

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, April 6, 2009

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYER

Introduction of New Members

Mr. Speaker: I am pleased to inform the Assembly that the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly has received from the Chief Electoral Officer a letter indicating the election of William Alexander Blaikie as the member for the constituency of Elmwood. I hereby table the notice of return of the member elected.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present to you Bill Blaikie, member of the Legislative Assembly for the Elmwood constituency, who has signed the roll, taken the oath and asks that he be allowed to take his place.

Mr. Speaker: On behalf of all honourable members, I wish to welcome you to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba and to wish you well in your parliamentary career.

I'm also pleased to inform the Assembly that the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly has received from the Chief Electoral Officer a letter indicating the election of Frank John Whitehead as the member for the constituency of The Pas. I hereby table the notice of return of the member elected.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present to you Mr. Frank Whitehead, member for the constituency of The Pas, who has taken the oath, signed the roll and would seek to take his place in this Legislature.

Mr. Speaker: On behalf of all honourable members, I wish to welcome you to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba and to wish you well in your parliamentary career.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 12—The Residential Tenancies Amendment Act

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice

(Mr. Chomiak), that Bill 12, The Residential Tenancies Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur la location à usage d'habitation, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, this bill introduces provisions which allow landlords to request a pet deposit if they so choose. As well, it introduces a requirement for a standard tenancy agreement for tenant services provided by landlords, determines claims by landlords against guarantors and imposes administrative penalties on landlords and tenants for failing to comply with the orders.

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

PETITIONS

Neepawa, Gladstone, Ste. Rose, McCreary—Family Doctors

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

These are the reasons for this petition.

Access to a family doctor is vital to good primary health care. Patients depend on their family doctors for many things, including their routine health-care needs, preventative care and referrals for diagnostic tests and appointments with specialists.

Family doctors in Neepawa, Gladstone and Ste. Rose are unable to accept new patients. The nearby community of McCreary has not had a doctor available to take patients in months.

Without a family doctor, residents of this large geographical area have no option but to look for family doctors in communities as far away as Brandon and Winnipeg.

Residents of these communities are suffering because of the provincial government's continuing failure to effectively address the shortage of doctors in rural Manitoba.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) to consider prioritizing the needs of these communities by ensuring they have access to a family doctor.

To urge the Minister of Health to consider promptly increasing the use of nurse practitioners in these communities in order to improve access to quality health care.

This petition is signed by Lorilee Ryzner, Pamela Sul and William Cabak and many, many others.

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

* (13:40)

Pharmacare Deductibles

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition:

The NDP government has increased Pharmacare deductibles by 5 percent each year for the past seven years, with the curious exception of the 2007 election year.

As a result of the cumulative 34 percent hike in Pharmacare deductibles by the NDP government, some Manitobans are forced to choose between milk and medicine.

Seniors, fixed and low-income-earning Manitobans are the most negatively affected by these increases.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Premier (Mr. Doer) of Manitoba to consider reversing his decision to increase Pharmacare deductibles by 5 percent in budget 2008.

To request the Premier of Manitoba to consider reducing health-care bureaucracy, as previously promised, and to consider directing those savings into sustaining Pharmacare and improving patient care.

This petition is signed by Terry McCreery, Maxine Manness, Pat Wanklin and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Seven Oaks Hospital—Emergency Services

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by J. Craig, D. Belcher, W. Melnyk and many, many other fine Manitobans.

PTH 15

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

These are the reasons for this petition.

In 2004, the Province of Manitoba made a public commitment to the people of Springfield to twin PTH 15 and the floodway bridge on PTH 15, but then in 2006, the twinning was cancelled.

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

Signed by school trustee Don Nichol, trustee Diane Duma, Ken Heard and many, many, many other Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: Before we continue on, I'd like to remind members when they're reading a petition that the names are read as they sign them and not to add anything to the name.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I'm just reminding the members of the rules of reading petitions.

For the information of the House, there seems to be a little misunderstanding here. For the information of the House, if a trustee or councillor or mayor wishes to be recognized, they will sign trustee and their name or mayor and their name. Members in the House are to read petitions as printed and not to add anything to it.

We're still on petitions. Are there any more?

Okay, we will move on to committee reports. Committee reports.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Diane McGifford (Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy): I am pleased to table the Adult Learning Centres in Manitoba 2007-2008 Annual Report and the Manitoba Student Aid 2007-2008 Annual Report.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Provincial Ice Jams and Flooding

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): I have a statement for the House.

Mr. Speaker, communities north of Winnipeg have been working tirelessly to protect their homes against the unexpected flooding which occurred last weekend due to ice jams. Those in the Red River Valley have been diligently preparing for the impending flood waters moving north from the U.S.

Throughout this difficult period, the Premier (Mr. Doer), the Water Stewardship Minister, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen), the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) and myself and many of our colleagues have been in the flood-affected communities north of the city and those in the Red River Valley. We have met with community leaders and helped sandbag. We have been to Emerson, Morris, West St. Paul, East St. Paul, St. Andrews, Selkirk, East Selkirk, St. Clements, Grande Pointe, Grand Forks—actually, our friends to the south—Emerson, St. Jean Baptiste, Ste. Agathe, St. Adolphe, Letellier, Brandon, as well as hot spots within the city of Winnipeg such as Scotia Street and Kingston Crescent.

The most recent forecast indicates that the Red River crest is expected to reach Emerson on April 8 and will reach the Winnipeg area by approximately April 16. Water levels in Winnipeg are expected to rise significantly over the next few days and there remains a small risk of a serious ice jam.

We have been working closely with the City of Winnipeg to ensure that the most up-to-date flood information is available and that homes are protected. We will operate the floodway as necessary to avoid potential imminent flooding in Winnipeg.

I would, Mr. Speaker, like to thank the 200-plus government of Manitoba employees and countless other Manitobans who are working diligently to protect our homes and communities.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the minister for his statement today and updating the House, as well as Manitobans, as to what is transpiring in Manitoba with respect to the flooding.

I also want to take this opportunity on behalf of all of us to thank the many hundreds of volunteers who have helped out the many families who have

been negatively impacted as a result of this. Certainly, we want to extend to those families our very best as they go through what is a very difficult time.

Certainly, I know our leader, along with the Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu) and the Member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon) and others in the House had the opportunity to get out and visit some of the communities. That will be an ongoing thing over the course of the next while to ensure that people are safe in those communities and that, hopefully, we can mitigate the damages as a result of the flooding.

So, again, I want to thank the minister for his statement. We look forward to future updates with respect to this situation. Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I ask leave to speak to the minister's statement.

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

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I, too, want to express concern for the situation with regard to flooding, the people who have been impacted. Certainly, in the situation that we're in with the concern over flooding and the concern over ice jams, a huge vote of thanks is needed both for the Manitoba government employees who participated and for the hundreds and hundreds of volunteers who've been out helping sandbagging, and in numerous other ways with people who are affected by the flood.

I would say that looking at this and being up and down the river that we still have some way to go to improve the protection that we have on ice jams. But I would say in other respects, we are doing very, very well this year and hopefully that we won't have more rain or snow, which would exacerbate the situation, and we will get through this flood without too much more in the way of trouble than we've already had.

* (13:50)

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: I'd like to draw attention of all honourable members to the Speaker's Gallery where we have with us today family members of the honourable Member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead). We have Margaret Whitehead, his wife; Charlotte Whitehead, his daughter; Desiree Whitehead-Wescoupe, granddaughter; Maureen Brown, sister; Millie Delaronde, Elaine Kadachuk and Olive

Beardy, who are also his sisters and Brenda Nelson, also a sister.

Also in the Speaker's Gallery we have with us today Grand Chief Ron Evans, Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and Regional Chief Bill Traverse of the Assembly of First Nations.

Also in the public gallery we have with us today family members of the honourable Member for Fort Rouge (Ms. Howard). We have Bobbi Sturby, who is her mother, and also Dwight Solon and Gisele Solon, who are uncle and aunt, and Samantha Solon, who is her cousin.

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

Also in the public gallery we have from the University of Winnipeg eight Environmental Studies students under the direction of Ms. Maria Healy. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for Wolseley (Mr. Altemeyer).

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

I'd also like to draw the attention of honourable members to the table, and I ask you to assist me in welcoming Claude Michaud, our newly appointed Clerk Assistant/Journals Clerk to the table.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Enhanced Driver's Licences Project Status

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to extend congratulations and a welcome both to the new Member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead) and to the Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie) and also their families who are here to support them today, Grand Chief Evans as well as Chief Traverse. Congratulations, welcome.

I know that this can at times be a partisan place, but there will be other times when it is not as partisan. I know that you'll enjoy both as we all work toward a better province for the people that we're elected to represent.

Mr. Speaker, on the topic of the enhanced driver's licences, which is something that has been initiated by this government through Manitoba Public Insurance, we found and we know that two weeks ago, the government of Saskatchewan made the decision to cancel their move toward enhanced driver's licences as a result of uncertain demand,

rapidly rising costs and concerns about privacy and that that was done with the support of the opposition NDP. Also, we know that concerns have been raised by certain federal New Democrats, as well, about the direction of this program.

I want to ask the Premier: What is the status of this initiative in Manitoba? Can he report on the amount of uptake to date and what the government's forecasts are in terms of what this initiative will cost ratepayers and what it will achieve in terms of benefits for Manitobans?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, a couple of points on the enhanced driver's licence. Ultimately, we will have an enhanced driver's licence in the sense of having one piece of information on a traditional driver's licence available to all drivers in Manitoba.

Point No. 2, in terms of the present requirements of Homeland Security, some provinces, including Manitoba, have provided optional—optional—licences for people who do not want to purchase a passport and want to only purchase an ID that will be acceptable to the U.S. government, the U.S. Homeland Security. British Columbia has a form of enhanced licence. Manitoba has a proposal and has some limited, very moderate, actually, uptake on the licence. Ontario has a similar package—in fact, we're using similar technology—and the Province of Québec is proceeding as well.

Mr. McFadyen: I take it from the Premier's answer that the intent is to move full speed ahead here in Manitoba in the face of evidence of rapidly rising costs, limited uptake and concerns about privacy raised by a number of experts in that area, Mr. Speaker.

There's a \$30 difference between the enhanced driver's licence and a passport. There were certainly other means that could have been put in place to deal with that challenge in the event that it presented a challenge to Manitoba families.

I want to ask the Premier whether they are taking any steps to revisit this initiative and if he can report to the House today on what ratepayers are going to be stuck paying for in the event that this does not go as originally advertised and planned.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite would heed what was happening in Saskatchewan. That's his right to do so. I would point out British Columbia, Ontario, Québec and Manitoba have brought in an optional enhanced driver's licence. You

do not have to provide the information onto that draft licence if you don't want to. You have the option of not having a passport, not having an enhanced driver's licence, having the existing driver's licence. It's an option that people have in terms of privacy. You do not have to suspend your privacy rights to have a driver's licence in Manitoba. If you choose to have and purchase an enhanced driver's licence, you are allowed to provide greater information that's required by the U.S. Homeland Security branch. You can also choose not to have that and go with the passport, as stated by the member opposite.

So right now we have a driver's licence that won't get you into the United States after June and a passport that will. For some that don't want a passport, this is an option for them. We believe it's sensible and that's why most provinces are proceeding with it.

I would point out that members opposite voted for the legislation.

Mr. McFadyen: The analysis previously presented is not holding up in fact today, which is why we're asking the questions, Mr. Speaker.

We recognize that it's voluntary. I wonder if the Premier can indicate how many Manitobans have opted to sign up for the \$50 card and how much money MPI has put out—ratepayers' money—how much have they put out and how much has come back in? What is the cost that is going to be left for MPI ratepayers in the event that there's very limited uptake, which appears to be the case as things today exist, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, the whole issue of going to a more modern licence is part of our belief to go from two pieces—which I've always thought was rather obsolete—to one piece. Part of that is going to be for every driver in Manitoba. Part of that technology will be for every driver in Manitoba, and part of that will be for those who choose to purchase the enhanced driver's licence, those people who go across the border a lot but don't plan on going to Cuba or don't plan on going to China and would want an enhanced driver's licence to meet the requirements of the U.S. Homeland Security.

Mr. Speaker, we as a province, like many other provinces, would prefer not to have the new conditions that the U.S. Homeland Security branch has put in place. We did not think it was appropriate and sensible for the Bush administration to come forward in a post-9/11 regime with the requirements.

We thought already that we had proper security at the border, but given the fact that there was a unilateral decision made in the United States, we have provided a kind of option, a set of ranges, for the public that want to protect their privacy.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would point out that when you look at public insurance, something that has been opposed by members opposite every step of the way, the Public Insurance Corporation of Manitoba has the lowest rates in North America and the money is invested in this province, something we're very proud of.

* (14:00)

Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Enhanced Driver's Licences Security Risks

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, the enhanced driver's licence has been scrapped in other provinces for a variety of reasons, including privacy concerns. The licence contains a radio frequency identifier which can be read by anybody with a RFID scanner. This means that personal information could be skimmed and used for purposes of identity fraud. It has the Ombudsman concerned and prompted her to advise people to opt instead for a passport.

The public needs to be aware of the dangers as well as the benefits of the licence. When is the minister going to tell Manitobans about the risks to their privacy?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Act): Mr. Speaker, let me quote from what the Ombudsman said: We are pleased that early in the development of the EIC program, MPI and the Manitoba government consulted with us on privacy issues. MPI and the government have heightened Manitoba's awareness of privacy consideration in the program and refined the collection and use of personal information. This has been a positive, co-operative experience, quoting the Ombudsman of Manitoba.

Mrs. Taillieu: Mr. Speaker, the Ombudsman also said that Manitoba and Canadian privacy laws don't apply in the U.S., and officials can keep their personal information for up to 75 years.

In an article by Jesse Brown of the CBC, the author writes, and I quote, one safeguard is the technology that allows RFID to be turned on or off by pressing down on the chip. Another is a version

that's only readable from a few inches away, but Manitoba has ignored these options, end of quote.

The NDP have opted for a bulky sleeve instead, which, if not told the purpose of the sleeve, people likely won't use it. Why does the minister have such disregard for the privacy of Manitobans that he would not take all steps possible to protect their rights?

Mr. Chomiak: I'm very pleased that civil liberties groups, as quoted in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, have lauded Manitoba for being the only province to recognize the information contained on the chip is personal data which makes them subject to protection of the privacy act, and for privacy reasons the card comes with a protective sleeve, and it's been identified as that. And, Mr. Speaker, the member might note the ad taken out by the federal government in last week's *Globe and Mail*, across the country, talking about using Manitoba ID to cross the border.

Mrs. Taillieu: Mr. Speaker, it's clear that the passport is the only answer because it takes you anywhere, anytime, so why do anything else.

We understand the importance of maintaining trade and tourism and ease of border crossing. We also understand that issues of security will always trump issues of privacy. But individual privacy is a right that should not be easily tossed aside, because once you don't have it, you're not going to get it back.

Other provinces have cited privacy concerns, with other reasons, for scrapping this hugely expensive enhanced driver's licence program. Will this minister do the same thing?

Mr. Chomiak: I believe I talked to the minister responsible in that particular individual province several weeks ago when he sought advice with respect to this particular matter and indicated that legislation would be necessary and they didn't have the proper time frame as in Manitoba where all the opposition parties, including the member, voted in favour of the protection that we put in the legislation and agreed with our recommendation that it be voluntary only, Mr. Speaker, and only indicated that sometimes people have to be consistent in what they say in this House.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let's have a little decorum. It's very hard to hear the questions and the answers.

* (14:00)

**Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation
Claimant Adviser Office**

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): I wonder if the minister has one of those enhanced driver's licences.

Mr. Speaker, many Manitobans who are injured in motor vehicle accidents are seriously hurt and unable to work. They can't afford to pay a lawyer to assist them if they need to appeal the MPI decision. Those claimants have limited options. They can get help from a family member or a friend or from a claimant adviser officer.

Can the minister responsible for the claimant adviser office tell the House what the current wait time is for assistance from a CAO and how many claimants are waiting for help?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, as the member is aware, the claimant adviser office was set up under this government. It's funded by Autopac. It provides an advocacy service for people that have a concern about the way they were treated by Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation.

It is clear that there is a great deal of need out there. People need advice and support, and there has been some trouble with waiting times there. I know they've been working diligently to reduce those wait times to provide that service to people which did not exist before we came into government.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Speaker, when MPI claimants go to appeal, they're facing an army of MPI lawyers. It's naive to think that most of these people would be able to launch a fair appeal without the assistance of someone who is experienced in the MPI claims.

The claimant adviser office is one option, but claimants are currently being turned away and told there's a wait list. Those who do get assistance of the CAO can't choose who their representative is and they have no recourse if they feel that their CAO is not acting in his or her best interest.

Can the Minister responsible for MPI (Mr. Chomiak) tell the House why MPI is refusing to allow claimants the right to have a representative other than a lawyer, a CAO or a family member or friend?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, there never was any support for anybody that wanted to take on Manitoba

Public Insurance Corporation with respect to a claim they had until this office was put in place.

It provides a service to people. It provides a service that will allow them to make a full appeal if they wish. In addition, we have put in place mediation, a demonstration project right now so that people can find a way to resolve this matter without having to follow a conflictual model. They can use a mediation model to come to an outcome as well.

If the member has any specific individual that does not feel they have been treated properly, I would ask him to bring it to my attention and I will follow up on it and make sure that they get satisfaction.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Speaker, the MPI claimants who wish to exercise their right to appeal have been told by MPI and the Automobile Injury Compensation Appeal Commission that they cannot get assistance from someone who isn't a lawyer, a representative of the CAO office or a family member or friend.

Claimants feel that without fair, independent and affordable representation, they don't stand a chance against MPI and its lawyers. Last year only 27 percent of the AICAC appellants were successful.

Will the Minister responsible for MPI tell the House, will he support claimants calling for access to a fair and affordable representation or will he continue to allow MPI to dictate who can represent victims of automobile accidents?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, there is for the first time in the history of this province a resource to challenge an MPI decision. This resource is called the claimant adviser office. It's funded by the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation, but it operates under the Ministry of Finance as a consumer protection service so there is no conflict of interest with the minister responsible for the Crown corporation.

They have been doing their job representing people. They have been working on mediation alternatives. Again, if the member has a specific person that does not feel they have been treated properly or they do not feel they have been getting a timely service, I ask him to draw it to my attention and I will raise it with the claimant adviser office and find out their status and see what we can do to advance their claim in a timely fashion.

**Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation
Cityplace Mall Purchase**

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

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): [*inaudible*] that they're getting a fair shake with the CAOs.

On a new question, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this year, MPI announced that it had purchased Cityplace mall at a cost of \$80.5 million. Every year MPI insists that it needs more money in its rate stabilization reserve to prevent rate shock and resist giving MPI ratepayers rebates.

I'd like to ask the Minister responsible for MPI: Is MPI taking \$81 million out of a rate stabilization reserve which is supposed to protect ratepayers from rate shock?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Act): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated to the member in the House last week or the week before when he raised this question, MPI was leasing in a building for 28 years, and when they looked forward to their continued functioning in Manitoba, they felt it was better to stay in the building that they were leasing for 28 years. In fact, it would be a lower cost in the long run than the lease costs, in terms of paying the mortgage, so it made a lot of sense for MPI to do that.

I had already answered the question to the member, with respect. It's not coming from the fund that the member references; it's coming from long-term investments.

*(14:10)

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Speaker, buying the apartment you're renting just to—buying an apartment block just because you're renting an apartment isn't good business.

Mr. Speaker, as a result of this purchase, MPI is now the landlord for a number of clothing stores, restaurants and even the MLCC liquor store, yet the retail space in Cityplace has a very high vacancy rate, about 18 percent. Commercial real estate speculation in this market is a risky business, a risk that MPI now has passed on to the MPI ratepayers.

Can the Minister responsible for MPI explain to Manitobans why MPI can afford to purchase a shopping mall but cannot afford to support insured claimants who have suffered catastrophic injuries?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, I think most Manitobans would understand that if you occupy 80 percent of a building and you have for 28 years and you plan to be there—unless the Conservatives come in and privatize it like they did MTS—that it would make some sense that if you're going to be there for another 20 years, it's cheaper to own the building and to pay down your mortgage than to lease forever and ever and ever to individuals and other land developers in the city of Winnipeg.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Speaker, the MPI CEO told the *Winnipeg Free Press* that purchasing Cityplace gives MPI greater flexibility to expand. That means that MPI paid prime commercial real estate prices for what is ultimately going to become cubicles for bureaucrats.

Can the Minister responsible for MPI confirm that MPI is planning to convert the real estate space in the mall to office space and tell Manitobans how many more bureaucrats MPI is planning to hire to fill the space?

Mr. Chomiak: It never fails to amaze me how against MPI the opposition have been from the day MPI was brought in. Mr. Speaker, 50 percent—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Attorney General has the floor.

Mr. Chomiak: Eighty-five cents of every dollar that MPI earns goes back to Manitobans, 85. The members opposite would have the money go to Americans, have the money go to international companies, not build schools and not build hospitals in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, and, on top of it, have the lowest rates in North America.

If we have to have this battle over again against public insurance, I'm sure Manitobans will be happy to line up behind us, Mr. Speaker, as opposed to what happened with the Manitoba Telephone System where we lost everything and the rates went up all across Manitoba, including rural Manitoba. Is that what the members opposite want to put back on the backs of Manitobans again?

**Red River Floodway
Circumstances of Operation**

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Several of my colleagues, including the Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu) and the Member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon), have asked questions about the current flood situation we are facing in Manitoba. There has

been talk from government officials about the potential of opening the floodway gates prior to ice flowing freely on the river, and many people are concerned about the impact that this could have on their communities.

Mr. Speaker, my question for the minister is: Under what circumstances will the gates be open prior to the ice flowing freely on the river?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): I think it's important to note that the normal circumstance is to operate the floodway after the ice has cleared, but it would not be the first time, if required, that we do that. In fact, it has occurred prior to 1997. Also, during 1997, very exceptional circumstances, it was used. Obviously we will operate the floodway as soon as the ice is flowing freely.

We are looking at earlier operation in place largely because of a combined element of potential ice jams and a very significant flow. I'd note, by the way, that the Red River is cresting in Emerson today. So over the next few days there'll be crests all up and down the valley, and I'll continue—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Warnings for Affected Communities

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I think it's important that people in affected communities be given ample warning about the opening of the floodway gates when that time occurs, Mr. Speaker.

Other than just the sounding of the horn, how does the government plan to warn people in these communities of the opening of the floodway gates?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): Well, I thank the member for the question.

I think, first of all, it's important to note that a public statement was given by Steve Topping and the Department of Water Stewardship, and if the city's river level is predicted to exceed 20 feet at James Avenue within a 24-hour period, that the floodway will be operated as necessary to avoid imminent flooding in Winnipeg. It's very important, by the way, not to understate the significance of what we're dealing with this year with a combined situation with ice and the high water flows.

We will follow the floodway's environment act and we will be making a further statement this afternoon as part of our flood briefing to make sure

people are aware in advance of the situation. In addition to that, we will work with the media, I know, who are covering this around the clock. I want to thank the media, by the way, who have been doing a great job in informing Manitobans. I'm sure—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Preparation for Potential Ice Jams

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, you know, many people are concerned about what will happen if the floodway gates are opened and ice jams occur in the floodway.

Are the floodway bridges prepared to withstand significant damage that could occur as a result of these ice flows, and what is the government doing to prepare for these ice jams to ensure that the safety of the public is protected?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): Mr. Speaker, I certainly hope the members opposite appreciate the combination of the factors and the risks not only of operating the floodway, but the significant risks of not operating the floodway. In fact, I know that the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) certainly has been involved with previous briefings, and I certainly offered today to get the latest information to any and all members of the Legislature, whichever party, because this is not a partisan issue.

I do want to indicate, by the way, in terms of informing Manitobans, we do have the precedent of the summer operation of the floodway. In addition to the operation of the siren, we also do notify affected and potentially affected properties in addition to the broad information of the media.

But I think it's really important here, if the member does want a briefing on the situation, I'd like to offer it outside of question period. I'm sort of prepared to answer questions but in a non-partisan environment. I'm willing to put forward any of our senior staff—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Low-Speed Electric Vehicles Special-Use Regulations

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Northland Machinery in Carman is a distributor and dealer for electric low-speed vehicles. The Minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines has maintained that the federal government must certify these low-speed vehicles before the Province can issue special-use

permits. The federal government has certified LSVs as of August 2008.

When will the Province of Manitoba issue regulations for special use of low-speed vehicles in Manitoba?

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines): I am pleased to let all members know that we're working with the Minister of Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) to see how these new vehicles can be incorporated into our transportation grid. We're working with other jurisdictions to make sure that different jurisdictions have similar regulations so that you have the same sort of regulation in Ontario or Québec or B.C., as we do here in Manitoba.

We also want to work with other suppliers like Westward Industries, which produces a very good vehicle here, and others. But, Mr. Speaker, what we want to do is continue to work with business, the government and different consumers to make sure that these vehicles are driven in Manitoba safely as part of an integrated transportation system. Thank you.

* (14:20)

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, the town of Carman and Northland Machinery are very interested in setting up a special-use zone for low-speed vehicles.

Will this government commit to working with Northland Machinery and the town of Carman to set up the parameters for operating low-speed vehicles?

Mr. Rondeau: The short answer is, absolutely. We want to work with the different companies here. We think that by marketing not only to that distributor but other manufacturers like Westward Industries, we can actually not only just operate those vehicles here, but if we do it properly, we'll be operating those vehicles across Canada, indeed the world. I think that's our opportunity to take these vehicles, integrate them into our transportation plan, share the rules and regulations with other jurisdictions and continue to expand.

I'm very, very eager to see these vehicles continued on our streets and to continue to be a leader in green technology. So it's not just the green technology but creating the jobs and the opportunities in the manufacturing industry to continue to grow our green economy.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, I've heard all this before, and it's still not getting us anywhere, so what I have is just a very, very simple question. When will the new regulations come into place?

Mr. Rondeau: Very, very soon. Mr. Speaker. I look at the member opposite. We look at the new mass transit announcement. We look at the bye bye beaters announcement. We look at the other things that are happening as far as trails, and I tell all members, stay tuned. Things are happening.

Corporate Income Tax Revenue Forecast

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): First, let me congratulate and welcome the two new MLAs.

The Minister of Finance, in his budget, estimated corporate income tax revenue of \$380 million for the year just completed, up by \$13 million from the previous year. Yet the minister's own third-quarter report showed corporate income tax revenues were down by \$26 million in the first three quarters.

I ask the Minister of Finance: Why did he estimate increased corporate income tax revenues for the year when the first three quarters were down? Is the minister somehow suggesting that there was a dramatic turnaround in the economy January to March so that corporate income tax revenues rose?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, this member asked a similar question the last time we were together, and I indicated to him that the forecast for corporate tax revenues is down this year versus last year, reflecting the softening of the economy that's going on all across the globe.

The forecast has been done in order to provide the realistic situation about growth in the economy and, as the member knows, all the forecasts for the economy across the country have been revised downward, almost on a weekly basis. At the time the budget was prepared, the estimates were revised down to reflect the reality at the time that they were taken to print.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, this coming year, the Minister of Finance is budgeting a deficit in core government operations of \$88 million. Included in that is estimated revenue from corporate income taxes of \$346 million. If the present situation were similar to the recession of the early 1990s, we can

expect that corporate income tax revenues will come in much lower. Indeed, the Minister of Finance is today suggesting that he's revising revenues down, week by week.

What is his latest prediction for the deficit in the core government revenues? It was \$88 million last week. Has it gone up and up now?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I think the member, once again, didn't actually hear what I said. I said forecasters have been revising the estimates for growth in the economy. I said that we had printed the numbers in the budget with the best information at the time that we took the budget to print.

The reality is that we expect the budget to stay on track. If there's a change, we will report that in the quarterly reports that we provide to the Legislature. The member is entirely welcome to come to Estimates, and I'm happy to give him the detailed methodology by which we came to the forecast.

The reality is we're not making any change in the predictions at this stage of the game. We're debating the budget in front of us, and I look forward to the debate.

Seven Oaks Hospital Emergency Services Reduction

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to point out two facts. First, we need to be very clear that there has been a reduction in emergency services at the Seven Oaks Hospital. That's fact No. 1. Fact No. 2 is that the NDP MLAs from Winnipeg's North End have been deadly quiet on the issue. They have not stood up for the North End Winnipeg residents. I want to be clear on that particular point.

Mr. Speaker, the front-line medical officials and professionals have made it very clear to myself and others that this is not a good, sound decision. We are looking for leadership from this Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald), failing that, from this Premier to reverse the decision and restore the services that have been cut out of emergency from the Seven Oaks Hospital.

Will the Premier do the right thing and make a commitment to restore those very important, critical services today?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, we will continue to listen to the advice of medical professionals, and we will continue to heed their advice in the delivery of health care in Manitoba.

Provincial Parks Enhanced Services

Mr. Drew Caldwell (Brandon East): Mr. Speaker, I'm tempted to ask a budget question given the absence of such from the members opposite.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba is known worldwide for the quality of its wilderness areas. In Churchill, we have the tremendous polar bear experience, beluga whales, the aurora borealis. This government has been working very hard on the UNESCO World Heritage Site for the tremendous wilderness area east of Lake Winnipeg.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Conservation please explain to the members of the House today what the Manitoba government is doing currently to improve Manitobans' access to the province's great outdoors? Thank you.

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Conservation): Finally, a question with some substance to it, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, maybe it's because of this government's wisdom of putting more money into park infrastructure; maybe it's because we've removed logging, commercial logging from 80 of 81 parks; maybe it's because we eliminated the park entry pass; maybe it's because we replaced an old out-of-date American system, supported by guys across the way, with a made-in-Manitoba solution.

But, Mr. Speaker, today, Manitobans are proving how much they love their parks: 9,839 campsites have been booked today. We're going to break their record from last year.

Rural Long-Term Care Facilities Government Strategy

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, the recent budget talked about looking after personal care home expansion. When short on substance, personal care homes would be built or added on to.

Could the minister responsible tell the House and the residents of Lakeside constituency to look forward to an increase in the number of beds in the Teulon, Stonewall, Lundar and St. Laurent areas?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I see today is the day that we are to be spending in health care. I know yesterday was the day that we were spending too much in health care.

What I certainly can tell—

An Honourable Member: Yesterday was Sunday.

Ms. Oswald: I think that they complain about health-care spending every day of the week, Mr. Speaker.

But I would tell the member opposite that, of course, we continue to invest in residences for our seniors, whether they're in personal care home environments which we know are very important to our communities, but, in addition, we continue to invest in supportive housing, Mr. Speaker. We continue to invest in supports for seniors in group living, and, of course, we continue to invest in home care, the No. 1 program in the country.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, the minister may make light of the situation, but the people of Lakeside take this very seriously. I know our R.M.s, and the RHA have been asking for personal care beds to be increased since 1999. We need action from this government.

Mr. Speaker, could the minister responsible tell this House why our residents are being left out and not being looked after by this government?

Ms. Oswald: Mr. Speaker, we know that we have spent, in Manitoba, well over \$200 million in replacing hospitals, renovating emergency rooms. We know that we're going to continue to work with our regional health authorities and with communities on the needs of each community.

I know that virtually every member of this House has a request concerning health capital infrastructure. We're going to work with our regions to make sure that our seniors and our communities are getting the services that they need, and we'll just continue to work and go forward on that, Mr. Speaker.

* (14:30)

18th Street Bridge Lane Addition

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: Now, the minister has proven that he's mismanaged the construction of the two new bridges across the Assiniboine River. It's only a one-year delay. We

hope that they get built sooner than later, but he can actually make amends, Mr. Speaker.

I wonder if the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation today would commit to the construction of the fourth lane on the overpass over the railway tracks down 18th Street. We have the land. We have the ability. All we need now is political will.

Will he make that announcement now, that they will, in fact, do the fourth lane across the railway tracks?

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Mr. Speaker, when the member opposite was the mayor of Brandon, we never heard a word from him about doing anything, let alone the bridges over 18th Street.

We made a commitment to put millions of dollars of infrastructure into the city of Brandon and, Mr. Speaker, we take great pride in the fact that we're working with the city council in Brandon and also working with the R.M. surrounding that city to ensure that the infrastructure improved in that particular region.

Mr. Borotsik: Mr. Speaker, I didn't get an answer on the 18th Street overpass, and I'm sure the minister, once he thinks about it, will be able to answer.

By the way, the City of Brandon, when there was an individual who was mayor, did purchase the land, Mr. Speaker, which is now purchased and actually available to the provincial government to add that fourth lane. Now, that was vision and foresight. Now maybe the minister will have some vision and some foresight, instead of just transferring a bottleneck of traffic to another bottleneck. Maybe he will now announce that he will look very favourably on construction of the fourth lane of the overpass in 18th Street.

Mr. Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, once again we hear from this critic to spend, spend, spend, spend and then tomorrow we'll hear cut, cut, cut; you're spending too much. We're very proud of our record in infrastructure, spending billions of dollars with regard to the infrastructure in this province.

Brandon has been well served by the Member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell) with regard to bringing these issues forward, as well as the previous MLA for Brandon West. I have to tell you that having the input from these two MLAs into the infrastructure department, as well as working with

our department, Mr. Speaker, these two bridges will be completed on time and on budget. The people from Brandon will be well served by the Province of Manitoba.

Mr. Borotsik: Mr. Speaker, actually, if we took the salary from the previous member of Brandon West and put in the construction program of the 18th Street overpass, I would be much happier for that. Actually, it's not the two bridges. It's not the bridges over the Assiniboine which, by the way, are, in fact, a year to 18 months overdue. So they may be on budget and they may be on time, but that would be the second time that they've tendered that contract.

What I'm simply saying is: Has the minister honestly looked at the problem of the three-lane bridge instead of a four-lane bridge over 18th Street, the overpass over the railway tracks, because, Mr. Speaker, that is going to become a terrible bottleneck. We don't want a Disraeli issue here. I just simply want one more lane attached to a bridge.

Will he make a commitment to do that, or will he simply say we've got the money, we've got an infrastructure program, but we're not going to spend it?

Mr. Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, we're very proud of our record of consulting and working with communities on infrastructure projects. We'll continue to do so. But I ask the member opposite: Is he going to finally vote for a progressive budget, not only having a partisan first name as a Progressive Conservative, is he actually going to vote for a progressive budget for the first time?

Millions of dollars are being put into infrastructure, Mr. Speaker, and members opposite continually vote against it, against it every single time. They go into their coffee shops and swagger in their coffee shops, complaining about this government, and yet we're the government that is putting billions of dollars into infrastructure in this province.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

World Water Day and Earth Hour

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring awareness to two very important events which took place in the month of March.

The first was World Water Day, which was observed two weeks ago. World Water Day originated from the 1992 United Nations conference on environment and development in Rio de Janeiro, and is now held annually on the 22nd of March as a means of focussing world attention on the importance of fresh water and advocating for the sustainable management of fresh water resources.

Mr. Speaker, 2009 marked the 17th observance of World Water Day, and this year's theme focussed on trans-boundary water management.

According to the United Nations, by the year 2030, Mr. Speaker, nearly half of the world's population will be living in areas of high water stress. Already, over 40 percent of the world's population resides within internationally shared river basins.

I am proud of our government's strong defence of international water rights regarding the Devils Lake outlet, our many efforts to improve the health of Lake Winnipeg from pollution within and beyond our borders and the recent launch of our highly successful water smart conservation program.

In that regard, Mr. Speaker, I am also very proud to represent the constituents of Wolseley where students at the University of Winnipeg recently voted to end the purchase and provision of bottled water on campus, the first such university in Canada to do so. This bold move recognizes the importance of treating water as a public resource rather than as a private commodity.

The second awareness movement in March that I would like to bring to members' attention was Earth Hour, which took place on Saturday, March 28 at 8:30 p.m. Earth Hour is also an international event, asking households and businesses to turn off their non-essential lights and electrical appliances for one hour to raise awareness towards the need to take action on climate change.

This year over 80 countries and more than 2,000 cities committed to Earth Hour 2009, including our very own Manitoba government. I thank all Manitobans for their participation in these important events. Our conscious effort to take a stand for the environment demonstrates how a changing world can begin with individual action. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Dominion City Rail Line Commemoration Ceremony

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, for many years Manitoba has relied on railways as a major form of transportation. Canada's first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, the Member for Portage-Marquette, implemented the national policy, part of which was to develop a transcontinental railroad. The merits of the visionary policy are felt across our nation to this day.

A case in point, in Dominion City this past summer, an important anniversary in Canadian railway history has been marked. In 1878, the first railway in western Canada was completed in Dominion City. To commemorate the occasion, a plaque ceremony was held and stories were told about that unforgettable day.

Dr. Lloyd Penner, a historian from the University of Winnipeg, shared the unique story of how the last spike was driven on this line. According to Dr. Penner, on December 3, 1878, a crowd had gathered to watch a last-spike ceremony take place. As part of that ceremony, delegates were invited to take one swing at the last spike so that, after each delegate had a turn, the spike would be driven further into the ground. However, after all the men had taken their turn to drive the spike in the ground, it was still not complete. They decided that they would let the women try, but unfortunately the women were not making a lot of progress either. Many started to wonder who would be able to finish this railway. Finally someone suggested that Mary Sullivan, who was the daughter of the railway section boss, give it a try. Mary spit on her hands, raised the hammer high over her head and, with one mighty blow, she hit the spike, driving it into the ground to complete the railway. The crowd cheered and raised a toast in Mary Sullivan's honour, calling her the hero of the day. Since then, the last spike has been painted white and a circle has been drawn around it to commemorate the event.

Mr. Speaker, this railway has become a key means of transportation connecting Manitoba with the rest of Canada as well as the United States. The line is used to transport products in and out of Manitoba and thus contributes to the livelihood of many Manitobans. Thank you.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Maples Collegiate Cancer Fundraising Campaign

Mr. Mohinder Saran (The Maples): I rise today to acknowledge the efforts of teachers and students in supporting one of their own at the Maples Collegiate. This past January, teachers and students united together in a fundraising campaign for Damon Cann, a student at Maples Collegiate recently diagnosed with a rare form of cancer. Seventeen teachers from the Maples Collegiate participated in the campaign called Dropping Dreads for Damon, in which they voluntarily shaved their heads. The head-shaving event also brought out an appearance from Chris Cvetkovic from the Winnipeg Blue Bombers.

In addition, the Maples Collegiate hockey team played their first annual Cancer Awareness Hockey Game against Kildonan-East Collegiate at the Maples arena. They wore pink to show their support in the fight against breast cancer, and admission money generated at the game was donated to CancerCare Manitoba.

These events brought together students, teachers, staff members and a great number of community members for the common cause of fighting cancer. Over \$10,000 was raised between the head-shaving event and the hockey game.

It is wonderful to see this sort of grass-roots community activism taking place in The Maples constituency. To see community members coming together to support each other in time of need is a testament to the power of a common cause and a reminder that everyone, no matter how big or how small, can make a difference and change the lives of those around them for the better. I am proud to be in the Manitoba Legislature today speaking on behalf of the constituency of The Maples. It is an honour to serve a community that has such a positive spirit and strong sense of commitment to one another. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

* (14:40)

Oak Park Raiders

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I rise today to congratulate coach Joel Nedecky and the Oak Park hockey team on their win in the AAAA provincial high school hockey championship final at Winkler arena. They upset the top-ranked St. Paul's Crusaders two to one. It's a first hockey championship for Oak Park and they fought really hard for it. Oak Park lost both the provincial and city championship to their arch rivals a year ago and lost another city

championship final to the Crusaders a couple of weeks ago.

The Raiders jumped to a two to zero lead in the first period. Keegan McGonigal and Kenton Gillis, on a breakaway, scored for Oak Park. Forward Mark Papko replied for St. Paul's on a second period power play and the Raiders then fought off the Crusaders from there. Oak Park goalie Kyle Sobiak was strong in keeping the Crusaders at bay. Jeff Borse, named tournament MVP, was very happy with the outcome, stating that it was a good way to end his high school career. Oak Park goalie Kyle Sobiak, forward Brody Warren and defenceman Dillon Smith were named to the all-star squad. Dillon Smith was also presented with the player's choice award.

In an earlier game against Garden Valley, Oak Park had a two to nothing lead at the 12 o'clock mark of the first period. Then Garden Valley tied the score at two to two midway through the second period. Oak Park's Jeffrey Borse scored on the power play with just over five minutes left in the middle frame to restore the Raiders' lead. That set the stage for Garden Valley late in the game. With their net minder on the bench in favour of a sixth attacker, Garden Valley beat a screened Oak Park goalie with just 48 seconds left in regulation time. That sent the game into sudden death overtime and Oak Park's David Campbell ended it just past the midway point of the extra period.

High school sports are about more than just winning the game. It provides a background for learning and developing many skills that will carry over for a lifetime. Discipline, teamwork and goal setting are just a few of the benefits that one experiences while playing a sport.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to again congratulate the players and coaches of the Oak Park Raiders hockey team on their first provincial championship. They made our community proud.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Royal Manitoba Winter Fair

Mr. Drew Caldwell (Brandon East): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of another successful Royal Manitoba Winter Fair in Brandon, Manitoba. The Royal wrapped up this past weekend at the Keystone Centre after a full week of attractions. The Royal Manitoba Winter Fair is one of Canada's largest agricultural events and the largest annual

event held in the city of Brandon. The first Manitoba Winter Fair was established in 1908, and in 1970 it was granted royal patronage by Queen Elizabeth II, becoming one of only two fairs in Canada to receive such an honour.

The Royal Manitoba Winter Fair has become a tradition for Brandonites and Manitobans alike and is anticipated throughout the year. The fair combines agriculture and livestock, equestrian events and world-class entertainment, not to mention a variety of wonderful things to smell, taste, hear and see in more than 300 commercial and agricultural exhibits. This year saw nearly 120,000 visitors come out to support the event. The exhibits highlighted agricultural awareness and inspired visitors to explore Manitoba's rich agricultural history. Events ranged from the tranquil reflection of the Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba's art exhibit, Agrarian Worlds, to the entertaining antics of the Superdogs show. A number of high calibre competitions highlighted the skill of Canadian equestrian riders and Canadian Olympic athlete Karen Cudmore claimed many titles throughout the week.

I would like to congratulate the organizers for making the 102nd Annual Royal Manitoba Winter Fair such a huge success. I would also like to extend my appreciation to the many people who volunteered their time and effort to the success of the fair. Events like these would not be possible without the high level of community involvement in spirit that we are fortunate to find amongst the people of Brandon.

Provincial Exhibition of Manitoba president Stan Cochrane, executive director Karen Oliver, and Royal Winter Fair Chair Terry Klassen in particular deserve specific recognition. I wish them all the best for the 103rd annual Royal Manitoba Winter Fair and invite all members of the Legislature to attend in March 2010. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

BUDGET DEBATE

(Second Day of Debate)

Mr. Speaker: Resume adjourned debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government, and the proposed motion of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) in amendment

thereto, standing in the name of the honourable Minister for Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross).

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): I seek consent of the House, Mr. Speaker, to have it remaining in the name of the member for healthy development.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave for the debate to remain standing in the name of the honourable Minister for Healthy Living? *[Agreed]*

Okay, it's been agreed to. Okay, do we have a speaker?

Mr. Frank Whitehead (The Pas): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, honourable members.

I welcome the opportunity, of course, to speak to the budget 2009 debate and to rise in opposition to the amendment before us on the budget. However, as one of the two newest members of the Legislative Assembly, it is first incumbent upon me to introduce myself and to pay homage to my predecessor and my guide, Oscar Lathlin, and to convey to you what the people of The Pas constituency have told me about their needs and hopes.

Mr. Speaker, I went to all the communities—and we have several communities in my riding—three times and four times over because I wanted to know what the issues are with the people of all ages and of all backgrounds.

During the nomination campaign I had the privilege of speaking to the NDP membership, and they in turn gave me the privilege to represent them as a candidate during the election. I was honoured by that because for me that was a huge undertaking to gain confidence with the membership in our constituency. But, during the campaign, I had the privilege of speaking to other members of the communities; people who would not necessarily vote.

Mr. Speaker, I had people come up to me to tell me this will be the first time they will vote because of what has been happening in their communities, the benefits reaching their communities the NDP government has provided for them in recent years.

I come from a riding comprised of several communities, large and small and in-between. That includes The Pas, Opaskwayak Cree Nation, Cross Lake, Pimicikamak, Norway House, Cormorant, Wanless, Moose Lake, Carrot River *[phonetic]* valley community, Rose Island community, Rocky Lake, Young Point, Umpherville. You see,

Mr. Speaker, the constituency I represent is very diverse, not only in need but in the opportunities as well.

* (14:50)

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be a representative of that constituency. I've had the privilege of working with many leaders in the past to enhance opportunity to move forward on social and economic development in our communities. I am privileged to have been in the same room, in the same boardrooms, in the same convention rooms with the likes of Oscar Lathlin, Chief Gordon Lathlin, Charlie G. Constant, Chief, mayors of The Pas, Gary Hopper, and so forth. These were leaders who had a vision for their communities. These were leaders who knew that given the right kind of resources, they could make their communities grow and develop into what they are today, vibrant and energetic communities.

Mr. Speaker, I come from a family, a huge family. I have many sisters, about eight or nine, around there, around there somewhere and two brothers. My dad and my mom, they raised us well. They instilled in us a sense of fair play, a sense of responsibility and justice to remember always the people we work for and we represent.

My father, who will turn 85 this spring, is a veteran of the Second World War, but he's also a survivor of the residential school. He went to school in Elkhorn, Manitoba, for a long time, and from there he went directly into the service and directly into the war. He was 20 years old by the time he was in Normandy Beach, survived that and went on to help liberate France, to help liberate people from tyranny and forces of evil. By the time he was 20, he had lived a lifetime of struggles and hell. Mr. Speaker, it is people like him that I always remember that we have the privilege today and always to be in democratic places like this to convey our business because of people like him.

Mr. Speaker, I also have something to say about the young people, the young people who I cherish and I've always had the privilege of working with them to advance their causes, to advance their lives in a good way. I want to see young people grow old. I want to see them prosper from opportunities, so I've taken upon myself to work for them to make sure that there is something for them that they can work with and look forward to. They need to have a positive outlook on the future.

This election we attracted many young people. Many young people came forward and voted for the first time. I think, Mr. Speaker, that to me signals an opportunity for us to work with these young people, help them grow and develop so they can become responsible citizens, so they can contribute to society and some day we will see those young people in here as well.

Mr. Speaker, I've joined the NDP team at a time when wise and deft hands are needed to keep Manitoba's economy on a steady and balanced path. Budget 2009 shows the way, I believe, with investments in transportation, social housing, health-care infrastructure, more apprenticeship and other training opportunities, responsible tax cuts and new financial backing for Manitoba businesses. My colleagues, who will follow me in the budget debate, will speak to many issues. Each one of us, in our own way, will show that this is a budget for all Manitobans. To do my part in this, I would like to touch on some of the things budget 2009 will do to spur stable employment in The Pas, in particular, and prepare its workers for post-crisis economy.

This budget continues support for the Northern Essential Skills Training Initiative. It's been estimated the hydro, mining, and forestry industries will be recruiting thousands more skilled workers as production begins to ramp up again in a few years' time.

To enable Aboriginal and northern residents to qualify for apprenticeships and certification in these fields, the province is providing them with a means to develop skills in literacy, communications, math and computer use. This will open up long-term employment as electricians, industrial mechanics, welders and instrumentation technicians, and give industries in northern Manitoba a competitive edge.

It is Oscar that we have to thank in large part for this initiative, Mr. Speaker. Sadly, it was announced just a matter of weeks after his passing. Oscar was ever the champion of educational success as a means of bringing prosperity to northern communities, and his efforts to found the University College of the North will be a major part of his legacy.

The provincial government is also directing funds to training for workers in communities squeezed by the record low commodity prices brought on by the global economic downturn. This forestry and mining training work force initiative will ready many workers and communities dependent on the mining and forestry industries for

the time when market conditions improve. Tolko, which announced a round of layoffs at its sawmill in The Pas in January, will be partnering with the province in this initiative.

The NDP government's attention to transportation in the north has given a boost to the quality of life of northern Manitobans and builds a foundation for the development of our northern communities and businesses. I therefore welcome, Mr. Speaker, budget 2009's allotment of stimulus funding to highway renewal. My constituents, whether they are talking about the welfare of their families, the stability of their communities, or employment opportunities, stress how fundamentally important better transportation links are to them. They will benefit, in particular, from the resurfacing of Highway 373 to Norway House, Highway 374 to Cross Lake and Highway 10 south of The Pas, all projects that this budget has promised.

The Northern Healthy Foods Initiative is yet another successful undertaking spearheaded by Oscar. Its purpose is to encourage remote northern communities to produce more of their own food and to improve the nutritional choices available to their residents. Over two dozen communities are now enjoying the harvests from their vegetable gardens and some are even raising their own chickens thanks to the provision of freezers under this initiative.

Northerners are able to sustain their families year-round with fish and game. Therefore, it is very satisfying to see that the budget 2009 makes provision for establishing a GO Centre in northern Manitoba in support of this initiative. These GO centres, otherwise known as growing opportunities centres, have an excellent track record elsewhere in Manitoba of helping communities use agricultural production in innovative ways to raise their standard of living.

Under Oscar, The Pas enjoyed many improvements to its medical facilities, including renovations to St. Anthony's Hospital, the creation of the wellness north project, the development of dialysis facilities in Norway House, and the new St. Paul's nursing home in The Pas.

* (15:00)

Budget 2009 addresses the still pressing need for more health-care professionals in the north and with an undertaking to expand training for nurses at the

University College of the North. It will also double the size of scholarships for Aboriginal medical students.

Just last month, Mr. Speaker, the Premier (Mr. Doer) and I had the good fortune to meet with students in the Aboriginal midwifery program that this government introduced at the University College of the North in The Pas and in Norway House.

As members may know, this unique program offers training in both traditional, Aboriginal and western methods of midwifery and includes both classroom and clinical components. The students were charged, full of hope and energy, all of them eager to return to their communities at the end of their program and put their new skills to use. I mention these students in the context of the budget because they have set a precedent for the rest of Manitoba.

Budget 2009 will be supporting the expansion of midwifery training in southern Manitoba, and so here we have an example in this budget of the south following the lead of northern Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, there is also in this budget an excellent example of a program that was pioneered in southern Manitoba being exported to the north. I'm referring here to Neighbourhoods Alive!, a long-term venture that enables community organizations to revitalize neighbourhoods while supporting training, employment, recreation and safety programs.

Budget 2009 expands the program to The Pas and a number of other centres outside Manitoba's major urban areas.

Having worked long and intently with The Pas' community organizations, I know we, in The Pas, will rise to the occasion and make The Pas home to one of the most outstanding Neighbourhoods Alive! projects in all of Manitoba. We will do this knowing that we would be making Oscar proud. We will help fulfil his vision, Mr. Speaker.

I want to say to all members of this Assembly here, I'm proud to be here, to be working and sitting alongside you and making plans and decisions that will forever impact all of Manitoba, and particularly, Mr. Speaker, I am here to represent, of course, The Pas constituency which is comprised of many backgrounds of cultural diversity.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, it's no secret that I have worked hard for Aboriginal issues, and I will continue to work hard for those issues to make sure

that the First Nations Aboriginal people in this province here will benefit from all decisions we make in this House here.

I want to say that I have learned from many elders as well. You see, Mr. Speaker, I'm also a traditional person that has knowledge of ceremonies and has knowledge of the old ways.

When I went looking for my culture to learn more about it, many elders came and taught me. One particular elder I will never forget. His name is Joe Duquette. He was from Saskatchewan. He's a good elder. He taught me everything that he knew. Joe Duquette—his name forever stands—there's a school named after him in Saskatoon, the Joe Duquette High School—for good reason because his vision for the young people was far-reaching, and that's why they honour him that way.

One of the things he told me: Grandson, he said, I'm very happy for you that you want to know more about your culture, about your ways, and I will teach you and I will guide you—which he did. But, Mr. Speaker, one of the most profound statements that he ever made to me was this: I'm glad that you have learned your culture and your ceremonies, but don't ever forget, he said, there is one culture that is more far-reaching than any other cultures combined, and that is the human culture. That is how I do my work.

In conclusion, I want to say that it's been a fast 23 days or so. Very fast. Even last week, being introduced to many different procedures and different people in the building here, and I wanted to say all of them are first-rate people, all of them. I can sense there's a sense of camaraderie that we're all working for the same thing, and that is to create better tomorrows for all Manitobans. I want to thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak to you. Thank you.

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, it is, indeed, an honour to rise and participate in the budgetary debate in the Manitoba Legislative Assembly.

May I take this first opportunity to congratulate and to welcome the new honourable members to the Assembly, that being from Elmwood and from The Pas. I'm sure that they are most proud, as their family is of them, to take their seat in the Legislative Chamber. I have said on past occasions that less than one one-hundredth of 1 percent of all Manitobans ever have the honour and privilege to serve in the

Manitoba Legislative Assembly, and one should not take a seat in this Chamber lightly.

I also would like to take this opportunity to welcome another distinguished individual to the Chamber, Claude Michaud, who is now going to be serving with the Clerk's office and, in turn, serving the Chamber. I must take this opportunity to thank, always, for the outstanding support that we, as members of the Assembly, receive from the Clerk's office.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the topic at hand. The opportunity to speak in this Chamber is one that one should have a reasonable exercise of individuality upon ideas and representation of the interests of their constituents to which they are responsible. The speeches that are coming from the opposite side of the Chamber, I will say, leave me wondering, "grafting" at times as to the message being put forward in the addresses that we hear. I believe that there is a lot of backroom involvement in the messaging, trying to put forward and spout the accolades of this government even though there may be few and far between. Very selective cherry-picking, I will say, at best, of information.

*(15:10)

Even during question period I came very close to rising on a point of order because it is incumbent upon members of this Chamber to bring forward accurate and informed positions. The Premier (Mr. Doer)—the First Minister—today stated that MPI, Manitoba Public Insurance, provides Manitobans with the cheapest insurance in all of North America, and that statement was applauded by members opposite. It is far from the truth. If any of the individuals across the way would take opportunity to come out to committee and listen and learn from MPI officials who stated, that because of the amount of auto thefts, because of the inordinate amount of hail claims, that Manitoba is no longer the cheapest average insurance afforded the motoring public. Indeed not. Manitoba is third, if not potentially fourth place in Canada, not to mention North America, yet the First Minister brought false and uninformed information to this Chamber.

I think it's incumbent upon all of us before we make a statement that we actually do our research and know what we're talking about rather than trying to bring forward a political spin to a message that is accepted only by ill-informed individuals and,

obviously by the applause over there, a lot of people even in this own Chamber are ill-informed.

Now, Mr. Speaker, again we look and it doesn't take very long to start out and see the falsehoods in what is stated as a steady and balanced budget. Agriculture, according to the First Minister as stated on an open-line radio show, that agriculture is indeed the reason why Manitoba has not seen the extraordinary downturn in the economy as other areas of the nation and world have experienced. So let us turn to agriculture and see what this government thinks about agriculture and its future. The first line that one would look to the future of agriculture would be this government's commitment to research in agriculture.

What has this government done in this budget? We look at it: Agri-Food Research and Development Initiatives sliced, sliced by over 25 percent in this budget. What does that tell you about this government's belief in the future of agriculture? It is so hypocritical of this government to look to the future of agriculture and say that the economy of this province is keeping Manitoba out of the recession, and then to cut agriculture off at the knees, especially the future of agriculture by cutting back in the research and development, which we all know is the future that we depend on.

Also, too, let us look to the university. That's where we educate the next generation of producers here in the province. What do they do with the grant? It's exactly the same as it was last year, which was exactly the same as the year before. No cost of living or inflationary adjustment whatsoever. The price of books, according to this minister, the price of programming, the price of educational officials, professors and support staff, obviously must keep their wages at a level according to this government. But I think not. I think there have been contract improvements, more resources. This government obviously then with that knowledge, and I'm sure that they're not that naive, that there have been wage increases and cost of supports. So they must think us naive on this side of the House to believe that they're really looking to the future of agriculture, and training the next generation by holding the budget stagnant.

I think that it speaks volumes of this government's attitude, not only toward education, but also toward agriculture and their short-sightedness to the future of the industry—the very industry that the

First Minister (Mr. Doer) states is keeping Manitoba out of the recession. Interesting.

Let's go further, to research here in the province of Manitoba. The Prairie Agricultural Machinery Institute, which supports the agricultural industry here in Manitoba—[interjection] The honourable House leader on the government side says, maybe, perhaps, we should call an election and debate this in public. I would relish the opportunity to do so because I won the election. I am here. So, therefore, I have the support of my constituents, an agriculturally based constituency, and—well, if the members opposite want to debate their own, and call into question their own figures, perhaps, maybe, they should've taken it to caucus and had a chance to talk about it before they brought it here to the Legislative Assembly in order to debate.

Again, support for the mechanical side of agriculture, exactly the same as last year. Again, they make believe that there have been no cost increases.

Agricultural sustainability, in its own statement, the livelihood of agriculture, stays the same. Obviously, there's been no increase in initiative. What do we look at? We look at irrigation development here in the province. Once again, exactly the same, no vision for the future. Obviously, with the inflation taken into account, this is actually a cutback.

This week, the lead story is the honourable Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) on the radio—CFRY, to be very specific—speaking about how proud she was of the Royal Manitoba Winter Fair in Brandon, Brandon West, may I add—the honourable Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik), very appreciative of his support and of that show. The minister went on to say that she's very proud of her support, and her department's support, of the agricultural societies, which one thereof is responsible for the royal winter show.

When, might I ask, was the last increase in support funding for the agricultural societies in the province in Manitoba? When? When was the last time? You are increasing the budget phenomenally. In fact, the budget has doubled in the 10 years that these honourable members have been on the government side of the House. So, if you have doubled your budget and then held ag societies at the same level virtually that entire time, what does that speak of your support of agricultural societies really?

The Agricultural Museum at Austin, the Manitoba Agricultural Museum, is another agricultural society here in the province, struggling, struggling to keep the doors open. In fact, they believe, within two years' time, they may not even have one steamer fired up at the Threshermen's Reunion because they don't have the resources to comply with this government's regulations in their testing of the boilers. Can you imagine? This government puts in rules and regulations and then doesn't provide the resources to the agencies that depend upon to provide these services, and all of a sudden the service is no more, the sign out on the highway, come and view one of our heritage sites, yet, this government plays only lip service to that entity.

*(15:20)

Let's take a look at other regional development corporations, the same as last year, other grant assistance, the same as last year. This is really interesting, that this government can double its budget in 10 years and yet hold agriculture the same length of time, during that same time period, Mr. Speaker.

You know, it's very, very disheartening how some of the other departments—we can move on from Agriculture to Competitiveness, Training and Trade. That's what this province is all about, people producing a product and the government recognizing that an informed and well-trained work force is important, and that once that product is produced, that we have developed markets where we can, in fact, take that production and market it.

What does this government believe is important in doing so? This government comes forward with this year's budget, and Manitoba Trade, the arm of this government, saddled with the responsibility of developing marketplaces for the manufacturing industry, and others that the First Minister (Mr. Doer) also said was the backbone of this province. Let's just take a look at what happened. This government's actually seen fit to reduce the level of support of Manitoba trade. Not a lot, only perhaps \$80,000, but when you consider that this budget is increasing by over 4 percent, and the cost of inflation perhaps around 3 percent, actually, that's probably close to a 10 percent cut. So, Mr. Speaker, I fail to see the vision of this government in not preparing for the future at this juncture in time.

You know, also, one wants to ask the questions about the commitment of this government to

education when we look at the threat by the minister responsible for K-to-12 instruction that, now, to take away the taxing powers of school boards because they did not hold the line as far as raising of mill rates in their respective jurisdictions. But you wonder why that threat was there in the first place. It is something that one has to investigate as to whether or not the provincial government has been providing the resources for quality education here in the province of Manitoba. For a number of school divisions in the province, the answer is, even under the threat from the minister's office, have gone ahead and raised the levies because they, as I believe, in the students' best interest, to support education here in the province in Manitoba, and indeed, Mr. Speaker, the long-term viability, the long-term prosperity of our province depends on education and the next generation.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we can move on to further involvements of this government and even though they keep saying that this is such a marvellous budget and what, indeed, is happening to the province. We want to take a look at some of the other undertakings that this government believes are important.

The projects that we've seen on the go for a number of months and, in the case of the bridges in Brandon, the number of years to actually come through, from this government's promises. Once again, in this budget, speaking of promises, there was the mention of Victoria Hospital and the emergency room renovations and upgrades. Well, I'm wondering how many times the government has actually made this announcement, because my sister-in-law was in charge of different sections of the emergency room, but is now retired. The belief is that it's been more than five, perhaps seven years since the original announcement was made, and still no construction has taken place. It was also glaringly obvious that there's another commitment up in northern Manitoba for a hospital that was announced five years ago and yet there's still no movement towards fulfilling that promise. Still, more than \$60 million is expended each and every year transporting persons to quality health-care facilities elsewhere in the province. That's very disappointing to see that this government, with more than doubling of their budget expenditures in 10 years, has not seen fit to keep their promises.

Speaking of promises and yet a shell game in another attempt to disillusion and confuse our voting public is the statement that this budget is indeed balanced. For the longest time we on this side of the

House tried to help the government in its budgetary process and in keeping the balanced budget legislation, but this government has now chosen to change that legislation. Also, a change in accounting was one that I personally welcomed to make sure that the public actually had a clear insight into the expenditures of this government.

But the bottom line of every report that now comes forward, there is a net debt of this province shown, and what is happening, Mr. Speaker, is that the net debt, year over year over year, is increasing. So the question is begged to be answered: How does this government believe that the budgets are balanced when the net debt, that's the cashing in of all of the resources of the province from that of its liabilities and coming up with the net debt? So if this government really, truly has a balanced budget, the net debt should be the same year over year over year, or with the surplus, as this government has stated, should in fact be being reduced, and it's not, and it's not.

So the falsehoods continue, and I'm really actually extremely, extremely disappointed. We want to be actually very, very concerned that this province—they say they're ready to go to and prepared to face any of the challenges that are going to be faced in this province as far as emergencies. We've heard a lot of the potential flood situation, and yet this government year over year is really reducing its support to municipalities to prepare for emergencies. It, itself, as far as its own run department, is only increasing by 0.8 of one percentage point. The Interdepartmental Affairs Department, year over year, is actually being reduced by 11.4 percent because of its major, major cutback in support of and assistance to municipalities. I don't think you'll have to go too far to speak to a municipal official and ask whether they are indeed flush with resources so that this government can cut back. So, Mr. Speaker, I know that I've gone on at length and shown that there are tremendous contradictions to this government as it pertains to the budget that is before us today.

* (15:30)

Before I conclude my comments, I would like to point out one specific error in this government's statements, and that was the honourable House leader once again brought up that this government would not be selling Crown-owned assets in order to balance the budget, but let everyone know the actual truth of the matter. Even though the previous

Conservative administration did offer to the public Manitoba Telephone System, Manitoba Telecom, the resources that were garnered from that offering went into the rainy day fund, the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, and those funds remained there until this government saw fit to spend those resources. They say they added, and indeed they did, but they are now drawing on those resources and spending them today.

So one has to ask the question, what would this government be doing if they didn't have this great stabilization fund on which to draw on? This budget may not then be able to be achieved and the expenses that are listed in here fulfilled. So this government likes to blame other people, and then they go ahead and are thankful that the other people made those decisions because they now have the resources to do what they want to do. And so, be thankful. Be thankful.

It's very interesting how the spin goes on and on and on by this government. *[interjection]* There's a lot of commentary going on this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, and I'm sure that there are others that want to make the address here this afternoon. But this government really truly does frustrate me on a number of fronts, and we've talked about education, we've talked about the support for our infrastructure, we've talked about the lack of support for the future of agriculture here in the province of Manitoba, and I hope there have been some persons on the government side of the House that have indeed been listening this afternoon.

I think that the honourable members really truly do come to this Chamber, as the address from the new MLA for The Pas stated earlier today, that they are here in the best interests of their constituents, and I would hope, with that at the heart of all the decisions that are made by honourable members opposite, that maybe there may be some modifications and some true navel-gazing in regard to this budget and some modifications made that will see the future of agriculture which now the First Minister (Mr. Doer) has taken opportunity to recognize as being responsible for keeping the economy of this province of ours, and hopefully he will talk with the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) and ask why she is cutting back on the research in agriculture, the sustainable development components. The fund which I reference is for researchers, persons in the field, that are actually doing the hands-on, rubber hitting the road work. It has nothing to do with further enhancements of the

bureaucracy in this province, and that's not the case for many departments across the way, where we've seen significant increases in staffing and yet we're left wondering on this side of the House as to the productivity that one would expect coming forward from greater numbers in the civil service.

Mr. Speaker, with those hopefully informed words, and I will say that the First Minister in regard to his earlier statement pertaining to the actual ranking of MPI in Canada, not just North America as far as affordable insurance, is that we are the fourth lowest. We are the fourth lowest according to the MPI 2007 Annual Report.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable First Minister, are you up on a point of order?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is claiming to speak for my point of reference. I would suggest it would be in order for him to table the document.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Portage la Prairie, on the same point of order?

Mr. Faurchou: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The quotation that I reference is from the Manitoba Public Insurance 2007 Annual Report, which the minister receives—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

On a point of order raised by the honourable First Minister, I'd just like to—order. I'd like to remind members that when asking for a letter that a member is reading from, that it has to be a personal, signed letter. That is the requirement of tabling a letter.

Order. The honourable First Minister does not have a point of order.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Portage la Prairie, to continue.

Mr. Faurchou: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This I want to clarify also, that this is just in reference to the insurance component and does not actually include the more than 400 percent increase in vehicle registration that has taken place during this government's tenure as well.

So on that very note, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the budget debate 2009 and wish all the new members well in their endeavours and participation here in the Legislative Assembly.

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Elmwood): I hope these mikes work, Mr. Speaker, they seem awfully far away.

Mr. Speaker, it's a great privilege for me to be able to rise in this Chamber today, having been sworn in a few hours ago along with my new colleague, the honourable Member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead). He and I together make up the class of 2009, and we intend to make our presence felt here in the Chamber as time proceeds.

I was also greatly pleased, Mr. Speaker, to be able to be sworn in on April 6, which, for those of you who may not know such august facts, is Tartan Day. I reference a failure of mine in the previous Chamber in which I served. I'd always thought through private members' business and others had thought the same thing, to have April 6 recognized by the Parliament of Canada, but that job now has fallen to the honourable Member for Sackville-Eastern Shore, who has a private members' bill in that regard. I hope that he has more success than I did in previous parliaments.

It's not the first time that I've actually spoken in this Chamber. I spoke in this Chamber almost 40 years ago as a member of the TUXIS, an Older Boy's Parliament. At that time, the premier or the prime minister was someone by the name of Tom Axworthy, who later went on to have as a distinguished career as one can have as a Liberal.

* (15:40)

I want to begin, Mr. Speaker, by extending, obviously, thanks and appreciation to my family for the support that they gave me over the years as a member of Parliament, and for the support that, particularly, my wife, Brenda, extended to me when I told her that I was actually thinking about going back into politics, and she and the Premier (Mr. Doer) will have to settle this later.

I also want to thank all members for the warm welcome that they've extended to me since my election and as I say, in particular, congratulations to the honourable Member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead).

I also want to begin, Mr. Speaker, by extending my gratitude and appreciation to the people of the

provincial constituency of Elmwood for the confidence that they expressed in me on March 24. The riding is called Elmwood, the constituency is called Elmwood, but it's really Elmwood and East Kildonan and a number of other neighbourhoods. And I want to thank all the people of all those neighbourhoods for the support that they gave, not only to me, but to this government and to the Premier on that day because by-elections can sometimes be challenging for governments. But, in this case, what we found was that we had a by-election and the people who had an opportunity to pass judgment on the government, and the government passed. The government passed with flying colours.

Very interesting, Mr. Speaker, I'm not used to a Chamber in which you can order coffee, which is kind of a drag; you don't have an excuse to leave. So I'll need advice from members as to what the appropriate pretence is.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I was saying I wanted to extend my thanks to the voters of the provincial constituency of Elmwood. They were encouraged in a number of ways, through various pamphlets and campaigning, to change. It was time for a change and I think what the people of Elmwood realized, and what all people who think about these kinds of things realize, is that you don't change your principles. If you're a community, if you're a neighbourhood, if you're a constituency that's been committed to a particular view of Manitoba, a view of Manitoba espoused by the NDP and, before that, the CCF over the years, that's not something you change. That's something that you express loyalty to. That's something that you support whenever you have the occasion to do so and the people of Elmwood chose to do that on March 24.

In that context, Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge some of my predecessors in the constituency of Elmwood because, again, as the people of Elmwood were reminded, they voted CCF and NDP for 50 years, over 50 years, going back to the election of Steve Peters in 1958, who served from 1958 to 1966; then the honourable Russ Doern from 1966 to '86; and more recently and my immediately recent predecessor, Jim Maloway, who's now the member of Parliament for Elmwood-Transcona.

In that context, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to reference an issue that was of some considerable discussion during the by-election. Of course, that is just how the Disraeli Bridge, which needs to be repaired, is going

to be repaired in a way that results in the minimum inconvenience for the people of northeast Winnipeg, and not just the people of northeast Winnipeg, but all the people who might be affected, because if people use the Redwood Bridge to go over to the North End, or if more people from Transcona go through St. Boniface or however it works, everybody is going to be affected or at least on one side of the city by however this unfolds.

I want to give credit to my predecessor for highlighting the inadequacy of the plan that now sits there at City Hall, the idea that it would be acceptable in some way to close the bridge entirely for 16 months. What I found during the by-election was that everyone agreed on this; whether we were New Democrats or Conservatives or Liberals, it didn't really matter. Everyone was very, very concerned about the effect that such a closure would have on the constituency.

So I see it as a first order of business for me as the MLA for Elmwood, Mr. Speaker, to work with all levels of government, with my colleagues here in the provincial government, with the City, with the federal government, because this is the piece of infrastructure that needs repair and needs to be done in a way that minimizes the inconvenience for the people of northeast Winnipeg. I look forward to trying to bring people together around this. The time for finger pointing and blaming and claiming that one party cares more about it than the other, I hope is past and I hope that we can work together, all levels of government, to come up with a far better plan than what is now on the table.

So, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I worried about when I was going to give my budget speech is that I've never spoken in favour of a budget. But then I've never had an NDP budget to vote for. Or perhaps I should say almost once when there was a—not in the last Parliament, but in the previous Parliament, there was a significant NDP amendment to a federal budget, which came to be called the NDP budget. I did vote for that amendment to the federal budget. But other than that, I think, perhaps, some of my colleagues were a little bit worried that I might lapse into an older movie and not see my way to speaking in favour of a budget.

But, Mr. Speaker, this is a budget that is eminently worthy of being spoken in favour of, and I'm very glad to be able to do that here today in this particular context.

Mr. Speaker, I mean, look at the headlines: "Prairie Prudence." Now, on Tartan Day, that just makes my thrifty Scottish heart pitter-patter. What could be better than prudence?

In any event, prairie prudence, or, and I say, with due respect to the Liberal in the House, a very credible budget. None other than my former colleague from the House of Commons, Mr. Reg Alcock, who felt moved to defend this government and this budget against what he saw as this rather superficial analysis and mistaken analysis being offered by various folks in the media, although, Mr. Speaker, I must say that actually, the criticism of the budget was fairly minimal. I mean, I have been provided, and if I have the time or the inclination, I could probably read all these quotes that I have here about all the wonderful things that were said about the Minister of Finance's (Mr. Selinger) budget from the—well, all the places that you would expect in other contexts, maybe there to be criticism of a New Democratic Party budget, but, no, nothing but praise.

But I was particularly taken by the offering of my former colleague from the House of Commons, Reg Alcock, in his article about the budget. Now I notice that the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen), when he was speaking to the budget, said that he thought that the Premier (Mr. Doer) had put off the budget until after the by-election so that voters in Elmwood and The Pas wouldn't be motivated to vote other than NDP by the obvious unacceptability of the budget. Unacceptability of the budget, only in the Leader of the Opposition's mind, we might add.

Nevertheless, the fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, as someone who was a candidate in the by-election, I think the Leader of the Opposition and others who may have similar thoughts should be very, very glad that the budget didn't come the day before the by-election because given everything that people had to say about the budget, we might have been in a position where we actually got more votes than we got on March 24 if the budget had been on March 23 and the headline had been on the morning of the by-election, "Prairie Prudence."

* (15:50)

So I obviously don't accept the judgment of the Leader of the Opposition on the budget. I think there's a certain—I was reminded of George Bush, Sr.—just can't get that vision thing going. But the NDP can get the vision thing going, Mr. Speaker, and when the history of Manitoba is written, we'll

see that the visions that created the kind of Manitoba that people will be proud of in the future, and are proud of now, have been NDP visions: NDP visions about hydro development, NDP visions about public auto insurance, NDP visions about health-care innovation—the first province to do home care, to do Pharmacare, to do all kinds of things that—the treatment of firefighters when it comes to Workers Compensation. All these things.

Mr. Speaker, the list is long of things that were pioneered here in Manitoba, and have become common currency in other provinces as a result of the work done by so many NDP governments: the Schreyer government, the Pawley government and now this government, of which I'm very proud to be a part, and the great leadership that it receives from the Premier (Mr. Doer)—but, I might add, who isn't a bad canvasser when it's about 24 below. We'll always remember fondly the evening we spent on Glenwood Crescent knocking on doors and, fortunately, someone was able to take a picture of us. We stopped in on somebody that we knew right near the end, and fortunately she thought of taking a picture so she could just capture how cold the Premier and I looked at that particular moment because you always want to be able to go back to your campaign manager and prove that you were actually out there canvassing.

Mr. Speaker, I said that it's the NDP vision that I think will characterize the history of Manitoba, as it's written both now and in the future. But it would be a mistake, particularly in the current context, not to notice that there was at least one Conservative who had a vision—we are benefiting from that vision here today—and of course, that's the vision of Duff Roblin, who built the floodway. That vision has been added to with the expansion of the floodway but, nevertheless, that was a progressive government for its day. Certainly, the building of the floodway is something that is a legacy that former Premier Roblin should always be proud of, and he will always receive a great deal of credit for.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I thought that it would be appropriate at this time, for me anyway, in a personal way, to just acknowledge some of the people that—former members of this Chamber who, for me, have been mentors. People who've inspired me along the way and, of course, I mentioned the Schreyer government and the Pawley government, but certainly both Ed Schreyer and Howard Pawley and their times as Premier, when they were an inspiration to me. And, of course, Ed Schreyer was the leader of

the New Democrats when I decided to become a New Democrat, and it wasn't any coincidence that, at that time, this province was receiving the kind of leadership that it was from the newly elected NDP premier of this province, Ed Schreyer.

But I go back a little further to another leader of the NDP who was a mentor of mine, Russ Paulley, the MLA for Transcona who, when I was wandering in the political wilderness said to me, Bill, some day you'll be a New Democrat—and he was right. I received a lot of advice and historical reflection from Russ Paulley at that time, and also from another member of this Legislature, the Member for Seven Oaks, I believe, who was the deputy minister to Russ Paulley when he was the Minister of Labour: Art Wright.

It's the nature of politics, history goes on and people are sometimes forgotten, but I know that Art Wright, who was also a railroader—as was Russ Paulley; both came out of the upholstery shop in Transcona which used to be NDP headquarters, the upholstery shop. Art was one who familiarized me at the time, when I used to come and visit him in this building, with the history of the NDP, the CCF and the Independent Labour Party, and all of the things that had gone on in the '20s, proceeding right on from the Winnipeg General Strike. I wanted to acknowledge him at this particular time, Mr. Speaker.

I also wanted to acknowledge people who were former MLAs in the general area that I come from. I think of a predecessor of yours, Mr. Speaker, Peter Fox. I think of Wilson Parasiuk, who was the Minister of Health and Minister of Energy and the Member for Transcona for a long time. I think also of Lloyd Stinson, another former leader, not of the NDP but of the CCF, who was also not only a New Democrat but a United Church minister, and someone who expressed again that great tradition on the left here in Manitoba and in Canada of people from the church who have found their way into left-wing progressive politics. I never knew Lloyd Stinson, but I read his book called *Political Warriors*, and I recommend it to people who want to get a bit of a flavour of the times in which Lloyd Stinson was working on behalf of the people of Manitoba.

I think one other MLA that I'll mention, Mr. Speaker, it turns out—I didn't know this until much later—that almost all of us at a certain point in the community where I grew up in Transcona were

brought into the world by Dr. Murdoch McKay, after whom a school is named. I only found out much later that Dr. Murdoch McKay was actually the Leader of the Liberal Party here in the Manitoba Legislature in the 1930s. So I was brought into the world by a Liberal. I was raised by a Conservative, my mother, who later saw the light when her son was an NDP candidate and, as I say, brought into the world by a Liberal, raised by a Conservative, although I'm not sure that was my dad's politics, but he knew better than to have his own opinion on these matters, and I ended up a New Democrat and I'm very glad about that.

It is in that context—the honourable Member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead) referenced elders, and I want to say how grateful I am to have been elected at a time—I say elected, not now but elected in 1979, 30 years ago in May, to the House of Commons when a lot of the CCF elders, elders of the New Democratic Party, were still around.

I remember every year they would gather in Stanley Knowles's office for their yearly supper: Tommy Douglas and Stanley Knowles, Sandy Nicholson, Frank Scott and that whole bunch of people who revolutionized Canadian politics in the 1930s. It was my privilege to know them at that time and to get to know some of them even better, particularly Tommy and Stanley. These were the elders of our movement, and I intend to keep them in mind as I carry out my duties here in this particular Chamber.

I think they represented something that's sometimes called the social gospel tradition in Canadian politics, a particular relationship between faith and politics. I'm happy to notice, as I think many people are, that we're finally coming out of a period of about 25 years now where politics and religion came to be associated in one particular way. That is to say, people who, when they thought religion and politics, they thought about if you're religious you must be right wing. The alliance between the political right and the religious right, particularly in the United States, created an entire era where people came to see the relationship between faith and politics in this particular way.

I'm sorry that I had to be a left-wing Christian politician in that particular era. It wasn't easy. But I'm glad to see that—in part thanks to what's happening in the United States of America and thanks to the new President, Barack Obama, but also because of other things that are happening. He's in

some ways an expression of things not just a cause—that we're now entering into a new period where we can recover older traditions of faith, inspiring not just right-wing politics but also left-wing, progressive, justice-seeking politics.

Another great thing happening, Mr. Speaker, of course, and I think, again I reference what my colleague from The Pas said about young people becoming involved. I think all of us here in politics remember a time, particularly in the late '90s when you couldn't get young people involved in politics. They were despairing about the possibility.

* (16:00)

I hope that what's happened south of the border is something that—well, it's already happening here. We already see a great many more young people. I don't know what it's like in other parties, but I know what it's like in our party. There are a lot more young people involved than there ever were before, and I celebrate this re-engagement with politics that I see happening within that demographic, Mr. Speaker. Because politics matter, and maybe that's why I'm here when I could be—I was going to say on the golf course, but I don't golf, but the metaphorical equivalent—because I think politics matter. It matters what kind of government you have. Different decisions are made depending on who is in power and who is not in power, and that's the reason why I responded to the call when the Premier (Mr. Doer) was in touch with me to ask me to think about running for the nomination in Elmwood. I see this new era emerging, when the best in all our religious and humanist and secular tradition, the best in all those traditions is a justice seeking tradition of a society with more equality, more inclusion, more respect for the environment. I see this beginning to happen, and it's not something I wanted to watch from the sidelines. It's something I wanted to be a part of, and that's why I'm here today.

I thank you for the honour of addressing the Chamber.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): I have to say, at the outset, that that is a tough act to follow.

I just want to say congratulations to the new Member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead) and the new Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie) that have recently been elected to this Chamber. I listened to both of their speeches today and I have to say we have a significant contribution, I know, that will be

made by both members as they undertake their duties in this Legislature.

I have to say at the outset, too, that certainly the Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie) that sits in his place today was not my candidate of choice. I want him to know that I worked pretty hard in the Elmwood constituency to talk to voters and to convince them that possibly the Conservative candidate might have been the candidate of choice, and we were unsuccessful. I want everyone to know, though, too, that we expected the outcome that happened on election night in the by-election in Elmwood because of the long tradition and the history in the Elmwood constituency of support, as the new Member for Elmwood has outlined the history of the constituency of Elmwood.

So I want to say to him, congratulations. I know that he will make a significant contribution, as will the new Member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead) in this Legislative Chamber.

I would disagree on some of the comments that he has made and I—especially comments made on the budget. I know that he has recited a number of people that have supported the budget, have talked about prairie prudence, and those have been the headlines in the paper. But I can't help but think that this budget somehow is NDP math. I can't understand, as an ordinary person who has to manage a household budget, how this budget could be interpreted by anyone as being a balanced budget. Because I know that if I have debt that I am paying down on a regular basis and, all of a sudden I choose not to pay down that debt anymore, Mr. Speaker, and if I choose to depend on others—which Manitoba traditionally has done over the last number of years as a have-not province. We've expected other Canadians to balance our books for us by the way of federal transfers that come to us because wealthier provinces, those provinces that create revenue, have to share with the poorer provinces.

So if I'm expecting my neighbours and my friends to give me money to balance my books, nobody can say that I'm managing my affairs in an appropriate manner, Mr. Speaker. So, if I'm depending on my friends and my neighbours to give me money, if I'm ignoring the debt that I have and saying I don't have to pay it down any more, and if I am borrowing more money and going further into debt when I only have X number of dollars that I'm earning, and I'm spending more than what I take in,

there's absolutely no way that I can balance my household.

What does it lead to? It leads to further debt down the road and possible bankruptcy. I might end up losing my house and losing everything, so I have difficulty understanding logically how we could look at this budget that was presented this year as a balanced budget.

I'm not saying that there aren't a lot of good things in this budget. There's support for many worthy causes. I know there are new schools that are being built that we have been asking for and there's a real need for. I noticed there was an absence of some schools that are needed in the province that weren't there, but I know we can't be all things to all people and we can't do everything for everyone, that there are some good things in this budget.

I didn't see a lot, Mr. Speaker, in the budget for northeast Winnipeg. I listened intently to the Member for Elmwood talk about setting politics aside and trying to work together for the residents of northeast Winnipeg. I commend him for that, and I want him to know that's what I've always done. I think we need to set politics aside to try to ensure that the needs in our communities are met.

Let's move now to infrastructure in the northeast quadrant of the city of Winnipeg. I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that when I was newly elected to this Legislature, the Premier (Mr. Doer), who wasn't the premier at the time but he was the Minister of Urban Affairs and I was in opposition, sat down together and talked about the infrastructure needs of northeast Winnipeg. That was at the time before the first leg of the Chief Peguis Trail was built. We worked co-operatively together, not as an NDP minister and a Conservative opposition member, but as residents in the community of northeast Winnipeg that recognized a need.

We were able to set partisan politics aside and work together to try to accomplish a goal, and the end result was the first leg of the Chief Peguis Trail which is the first leg of the inner city beltway that is to be built. The second piece of the Chief Peguis Trail has recently been announced by the City of Winnipeg. It was in the plans 20 years ago, but when it was announced last year by the City of Winnipeg, that plan had changed.

Now, I want you to know that there are residences along the land that was set aside for the

extension of the Chief Peguis Trail that are in very close proximity to that trail. There are residents. There are churches, and, Mr. Speaker, the original plan called for an underpass to mitigate the noise and the sound when that next leg of that inner city beltway, the Chief Peguis Trail, was built.

Well, the new plans that came out from the City of Winnipeg didn't include that underpass at Rothesay and Douglas. The community was up in arms. I did a survey out into my community and got many, many responses back. I had phone calls that had said, you know, if they can't do it right, don't do it at all. Why would we change the plan? I guess it was a matter of finances or money, but people are saying, do it right or don't do it at all.

* (16:10)

Now, Mr. Speaker, we've heard the provincial government talk about the inner city beltway as being an integral part of CentrePort Canada. It's part of the new infrastructure that has to be built to move traffic through the city and around the city and make us competitive as a province for CentrePort Canada. And to that end, the government here has passed legislation that's set up a board that's going to look at the infrastructure requirements to make us competitive across the country, to get that CentrePort here in Manitoba.

Well, Mr. Speaker, if we are going to build second-class roads to support that project, I'm afraid that we're going to lose out. Why would we have traffic lights at Henderson Highway, traffic lights without a level crossing at Rothesay, traffic lights at Raleigh and Gateway, traffic lights at Lagimodiere Boulevard, when it's supposed to be an inner-city beltway that moves traffic efficiently and effectively throughout the city. It doesn't make sense to me. I think it's important, again, that all levels of government come together and work towards doing that piece of infrastructure right, just like it's important for us to refurbish and reconstruct the Disraeli Freeway in the appropriate manner that isn't going to tie up traffic unbearably or close that structure for 16 months.

I've been working with my community. I know that the former Member for Elmwood was very vocal on the issue. I disagreed somewhat with the approach that he took, because my approach was saying, yes, it needed to be done, but all levels of government needed to be involved in finding a solution. There's a major cost to the reconstruction of the Disraeli Freeway. We know, Mr. Speaker, I know that the

City of Winnipeg can't do it alone, that there needs to be co-operation from all levels of government, and everyone needs to be involved in trying to find the right solution to ensure that there isn't the significant backlog of traffic right throughout northeast Winnipeg, Transcona, the North End, and we don't need that to happen.

I did, to that end, write to both the Premier (Mr. Doer) and to the mayor, last May, asking if we might sit down and try to find a solution. Mr. Speaker, we're still, almost a year later, looking for a solution. So I'm glad to hear the commitment from the new Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie), that he is going to attempt to work with all levels of government to find a solution for northeast Winnipeg, and it does go beyond partisan politics. It's all about trying to ensure that members of our community can get from point A to point B during construction or reconstruction in a common sense way. There has to be a common sense solution and, I think, if we all put our heads together around it, we can find some of the answers. This isn't something that we need to make partisan, but we need to hold all levels of government accountable for what they're prepared to do to solve the problem.

Mr. Speaker, these are two of the infrastructure issues in northeast Winnipeg. When I look at the kinds of things that government has funded, and all of them worthy projects—we look at the human rights museum, we look at the MTS Centre, we look at the new stadium that's been announced, we look at rapid transit and we look at the Kenaston underpass that the government likes to talk about being a partner in—well, I'm saying, why should northeast Winnipeg be treated any differently than any other part of the city? If the province is prepared to go to bat, to put money into the Kenaston underpass, which they did and they supported and we supported, it was the right thing to do. But it's the right thing to be involved in northeast Winnipeg. Let's not short-change the residents out in our community when there's a significant need.

I look at some of the issues, and a lot of the issues in my community are issues that the City of Winnipeg bears some responsibility for. I look at Henderson Highway going out into East St. Paul. There's a stretch of Henderson Highway from Gilmore to the Perimeter that has no median, and we have no ability—I mean, cars sit for minutes and minutes at intersections trying to get across Henderson Highway at rush hour. I think it's probably the only major thoroughfare within the city of Winnipeg that is in that condition. Well, it's time,

and I do encourage and I attempt to work with our city councillor out in the area to find a solution. I mean, there has to be, again, some sense that northeast Winnipeg needs to get its fair share of infrastructure dollars from the City of Winnipeg and also from the Province of Manitoba. If we can get the federal government to be a partner in a three-way project, that makes ultimate sense, Mr. Speaker. We want to make sure that our community is well served by all levels of government, and it does go beyond and many, many of the issues that we deal with.

I know I deal with individual constituents on a regular basis, on access to health care or access to other services that they might need, and I have to tell you that I'm very often quite successful on a one-by-one basis of getting support and knowing where to go to get some answers and some solutions. Those are probably some of the most rewarding experiences that I have, but I have to say to you that sometimes it's a little bit harder to look at the larger projects that impact many, many constituents and try to find the solutions. So, if there's any legacy that I would like to leave, it would be a legacy that would be ensuring that we work together to find the right solutions.

You know, I listened again to the history lesson that we got from the Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie) about the NDP and the CCF. He takes great pride in his roots and his tradition. I take great pride in who I am and who I am as a Conservative also. I believe that there isn't any one of us that sits in this House that believes that we will be government for life. Governments do come and governments go. I've had the opportunity to be in both opposition and in government, and I know that the Member for Elmwood will experience a considerable difference, I think, as he sits around the caucus table on the government side of the House rather than on the opposition side of the House.

But make no mistake. There isn't any one government that will be around forever. There isn't any one MLA that will be around forever, and it doesn't matter how hard you work in your constituency, when the time comes for a change of government, sometimes constituency politics really don't matter. I think we all have to realize, and sometimes we're humbled in this Legislature by what happens in the whole political process, but there aren't any of us, again, that can say with any confidence—and there aren't many professions where you have to justify your existence as an individual every four years. That's something that we have to do, and it doesn't necessarily mean if you are no

longer on the government side of the House, that you haven't done a good job or that, if you lose your seat as a member of the Legislature because there's a major shift or a mood for change, for some reason or other you haven't done your job, because we all know in reality that what happens when there's a tide and a desire, by those that elect us, for change, that things will change.

So, Mr. Speaker, I've spoken a lot about my constituency. I thought it was important to put those thoughts on the record and indicate that I will work with whoever I can work with to try to impact positive change for northeast Winnipeg. But I do want to indicate, too, that I can't in all honesty support this budget. Although I can support initiatives in this budget, I cannot support this budget as being a truly balanced budget. I think the misleading language around the budget is one of the reasons why I cannot stand in my place and support this, because I know truly in my heart, and I know from having to manage a household and finances, that I couldn't do what this government is doing today and indicate that I had balanced my budget or my books and say that with any sense of comfort or pride.

So I will not be supporting this budget, but I do want you, Mr. Speaker, and all members of this Legislature to know that I will support initiatives that truly impact positively the community of northeast Winnipeg. Thank you.

* (16:20)

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, today is Tartan Day and I'm proudly wearing my Fraser tartan tie in honour of my great-grandfather, John James Anderson Fraser, who was born in LaChute, Québec, but whose ancestors came from Banffshire, Scotland. Appropriately enough, after he left LaChute, and studied theology in Montreal for one year, but didn't feel the call to ministry, emigrated to Ontario and then came to Manitoba and homesteaded in the Breadalbane area about six miles north of Virden, represented by the Member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire), and was a homesteader there in 1879.

I'd like to congratulate and welcome the new MLA for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead) and I look forward to getting to know him. I note that the headline in the *Opasquia Times* for March 27, 2009, reads: "Landslide victory for former chief." The article goes on to say, and I quote: "It might be white as snow outside, but on Tuesday the riding of The

Pas was painted orange once again. In a contest that wasn't even close, Frank Whitehead, the NDP candidate for the provincial by-election, won easily, maintaining the NDP stronghold over the region. Whitehead rode to an easy landslide victory garnering 2,949 votes. Edna Nabess, the Progressive Conservative candidate who ran a public and broad campaign in an effort to wrestle the riding from the grips of the NDP, didn't see much bang for their bucks, so to speak. Nabess finished the voting with less than one-quarter of the ballots cast in her name, at 722.

"In fact, Nabess finished with a lower percentage of the vote than her predecessor George Muswagon did in the 2007 election. Muswagon's 985 votes constituted 21.3 percent of the vote compared to 19.2 percent for Nabess."

I also want to quote from the editorial—*[interjection]* Well, the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) wants me to talk about Elmwood, and I'm happy to talk about the constituency of Elmwood, where we won every poll. *[interjection]* I'd ask the Member for Brandon West just to be patient because the stories from The Pas get even better.

I want to quote from the editorial by Trent Allen, entitled "Paint us Orange." He said on March 27, 2009, and I quote: "Shock and awe is a term we hear a lot of today, and it can be applied to a lot of issues. And on Tuesday it could be used in terms of the political ring here in The Pas. Frank Whitehead is your new MLA."

Mr. Speaker: Order. I've been very patient here and I think the member will know that we have a rule that the honourable member that was referenced to was just sworn in this morning, so he is an honourable member, is to use members by their constituencies or ministers by their titles, not by their names. So I remind the honourable Member for Burrows.

Mr. Martindale: Thank you for that reminder, Mr. Speaker. I was wrong in thinking that in quoting I could do that, but I will follow your advice.

So to continue: The Member for The Pas "is your new MLA. In that there is no shock or awe. Well, maybe a little awe at the fact that the riding has been in the NDP grips for so long, I'm sure a caveman named Aug was the last non-NDP MLA we've ever had. What is extremely impressive in my eyes is the fact that the MLA for The Pas built upon

that strength at a time when the Progressive Conservatives and the Liberals were fighting hard to tear it down. Seemingly seeing a weakness in the NDP with Oscar Lathlin's death, both parties fought to stealing votes at the expense" of the now-MLA for The Pas. "While the Liberals got off to a slow start, both parties were much more visible than they were in the past, with Nabess arguably having more signs up than any other candidate. Which apparently meant diddly squat. The MLA for The Pas ripped apart the efforts of the other two parties, quadrupling the number of votes Nabess garnered and in the process emphatically stamped the NDP brand on the riding. While it was pretty much a cinch we would remain an NDP riding, the manner in which it was done was truly stunning."

Further on, he said: "You may as well paint the north orange now and get it over with."

Well, some of us would argue that the NDP was already painted orange and we just kept it orange, but maybe a darker hue because we did even better.

I would also like to congratulate and welcome the new MLA for Elmwood. We first met in 1974 at Emmanuel College in Toronto where we were both studying theology and we have been friends ever since. We have a lot in common. First, we had the good sense to marry Canadians of Ukrainian descent who have stood by us for better and for worse, in good times and bad, and through election after election after election.

When I was in third year of theology, I was president of the student council and the MLA for Elmwood was on my executive. As I recall, he always voted with me, and I look forward to always voting the same way in this Chamber as well.

Along with our spouses and five other couples, we formed a group to study and implement the Shakertown Pledge—a pledge to implement personal, spiritual, institutional and environmental renewal. It is worth quoting declaration No. 4, which says: I commit myself to join with others in reshaping institutions in order to bring about a more just global society in which each person has access to the needed resources for their physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual growth.

That is something that we have dedicated our lives to for several decades, and so, too, have many New Democrats since this statement also reflects social democratic values.

I was ordained in 1976 and sent to Eatonia, Saskatchewan where the MLA for Elmwood and his wife, Brenda, visited my wife, Carol, and me. After ordination, the MLA for Elmwood was employed at North End Community Ministry, an outreach ministry of the United Church, located at 470 Stella Avenue in the North End of Winnipeg. In 1979, when the MLA for Elmwood was elected to Parliament, which created a vacancy at North End Community Ministry, I was asked to apply and began to work there in June 1980.

It is a great honour to be elected five times by the voters of Burrows constituency. However, I believe it was a greater honour to be employed by the United Church in a prophetic ministry. Now, why would I say that? I say that because party politics in Canada are constraining in what individuals can say and do. In opposition, this is less true, but that is because the role of the opposition is limited mainly to critiquing the government of the day. In government, at least in Canada, party discipline is strong and for some good reasons. The government, regardless of which party is in office and whether it is at the federal level or provincial level, wants everyone to be on message. It is important to achieving the party agenda and the government agenda to be united—united behind the leader, united behind their policies and supporting one another, especially when it comes to recorded votes. Our caucus is a good example of this because we are united behind our leader, united in our policies and very supportive of each other.

By way of contrast, in the United Kingdom, things are quite different. I was in the public gallery in the House of Commons at Westminster when Prime Minister Blair's terrorism bill was debated. I wish I could say that I saw the historic vote on it, but spectators can't actually see the vote because it happens in the lobbies. It was defeated because, and only because, a sufficient number of government backbenchers voted against it. It was historic because it was the first time in nine years that Prime Minister Blair lost a bill. This almost never happens in Canada.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Now in the pulpit, one has the luxury of an institution which prides itself on having, at least in theory, no constraints on what one says, as long as one believes that the message is grounded firmly in Scripture, theology, tradition and reason. The

prophetic ministry that both the Member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie) and I were engaged in was not that of foretelling the future, but rather in forth telling the Word of God to today's society. Another way of saying this is to speak truth to power, which both of us did in various ways, such as organizing tenants to fight for their rights and in presenting briefs to government. Whether or not we were effective, I will be addressing the paper I am presenting to a national symposium organized by the United Church called "Re-imagining Power in Church and Society." My paper will be called, "Do We Matter: The United Church's Influence on the Government."

* (16:30)

Following my presentation will be a response and comments by the MLA for Elmwood, appropriately enough. Partly due to the influence of the MLA for Elmwood. I, too, ran for elected office and was first elected in 1990. I remember that the MLA for Elmwood once gave me the advice that starting in opposition was a good place to start, and that is what I did for what I'd like to say was nine long years. I note that MLA for Elmwood took his own advice, except that he was in opposition caucus for 29 years.

In November 2007, the former member of Parliament for Elmwood-Transcona was voted the *Maclean's* Parliamentarian of the Year, as voted by his peers in the House of Commons. He was honoured by the House of Commons when he was elected Deputy Speaker and, if my research is correct, this earned him the title of Honourable for the rest of his life. We look forward to his contribution to the NDP caucus, to our government and the people of Manitoba and hope that his contribution will span many sessions and several legislatures.

I recently visited a senior citizen, someone that the new Member for Elmwood knows, Jim Burgess. Jim shared a dream that he had, in which he was elected to the Legislature. In his dream he was making a speech. In it he outlined all the things that he thought the government should be doing for seniors. It was a long list and, of course, would cost money to implement. This prompted someone to ask how are you going to pay for it. Jim replied: That's not my problem; that's the problem of the Minister of Finance.

Let's not forget that was a dream, albeit an interesting one.

In fact, how a government goes about paying for its programs is not just the responsibility of the Minister of Finance but of the whole caucus, Treasury Board and Cabinet. This is something that I understand, and so I am cautious about ideas that I would like to see become programs or enhancements of existing programs. My tendency is only to speak up when I see a need or feel passionately about something in the hope that it will be taken seriously.

I am proud of the fact that in two areas I have saved taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars. In the first case, I agreed to the reduction of a budget for an organization in my constituency and saved taxpayers \$100,000 per year. One might think that was a risky thing to do, but, in fact, taxpayers were not getting value for their money. After the decision was made, I did not get one phone call or comment from anyone criticizing this decision. The decision was taken, I believe, in the year 2000. So I can say that I saved taxpayers and the government \$900,000 since then.

The other major saving was in prison costs, albeit to the federal government. I chose mediation instead of a trial for someone who was charged with assault with a weapon, forcible confinement and uttering threats. The individual had already done time in Stony Mountain Penitentiary and could have been sentenced to at least four to six years behind bars. I'm not sure how much I saved taxpayers that time, but my guess is that it would also be in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. More importantly than the savings is the fact that the mediation was successful and the young person turned his life around.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I think I'm actually ready to speak on the amendment to the government motion. I want to do so first by referring to two newspaper articles. One is headlined "Budget deals with the real world" and is by Reg Alcock. In this article he concludes by saying: The provincial government has produced a very credible budget, in a very difficult environment. It has also retained the capacity to act, should the situation in Manitoba worsen. For this, the Premier and the Minister of Finance and the hundreds of public servants who put this budget together deserve our thanks.

I believe this is high praise coming as it does from a former president of the Treasury Board.

The second article I want to quote from is also from the *Winnipeg Free Press*. It is titled "At times it takes a natural disaster," and the subtitle is

"Spending unpopular until it's too late." This is the column by Dan Lett in the *Winnipeg Free Press* on Wednesday, April 1, 2009. He says: "You would think Winnipeggers would have learned a lesson from the wrongheaded reaction to Duff's Ditch, but efforts by the current Premier . . . to expand the floodway show that old idiotic habits die hard."

"Throughout the process of deepening and widening the floodway, ex-urban tax refugees complained about the unfairness of spending everyone's tax dollars on a project that would only protect Winnipeggers. Anti-tax crusaders have dogged the project with unfounded allegations of cost overruns. The province's heavy construction industry threatened a political holy war over a decision to use a master labour agreement to oversee wages paid for those working on the expansion."

"With a river crest barrelling towards Winnipeg like a muddy, brown bowling ball, it's no surprise that many of those critics (with the obvious exception of those who live outside the floodway) are alarmingly quiet. As it should be."

So I think this is a good example of our government preparing for the future, preparing for what might be another Flood of the Century or worse. So we've invested, I believe, it's at least \$800 million in expanding the floodway and flood proofing small communities south of Winnipeg and making improvements north of the floodway to protect people in Selkirk and further north. Now we're going to see those benefits pay off. It doesn't mean that we're out of the woods yet, but I think having the expanded floodway is probably going to be very, very beneficial this year.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I recently read an article in *The Globe and Mail* about a program, I believe, called *Pathways*. It sounded very exciting because the goal was to improve high school retention rates for low-income students. I thought this was something that our government should be doing. To my surprise, within days I was invited to visit a program funded by our government called a Bright Futures program, which is being run at two sites, one in Seven Oaks School Division and one in Winnipeg School Division.

This is the beginning of the program, but already it is improving academic success. I had occasion to visit there, along with the MLA for The Maples (Mr. Saran), just last week, and we were very impressed by the very compassionate and competent teachers we met. We were also joined by the Seven Oaks

superintendent, Mr. Brian O'Leary, and we heard about this program and got some information about it. It is already paying dividends.

For example, we heard about a student who failed an exam, did very, very poorly, had a bad attitude about the teacher, but, because of the mentoring, because of the peer mentoring, because of the teachers, this student has improved and is getting A-plus marks. So, not only are they improving academic success, but they are greatly improving—in the future, I believe, they're going to greatly improve the high school graduation rate. That's something that is desirable, especially because high school graduation rates are not as high as they should be, especially in low-income communities.

The target group for the Seven Oaks program is those families living in the Elwick school area, and they do have an income test to invite the students to come. I know that the Minister of Advanced Education (Ms. McGifford), the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) were at that site a couple of weeks ago. It's to their credit that we have this, I believe, a pilot program.

In addition to the academic tutoring and the access to computers, they have set up, or are hoping to set up, educational savings accounts for students, a scholarship fund of a thousand dollars a year held in trust until after high school graduation for post-secondary education such as college or university. They're also providing funds for students to take after-school lessons or enrol in sports programs, because many low-income families just can't afford that.

They're also providing opportunities for them to volunteer. It's actually an off-site study place. It's not in the school. It's away from the school, and the case for the one at Seven Oaks School Division, it's at 660 Sheppard Avenue. In the case of the students from the Lord Selkirk area who normally attend David Livingstone School, the tutoring site is at Children of the Earth High School. If students move away from the school that they enrolled in in September, they can still continue to come to the place to study, and they will be given bus tickets to get there.

So I commend all those who are involved in this program and for our government and for our ministers to having the vision and the foresight to fund this program. We know that these students are going to be followed from now until they graduate, and we look forward to great success.

Now I have a number of news releases. There's so much good news in this budget that I probably don't have time to read all of these things into the record, but I will just highlight a couple of things. *[interjection]* Well, I'm sure there's somebody on the other side that's just itching to get up and speak to the, actually, to the amendment to the budget motion.

We do have an economic plan, a 10-point economic strategy as outlined in budget 2009. Our budget is balanced, in keeping with Manitoba's deficit free, with a \$48-million summary financial surplus that includes core government departments, Crown corporations and pension obligations.

* (16:40)

Now, this is something I don't think the opposition is really enamoured with because they don't really want to see a profitable Crown corporation, like Manitoba Hydro, as part of the government reporting entity because instead of having a \$48-million surplus we're probably going to have a surplus—we could potentially have a surplus of hundreds of millions of dollars because Crown corporation revenue is included in the bottom line.

Well, we'll listen to the members opposite and see what they have to say about this. But, of course, they wouldn't want to have a surplus that's bigger than what is projected. In fact, they're objecting to things, which is a little bit strange to me, that they had a hand in setting up. So, for example, it was the Filmon government who set up the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, and, when that bill was debated—because I was here at the time—it very quickly became known as the rainy day fund. Now, we're being criticized by the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) in his speech for taking money out of the rainy day fund. We're not taking very much, but it's needed and it's needed for times like this when the economy is softening somewhat in Manitoba. So I don't think you can hardly criticize our government for taking money out of a rainy day fund that was set up by your government specifically for that purpose.

We are saving for the future. Manitoba's Fiscal Stabilization account will stand at \$634 million in 2009-2010, up from \$226 million in 1999 and allowing for a \$110-million investment in vital services.

We are focussing on skills and knowledge. We are making historic investments in education, training and skills development which will help

Manitoba prosper in the knowledge economy. Investments include a 6 percent increase in base operating grants and strategic programming for universities and colleges; a 5.25 percent increase, or \$53 million, for public schools, the largest-ever investment in public school funding; more training seats for apprenticeships and a new bursary fund for prospective apprentices; new tax credits for employers who provide apprenticeship placements; doubling the available scholarships for Aboriginal medical students; and expanding nurse training across the province.

I'm only going to highlight the other parts of our 10-point economic strategy, and they are growing through innovation, modernizing infrastructure, strategic tax cuts, increasing access to credit and capital, tackling debt and pension liabilities, helping Manitoba communities, and building a green energy economy.

I'm sure that my colleagues are going to address our 10-point economic strategy, and so this concludes my contribution to the budget debate.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Madam Deputy Speaker, it is certainly my pleasure to rise to speak to the amendment put forward by the Leader of the Opposition and to the budget as proposed by the government.

But, of course, I should also congratulate our new members to the Chamber today. We certainly look forward to working with you in the coming days and years.

I also want to remind you all this new-felt warmth for you in the House here—I should also remind you that your election was crucial to the NDP because you've now increased the vote tax that the NDP can now take with your election. So, you know, you're just a bit of a dollar sign, but I certainly hope that you will be able to contribute to this House.

For this government to advertise budget 2009 as steady and balanced brings Manitoba and this government to a new low. If steady means Manitoba will not decline as much as other jurisdictions in the current recession, then, conversely, that does mean that Manitoba did not take advantage of the economic opportunities like other provinces have over the past 10 years. It's rather sad when suddenly mediocre is a good thing. Steady as you go just means that you've dropped to a new low.

The fact that other provinces have now fallen to our stagnant rate, that hardly rates cheering about.

All it really means is that other provinces have slowed down. There have been slowdowns in other provinces, down to our level if this is what the government would like to tell you, but they're also positioning themselves for a rebound. And nowhere in this budget did I see anything about a rebound, because all we talked about was steady, steady as it goes. There's no plan to recover.

So it's a sign that they've run out of ideas, or they never had any ideas, however you want to put it. It's not going to be good for Manitoba in the years to come as we watch other jurisdictions take positive actions to address the economic downturn, and make no mistake, although this government likes to tell you that we're okay, we're not going to fail and all that, there have been job layoffs already, and there will be more, and there is a lot more in terms of financial crisis coming to this province.

But the Premier (Mr. Doer) has been very successful within Manitoba at creating the image that being mediocre is good enough for many people. And I say the Premier because, although the Finance Minister delivers the budget, it really is the Premier who is controlling all the decisions of the budget and the message delivered. It is the Premier who has hidden the growing dependence on federal transfer payments. Nearly 40 percent of the total revenue of Manitoba now comes from the federal government, courtesy of other provinces. That's 40 cents on every dollar that this province spends is coming courtesy of Alberta, Ontario, B.C., and it is the Premier who will not explain to Manitobans why these provinces do have legitimate concerns of how their money is being squandered and wasted in Manitoba. As these provinces face real deficit, there will be demands for change, and this is going to not bode well for Manitoba in the years to come, when you have such a high dependence on federal transfer payments. And as these provinces face—there will be demands for change, but the Premier, being the astute politician he is, will probably be long gone by this time, leaving someone else to clean up the mess, and perhaps we can welcome one of the new members as a prospective leadership candidate, so we'll look forward to that.

If you look back at the past 10 years, a pattern quickly emerges. The Premier came to power on the promise of fixing hallway medicine in six months and \$15 million. Great promise.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

The health budget, just in the last five years, has gone up some \$1.3 billion. We're now at \$4.7 billion per year in Manitoba on health care, but we've replaced hallway medicine with highway medicine. So what have we got for our money? If you want to be in the rural areas, that means we don't have timely access to emergency care. We've heard our colleague from Inkster talk at great length about Seven Oaks Hospital. Well, as much as they do love to harass the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), at least he does talk to his constituents and he does know what's going on. That's something that all members need to pay attention to, is to listen to what your constituents say.

The transfer and equalization payments have increased tremendously to \$4 billion in the same time period. In the last 10 years, our transfer payments are up to \$4 billion per year. But, in spite of this huge influx of cash, Manitoba's debt has also ballooned, from \$5 billion in 1999 to we're going to be almost \$12 billion in 2009, and that means that a family of four now carries the debt, the collective debt of Manitoba. A family of four carries the debt of almost \$40,000 each. That's over \$9,700 for every man, woman and child in this province. The debt per capita has gone up over \$1,200 per person just in the past year.

* (16:50)

So it's not a trend that, if you have any financial management, it's not a trend that you'd like to see. For the 2009-2010 fiscal year, Manitoba will take \$110 million from the fiscal stabilization account. That's on top of the \$68 million they took last year. They're going to reduce debt repayment from \$110 million to \$20 million. They're going to increase Manitoba's debt to almost \$12 billion, and, in the end, we have the Finance Minister declare a \$75-million surplus.

Now let's recap on this. I understand that math may not be the strong suit of some members in here, but you've reduced income—[interjection]—from tax sources. Let's recap. You've reduced the income from tax sources. We've increased spending; we're withdrawing from the savings account. We're reducing debt payment, and you declare a surplus. Only in NDP land can you ever figure that math out. You call this a balanced budget.

Mr. Premier, your credit card is maxed out and you're moving this province quickly towards insolvency. It reminds me a lot, it really does remind me a lot of Lehman Brothers and Citibank. Now, all

we need is a retirement pension set up for the Premier, something like Sir Fred's from the Royal Bank of Scotland, and that would really be the icing on the cake for Manitobans.

Now the Premier (Mr. Doer) has directed the NDP spin machine into overdrive, but it's not just the Conservative Party that the Premier must deal with for the coming two and a half years. The Premier will have to deal with Manitobans losing their jobs, and we've already seen this begun. There are layoffs. Your personal and corporate budgets are being tightened. All those promises made to special-interest groups may not be fulfilled.

In this budget, the Aboriginal community was mentioned many, many times in the Budget Address, yet why is it after 10 years of promises of help for the Aboriginal communities, many communities still face problems of poverty, violence, drug addiction and lack of economic development? When is the real help going to come from this Premier for these communities? The Premier's promises are ringing hollow in the ears of those who really do need it the most.

All of this is because of a Premier whose only vision is to cling to power based on increased revenues and taxes, increasing fees and handouts from other provinces, plus he gets to take the profits from Manitoba Hydro, Manitoba Public Insurance, Workers Compensation Board, Manitoba Liquor Control Commission to try and use to balance a budget that can't be balanced. Thank goodness the Crown corporations remain profitable in order to help him at least attempt to achieve a balanced budget.

But, if the Premier had had any real vision for all of Manitoba in the past 10 years, this province would be on a much more solid footing. He could've used the increasing revenues from transfer payments over the past 10 years to pay down debt. I know that debt doesn't bother some people when they don't feel liable to repay it, but, from experience, debt can be a good thing, but it has to be manageable. Manitoba's debt is not manageable and it's getting worse every year.

In the past 10 years, the Premier could've done away with the payroll tax. He could have used this time, fiscal stability and increasing revenues to take away the payroll tax. It's a tax, and again, many people don't realize this, but this is a tax on being successful. I have companies that start out small in my constituency, and, because of the price of

success, they now have to pay the payroll tax, unlike other provinces around us.

The other thing that you have to realize, too, is that Manitoba now has more debt. Manitoba has more debt than B.C., Alberta and Saskatchewan combined. We have way too much debt for our province.

The Premier (Mr. Doer) has squandered the last 10 years by not having a bankable plan to permanently remove education taxes from commercial property and farmland. Instead we have a tax first, and eventually refund a portion in a bureaucratic jungle that maximizes political spin but has no cost efficiency built in. We need to talk about cost efficiency. You always should be talking about cost efficiency, particularly when we're facing declining revenues.

With the introduction of tax increment financing legislation, does this mean that education taxes will never be removed from property taxes? This tax increment financing, by the way, was what the minister dubbed as being creative financing. It's just another tax on Manitobans.

The Premier has decided to play Russian roulette with the school divisions now. It's either take the tax incentive grant or else. Or else what? You're going to introduce legislation to force them to take this? Will you fund the true costs on a sustained basis, or are divisions to operate on a year-by-year basis, waiting to see if the tax incentive grant materializes, and at what level? It makes great politics for the Premier—blame the school divisions for the tax increases—but, once again, there's no long-term planning on behalf of this government. In terms of taxes and tax regime, over and over again it becomes apparent there is no long-term plan to reduce taxes, only to increase them.

The Premier has championed infrastructure projects as a means to overcome the economic recession. In those photo ops of infrastructure announcements, he conveniently and continually forgets to mention that the vast majority of those funds are coming from the federal and municipal governments. Remember, the provincial portion, 40 cents of every dollar, comes from the federal government. The way the latest infrastructure project has been set up, the municipalities have no input on the selection process.

Mr. Premier, you're running out of money fast. In the next year, Manitoba's debt will balloon once again. Despite his rosy projections of what will happen, given in this budget, we know that with their penchant for spending—we feel it with the tax revenue declining because of this recession right now—we could be in much worse condition this coming year from now than what this budget has projected.

Instead of using the last 10 years to build a solid foundation for Manitoba, you've squandered our children's and our grandchildren's financial future in this province. To say that Manitoba is in better shape than other provinces is nonsense. You can use all the projections you like, but we know that how they've been spending money in the last 10 years, with revenues declining, there is no guarantee that transfer payments will continue at the level that they are. So—

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable Member for Carman (Mr. Pedersen) will have 13 minutes remaining, and also the debate will remain standing in the name of the honourable Minister for Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross).

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, April 6, 2009

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