tell me there are not

visible signs on the horizon that things are changing positively. They are changing positively.

Also, Madam Acting Speaker, when I talk about the North, \$16 million more has been added to the highway upgrade program this year, for a total for highways of \$145 million this year. The amount of the highways budget spent on northern roads has increased annually under our government. It is at 27 percent right now, it used to be at 30, and it has dropped as low as 25. Under the Tories, it used to be 4 percent and 6 percent, sometimes a little higher.

Madam Acting Speaker, 27 percent of this year's projected budget goes to northern Manitoba. Now, that is extremely important for us. There have been infrastructure investments in the North. They have been more than doubled since 1999, including 25 million for a new road and ferry to provide all-season access to South Indian Lake. There have been other assists to South Indian Lake, as well. In fact, right now we are working on the development of the latest First Nation in the South Indian Lake area. There has been upgrading of airports in Pikwitonei, Thicket Portage, Gods River. Construction of the new Kichi Sipi Bridge across the Pipestone Lake, and on and on and on.

In addition, the Province has more than doubled the investment in the winter road system since 1999, particularly in the Brochet, Lac Brochet and Tadoule Lake area, away from the toll roads that would increase enormously the cost of foodstuffs and gasoline in the North. Now the tolls are off the road; the prices are lower.

Other commitments, Madam Acting Speaker, include providing Thompson and Flin Flon with the first significant transit-operating grant increase in a decade through the Building Manitoba Fund. That is an increase of 15 percent. We are adding 20 additional officers for rural and northern Manitoba, and yesterday we heard in the news 54 officers in the city—

An Honourable Member: Throughout Manitoba.

Mr. Jennissen: Throughout Manitoba. Funding for housing renewals programs, Madam Acting Speaker, investing over \$600 million in Manitoba infrastructure renewal over the next six years and further in the North. New resources for the University

College of the North, it is very important to northerners. It is a symbol of our independence up there. I am really sad that the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Murray) spoke strongly against that initiative.

There is pre-project training for proposed hydro development in the North. Major developments with Wuskwatim in partnership with Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation of Nelson House. As well, plans are being made for Conawapa. We are strengthening Hydro, east-west grid, wind power in St. Leon, Power Smart, geothermal, and so on and so on. So hydro power, which is to us what oil is to Alberta, is extremely important and we are developing it in northern Manitoba.

I should also add that we have focussed deliveries of programs to the North via the Northern Development Strategy. There is support for Manitoba's first Aboriginal midwifery program. There is refresher training for volunteer firefighters in remote and northern communities. There is increased expansion of health services, particularly Telehealth, and particularly in Snow Lake, hopefully, that is where we are directing it. There is a diabetes prevention strategy. There is a 20% increase in northern income assistance allowance to offset the high cost of healthy foods for northern residents.

There is and there will be continued support for the MEAP program, that is the Mineral Exploration Assistance Program, and programs aimed at helping prospectors. There is continued funding for the Northern Forest Diversification program in The Pas. Dave Buck is in charge of that. It is a great program. I have known Dave Buck for 30 years. They are talking about non-traditional uses of the forest, for example, mushrooms; there are essential oils, mint teas, Christmas wreaths, products made from birch and birch bark. In fact, I have a couple of friends in Flin Flon, Doug and Linda Aireu [*phonetic*], and they work with the birch sap in the spring. They make some interesting things from it, including a really fine wine. They gave me a bottle of it. I assure you it is of the finest quality.

So, as I said before, Madam Acting Speaker, we have done a lot of things in northern Manitoba. This budget is just a further confirmation of our commitment to the North. This budget is a budget that is honest. I am somewhat upset when I hear members opposite talking about, in glib terms, the

fudge-it budget. You know you want to talk about fudge-it budget, let me read you something. Let me read you from the Hansard, April 8, 1993, page 1569, where a member named Harold Neufeld, former member for Rossmere, also known as Honest Harold, here is what he said—this is in 1993: "You might say that the deficit this year was not \$562 million, but indeed it was \$862 million, that is the difference between last year's debt and this year's debt." Talk about fudging, they fudged \$300 million bucks and who brings it to their attention? Their own member, Honest Harold. I guess in Rossmere they are quite honest. At least the people I know in Rossmere are quite honest. There was not only Honest Harold, there was an honest Ed, Ed Schreyer, there was honest Vic Schroeder, and there is the member right now.

The member right now is one of the most honest and ethical gentlemen in this House, Madam Acting Speaker. So Rossmere has a history of sending honest and ethical people to the House, even when they say things that their own government does not like. In this case, Honest Harold saying, "Hey, Tories in our own party, you just fudged \$300 million." I think that is rather interesting.

* (16:00)

Madam Acting Speaker, you do not have to take my word for it that this is a good budget and that it reflects the needs and desires and aspirations of all Manitobans. Let me read you, and let me conclude with this, what someone else said in the *Free Press*, Sunday, March 13, 2005, page B5, the gentleman's name is Todd Hirsch. Todd Hirsch is the chief economist at the Canada West Foundation, an independent and non-partisan policy institute in Calgary. He has no reason to be for us or against us, although he is a little glib with the title. He calls it "Manitoba's Monopoly budget," saying that bringing down the budget is a little like playing a Monopoly game, but apart from that here is what he says, and I quote now: "The actual amount of cash transfers from the federal government to Manitoba is forecast to be about 4.2 per cent lower this year than last. At the same time, the total revenue that the province generates from within Manitoba (i.e., own-source revenues) is expected to increase this year by about 1.8 per cent—even with the various tax cuts.

"It is encouraging that, while federal transfers in absolute dollars are falling, own-source revenues in

Manitoba are rising. This year, transfers from Ottawa will account for 34.2 per cent of total revenue for the province; last year it was 35.6 per cent.

"Even the debt picture continues to improve, although slowly. According to the Dominion Bond Rating Service, Manitoba's debt-to-GDP ratio sits at 33.9 per cent, down from 38.7 per cent just five years ago."

So that is a 5% improvement, Madam Acting Speaker. So even outside, an independent analyst is saying this was a good budget. It is a budget, I think, that has to be taken seriously. I would tell the Tory opposition that we voted for one of your budgets when it was a good budget, this budget is much better. I do not see any reason why you would not support it. I hope that you do.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Madam Acting Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank the House for having this opportunity, for the third budget, to put a few things on the record for myself, the Member for Lakeside. I want to, at this time, give my condolences from my family and the people from Lakeside for the four fallen officers from Mayerthorpe, Alberta.

Also, I want to take this opportunity to thank the people from Lakeside for having the faith in me to deliver their desires, their needs, to the house of representatives here in the province of Manitoba. Having said that, I would like to get into the issues and the meat and the potatoes of the budget.

I have grown up and lived my whole life on an agricultural base. Now, I have been a beef producer for most of my adult life. Having worked in the Royal Bank, and worked for the Interlake School Division at the same time, I still always had my fingers in the livestock sector.

My vision that I saw in the budget was somewhat misplaced, Madam Acting Speaker. Nowhere did I see help for rural Manitoba. The NDP budget has ignored the needs of rural Manitoba. Doctors in rural communities are leaving and expectant parents are having to face highway medicine.

Mr. Harry Schellenberg, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

This NDP government missed an opportunity to make a real difference with the windfall of

unprecedented revenue. Instead of hope, they offer missed opportunities. This NDP government is mortgaging rural youths' future. Our young people are worried. They face an uncertain future. If young people want to run their own family farm, it is becoming less possible for them to do so.

Mr. Acting Speaker, this NDP government is offering our young people debt rather than real hope. Fifty thousand dollars in loans and interest are soon coming due. Where their plan is to deal with extra debt, they put our farmers in and our young people.

Yesterday, Mr. Acting Speaker, was Agricultural Awareness Day, and I do want to take this opportunity to thank the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) and the First Minister (Mr. Doer) for allowing us, on this side of the House, to join them in the celebration, and the motion was brought forward by the member from Carman, and we thank him for that. It was probably the best event that I attended in this House since being elected in June of 2003. I had a number of people that I talked to after the event and I can probably say that it was probably one of the events that we should make sure that we continue on and press forward for all of Manitobans, to bring not only rural Manitoba and urban Manitoba together.

I want to come back to why the NDP are not aware of their failure to deliver a really sustainable solution for the BSE crisis. Yesterday, in the remarks from the Minister of Agriculture, I want to say that she said, "We recognize." On page 1 she refers to, comes back to, "We recognize 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 the Repositioning the Livestock Industry Strategy. We will continue to support our producers." Well, when you look at the budget that really did not happen. There was no mention of a concrete solution for the BSE crisis in this budget. This is a crisis that affects every Manitoban. Why do they not have an adequate solution for our beef producers?

We need more slaughter capacity. We need action not just idle clatter and rhetoric from the members opposite. They get an A for announcements and a D for delivery. We need Manitoba families and businesses to feel assured in rural Manitoba and urban Manitoba because it does affect all of us. We, on this side of the House, offered a five-point BSE

recovery plan, some six, eight months ago, and we cannot ignore this issue. There are 29 plants in the province of Manitoba, and not one, not one, has received any money for plant upgrades. We had one federally inspected plant at that time, and we still have one.

The NDP promise of \$3 million is a far cry from the \$40 million needed for the slaughter capacity we outlined in our plan. The NDP offered a drop in the bucket, not a genuine solution. If you do the number crunch, \$3 million works out to \$6 per head. Not near enough.

We had a plant in St. Claude, and in the *Central Plains Herald Leader* on March 5, he was quoted, "It is too bad the government will not step up to the plate when it has been two months since I heard from them." I find that somewhat disturbing when we do not take time to phone people back. I take very great pride in being a member of this House, and any time a constituent calls, I make sure I get back to them in a timely and fashionable manner. I think all members need to do that, and whenever we form office, in the next election, we will make sure that that is followed up on.

We cannot back off or ignore this issue. Our five-point plan was \$40 million to increase slaughter capacity, at minimum the additional 500 head-per-day shortfall that currently exists in Manitoba, \$2 million to upgrade and fully fund a feasibility study and business plan. This part was announced and addressed in the minister's statement a week ago Monday, and we are pleased to see that she has adopted one point of our five-point plan.

We also went on to say we need \$10 million to provide forgivable loans to existing small, new plants to allow them to move forward with the necessary upgrades to meet federally inspected standards, thereby allowing Manitoba beef to be exported to other provinces. That is an issue we cannot drop.

The minister talked about increasing slaughter capacity in the province of Manitoba. When a person comes from Ontario to eat a hamburger in the province of Manitoba, we cannot ship that hamburger back to Ontario. We need to find an interprovincial trade agreement. We have discussed this numerous times with the minister, and her comment is that the rest of the provinces will not go

for it. Well, I say step up to the plate, be accountable, stand up for the producers of Manitoba, fight for our province, meet the needs of our producers and have that plan instituted.

We also asked, we wanted \$20 million to provide immediate cash advances and the minister talked about that yesterday as well. We will outline it for her, once again. A cash-advance program is similar to that put on the grain whereby we advance the producer. If the animal is worth \$800, they would get an advance of 50 percent on that animal which would attribute to \$400. Once that animal is sold, that \$400 is paid back. It works in grain, it will work here. Very simple. Beef producers need real help but not strings or conditions. Farmers are planting next year's crops. They need cash advances now.

*(16:10)

Producers are already struggling to survive in these uncertain times. Why would we ask our producers for money when they are facing a crisis? Common sense would say eliminate the deposit on the CAIS program. It is a program that was introduced, according to the minister, in haste, and we are seeing the results of that right now. It is a program that is mismanaged and is accessible to very few farmers. To ask them to put up a deposit of which money they do not have. We have seen the poorest grain prices in oil seeds, grains and ruminants. I would like to put on the record some of those that just came out today. Grain prices in 2004 are 19.4 percent lower than in 2003, 25.3 percent lower than in 2002. From December 2003 to December 2004, the grain price index fell 36.8 percent. Further, for 2005, it is estimated only 30.4 percent of the grain crop will be in the top two grades.

Ruminants is another product that has gone down. Cattle prices are down 23.1 percent lower than they were prior to the BSE crisis in 2002. Culled cows alone, 2004 prices were 67 percent lower than pre-BSE 2002 prices. Again, this just goes on to substantiate the fact that farmers are cash-strapped and should not be required to put the CAIS deposit in. Not only did the federal government see the wisdom in this, they passed a motion in the House that carried. The federal government also asked that the deposit be withdrawn. We ask the minister to seriously consider the fact that the federal government has asked for it, the farmers have asked for it and KAP has asked for it. We ask the minister

to do the right thing and remove the CAIS deposit requirement.

This Doer government has once again cut funds from the protection of farmlands. In fact, it is down again from last year's cut for waterfowl and wildlife management. The producers that provide the food and the quality products to the people, not only of Manitoba but of Canada, are being punished again by an uncontrollable act of nature. Manitoba's producers deserve to know that adequate funds are there in the event that they need the financial support. Instead, this Doer government continues to cut funds needed to producers' livelihoods and farmland.

What does the budget offer? It offers disappointment and failure. Failure to eliminate education taxes off residential property and farmland. They have said there is a 19.6% increase in the agricultural budget. You take out the 20 million that should have been put into the education budget, actually 3.3 million, the 3 million they put in for upgrades in slaughter capacity, take off the deduction that they had in the wildlife and waterfowl, there is no increase for our farmers in the province of Manitoba. They have a failure to provide sufficient slaughter capacity. I cannot support this budget, Mr. Acting Speaker. It makes the bare minimum to make Manitobans think that this Doer government is addressing the problems of this province.

They call it a good-news budget. It is an old news budget. They think that Manitobans can be thrown a bone every day and just call it another announcement. Not the case. Manitobans deserve the best, not a mediocre, inadequate budget. This budget lacks vision. It lacks commitment to Manitoba farmers and provides insufficient support for our beef producers, though I think that what abounds from this budget are missed opportunities.

In this budget also, Mr. Acting Speaker, the announcement again which is a re-announcement of last year's, are the upgrades to No. 6 highway. When you look at the upgrades to No. 6 highway, and the member from Flin Flon talked about how proud he was of the upgrades, well, they started in the Interlake and went on up to Flin Flon and Thompson. None of that money stopped in Lakeside. Whenever they talk about representing all Manitobans, they certainly do not do that. We have yet to get a dollar in our Lakeside riding for upgrades. Hopefully this year, but I can guarantee it will be a re-

announcement again next year on Highway 6, because they have not even bought the land to make the necessary upgrades.

When it comes to Highway 227, it is the alternate route to evacuate the city of Winnipeg. We talk about the floodway. We talk about making sure Manitoba is safe. Highway 227, if you go back in the history books, is the evacuation route for the city of Winnipeg, and it should be paved. There are four miles to be developed on that yet, and we would urge the minister of highways to carry forward with that commitment.

Also, I want to correct the record for the member from Flin Flon. When he is talking about the U.S. and our friends, and yes, they are our friends, I would hope that the people on that side of the House would consider them their friends too. To sit in this House and condemn us for being friends with the United States is a disservice to everybody in this House. We need to learn to work together with our partners. They are our biggest trading partner. Whether or not we want to be their friends, it is so crucial, we do not need to be taking them to court, and we do not need to be slapping them in the face every time we have an opportunity. It is an opportunity that we have to work together.

In fact, when the new Secretary of Agriculture got sworn in, Mike Johanns, I sent him a letter of congratulations and asked him to work on our behalf. I have yet to see that from that side of the House. He called me on Monday, prior to the border opening and made a commitment to me that they were safe, they are sure that the border would reopen and we, as well, thought the border would open, but we got fooled by the powers of the court system. That comes back to my point about the integrity of people in this House.

Also, the member from Flin Flon talked about the honesty of a few members in this House. We are all honourable members. I take exception to it. What I saw in this House today was deplorable. I have only been here three years. Just a little over two, I guess. I am sorry. I correct myself for that.

An Honourable Member: It seems like that.

Mr. Eichler: But it seems like that. That is right.

I was shocked, and my heart goes out to the members from Riel, Fort Garry, Seine River and St.

Norbert, for not having the opportunity to put their words on the record so that the Victoria Hospital would not be closed. I saw their looks. I saw the look in their eye, and I feel for them as new members. There was one thing that I wanted to make sure of when I ran for office, and that was, I would have an opportunity to discuss any issues before they would be brought to the House. I know that this never happened, by the look on their faces.

The other thing that I wanted to do before closing, Mr. Acting Speaker, was make sure that the people of the province of Manitoba realize that the members in this House are, as I said before, all honourable, and we want to make sure that when we vote on this budget, that we have all the right figures, and I cannot go along and support this idea of information that has been misleading in this House, and the comments have been brought up. I think it is important that we as Manitobans have the integrity to bring those issues forward, and having said that on the record, I would like to thank the members from this side of the House for their support.

Mr Rondeau: Mr. Acting Speaker, I am pleased to put a few words about this very good budget on the record.

I am pleased to speak in favour of the budget because it is a vision. It creates a plan. It creates a framework on which to build a strong future. It is a future of health care, good roads, positive education, support for seniors, support for business, support for farmers, manufacturers, mining industries, students. What it is, it is a vision for all Manitobans. Just like our party represents all of Manitoba, this is a budget for all Manitobans.

I would like to contrast my speech to the doom and gloom of members opposite and talk about where we are building our future and where it is important to be. First, I look at the economic framework of our economy. We have a very good economy. It is diverse. It is modern, and it is competitive.

In 2004, the real GDP growth was 2.8 percent, and total business investment in this province was 5.8 percent. That is almost 6 percent. The areas that are important to note are, first, mining. Mining was up 8.1 percent. We had good strong metal prices. The mining industry had record-high exploration.

When people explore, that is good for our economy, but they will find deposits that then can be produced, which will be good for the economy. We have had excellent expansion of our petroleum industry.

* (16:20)

We have had good expansion of construction. We have had a 4.7% increase in construction. Housing starts are up 5.6 percent, and single-family dwellings are over 10% increase. That is a huge increase, and it is nice to see building going wild in this province, Not just in single-family dwellings, but commercial buildings. We have the new airport coming up. We have the library, Millennium Library. We have had multiple office starts. We have had the new bank going up. We have the MTS Centre. Multiple buildings are going up. In fact, real estate has gone up an average of 5.3 percent. What is nice about it is it is not just in the city of Winnipeg. It is all across our province. It is from the north, in Flin Flon and Thompson, to rural communities. Our growth is across the board into the whole province.

I want to give you some numbers of the change in different industries from when the members opposite were in government. The printing and publishing industry has improved by 295 percent, chemicals by 292 percent, wood by 220 percent, primary metals by 168.5 percent, plastics by 136 percent, fabricated metals by 126 percent and food industry and production by 108 percent. Those are numbers of increases from when members opposite were in government and now. I am proud of those because it shows that it is across the whole province.

When we talk about labour market, we, right now, have an all-time high employment level, 576 000 people are employed in our province this year. We have the second lowest unemployment rate in Canada, and the labour force participation is the second highest in Canada at 69 percent. This is also taking into account that we actually have a net immigration. There are more people coming to our province than leaving. That is why we have more houses, that is why we have an increase and expansion of our economy because more people are coming in, industry and business expanding, personal incomes are going up, and it is a wonderful opportunity of growth.

It is interesting to see also in our investment when people are saying we do not have a plan. We

have made sure there is a good foundation for investment. There has been a 9.9% increase in capital investment and it is well over the Canadian average, and when you look at it, it is crossed away. That is not even considering major construction on the floodway or the new hotels. Again, things like Biovail, Cangene, the Richardson Centre for Functional Foods, St. Leon wind farm, which is really wonderful to see a very good project starting there, the U of M, et cetera. The Airport Authority, by the way, I was at the first public meeting, and people are actually excited. People are invigorated that we actually have a growing economy and there is a positive future for people in Manitoba.

We will talk about the growth. Between October '03 and '04, there was a growth of over 10 000 people. That is true growth and the total increase was the best since 1985. Also, there have been three consecutive years of positive growth under this government. In the nineties, there was no huge building boom. There was no craze because people were leaving at unprecedented levels. Now people are coming back to the province because they can see a good plan for young people, a good economic plan. They can see how they can participate in a positive way so they are coming to Manitoba and they are growing the economy.

When we start talking about business, we have a very important pillar that people need to know about. One is that you need to combine your education strategy and your labour force strategy by having affordable tuition, by having bursaries and scholarships, by having an ability for people to get the training they need. I have to commend the Minister for Advanced Education (Ms. McGifford) because the college expansion initiative has created huge opportunity for young people to get the skills they need and to drive the economy in the future.

Just to let you know what our economy is like, 79 percent of Manitoba small businesses export goods interprovincially and 60% export to the States. Lots of our businesses, like businesses with less than 50 percent of the people, comprise 94 percent of the businesses present. Small businesses are a core to our economic development. They are core because they source a lot of goods locally. They have depth and they put their roots into the province. So what have we done for the small business? First, we did a tax break from 8 percent, and this budget announces that

in a couple of years it goes to 4 percent. That is cutting by 50 percent the small business tax rate.

Also, when members opposite were the friends of business, they had a \$200,000 threshold for the small business tax. We have doubled the threshold to \$400,000. So we halved the tax, doubled the threshold. That means that the small business has a great environment in which to flourish.

We have also worked to support the Canada-Manitoba small business centre, and we have also helped to support businesses across the province. It is neat to note that the bankruptcies are down by 26.7 percent. The farm bankruptcies are down by 3.6 percent and personal bankruptcies are down by 10.3 percent. So, if you look at it, of the negative news that we heard lots of in the nineties, that is the only thing that is down. The negative news is down. The positive news continues to be very, very buoyant.

I would also like to point out that we have increased the Research and Development Tax Credit from 15 percent to 20 percent, and that shows that we have a better future as far as the U of M's SMARTpark, as far as the research in food, as far as development because that is increasing the research and development and moving that forward.

As far as the pension liability, one of the things that we have to understand about long-term liability and debt is that we have to make sure that we follow a responsible action. I think it is very responsible that our government looked at this huge pension liability that was going to keep on going up that would have handcuffed our province economically in the future. So I thought it was very prudent economically that we started to tackle that. We were the first government in 40 years that decided that this was important, because every year the debt would have gone up, and it would have been a huge difficulty in a number of years. What we did is we started to pay it, and I think it is very prudent that we paid it. What we have done is not only are we paying down the debt of the province, we are also paying down the pension liability, which is prudent, and that will make sure that we have a good economic house in order. That is good long-term financial management.

We have grown the economy. No, not "we." The entire province has worked hard together to grow the economy by \$10 billion more. That is a huge growth

in economic terms, \$10 billion more. Never has it happened, and definitely not under the members opposite. It is neat to see that our expenditures due to the debt have been down. They are down by 33.9 percent. Other expenditures, we have been able to move those to areas that are important such as health care, roads, education, et cetera.

It is neat to see what happens when you are paying down the debt. You are paying down the debt, your cost for debt services is going down, so we have followed that. We are not only balancing under just the old Tory legislation, which they, at first, required us to balance under, which we did. Also, the Tories said, "Oh, we followed that rule; you should follow the rules." And we did, and we did it successfully. Then they are saying, "Oh, but we do not agree with those rules; we have to make it tougher." And we did. We followed the Auditor, and we are balancing under both systems, systems that I might point out the former government would not have balanced under. So while they are screaming that you should have balanced under both summary budget and the balanced budget legislation, the test of their budgets under their watch would never have passed that standard. I would like to point out that this budget passes that standard.

* (16:30)

I would also like to point out we have no draw on the rainy day fund. In fact, there have been three times that governments have put money into the rainy day fund. One, on the sale of a Crown asset, and I might add telephone bills are double the cost than what they were under their march. So what they did was they sold the telephone company, they put the money in the rainy day fund and they drew it down. There are only two other times when money was put in, both under our watch, and it is nice to see that, again, we made a \$314-million contribution to the rainy day fund so that we have provided money there, and we did not do it by selling a Crown asset. We did not do it by pushing so that people would have to pay higher telephone rates.

Then, when we look at it, where are we growing? We have very innovative markets. We are growing in biotechnology. We are growing in transportation and transportation industry. We are growing because we are at the centre of the mid-Canada corridor. We are growing in areas of high skill, high technology, and what is nice about that is

that when you have two competition ways you can either go into low-skill, low-wage type of economy, or you can go into a high-skill, high-wage economy. Manitoba is starting to focus on the high-skill, high-wage economy, and that is important.

That is why, again, when I point out, we have an education plan that links to the economic plan. When you look at the businesses, the businesses also agree. When you look at the surveys from the different business organizations, they say their biggest challenge is a human resource challenge, because they need to make sure they have the skilled, trained people to make sure that their business works and operates profitably. We are willing to work, and are proving to work, as a good, solid partner in that endeavour.

The other point I would like to make about this budget is that we continue to make important investments to quality of life and affordable living. I was pleased to see the cultural announcement, where we are putting more money in culture in the film industry. I was pleased to see that we are putting more money into sport. I think it is wonderful that our government continues to look at healthy living as a proactive way to address health care needs. I look at it where we have the cheapest hydro-electricity rates in North America, and I repeat, for both business and for consumers, the cheapest hydro-electricity rates in Canada.

We do not have a health care premium. I often think that it is important to compare apples to apples. In some provinces they say they have a low provincial tax, but they do not say that they have added on a health care premium. We do not have a health care premium and we have fair taxation. I might point out that that taxation level has dropped. In terms of the corporations, it went from 18 and now it has been announced that it is going down all the way to 14 percent. That is consistent dropping of taxation, and the corporate tax rate has not dropped under the former government, under the Tory government. It dropped under an NDP government, because it is fair and balanced. Small business tax rate, I might reiterate, has gone down under this government. It did not go down under the Tory government.

We also have very affordable house prices. We have good auto insurance prices. We have great recreation and cultural amenities. We are expanding

cottages so that people can afford cottages. When you are looking at it, in case people need a view, what you want to do is if you have a \$60,000 income in Manitoba, you can afford to live. If you have less than that, you can afford to have a good quality of life, where if you were in Toronto or Montreal or Vancouver, you would be on a subsistence level.

I think that we have, when you take the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, the symphony, the theatre centre, the football, the hockey, the baseball teams, the golf courses, the beaches, the best fishing around, you have a wonderful opportunity, you have a wonderful standard of life, you can afford to own your home in your lifetime. You do not have health care premiums which are very onerous, and should be considered in most of those other provinces. We also have a health care system that we can be proud of.

Again, as Minister of Industry, I would like to point out that in the U.S., the big three auto makers spend more on health care premiums for their employees than on steel that goes into their vehicles. Chrysler estimates that it spends \$700 on employees' health benefits for every car produced in the U.S. compared to \$233 for each car produced in Canada. That is a huge saving per car.

In order to allow my fellow caucus members to speak, I will just go through very quickly some of the KPMG's competitive studies. Basically what it says, and I reiterate, that we have done well competitively from most other cities. We have done well in most Canadian cities, and we compare well to the U.S. We have been successfully innovating. We have spent some money on the Composite Innovation Centre, where we have partnered with industry and the feds, where we are helping industry expand and innovate. We have gone to the Advanced Manufacturing Initiative, AMI, where we have gone with the federal government, the provincial government and industry, again, to show people how to compete, and not just compete locally, but globally. What this centre does is it takes the best in manufacturing, best of technology, and shows small businesses, medium-size businesses how to innovate and how to compete, and that has been a wonderful announcement by this government.

I continue to be proud of how we can work together, work with business, work with labour, work with students, work with farmers to develop and expand the industry of Manitoba. I am proud of

the fact that we have an open-door, positive approach and it is working. It is working by growing the economy, it is working by having more people move here, it is having a very positive effect on the immigration system and it is nice to see innovative things like the Immigrant Investor Program that shows that we are at the front of innovation, of expanding our economy and bringing good things to this province. We have a great future. I hope the other members opposite, from the Conservative and the Liberal parties, vote for a progressive, innovative, active budget.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Mr. Acting Speaker, I am pleased to stand up and support the amendment that my leader introduced in the House on this dismal budget that we have seen presented by members of the government.

I listened intently to the Minister of Industry and Trade when he was very knowledgeable and provided many statistics and a lot of detail around several files that he has responsibility for. I listened intently. I know and I believe that the numbers he presented to the House were accurate, and that he was well-informed and talked about how wonderful our province is doing. He neglected to talk about one file that he has responsibility for, and that was the Crocus file.

Mr. Acting Speaker, we have a labour-sponsored fund in the province of Manitoba called Crocus that 33 000 Manitobans have invested in. They invested in it, believing that because it was guaranteed by government, government would be watching, monitoring and looking after their better interests through this investment. But what have we seen? We have seen the minister stand in his place, although he has responsibility for the legislation, and try to indicate that it is someone else's responsibility, that this is not a file that he can get involved in. Well, 33 000 Manitobans are asking why. What has this government got to hide? What have they been doing with money that 33 000 Manitobans have put in trust? It is their future and their retirement funds that they are talking about.

When I hear the Minister of Industry (Mr. Rondeau) stand up and brag about how well the province is doing, talk about the positive news being up and the negative news being down, I question what those 33 000 Manitobans are saying today. I would venture to guess that they would say that the

negative news is up and the positive news is down. Their retirement savings have decreased by 50 percent while this minister stands up and talks about how well this province is doing.

* (16:40)

I cannot support the budget for several reasons, but there are two very glaring reasons that I cannot support this budget. One of them is that we saw in last year's budget that the government reported a \$13-million surplus. When the Auditor looked at the books, he indicated to us that, indeed, there was not any surplus, but there was a \$604-million deficit.

Mr. Acting Speaker, who are we to believe? We have seen many times, and just recently in this House, indication that we cannot trust the numbers that are put into any budget by this NDP government.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I know that you were not around in the early eighties. I know that I was not around in 1984. I was not elected until 1986, but I certainly do remember, and one of the reasons I decided to get into politics was because I looked at what was happening in the province under Howard Pawley and those that he had put in positions of trust within his Cabinet, and I thought to myself we have to be able to do a better job. We need to get a government elected in this province that can manage the government's affairs.

We saw under Howard Pawley the province brought to its knees by increasing debt and a spend-and-tax attitude by a government that finally got Manitobans so up in arms that they tossed the government out.

You can understand why when we go back in history. We just have to look at newspaper articles and look at the then-Minister of Finance in 1984, Vic Schroeder. I think all of us in the House have had the opportunity to meet with him and get to know Vic Schroeder as members of the opposition, but we know that he is still in a position of power under this government. He runs Manitoba Hydro. He is the person that this Premier (Mr. Doer) has put his trust in, and put Manitobans in a position where they have seen unprecedented raids of revenue out of Manitoba Hydro, over \$200 million. When you look at the increased fees that are coming into government coffers from Manitoba Hydro, we see the same old tactics by an NDP government and the person who has been appointed by this Premier.

Just let me go back to 1984, because I think we have got déjà vu to some 20 years later, we have got the same kind of situation in the province of Manitoba under Howard Pawley, a government that Manitobans turfed out because they really were not looking after Manitoba's interests.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I will just refer you to a headline on December 28, 1984, that says, "Auditor says the books are misleading." Now what was he referring to? He was referring to the budget that was brought in by then-Minister of Finance Vic Schroeder. It was not the same Auditor that we have today. The Auditor then was a Mr. Bill Ziprick. Mr. Bill Ziprick, in his Auditor's report in 1984 indicated that the government had cooked its books to show the 1983-84 net deficit as \$165 million, almost three times less than the actual deficit of \$428 million.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Mr. Speaker, I say to you déjà vu. What did the provincial auditor say of the NDP's books? I am just looking for the date, but it was just slightly over 20 years later the Auditor blasts the Province and says that the public was kept in the dark about the \$604-million budget deficit. We have the same characters today running the Province as we had some 20 years ago. They are back in the Dark Ages, and they are cooking the books again to try to make it look to Manitobans like they are doing something positive and all is rosy and there is good news.

Well, Mr. Speaker, Manitobans are not going to buy this kind of accounting. The provincial auditor, certainly, is not buying this kind of accounting. We cannot stand here in all good conscience and vote for a budget this year when the Auditor General has said the books were cooked last year. What are we to believe about the numbers in this year's budget? How can we possibly place any trust in anything being accurate in this year's budget?

Time will tell over the course of the next year, and when we see the quarterly financial statements and the year-end financial statements next year, we will know. We may know before that because we have no guarantee that any budget in any department that is reported in the budget today is actually truthful numbers.

We do not know whether the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), has talked to other ministers

and said, "Well, we will just put this notional amount in. We are not really sure whether that is the true budget or whether we can actually meet the number that we will put there, but we will put it in anyway." It seems to me that is the pattern and the course of action this government has taken. All we have to do is look back 20 years and find out that the same NDP government, not the new NDP government, or today's NDP government, but it was yesterday's NDP government, is right back alive and well sitting in this Legislature today and just take a look at who the Premier (Mr. Doer), has surrounding him, who his major advisers are.

We have Vic Schroeder, whom the Auditor said cooked the books, running Manitoba Hydro. We have Eugene Kostyra, who was the Minister of Finance when the government was defeated, Mr. Speaker. These are the people that are sitting around the Cabinet table, or behind the Cabinet table, directing this Premier and this government. If it was good enough for them to cook the books back then, we are seeing exactly the same kind of thing today. So, Mr. Speaker, I cannot in all good conscience stand up and support a budget when we have no idea whether it is an accurate budget, whether the books are fudged and whether we are going to see the same kind of activity continue as we saw some 20 years ago. No wonder Manitobans got tired of the New Democratic government.

Another reason I cannot support this budget is the announcement we heard yesterday that Victoria Hospital was going to lose its obstetrics department. We heard, and I think we took the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale), last year at his word when he said the obstetrics department was open at Victoria Hospital, that it was not going to close and there was nothing that the regional health authority could bring forward that would change his mind. That was policy. He was standing behind it, and he articulated that one year ago. But what has happened since then?

We all know what has happened. There is no will on the part of this government to take responsibility for reducing the funding to obstetrics at the Victoria Hospital, for reducing the number of beds. They can stand up and try to justify all they want why there are fewer women going to Victoria Hospital today to deliver the babies, but they are not standing up and telling the truth. The truth is that they reduced the number of obs beds at Victoria Hospital from 18 to 8. Well, that says to me that not

as many women would have the opportunity to find a bed at Victoria Hospital, because the number of beds has been reduced. It is hard to imagine a government that has become so arrogant, and we saw, by the questions we asked today, the looks on the faces of members who represent that southeast part of the city of Winnipeg—

* (16:50)

An Honourable Member: He did not know it was going to happen.

Mrs. Mitchelson: We did ask the questions, and we did not get any answers to the questions on whether they knew or what they knew.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to indicate to those members, especially the ones who do not sit around the Cabinet table and are not part of the decision-making process, when we were in government, there were some tough decisions that were made. There were decisions that were made that impacted certain communities right throughout the province of Manitoba. But I want to say to you that things were handled differently. There was not a decision that was made, especially under my responsibility, that might have impacted a colleague that I would not have discussed with that colleague ahead of time. I would never have waited for the newspapers or the radio to inform one of my colleagues that a decision had been made impacting any program or any project in their community.

Mr. Speaker, we can see the arrogance of this government. We can see the arrogance of this Minister of Health, who has no respect, not only for the front-line nurses who deserved to have that information before those beds and their jobs were cut right out from under them, but for the colleagues that the Minister of Health has sitting around his caucus table, women, four women, who represent those constituencies, should have been respected by this Minister of Health.

He should have gone to them, one by one, and explained what he was doing, the rationale behind it, and given them the opportunity to stand up for their community, to stand up for their constituents, who voted for them based on the belief that they would represent their best interests in the Manitoba Legislature and they would protect their community hospital. They would protect the women who wanted

to go into Victoria Hospital to deliver their babies. They would protect, they would stand up, they would speak out, and they would represent their constituents. Well, sadly, Mr. Speaker, we did not see that happen, and we know by the looks on the faces of those four women that they were not listened to. They may have, if they had had the opportunity, given some advice to the Minister of Health.

We heard the Minister of Health say, "Well, we are going to cut obstetrics out of the community, but we are going to put it back in sometime." What plan is that for the families in the southeast part of the city of Winnipeg? What plan is that for a community that is growing? We know that there are going to be significantly more individuals moving into that area in the city. There is new development in Waverley West, and we know that it will be young families who will be moving into that area who want community-based service in their community hospital. They want to be able to go to deliver their babies in a community setting in a community hospital. That opportunity has been ripped away from them this week by the decision that was made by the Minister of Health and this government.

Mr. Speaker, we know that front-line health care workers deserve more respect than they have gotten from this minister and this government. We know that the communities that are represented by four women on the government side of the House deserve more respect, deserve the kind of consultation that was not provided to them by this government. I venture to guess that those communities and those families and those voters will remember how they have been treated, with arrogance and disrespect for them. They will remember as we move towards the next election.

So those are two very specific reasons why I cannot vote for this budget, Mr. Speaker. I will continue to stand up for the constituents in River East, who many have indicated that they are not prepared to stand by and watch a government that has saddled their children and their grandchildren with the new debt since this government came into power.

How can you possibly say you have a balanced budget when you see debt increase by some \$3 billion under this government? How can Manitobans possibly sit back and accept this? I know that I want better for my children. I want better for my

grandchildren. I know that those in River East will be extremely disappointed and they would want me to stand up and represent their point of view.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to indicate with those comments that I will not be supporting this budget and I will be watching very carefully to see whether the women on the other side, that represent the communities that are having their community-based obstetrics program ripped out from under them, will be supporting the budget and supporting that kind of activity by their government.

Speaker's Statement

Mr. Speaker: Order. For the information of the House, we have concluded our meeting, and I would like to inform the House that I, as the Speaker, when incidents happen in the House, if the member either apologizes or withdraws, and the honourable Member for Wellington (Mr. Santos) explained the circumstances, apologized to the House, and I accept the word of the honourable Member for Wellington.

I, as the Speaker, have accepted that. There was disagreement by the members that were in the meeting, and that is entirely up to the members, but I, as the Speaker, have accepted the apology and assurance that this incident will never be repeated again by the honourable Member for Wellington.

Point of Order

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, first, on a point of order.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is quite obvious to members of this House that this is an unprecedented behaviour in this Chamber and that, as a long-standing member of this Chamber, the member from Wellington should have known that this kind of action would result in some pretty severe reaction.

So it is under this premise that I have to ask whether or not the Premier (Mr. Doer) of this province is prepared to ask the member from Wellington to step down as the Deputy Speaker of this Chamber.

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

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, just as I explained at the

meeting, in the circumstances given the explanation of the Member for Wellington of the innocent purposes for which he carried the apple-paring knife along with the spoon, given his apology to the House, a full apology, and given his assurances that he would not carry that object again, as I said earlier in the House, that, in our view, concludes the matter. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised, the honourable member does not have a point of order. To me it was clarification of information. So the honourable member does not have a point of order.

* (17:00)

MATTER OF PRIVILEGE

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, then I rise on a matter of privilege.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Russell is rising on a matter of privilege.

Mr. Derkach: I regret to rise on this matter of privilege, because I know this is somewhat of an emotional matter and could be viewed in many ways, but I want to view it in a very serious way and one which is not, perhaps, extraordinarily inappropriate. I do want to raise this matter, because I think it is an important one for us as members of this Legislature, and the way that we are perceived by those who view us as people who are supposed to conduct business on their behalf.

An object which could be viewed very readily as a weapon is kind of a serious matter, not only to members of the public, but, more importantly, if those kinds of objects make their way into a fairly respected Chamber like this, I think it does create a message and an image in the minds of those who perhaps watch us on a daily basis. More importantly, it also does cast a cloud on us as members in this Chamber when we have young people watching the goings-on in the Chamber.

In this country, in this province and in a democracy, we do not take weapons against each other when we have disagreements. We bring those disagreements into a Chamber of this kind. We use

words and we use parliamentary procedure to make our points. Yes, we use heckling, we use all of those sorts of tactics in a verbal sense, but we do not pick up arms or we do not pick up weapons or we do not pick up objects and hurl them at each other or use them against one another. I am not suggesting that this was the case in this incident at all. Please do not take that from what I am saying, but I think the position of Speaker and Deputy Speaker in this House are ones which are earned because of the respect a member has amongst the members in the Legislature and his peers. That is why, in a democratic society, we have moved to electing the Speaker of the Chamber. I think it would probably stand us well to elect the Deputy Speaker in the Chamber as well, because, Mr. Speaker, these individuals, whether it is yourself or any other member who assumes that position, are viewed in the highest esteem amongst your peers.

It is for that reason this is a serious issue. I do not have any reason not to believe what the member from Wellington said, but this goes beyond that. This is the perception that is cast upon this Chamber by an action of that kind. In our meeting, I think it is well known that, as the House leader for the Opposition and not on my own behest, I call for the resignation of the member from Wellington as the Deputy Speaker in this Chamber because of the seriousness of the issue. I did not do that lightly and this side of the House and those who believe in this action did not consider it lightly. I think, in all of our hearts, we somewhat feel for the member, but as I say, we have to go beyond that in the consideration of this matter.

I recall very vividly when the member from Inkster came into this Chamber with a McDonald's box, I think it was Big Mac box, and he gave it to a page and the page set it on the Premier's (Mr. Doer) desk. The Premier was taken aback by the sight of this McDonald's Big Mac box on his desk, and he reacted as though there was something more in that box than, perhaps, a Big Mac. What it might have been, none of us know at this point, but he reacted almost to a point of, "This could be a dangerous item on my desk." Although I do not want to use that as a comparative example, one must ask himself, if that is the reaction of the Premier to this kind of an object being placed on his desk, then what would we expect from him when a knife is discovered on his side of the Chamber? Although one might say that that is a very poor comparison and you are using it to

political advantage, this is not. I am saying that if we act in a consistent way in this Chamber, then we must view these kinds of situations in an equal measure of seriousness.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier of this province also has said time and again, and he said this publicly, that he is the ethics commissioner. I look to him then to start to use his power, his authority and his responsibility as the ethics commissioner and, more importantly, as the disciplinarian in his caucus, to show the public of this province and the members of this Chamber that he is serious about his role and about his actions.

Mr. Speaker, if we let this matter go, what are we to say the next time someone inadvertently, for whatever reason lays something on the table that could be viewed as a real weapon, and then says, "Oh, I forgot, I should not have brought it in here, and I apologize to the House for bringing that in"? Can we then say that we accept the word of that member and that object will then be taken away and never be brought back again and we take the member at his word? I think there is a line that you have to say, once you have crossed that line there has to be some disciplinary action taken.

I know that if a member in this House refuses to apologize to another member for making an inappropriate comment, that individual pays a price. The price that that individual pays is to stay out of the Chamber for a day. That is an assessment that you make, Mr. Speaker. You will name that member and that member has to, then, stay out of the Chamber for a day. Why? Why is that done? Because there is a line that is drawn and that line, once transgressed, has a particular penalty or action that will be called against that member if that member chooses not to adhere to the rules.

All of us who have been in this Chamber for any length of time know. It does not have to be spelled out to us on paper every single day, that bringing those kinds of objects into the Chamber is not something that should be tolerated. Tolerance is important in this Chamber, but I think there is a line there, too. I think there is a point of where we say, "Something of this kind, you should know better, you are an elected member, and we should not tolerate that in this Chamber." There should be some sort of sanction.

If you hold a position of authority in this Chamber, which the Deputy Speaker does have, a

position of authority in this Chamber when he is sitting in the Chair or when he is sitting as Chair of committees. He has a position of authority. That position in itself says that you have to be somewhat above reproach in terms of how you act and conduct yourself in this Chamber.

* (17:10)

So, Mr. Speaker, this incident today cannot simply be brushed under the carpet. It cannot be ignored. It cannot simply go by us without making mention and without us taking action. As much as I regret to do this, we sometimes do things that we do not want to do but we do it with love in our hearts because it is for the greater good, to ensure that, in fact, this Chamber is viewed and conducts itself with the highest of respect for the citizens that we represent here. We know what is happening out in our society. Any action in this Chamber that can be in any way connected to those unfortunate types of incidents that occur in society has to be addressed and has to be addressed properly.

We pondered on this side of the House what an appropriate action should be. It was not easy, but we had to do it within a constrained time frame because this matter has to be disposed of today, as I understand it. As a result of that, and I look at my colleagues, and there is not anyone in this Chamber and on this side of the House that wants to do this with any glee or with any satisfaction, but this is such a serious matter that I think we have no choice but to do what it is I am going to ask for.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Ste. Rose,

THAT, as a result of the inappropriate conduct and actions of the member from Wellington in the House, the members of the Legislative Assembly and this House have lost confidence in this member as a Deputy Speaker and that he be asked to resign as Deputy Speaker of this Chamber.

Mr. Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to offer the Speaker advice?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): With some regret, I feel I am in a position in which I do have to put a few words in terms of remarks on the record with regard to this issue. If I can address it in two ways. There is the person of the member from

Wellington whom I have had ample opportunity to get to know over the last number of years and whom I do have a great deal of respect for. I have found him to be a very kind individual. I do not want my comments to necessarily reflect on the individual.

What I want to talk about is the significance of what has taken place and the position of Deputy Speaker. I did have opportunity to discuss this with other members, in particular, the Leader of the Manitoba Liberal Party. It was felt that it was indeed inappropriate to have a weapon, or a knife of this nature, inside the Chamber. We respect the fact the member from Wellington, or the Deputy Speaker, did stand up and gave a heartfelt apology. We accept that apology for what it is worth, but having said that, the significance of having a knife inside the Chamber and seeing no consequence concerns us greatly. The member from Wellington has the option of entertaining what he feels might be appropriate. The Premier (Mr. Doer) has the option to do likewise. Obviously, the Premier has made a decision. I suspect, maybe, the member from Wellington might still be contemplating a decision.

We do feel that there should be some sort of a consequence to it, that we should not be taking this issue lightly as someone might have suggested. You know, you walk into the Law Courts Building today, and you would not be able to carry such a weapon. This is where laws are, in fact, enforced, and this is the Chamber in which laws are made. It has raised the issue of security inside the Chamber.

At one time, it used to be a free-for-all with all the doors being open and so forth. People could just come walking in. Today in legislatures in North America you see a lot more in terms of visible security. There are certain individuals that maybe one would have expectation that they would have a better understanding, individuals that maybe have been around a little bit longer in terms of experience and certain positions such as yourself, Mr. Speaker, as Speaker of the Chamber, having a fairly good sense of what the rules are and what is appropriate and not appropriate. Those same sorts of things would apply to the Deputy Speaker.

The general feeling that we have is, as much as we accept the apology, that we do not necessarily believe that that should be what resolves the issue. The issue is still there and does need to be dealt with.

We look to the motion, and we will have to give it consideration. If in fact it does come to a vote, right offhand I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that the most appropriate thing might be for the Deputy Speaker just to submit a resignation. After reflecting on it, I would look to the member from Wellington to add comment. I would be interested in hearing the Government House Leader's comments.

Failing either one of them providing comment, we would be inclined to support what the official opposition is suggesting, and that would be a resignation or a lack of confidence in the Deputy Speaker because we do believe very firmly that having a knife of this nature inside the Chamber is not an appropriate thing to be having. An apology, as well intended as it was meant to be, in this particular case is not appropriate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, first of all, in terms of matter of privilege and whether the matter was done on a timely basis, we do not express any view on that.

In terms of whether there is a prima facie matter of privilege, which is the responsibility of the House to focus on, it is our view that this certainly does not comprise a matter of privilege. Matters of privilege have to be raised rarely. They should be raised rarely because they deal with the very ability of members to perform their tasks as members.

* (17:20)

Mr. Speaker, what we have here today has been already canvassed by the House in the sense that, No. 1, the Member for Wellington (Mr. Santos) has stood in his place and he has explained fully why it is that he had the knife in his pocket. He explained that it was used to cut some paper today, because he did not have scissors with him, but that he uses it as an apple-paring device, and he also carries a spoon with him in his top pocket. He said that that was why he carried it with him. I understand he has done that for some time.

Mr. Speaker, No. 2, he has apologized fully to the House. The member, I think, has offered full apology. He is deeply embarrassed by this and he has expressed his regret, and No. 3, he has said that he would not ever do this again. He was concerned that he may well, indeed, have affected the sensibilities

of members of this House, I think were his words. So it appears that this was a matter of habit of the honourable member and he has clearly expressed his view that, indeed, on reflection, it was entirely inappropriate.

Mr. Speaker, the *Beauchesne's* 494, of course, says that we have to accept the statements of members as accurate when they are within their own personal knowledge of a member. So we must do that and indeed as members said there is no reason to question the intentions of the honourable Member for Wellington (Mr. Santos).

So, Mr. Speaker, even as a matter of order, it was accepted by the Chair as having been dealt with because the knife was taken and the explanation, apology and assurances were provided. So we remain of the view that the point of order has been dealt with, and that certainly it is not a matter of privilege. There was in no way any use of the knife to intimidate or in any way wrongfully display it, but the member has expressed, clearly, an appreciation that there are perceptions here that are important to be considered and that it was inappropriate.

Mr. Speaker: When a matter of privilege is raised in the House, there are two aspects that the Speaker has to determine. One is whether it is the earliest possible opportunity to raise the motion and, secondly, whether there appears to be a prima facie case of privilege. I believe that the subject matter of the honourable member's motion is of such importance that the House would want to deal with the issue immediately. It was my understanding, from the latest meeting held, that members want to have this issue dealt with today. That was my understanding. I therefore rule the motion in order and put the motion before the House for debate.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, this is not a motion that I want to get into a debate over. I just want to say that members on this side of the House regret that we have been put into a position like this. I think the expression that was expressed by the member from Inkster that this deals with two issues, one an action and the other the individual. Certainly, we have no ill will towards the member from Wellington. Rather, we are dealing with the principle; we are dealing with the actions. We have been, in our view, compelled to deal with it in this manner because, unfortunately, we had asked that perhaps this matter could be dealt with by the government and by the

Premier (Mr. Doer). As a result of not dealing with it appropriately, in our view, we have been put into a position where we have had to move this motion against the member as the Deputy Speaker.

Had, Mr. Speaker, the Premier acted on this matter, it would have caused many of us less embarrassment than having to deal with this in this form. It could have been dealt with very quickly by the Premier. As I said, there are 35 members on that side of the House, there are 20 on this side of the House. There are 2 independent members. To cause all of us less embarrassment in public, this could have been dealt with very easily and very quickly, but I regret that it has had to come to this point where we, in fact, have to vote on the confidence of this member. So, with those few comments, I rest my case.

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I, too, just want to, before the question is put, get on the record that, again, I would have liked, much like what the Opposition House Leader has said, to have had this matter resolved so that all parties would have been content and accepted it.

I think we could have forgone any sort of attempt to humiliate or anything of that nature because I do believe there is a great deal of positive feeling towards the member from Wellington as an individual. I would have much preferred, as opposed to voting, that the government made a more genuine attempt to resolve this as opposed to having to vote on the issue we are likely to have to vote on right now.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, I, too, rise with a degree of reluctance. I also think a degree of trepidation, a degree of sympathy in some ways, but more so an overarching sense of responsibility, a responsibility to this Legislature, to this House, to ensure this issue is brought forward in a respectful manner, but one that is dutifully thought about the long-term consequences because the decisions that we make here today are not just limited to today. They are not just contained within the four corners of this Legislature, of the current members who are sitting here in the House today, but in fact, they will impact members for many, many years that will come. I heard the comments from the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) and I thought they were very appropriate comments and I rise to support those comments here today.

Point of Order

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

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, I regret to interrupt the member's comments, but I just want to make sure that in the spirit of the discussion we had in the Chamber, we wanted to dispose of this matter this afternoon. I am wondering if there is a will in the Chamber not to see the clock until this matter is dealt with.

Mr. Mackintosh: It is my understanding that a matter of privilege would overrule the clock, but if I am wrong, Mr. Speaker, then we will deal with the question.

Mr. Speaker: The rule is that if we are not finished the debate and the business of the privilege, it carries over till tomorrow unless there is a willingness of members not to see the clock and deal with this to its conclusion.

What is the will of the House? Is the will of the House not to see the clock until we deal with this issue? That was the request I had. *[Agreed]*

We will not see the clock.

* * *

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, I was saying we look at the long-term consequences of decisions. There are times in the debates that happen here in the Legislature, that there are issues that arise and they are debated and then they seemingly are dealt with and they go away. The longer-term impact is not as significant. It does not linger for long, but this is an issue that is more than just a policy issue. It is more than just an issue that has come up about what the government thinks is a direction and what we as opposition think should be a direction. This is about the institution that we all share in common and that every day we share and it is not a partisan issue and it is not about the Liberals or the New Democrats or the Conservatives. It is about the Legislature as a whole and about our responsibility as legislators as a whole.

There are a number of pillars that we as individuals who are elected to represent our constituency and the province as a whole, I would

submit, we need to examine. Key among them, as a foundation, is respect. Respect for each other. Respect for institution. Respect for the work our constituents have sent us here to do.

* (17:30)

I would say, Mr. Speaker, that what we saw today, the Member for Wellington (Mr. Santos), is an issue that all of us need to be concerned about. I would say, in particular, it is not just because he is an individual member, but it is because of the particular position he holds within this Legislature as the Deputy Speaker.

I can say, as a relatively new member of the Legislature, Mr. Speaker, that we look to your position as Speaker and, by extension, the position of the Deputy Speaker, we look to those roles for guidance, for leadership, for advice, because we are not, as individual members, always experts on every nuance of the rule and every nuance on parliamentary procedure. So we turn to you, Mr. Speaker. When you are not in the Chair, when you are off fulfilling other roles and responsibilities that you have and the duties that are assigned to you by this Legislature, by the extension of a vote it falls to your deputy to hold the Chair and the respect and the confidence, I would say, that we have instilled in you, that we, collectively as a body, not as Liberals, not as Conservatives, not as New Democrats, but as a body of elected officials, have instilled in you.

That also falls and must fall to the Deputy Speaker. I know that our House leader raised the issue of the election, the electing of the Deputy Speaker. I think that he brought up a very valid point. I wonder why the Premier (Mr. Doer) has not come forward and taken a greater role of leadership here, because in fact the role of the Deputy Speaker is one that is appointed out of his office. I know that the Premier has, in past times—past times being the key, I suppose, Mr. Speaker—talked about the role of the Speaker, the confidence that needs to be seen in that role, the trust that needs to come from all of us as legislators and as elected representatives. He has spoken about that respect for the Chair that you sit in and the office that you hold.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Goertzen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope that members opposite do take this in a serious fashion. I

know they do not seem to take it with the gravity that you do. I appreciate the ability to put comments on the record, and I hope that members opposite will also see this as an important issue, a democratic issue, one that deals with all of us as legislators, not just along political party lines.

As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, before you called the opposite party to order, the Premier has in past times asked very specifically that there would be respect and trust in the office that you hold. I cannot imagine when he made those arguments, some of them I think were quite passionate, that he intended to exclude the role of the Deputy Speaker. I would find it hard to believe that on the one hand the Premier would say that the Speaker of this Legislature should abide by a certain set of rules and be subject to a certain set of standards but that the Deputy Speaker would be subject to an entirely different set of rules and an entirely different set of standards.

So what we deal with today is not a matter of a member who has said something on the record and then come back into the House to withdraw those comments. I know that you take those withdrawals on face value, Mr. Speaker. You take them as fact. This is an action that was taken that was much more severe than that, much more significant, one that affected all of us as individual members. I certainly do not suppose that the Member for Wellington (Mr. Santos) had any nefarious type of motives when he brought a knife into this Legislature, but I think, by his very actions, each of us was put at a degree of risk that we should not otherwise have been.

Well, and the Member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) laughs. I know he does not take many of these things seriously. I know that he does not care about the democratic rights in this Chamber. I would say shame on the member, but I say, Mr. Speaker—

An Honourable Member: Shame on you.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, and he can chirp if he wants from the side, the Member for Interlake, and I think that his constituents will see the lack of respect that he gives this issue and many other issues that come to this Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House, unlike the Member for Interlake, respect the

democratic process and this Legislature. He might think that safety in this province and in this Legislature is, as he says, "a joke," and "ridiculous." He might feel that way. I would say that he should take that to his constituents.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think we need a little bit of relevancy to the topic that we are on.

A matter of privilege, a point of order are very, very serious matters. I need to be able to hear every word that is spoken. I ask the co-operation of all honourable members, please.

Mr. Goertzen: Thank you, again, for calling the opposite side to order, Mr. Speaker, because I do, in fact, think that safety and the relation to the actions that were taken by the Member for Wellington are relevant, very relevant. Other members might not feel that there is a relevancy there, but I, as a new member, want to be assured that, when we come into this Legislature, into the building and, hopefully, by extension some day in the entire province, we do have that security and there is safety.

I think it is difficult not to draw the link between the actions for the Member for Wellington and not just the Member for Wellington, but the Deputy Speaker of this House, someone we look to for advice, someone we hope that there will be that leadership in the position that the Premier has assigned him to. If he does not hold the confidence of all members of this House, like yourself, Mr. Speaker, if you did not hold that confidence, I know that you would be put in an extremely difficult position. I am happy to say that that is not the position that you find yourself in today, and I hope you never do.

The Deputy Speaker, by his own actions, not by actions of any member of this House other than himself, has cast that issue of non-confidence. Perhaps the Member for Wellington is considering in his own mind if there are things that he could do to now address this position or address this issue by removing himself from the position. I will leave him to his own thoughts there.

On the specifics of this matter of privilege, Mr. Speaker, I would say to you that we cannot, as legislators, not as individual party members, but as elected members, non-partisan, ensure that all our actions and all our efforts to bring good order and

good laws in the province can happen without confidence in this Legislature, without a feeling that there is respect within the Legislature, and without confidence in your Chair and all those who fill it and especially the Premier's appointee as Deputy Speaker.

With those comments, I do want to conclude and say that it is not with a spirit of malice that this issue has been raised and certainly not personally. Maybe the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) wants to make it a personal issue, but I certainly do not. That might be her style of politics; it is not mine. I do say that we all as members have to ensure that we can gravitate to both pillars of respect to the Legislature, to the pillar of confidence in the Legislature and to the pillar of dignity and confidence in your Chair and those who fill it. If the Premier will not do the right thing, and if the member will not do the right thing, then we as a collective body will have to. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House is the motion that was moved by the honourable Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach).

Voice Vote

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

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

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

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

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

Formal Vote

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, with great regret that this has gotten to the position that it has, I would ask you to call the Yeas and Nays.

Mr. Speaker: A recorded vote has been requested.

Order. The question before the House is the motion moved by the honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

Division

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

Yeas

Cullen, Cummings, Derkach, Driedger, Dyck, Eichler, Faurschou, Gerrard, Goertzen, Hawranik, Lamoureux, Maguire, Mitchelson, Murray, Penner, Reimer, Schuler, Taillieu.

Nays

Aglugub, Allan, Altemeyer, Bjornson, Brick, Caldwell, Chomiak, Dewar, Doer, Irvin-Ross, Jennissen, Jha, Korzeniowski, Lemieux, Mackintosh, Maloway, Martindale, McGifford, Melnick,

Nevakshonoff, Oswald, Robinson, Rondeau, Sale, Santos, Schellenberg, Selinger, Smith, Struthers, Swan, Wowchuk.

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

Mr. Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The hour being past 5:30 p.m., when we return tomorrow, the matter that was under the budget debate will remain open.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, March 16, 2005

CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS		Loewen; Sale	883
Petitions		Mitchelson; Sale	884
		Driedger; Sale	886
		Hawranik; Selinger	887
Highway 200			
Taillieu	877	Children in Care	
		Gerrard; Melnick	888
Generally Accepted Accounting Principles			
Lamoureux	877	Members' Statements	
		Child Sexual Exploitation	
Westman Area Physician Shortage		Driedger	890
Cullen	877		
		Seven Oaks General Hospital	
Ambulance Service		Aglugub	891
Schuler	878		
Tabling of Reports			
		Victoria Hospital Maternity Ward	
Communities Economic Development Fund,		Loewen	891
Quarterly Report, Nine Months, April 1 to			
December 31, 2004		Immigration	
Lathlin	879	Altemeyer	892
Manitoba Liquor Control Commission,		Teachers' Pension Benefits	
Quarterly Report, Nine Months, April 1 to		Gerrard	892
December 31, 2004			
Smith	879	ORDERS OF THE DAY	
		GOVERNMENT BUSINESS	
Manitoba Lotteries Corporation, Quarterly		Adjourned Debate	
Report, Nine Months, April 1 to December 31,		(Seventh Day of Debate)	
2004			
Smith	879	Lamoureux	893
		Jennissen	898
Introduction of Bills		Eichler	902
		Rondeau	905
Bill 21—The Oil and Gas Amendment and Oil		Mitchelson	909
and Gas Production Tax Amendment Act			
Rondeau	879	Speaker's Statement	
		Hickes	912
Bill 203—The Manitoba Public Insurance			
Corporation Amendment Act		Matter of Privilege	
Mitchelson	879		
		Derkach	912, 915
Oral Questions		Lamoureux	914, 916
		Mackintosh	915
Victoria Hospital		Goertzen	916
Murray; Doer	880		
Stefanson; Sale	882		

