

Second Session - Fortieth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLAN, Nancy, Hon.	St. Vital	NDP
ALLUM, James	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	NDP
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	NDP
BLADY, Sharon	Kirkfield Park	NDP
BRAUN, Erna	Rossmere	NDP
BRIESE, Stuart	Agassiz	PC
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	NDP
CHIEF, Kevin, Hon.	Point Douglas	NDP
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	NDP
CROTHERS, Deanne	St. James	NDP
CULLEN, Cliff	Spruce Woods	PC
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	NDP
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	PC
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FRIESEN, Cameron	Morden-Winkler	PC
GAUDREAU, Dave	St. Norbert	NDP
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Liberal
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	PC
GRAYDON, Cliff	Emerson	PC
HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
HOWARD, Jennifer, Hon.	Fort Rouge	NDP
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Richmond	NDP
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	NDP
KOSTYSHYN, Ron, Hon.	Swan River	NDP
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	Dawson Trail	NDP
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	NDP
MAGUIRE, Larry	Arthur-Virden	PC
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor, Hon.	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
MELNICK, Christine, Hon.	Riel	NDP
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	PC
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	NDP
OSWALD, Theresa, Hon.	Seine River	NDP
PALLISTER, Brian	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Midland	PC
PETTERSEN, Clarence	Flin Flon	NDP
REID, Daryl, Hon.	Transcona	NDP
ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Kewatinook	NDP
RONDEAU, Jim, Hon.	Assiniboia	NDP
ROWAT, Leanne	Riding Mountain	PC
SARAN, Mohinder	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	St. Paul	PC
SELBY, Erin, Hon.	Southdale	NDP
SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Verendrye	PC
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	PC
STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon.	Dauphin	NDP
SWAN, Andrew, Hon.	Minto	NDP
TAILLIEU, Mavis	Morris	PC
WHITEHEAD, Frank	The Pas	NDP
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WIGHT, Melanie	Burrows	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, November 26, 2012

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: O Eternal and Almighty God, from Whom all power and wisdom come, we are assembled here before Thee to frame such laws as may tend to the welfare and prosperity of our province. Grant, O merciful God, we pray Thee, that we may desire only that which is in accordance with Thy will, that we may seek it with wisdom, know it with certainty and accomplish it perfectly for the glory and honour of Thy name and for the welfare of all our people. Amen.

Good afternoon, colleagues. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Local Government): Is there leave of the House to allow me to move a motion correcting an error that has been made with regard to the title of Bill 7 on the Order Paper?

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to correct an error that was made with regard to the title of Bill 7? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Lemieux: I move, seconded by the Minister of Housing and Community Development (Ms. Irvin-Ross), that the English title of Bill 7, The Planning Amendment and Winnipeg Charter Amendment Act (Affordable Housing), as it appears on the Order Paper, be altered to read The Planning Amendment and City of Winnipeg Charter Amendment Act (Affordable Housing).

Motion agreed to.

**Bill 7—The Planning Amendment and
City of Winnipeg Charter Amendment Act
(Affordable Housing)**

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Local Government): I move, seconded by the Minister of Housing and Community Development (Ms. Irvin-Ross), that The Planning Amendment and City of Winnipeg Charter Amendment Act (Affordable Housing), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Minister of Local Government. No? Okay.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? *[Agreed]*

Bill 9—The Teachers' Society Amendment Act

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Education): I move, seconded by the Family Services and—the Minister of Family Services and Labour (Ms. Howard), that Bill 9, The Teachers' Society Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Association des enseignants du Manitoba, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Allan: The Teachers' Society Amendment Act will amend The Teachers' Society Act to improve the process by which the Manitoba Teachers' Society investigates complaints, conducts internal disciplinary procedures and recuperates costs in cases of proven unprofessional conduct by a teacher, maintaining the highest professional standards for teachers.

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

Any further introduction of bills? Seeing none, we'll move on to petitions.

PETITIONS

Provincial Trunk Highway 1

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): I wish to present the following petition, and these are the reasons for this petition.

The background is as follows:

(1) The provincial government presently maintains a freeway system of PTH 1 through the province of Manitoba.

(2) The definition—by definition this would lead to an elimination of all traffic lights on PTH 1 by building overpasses at every major intersection along the highway.

(3) The Town of Virden and the local planning district have never adopted a 1997 Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation overpass plan for

the community at the junctions of PTH 1 with King Street, PTH 83 and PTH 257.

(4) This freeway system overpass plan is impeding business development in Virden. Presently, a Virden businessman is virtually prohibited from relocating his business to his own land because it sits on the footprint of the planned overpass, even though his relocated business would generate \$700,000 in provincial sales tax annually for Manitoba.

(5) Manitoba's infrastructure deficit has reached a record high. This deficit, paired with the number of existing projects still awaiting completion throughout Manitoba, will render the proposed overpass project financially unfeasible for decades to come.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To request that the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation consider abandoning the Manitoba freeway proposal for the junction of PTH 1 and Virden's three intersections, particularly the King Street junction.

And this petition is signed by M. Stephenson, A. Carruthers and S. Herkness and many, many others, Mr. Speaker.

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

St. Ambroise Beach Provincial Park

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

Here are the reasons for this petition:

The St. Ambroise provincial park was hard hit by the 2011 flood, resulting in the park's ongoing closure, the loss of local access to Lake Manitoba, as well as untold harm to the ecosystem and wildlife in the region.

The park's closure is having a negative impact in many areas, including disruptions to the local tourism, hunting and fishing operations, diminished economic and employment opportunities and the potential loss of the local store and decrease in property values.

Local residents and visitors alike want St. Ambroise provincial park to be reopened as soon as possible.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the appropriate ministers of the provincial government consider repairing St. Ambroise provincial park and its access points to their pre-flood conditions so the park can be reopened for the 2013 season or earlier if possible.

This petition is signed by D. Goodman, D. Marcine, M. Pull and hundreds of other Manitobans.

Vita & District Health Centre

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The reasons—these are the reasons for this petition:

The Vita & District Health Centre services a wide area of southeastern Manitoba and is relied on to provide emergency services.

On October 17th, 2012, the emergency room at the Vita & District Health Centre closed with no timeline for its—for it to reopen.

*(13:40)

This emergency room deals with approximately 1,700 cases a year, which includes patients in the hospital, the attached personal care home and members of the community and surrounding area.

Manitobans should expect a high quality of health care close to home and should not be expected to travel great distances for health services.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Health consider reopening the emergency room in Vita as soon as possible and commit to providing adequate medical support for residents of southeastern Manitoba for many years to come.

This petition is signed by the following: A. Reimer, J. Reimer, O. Paciorka and many more fine Manitobans.

Provincial Road 520

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

The rural municipality of Lac du Bonnet and Alexander are experiencing record growth due to—especially to an increasing number of Manitobans retiring in cottage country.

The population in the RM of Lac du Bonnet grows exponentially in the summer months due to increased cottage use.

Due to population growth, Provincial Road 520 experiences heavy traffic, especially during the summer months.

PR 520 connects cottage country to the Pinawa Hospital and as such is frequently used by emergency medical services to transport patients.

PR 520 is in such poor condition that there are serious concerns about its safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to recognize the serious safety concerns of Provincial Road 520 and to address its poor condition by prioritizing its renewal.

This petition is signed by J. Adler, T. Swiderli, C. Beur and hundreds of other fine Manitobans.

Provincial Trunk Highways 16 and 5 North— Traffic Signals

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

The junction of PTH 16 and PTH 5 north is an increasingly busy intersection which is used by motorists and pedestrians alike.

The Town of Neepawa has raised concerns with the Highway Traffic Board about safety levels at this intersection.

The Town of Neepawa has also passed a resolution requesting that Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation install traffic lights at this intersection in order to increase safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to consider making the installation of traffic lights at the intersection of PTH 16 and PTH 5 north a priority project in order to help protect the safety of the motorists and pedestrians who use it.

This petition is signed by J. Hofer, C. Wollmann, A. Wollmann and many, many other fine Manitobans.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Eric Robison (Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table the CEDF quarterly financial statements as of September 30th, 2012.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to our public gallery where we have with us today members of the St. Norbert Farmers' Market, who are the guests of the honourable member for St. Norbert (Mr. Gaudreau).

Also in the public gallery we have with us today, from Elmwood school CYCLE project, Mr. Wake, Ms. Balaban, Mr. Anderson and students Nick and Bolu, who are the guests of the honourable member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe).

And also in the public gallery today we have Eloise Ternovetsky and members of the Southdale ringette team, who are the guests of the honourable Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy (Ms. Selby).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Government Communications Staff Increase

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Welcome the Premier back from his meetings, and he missed a great discussion on Friday in respect of the vote-tax proposal the NDP is coming forward with. The arguments that the government put forward were several but none of them logical.

The first one was that they wanted to end the role of big money. This is coming from a government that doubled their spending, doubled our debt and has doubled their advertising budget. They also said they're strongly supportive of volunteerism, except in the case of their own party raising its own money. And the other argument they made was that they wanted to level the playing field, so let's talk about levelling the playing field.

The PC Party, the opposition, has one communications staffer, and we've learned that the government has—in terms of marketing and communications spinners, they have 192 people on staff—192 people to massage the message.

So my question for the Premier today would be: If he really wants to level the playing field, when will he begin reducing his—the roster of his spin team?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): If the member opposite's serious about democracy, he'll finally declare that the official opposition is opposed to corporate and union donations being legal in the province of Manitoba. We passed that law several years ago.

We've never had a Leader of the Official Opposition of the Progressive Conservative Party that has stood up and said that he thinks it's time that we ended corporate and union donations as the law legally available to Manitobans, unions and corporations. We have said that is no longer possible in Manitoba. They have groused about that and complained about that.

If he's serious about levelling the playing field, let him stand up today and say, no union and corporate donations as part of the democratic process.

Mr. Pallister: Given that we voted for the bill, I would hope the Premier would understand our support is there. That being said, I understand his petulance. We have the lowest donation limits of any province in Canada, and we still outraise that party.

Last year alone, the government spent 12 and a half million dollars on spinners. That is a 60 per cent increase in the staff.

Now, the Premier keeps saying he wants to protect front-line services, but this year he cut education. This year he cut infrastructure. He cut nighttime snowplow shifts, for heaven's sakes, at the same time as he was increasing the budget for spinners.

So I've got to ask the Premier again: How does he equate protecting front-line services with adding six dozen spinners to the payroll?

Mr. Selinger: When publications and information is provided to the public on workplace health and safety, that keeps working people in Manitoba safer. The member opposite may not want to do that, because he took no measures to do that the last time

he was in the building. We actually think it's important that people are able to work safely.

When we provide communications on safe roads, that is important for public safety. When we provided information on the flood, that is important for public safety. When we provide information to the public on immunizations, that is important for public health in Manitoba.

Which of those programs does the member opposite wish to cut, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Pallister: On this side, Mr. Speaker, we don't equate program spending to results, and we don't equate announcements to results either.

The fact of the matter is that the government is trying to avoid accountability by using communications staff instead of answering its own questions. Now, if you want a question answered on bipole boondoggle, you're going to get a spokesperson. You want a question from CentrePort on what they feel about the cuts to snowplows in the middle of the night, you're going to get a spokesperson. If you want information on cuts to ambulances or ambulance wait times, then you're going to get a spokesperson.

Well, what the government's done is replaced facts from honest civil servants with spin from government sympathizers.

Now, I asked a question last week of the Premier about the basic personal deduction. And while the media waited outside the west door, he wiggled outside the east door.

So I want to ask him: Is this how he avoids accountability, by hiring 192 people to answer the tough questions for him?

Mr. Selinger: The member opposite and the members of his caucus have voted against every increase we've ever made in the personal exemption: 49 per cent increase in the exemptions for dependants and spouses, 28 per cent increase in the exemptions for individuals. The member opposite heard that answer in the House here.

What he needs to do is explain how he's going to balance the budget while reducing taxes by another \$140 million, or if he's going to increase tax reductions by another \$140 million, which programs to Manitobans is he going to cut?

He needs to be accountable for his own pronouncements, which have not been costed out and

has not given any indication how he will pay for them.

That's the real accountability question here. He makes a one-off, glib announcement before he goes to his convention and then is not accountable for how he'll pay for it or who will have to pay for it.

Balanced Budget Government Timeline

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): What we need is accountability from our Premier, who made promises in the election and right after that he broke them. He promised he was going to balance the budget and he promised he wasn't going to raise taxes and he broke both of those promises. So there's accountability.

* (13:50)

Mr. Speaker, this Minister of Finance has refused many times to say if he plans to raise taxes to pay for the NDP's financial spending addictions. He has also not given us a date as to when he plans to balance the budget. They broke that promise. He hasn't said when he's going to balance the budget.

So we'd like to ask the Minister of Finance today: When does he plan to balance his budget?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Well, Mr. Speaker, the member across the way is incorrect. We've been very clear that our priority is to protect those services that Manitoba families value. We've been very clear with that.

And we've been trying to get an answer from members opposite as to where they would find—where they would pay for the one lonely proposal they've come forward with, of \$135 million that they would either cut from services or add to our deficit. They won't be accountable for that.

Mr. Speaker, we've been very clear that we want to come back into balance. We've been clear that every year we're going to work to make sure that we close the gap between the expenses and revenues that we're dealing with, but we're not going to balance the books on the backs of Manitobans. We're not going to balance the books by cutting services that matter most to Manitobans. We're not going to balance the books by—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. The minister's time has expired. Order, please.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, we know that the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and the Minister of Finance

are looking for wiggle room when it comes to balancing the budget. In fact, they've both wiggled and waffled on this issue a number of times.

So we hope we can get a straight answer from the Minister of Finance today. He's in government. He made some commitments. It's his responsibility to look after balancing the books. So we'd like to ask him today for a straightforward answer.

When does he plan to balance the books?

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Speaker, we're going to work very hard in these uncertain economic times. That is clear. We're going to work very hard to make sure that we have reasonable decisions when it comes to expenses and we have reasonable decisions when it comes to revenue.

We're going to do this in a balanced way, Mr. Speaker, because to take the advice of members opposite would do a number of things. To take their advice to come back into balance right away would mean cutting health services, cutting education services, cutting those services that protect Manitoba kids. I dare say if we were to take the advice of members opposite, we would kick our economy further into recession, which would cause more problems. Governments across this country, including the federal government, are taking—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. Order, please. The minister's time has expired.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, I could suggest to the Minister of Finance he might want to look at cutting some of those communicators that he hired over the last number of years.

Mr. Speaker, this Minister of Finance has added PST to a lot of services in the last budget: property insurance, women's haircuts, group life, accident and disability insurance. Now he won't say if he will hit taxpayers again with another tax grab to try to balance his budget. So a very, very simple question for this Minister of Finance: When will he balance his budget?

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Speaker, our government has provided over \$1.2 billion in tax savings for individuals, for property and for business in Manitoba. We've done this at the same time—in these uncertain economic times, we've done this at the same time as we've protected health care and education and services that protect kids. We've done that by strategically investing in our economy to make sure that that economy grows.

If we were to take the advice of members opposite, we would hurt those services that Manitoba families depend upon, and we would run the risk of pushing our economy further into recession. So, Mr. Speaker, we're going to continue a balanced approach—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

Harmonized Sales Tax Government Position

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, the lack of an answer gives me the opportunity to ask the Premier about HST.

In 2009, the government commissioned an investigative report which estimated \$400 million of additional tax consequence on the backs of Manitobans as a result of the acceptance of the HST, but the Premier has been all over the map on the issue. He initially said he liked it, then he said he didn't like it. And this year, in 2012 alone, he's added about \$180 million of HST-related taxes to Manitobans, including taxes on life insurance, hairdos, home insurance and so on. So Manitobans are naturally confused about the flip-flopping going on over there in respect of this issue.

So I want the Premier to verify to the House today that neither he nor any of his senior officials, including the Finance Minister, have had meetings in the last 24 months with senior federal government officials concerning the topic of the HST.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): There's only one member of this House which has left the door open to the HST and it's the new member from Fort Whyte, the Leader of the Official Opposition, and if he wants to do the right thing today, he will stand up and say that he will not bring in a harmonized sales tax in the province of Manitoba. That's what he should be doing today.

Mr. Speaker, when they were in government, they expanded the sales tax onto children's school supplies. They expanded the sales tax onto sanitary products for people in Manitoba. They made—they took a direct aim at low-income people on how they expanded the sales tax in the province of Manitoba.

Let the Leader of the Opposition today say that he will not harmonize the sales tax. Let's get a clear declaration on that from the member from Fort Whyte.

Mr. Pallister: Well, that's a phony and pretty rich response coming from the Premier of Manitoba

who's been introducing the HST by stealth since he came in as Finance Minister, and now as Premier. Three different times—in 2002 on mechanical and engineering labour, 2004 on professional services and this year on things as fundamental to Manitobans as basic insurance premiums and home insurance—so for the Premier to suggest we have to be clear in our position when he's been nothing but unclear on his own is quite rich, Mr. Speaker.

He promised not to raise taxes just a year ago, and a few weeks later gave us a whopper of a tax increase, the biggest in 25 years, \$180 million coming out of Manitoba households. Now, the fact of the matter is that's a massive tax burden onto the backs of Manitobans.

I want him today to give his word to Manitobans that he will no longer continue this HST-by-stealth campaign.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the member's been away from the House for quite a while and things have changed.

There's \$1.2 billion of tax relief that has been provided by this government for Manitobans. When the member opposite was in the Legislature, the tax for small business was 9 per cent. Today it's zero, the lowest in the country of Canada. When the member opposite was in the House, he cut the education property tax credit for Manitobans from \$325 to \$250. Today it is a minimum of \$750 for all Manitobans. When the member opposite was in the House, the corporate tax was 17 per cent on large business in Manitoba. Today it is 12 per cent.

There's been tremendous progress made on making Manitoba more affordable and competitive, and we will give him more examples if he wants to more—ask more questions on this topic.

Flooding Compensation Claim Settlements

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, let's be very clear. This same member from St. Boniface, the First Minister, came in this House before the election, said we will not raise taxes, \$180 million last year. This minister cannot be trusted.

Mr. Speaker, when governments make a promise, people expect government to follow through with it. It's called trust and integrity. It's been a full year and a half since this government flooded out many Manitoba families across Manitoba. The great people from Lake St. Martin are

here, people from all sides around Lake Manitoba with this man-made flood.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister to stand in this House today and apologize to all those family who have not received full and fair compensation through this government.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important that the member opposite recognize what I think all Manitobans recognize, the stark nature of the flood in 2011-2012: floods on the Souris, floods on the Assiniboine, flood on the Red River, floods on the Saskatchewan River and, particularly, of course, with Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin.

* (14:00)

And I want to indicate, Mr. Speaker, that we dealt with those challenges in a way that really, I think, showed the degree to which all Manitobans recognize the traumatic impact it had. There were 7,000 evacuees at the peak of the flood. There are still Manitobans evacuated.

And when it came to Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin, one thing I think the member should acknowledge is the degree to which the emergency outlet reduced 5 feet the level—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. Minister's time has expired.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, this is the same minister dug three ditches and left one of them with nothing but a rock in front of it. They don't have a clear indication about what they're doing.

Mr. Speaker, on May the 24th this government promised, and I quote: From the time of application, we expect to flow support to people within a matter of weeks. A month later, this government stated people would be fairly compensated. So why is this residents waiting for sign-off from the appraisers so they can do their flood claims?

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Kostyshyn) how his department has been able to mismanage this process so considerably that Manitobans are still waiting to get their compensation claimed—settled. I ask the Minister of Agriculture, stand up today and make it clear.

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I think the member should recognize the part of the historic flood that we dealt with has been the historic recovery effort. And

it is not, by any stretch of the imagination, complete, will not be complete until every Manitoban is back home.

But I would think that the member would have at least started his question by recognizing that currently this Province—and now, when I say this Province, that includes funding from the federal government to producer finance programs—has paid out, in terms of direct costs, more than a billion dollars. We've recognized, too, that there's probably upwards of \$250 million, Mr. Speaker, minimum, that may be required to be paid out in the future.

But we made significant progress, Mr. Speaker, including completing all of the appraisals that the member's referring to, significant progress on DFA. The flood was historic—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, I will start very clearly and say this government mishandled this whole file through miscommunications each and every day. They failed miserably.

Mr. Speaker, everyone in this House agrees that compensation was the right thing to do to help Manitoba families. Before and during the election, this government made promises, and those promises have been broken. Shame on this government for misleading those trusting Manitobans that give them another mandate, which they thought was the right thing.

Mr. Speaker, when this government failed the flood victims, we called upon this government to do the right thing, live up to their commitments, do the compensation they promised and do it today. Time is wasting. These people are waiting. It's time for action from this government.

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Speaker, this was the biggest flood impact since 1950. We had more than 30 per cent of the arable land in this province flooded. We had more than 80 per cent of the municipalities applying for disaster financial assistance. We had huge impacts on First Nations in this province, upwards of 7,000 evacuees, and many of the evacuees are still not back home from First Nations communities.

So we had a historic effort, Mr. Speaker, and I would say to the member opposite that we have put in place on behalf of this Province more than a billion dollars in terms of disaster financial assistance and compensation, and we're not done yes.

We're not only going to provide the recovery stage in terms of that kind of assistance, but we're already working on the reconstruction and the mitigation. We have two major reports that will be out in a matter of weeks. They'll do the Manitoba—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

Manitoba Hydro St. James Power Outages

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): Mr. Speaker, residents of St. James have come forward and complained about excessive amounts of power outages in their community. In fact, one business has indicated they are investing over \$10,000 in a generator, as they cannot rely on Manitoba Hydro for consistent electricity.

Can the minister tell this House why has he failed Manitobans yet again?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): I thank the member for the question, and I think it's rather strange coming from the members opposite, who have called Hydro's plans to spend capital to provide reliability, quote, a mega-mistake, Mr. Speaker.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I reviewed some of the issues related by the member, and I can indicate that the security record and the record of blackouts for Manitoba Hydro is amongst the best in the country. And in looking at the breakdowns that have occurred in St. James, a number of them occurred as a result of wildlife, a number occurred as a result of two pole failures, and some of it occurred due to equipment that is being replaced at the expense of 300 to 400 thousand dollars a year, something members opposite have criticized and are against.

Mr. Schuler: Mr. Speaker, the mega-mistake is believing anything this NDP has to say.

The NDP backbencher MLAs have the opportunity to ask questions in question period. Why has the member for St. James never raised this issue in the Legislature?

With in excess of 20 power outages, residents and businesses of St. James are being forced to take measures in their own hands and are looking at off-line measures to ensure that they have reliable electricity.

Manitoba Hydro says that the problem is that their equipment is of a postwar era. They just didn't say which war.

What has the minister done to deal with these unacceptable electrical outage problems in St. James, and where is the member that's supposed to represent that community?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Chomiak: The member has pointed out the distinct difference between the members opposite, who use every single opportunity to criticize the Crown corporation Manitoba Hydro, to condemn every single action taken by Manitoba Hydro, including its reliability bipole, Mr. Speaker, that they voted against and have spoken against at every opportunity—and we know how they solved the problems with Crown corporations. They sell them, just like they did with Manitoba Telephone System. They sell off the Crown corporations, go to the private sector, and see the rates? Highest in the country. Our hydro rates are the lowest in the country.

We're doing a refurbishing of the infrastructure, Mr. Speaker, like every other utility in the country. And we're putting public money into it to do that so we can build for the future and have hydro as clean, green energy, something members opposite vote against and criticize every day in this House.

Mr. Schuler: Well, Mr. Speaker, we were actually criticizing a minister who tries to blame all of Hydro's problems on wildlife when, in fact, Manitoba Hydro responded to the unacceptable power outages by saying, and I quote: Like the roof on your house, at some point you need to replace it.

When will this minister see to it that the infrastructure in St. James gets replaced, as it stems from the prewar era? We just don't know which war.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, I think the person who gave that quote was one of the communicators that the Leader of the Opposition criticized this morning in his earlier question.

Mr. Speaker, I got a list from Manitoba Hydro as to the reasons for the outages: two pole fires, lightning, phase burned down on W71, a locked trip out—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

I'm having a great deal of difficulty hearing the response to the question posed by the honourable

member for St. Paul. I'm asking for the co-operation of all honourable members. Please keep the level down a little bit so I can hear the response from the minister.

Mr. Chomiak: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In Crown Corporations Committee, we outlined the capital projections of Hydro, Mr. Speaker, and the—we're going to be building hydro for the future so we will continue to have in Manitoba the lowest rates and the most secure hydro. If we don't build that bipole, there could be rolling blackouts, and that's the risk members opposite want to take. We don't want to roll the dice on the future of Manitoba. We don't want to roll the dice on the future of hydro.

We're going to build hydro, and we wish we had the support of members opposite, and to do that we have to rebuild the infrastructure, which will take investment by Hydro. And when Hydro invests, the members opposite are always critical. We believe in investing in hydro, building it for the future so we can continue to have the lowest rates in the country.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Parking Tickets Outstanding Fine Collection

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, sounds like the government is trying to distance itself from their communicators. Do they not agree with what they're saying?

Mr. Speaker, we know this government likes to ignore, by its history, when it's convenient. We just saw that here. They often like to live in the past rather than looking ahead creating a vision for Manitobans.

Now we learn they're going back to collect parking ticket fines, way back, back 18 years, and the individuals have to prove their innocence 20 years after the fact. The Limitation of Actions Act refers to limitation periods for many things, but parking tickets are apparently a life sentence in Manitoba according to this government's actions. This government is so desperate for revenue that they're reaching back into Manitobans' wallets from almost 20 years ago.

* (14:10)

Mr. Speaker, how can this minister defend reaching back 20 years for revenue from a parking ticket? Is he that desperate for money, or is that—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): We believe that if somebody has an outstanding fine, they ought to pay it. And I'm actually surprised the member for Brandon West doesn't agree with that.

Now, it is true we put measures in place to make sure that outstanding fines are collected. We've used Manitoba Public Insurance. We've used the ability to deny individuals the chance to renew their licences or to renew their registrations because we think collecting outstanding fines is actually useful for the taxpayers of Manitoba in general.

And I'm surprised by the chattering across the way by individuals who apparently don't think that individuals should pay their fines. And, indeed, we've put in place collection efforts which have been incredibly successful.

And, Mr. Speaker, you know, we're not perfect, but we are 90 times better than the members opposite.

Mr. Helwer: Well, I'm interested to know what the measure of success was. I mean, the fines have gone up from—by \$2 million over last year. Is that successful on the collection side, that they've gone up and we can't collect those?

So, Mr. Speaker, the NDP said they needed wiggle room, as they're not being able to budget—balance the budget by 2014 as promised. Now they're desperately looking for money.

This NDP government has been able to collect outstanding through—fines through MPI registrations since 2009 and through licence renewals since 2004, and now you want to go back almost 20 years to punish Manitobans. It's bad enough that this is a cash grab. It's even worse; it is retroactive. Now, that, Mr. Speaker, is desperate.

Mr. Swan: Listen, I'm glad the member has asked that question again, because it lets me then put on the record just how unsuccessful the previous government was at collecting outstanding fines and how successful, using our Manitoba Public Insurance, our publicly owned auto insurer, how much more effective we are.

In 1998-1999, which was the last full year that Manitobans had to suffer under a Progressive Conservative government, well, at that time the government of the day only managed to collect about \$116,000 in delinquent accounts and not much more the next year. Again, Mr. Speaker, we've been

successful now using Manitoba Public Insurance at collecting 90 times as much of outstanding fines which we all agree Manitobans should pay.

And I'm really wondering, Mr. Speaker, why the alleged party of law and order doesn't want people—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

**Lake St. Martin First Nation
Evacuee Relocation Options**

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, the November 24th issue of The Globe and Mail has outlined and calls out the government, this NDP government, because it flooded the good people of Lake St. Martin First Nation in order to save so many others in southern Manitoba.

Grand Chief Derek Nepinak is in the—Grand Chief Derek Nepinak said, right from the start the Premier has said that he was going to dictate what happened with those communities, and that is unacceptable.

The—Adrian Sinclair has also indicated that the Premier has basically left his community out to dry.

I ask the Premier: After deciding to flood out the good people of Lake St. Martin, why has he not supported the home that they want in the higher ground near Grahamdale rather than offering them an old army base?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the folks in Lake St. Martin, that community and their families have suffered enormously from this flood, the record highest flood we've seen in modern history in Manitoba. And I think all of us in this Legislature would like to see those families get re-established and stabilized back home as quickly as possible.

The radar site was never envisaged as anything more than a temporary site to allow people to get as close to home as possible and to be on high, dry ground while the community was being rebuilt.

And the channel that we built, the emergency channel that we built, brought the lake down to an acceptable level. The emergency channel has been, as you know, constructed. It has brought down the lakes; it has brought down both lakes over more than 5 feet in a record amount of time. That has created the conditions for starting to rebuild these communities.

And we are very committed to working with the First Nations that have been affected by this flood to find permanent, long-term solutions so that this won't happen to them ever again.

**First Nations Communities
Concerns about Flood-Damaged Homes**

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, the good people of Little Saskatchewan and Dauphin River are still in a crisis mode, evacuated from their homes for the most part because of the problems of the flood of 2011, and many of these cannot return to their homes because their homes are infested with mould. And the problem is that this Premier has said, well, we're going to fully compensate everybody who was artificially flooded last year.

But I ask the Premier now: Will he make sure all the homes in Little Saskatchewan and Dauphin River are mould free in order that people can go home, and why has it taken a year and a half even to get started on this?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mould has been a serious problem and continues to be a serious problem in some of the homes that are in First Nations communities, particularly in the areas that have flooded. We have rebuilt roads so people can have access to their communities. In the case of Dauphin River, we have brought the lake down by 5 feet by building an emergency channel after we got federal permission to do that under the environmental regulations. We have built ready-to-move homes of a very high quality that are available for people on a temporary basis and will be available on a long-term basis in a location that meets the needs of those communities. And so we will continue to work towards bringing folks back home into safe housing that's on high and dry ground for the future.

In the meantime, we've invested in ensuring that young people in the city have access to recreation programs through the University of Winnipeg. We've made sure that they have access to daycare where they need it. We've offered an after-school program to the folks—the children and students of Lake St. Martin, and we appreciate the fact that the leadership has accepted that. We want to ensure children get an education and proper care and activities as we work with First Nations leadership and the federal—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

The First Minister's time has expired.

**Lake St. Martin First Nation
Evacuee Relocation Options**

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, Lake St. Martin community member Dr. Myrle Ballard has documented this tragic story of what's happened to Lake St. Martin in a film called *Flooding Hope*, the Lake St. Martin story. She has documented as part of 'thith' the health problems of flood evacuees, including all the stress they've been through, the depression, the suicides. She's also shown that there is a vision for a new home on higher ground near Grahamdale.

I ask the Premier: When will he move quickly to make sure that the people of Lake St. Martin can move to this new home on higher ground near Grahamdale where they've indicated that they want to move?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, we will continue to work with leadership to find a solution for that community that puts them on higher and safer ground for the future so that this event cannot happen again. The Grahamdale property is one that they can consider; the Halaburda property is one they can consider. And the radar site was never envisioned as anything more than temporary residences for people until their home communities were in better shape or other long-term solutions were agreed on.

This has been a challenging event for the people that have been affected by this. We're very aware that the suffering is very great, which is why we've gone and provided as many additional resources as we can and which is why we are committed to continuing to work with them to ensure that they can get back to higher and safer ground, and in the meantime, provide support for children and families to get education, recreation opportunities, daycare opportunities and after-school opportunities so those children do not waste a day, no matter where they live, in having the opportunity to fully develop to the adults we know they can be.

**Personal Care Homes
Government Initiatives**

Ms. Deanne Crothers (St. James): Mr.—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for St. James has the floor.

Ms. Crothers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba seniors built this province and our government is committed to building more personal care home beds and expanding home care so it's there when they need it, not cutting and privatizing home care and introducing home-care user fees like the former government did in the 1990s. I understand there are over 1,000 more personal care home and supportive housing beds in Manitoba today than in 1999, with over 170 more already in development in Morden, Lac du Bonnet, Niverville and Winnipeg.

Can the Minister of Health please provide an update to this House and all the seniors watching at home today on the next steps our government is taking to further expand services and options for our seniors?

* (14:20)

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): It's—and I thank the member for the question. I know I'm extremely fond of the member from St. James, and apparently this is uniformly held in this House. Their exuberance overwhelms.

I'm so delighted, Mr. Speaker, to announce that, indeed, there was a call for proposals today for 200 additional personal care home beds in the city of Winnipeg, in addition to the 174 that are in flight across the province.

And in addition to that, we're responding to what families in Manitoba have asked us to do, and that is to find as many innovative ways as possible for seniors to remain in their homes with an additional amount of support, which is why we've also announced today, Mr. Speaker, two additional hospital home teams that will not only provide more compassionate care in the home but reduce emergency room visits and hospital admissions by over 50 per cent—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. Time has expired.

**Vita & District Health Centre
Emergency Room Closure**

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): Every Manitoban is entitled to primary health care no matter where they live.

On October 17th, the emergency room in Vita closed. While this has been announced as a temporary closure, there is no end in sight. The Health Minister has taken no action to get the emergency room up and running again, and residents

in the area are afraid that the emergency room is closed for good. Rural Manitobans deserve access to equitable emergency health services.

Mr. Speaker, my question for the Health Minister is this: When will the emergency room in Vita reopen?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I thank the member for the question.

Not only is it important that the citizens of Vita have primary care, which, of course, is why we've made a commitment to all Manitobans that whomever shall wish to have one shall have access to a family doctor by 2015, but, indeed, we also care deeply, as I know the member does, about emergency care, which is why we are working with the regional health authority, Mr. Speaker, on securing additional physician services for the Vita area.

I can inform the member that an additional physician has recently been hired for the Vita hospital. This is very good news, Mr. Speaker. It is not enough to open the ER, because, of course, patient safety must be paramount and the on-call schedule will be too extreme, but it does build for the future. We want that ER open as well.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Smook: When? My constituency are—my constituents are concerned.

The emergency room was closed in October with the promise it would reopen in November. That is looking more and more like a hollow promise. With the closest ER being Steinbach, there's a genuine concern that the distance is too great in case of an emergency.

Last week the Premier (Mr. Selinger) stated that there's nothing more important than ensuring your family gets the care they need, regardless where they live. Rural Manitobans deserve equitable emergency service, and this government and this minister has failed. Mr. Speaker, Vita needs an emergency room, and the residents deserve access to emergency care.

When will the emergency room in Vita reopen, or does this minister just not care?

Ms. Oswald: And the answer to the question, when, is: When the regional health authority is able to recruit additional physician services, that emergency room will reopen.

I would say to the member once again that there has been one physician recruited already. I believe he was informed of that in his meeting with the regional health authority. And I can say to the member that while the one more physician is not enough to reopen the emergency room, because, of course, patient safety is paramount, it does build on the complement and we'll continue to work forward.

And I would hasten to add, Mr. Speaker, that our investment in the STARS helicopter is also providing very rapid acute services for the people in his area. I think that's a really important point to add. We've added to our land ambulance complement as well.

We want to ensure that the people of Vita and the surrounding area are getting the care that they need, and we're working to do that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

St. Norbert Farmers' Market

Mr. Dave Gaudreau (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to recognize the Marché Saint Norbert Farmers' Market, the largest market of its kind in Manitoba.

Every summer and into the fall, this popular meeting place comes alive with much to offer every visitor. Weekly market features are homemade preserves and jam, fresh and tasty bakery, local produce in addition to one-of-a-kind jewellery pieces, beautiful homespun crafts, elaborate bouquets and other unique gifts.

This year the market operated every Wednesday from early June to late September and every Saturday from early June to late October. On average, 10,000 people visited the market every weekend, making this a substantial attraction on the southern edge of Winnipeg.

St. Norbert Farmers' Market first took place in July of 1988 when eight vendors came together, installed themselves on the grass and experienced great success. Since then, the market has significantly expanded in size. This non-profit co-operative boasts 130 full-time vendors with approximately 50 casual vendors, all the while maintaining its root—St. Norbert roots.

With so much variety, there's really something for everyone. To add to the creativity already present at the market, a range of performers entertains visitors. As such, the market perfectly showcases the

talents and fortitude of Manitobans, craftspeople and farmers as well as the passion of fellow Manitobans for great local products.

In the next few years, the market is expected to undergo a number of improvements both aesthetic and practical. New structures and signage, superior vendor spaces, better circulation for pedestrians and vehicles, increased connection to the community and better drainage are some of the proposed improvements. I know that the community is excited to see these changes take place in the years to come.

As residents of St. Norbert and frequent market shoppers, my family and I take pride that such an eclectic entity with so much to offer exists in our area. Congratulations to all the artisans, growers, vendors, entertainers who continue to help St. Norbert shine. I look forward to celebrating the 25th anniversary of the market this summer and hope for its continued growth for years to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Michelle Stilwell

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): The Olympics and the Paralympic Games are known for bringing people together and for producing heroes from around the world. This year's Paralympic Games were no exception.

Michelle Stilwell grew up in Altona and at the age of 17 became a quadriplegic after falling during a harmless piggyback ride. An athlete all her life, she wasn't about to let her disability slow her down. She quickly became a member of the first gold medal-winning wheelchair basketball team at the 2000 Sydney Games—Paralympic games.

Due to problems with her spinal cord, she had to give that up and took on the new challenge of racing the 100 and 200 metres. She soon broke both world records and then broke them again on her way to the London 2012 games. At 2008 Beijing Paralympics she came home with two gold medals. In London Michelle set a Paralympic record in the 200 metre, finishing with a gold medal time at 33.8 seconds. In the 100-metre final she fell just short of the gold medal, coming home with a silver.

While Michelle moved away from the community of Altona at a young age, the community has rallied around her and has supported her efforts from afar. Community members sent a book of good luck messages from the town of Altona, and many gathered to watch her compete. Her sister, Wendy

Friesen of Altona, was able to carry all the good wishes from Altona to London and was there to watch her compete. Altona is planning a community party for Michelle and eagerly awaits her arrival in Altona. On behalf of all my constituents, I would like to congratulate Michelle Stilwell on all of her accomplishments, and I look forward to welcoming her back to Altona.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Elmwood Community Youth Cycling Leadership Education Program

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Mr. Speaker, a focus on young people is vital to our continued success as a province. Today I am proud to acknowledge an innovative and successful program for youth hosted at Elmwood High School known as the Elmwood Community Youth Cycling Leadership Education program, or CYCLE.

The CYCLE initiative is an after-school program that teaches grade 7 and 8 Elmwood students how to rebuild and maintain bicycles. The eight-week build-a-bike project provides programming and bicycle mechanic skills for 24 students each year, and each student builds two bikes, one for personal use and one to be donated to the phys. ed. department for use at the school. The program's students and instructor, John Anderson, graciously hosted me earlier this year to see the program in action first-hand. It was inspiring to see the excitement that these students have for learning a tangible, mechanical skill, bike safety and an appreciation for accessible and environmentally friendly transportation.

Teaching youth the skills to rebuild and maintain bicycles builds confidence and leadership skills, and many of the students who have gone through the program later return as volunteers, sharing with others the skills they have learned while developing a healthy community.

Cycling as an activity and transportation option is growing in Manitoba. The group Bike to the Future recently estimated that since 2011 there have been a 47 per cent increase in downtown cycling alone, and Manitoba is becoming a hub of bicycle knowledge and education with the development of programs such as Elmwood CYCLE.

* (14:30)

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the House to congratulate the amazing people who make this program a success. The River East Neighbourhood

Network, Elmwood High School Principal Mike Babb, as well as the teachers and volunteers, including John Anderson, who co-ordinate the program—many of whom are in the gallery with us today.

Above all, it is important to acknowledge and commend the enthusiastic students who dedicate themselves to keeping the spokes spinning.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Whitemouth River Bridge Replacement

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): Mr. Speaker, In November 2011, the bridge over the Whitemouth River, in the community of Whitemouth, was condemned. The bridge which suffered much damage in the 1997 flood was allowed to deteriorate since then and was no longer safe for people or vehicles to travel over.

Without the bridge, residents who live on the other side face a 14-kilometre trip to get to town, to get to work and to operate their businesses. Dairy operations in the community as a whole are suffering from the added extra mileage and extra time to their day and lives.

When the bridge was originally put in place, it was donated to the municipality. All levels of government believed that they were off the hook for maintenance, leaving the bridge to fall into disrepair. Now that the bridge is condemned, no level of government has offered to help build a new bridge. This is when Harm Sikkenga, his neighbours and community members decided to get to work. The residents of Whitemouth formed the Water Street Bridge Committee with the goal of getting the bridge replaced. The bridge is estimated at a cost of \$1.2 million to replace, and through the work of the community, the committee is nearing \$300,000 in donations.

The municipality has committed to a further 25 per cent of the cost, meaning that the community is almost halfway to their goal. The work of the residents of Whitemouth is a testament to what people can do without depending on the government, rather than waiting for all levels of government to step in on the project. The people of Whitemouth hired their own engineer and started raising their own capital for the project. The group is halfway there. They will continue to raise money and asking the government for help until they have a bridge in place.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the residents of Whitemouth and Mr. Sikkenga for having the drive and the passion to get a new bridge built, whether or not the government is going to support them or not.

Thank you.

Southdale Ringette Program

Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the sport of ringette and the important role it plays in my community. Ringette is incredibly popular with families in Southdale. Fifteen teams play out of Southdale Community Centre, making it one of the largest clubs in the Winnipeg Ringette League. The league is open to children 4 to 18, and from what I've seen, athletes of all experience and expertise are welcome to join at any age. Although ringette encourages young people to be active and have fun, make no mistake, it is competitive as well, with teams gearing up for the playoffs at the end of February.

If you live in Southdale, you likely know all about Ring Rage. This year 58 teams and 800 athletes took part in the annual tournament, and while teams faceoff on the ice, they work together to make Ring Rage happen each year, raising money for ice time and other expenses. I think most people in Southdale would agree, none of this would happen without the passionate support of Eloise Ternovetski, Southdale's ringette convenor, who recently added director of ice sports to her list of volunteer duties. Eloise was recognized as ringette's volunteer of the year for her dedication to the sport. It is a family affair in 'Elloiot's' life—Eloise's life. Two of her daughters play and her husband is a coach.

Southdale thrives because of people like Eloise and her commitment to children and young people in our community.

Thank you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

THRONE SPEECH

(Fifth Day of Debate)

Mr. Speaker: To resume debate on the proposed motion of the honourable member for St. Norbert (Mr. Gaudreau), that the following address be presented to His Honour the Administrator:

We, the members of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, thank Your Honour for the gracious speech addressed to us at the Second Session of the 40th Legislature of Manitoba, and the proposed amendment to the Leader of the Opposition in amendment thereto, and it's standing in the name of the honourable member for Midland, who has 25 minutes remaining.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): And I was up here on Friday afternoon, and I've had all weekend to think about it, and the Throne Speech is still bad.

The amendments—the amendment brought forth by the Leader of the Opposition should be passed. It is much better than the Throne Speech. However, we'll address it as it is and listening to question period again today, it's obvious that this government continues to spend beyond its means. It has no balanced budget timeline in sight, if ever, and with that they've doubled the provincial debt. And when they don't have a balanced budget in mind the only way that they can continue, then, is to either continue to raise taxes or borrow more money or both, which is what they've done over the last number of years.

But, while they continue to spend more money than they bring in, while they continue to double the debt and beyond and continue to not balance the budget, we now are the child poverty capital of Canada. We are now the highest percentage of children using food banks in Canada. Our roads and bridges are in disrepair, and for any of you who ever venture outside the city, you don't have to go very far and we have traffic lights set up on the highways. There's one-lane bridges in order to keep them going, if they haven't closed them altogether, the bridges.

We still see long lines in the waiting rooms and the surgeries. We now know that the ambulances are the new parking lots for patients and we continue to hear first-hand stories of long-time waiting which ties up ambulance personnel, which ties up doctors, which ties up emergency rooms, and yet there is no solutions coming out of this government.

So their—the problem is they've always had a lot of revenue coming in and they've spent all of that plus increasing the debt and they've never, ever looked at programs in terms of results. With these—with this government it's always about announcing another program, but don't worry about the results. We'll just throw more money at it, and I understand now, I finally understand why they do that. They have to have something for these 192 communicators to do. They have to spin these programs. A million

dollars a month they're spending in wages just to try and explain their failures. A million dollars a month, think what that could do in any government department. Any government department could use that money much better than having the spin out of these 192 communicators.

And I understand, too, with—why they need these communicators, 192 communicators to try and spin their way out of the Bipole III boondoggle. They have had the Clean Environment Commission holding hearings on Bipole III and, yet, at the same time, they've already brought in equipment for a converter station. Now, anybody with a shred of common sense would have to understand that this is equipment that you don't run down to your local Walmart and pick up. This machinery was ordered—what, two, three, four years ago? And, yet, so why do we—why do they even bother with this so-called Clean Environment Commission hearing when they've already ordered the machinery? They've already been out there to landowners, trying to get landowners to sign an easement. And when the landowners asked the land agent—who happened to be hired out of Alberta, by the way—when the landowners asked the land agent, well, how can I sign this when we don't even have a—when Manitoba Hydro doesn't even have a licence yet? The land agent's reply was, it doesn't matter. It's a done deal. It's going to happen. You should just sign now.

So here we have a government that has just no shred of decency when it comes to dealing with issues. They have firmly planted their head in the sand on Bipole III. They've—they have announced a needs analysis for the two dams, the Keeyask and Conawapa, but they forgot to put in Bipole III under this needs analysis. Are they afraid to discuss the needs analysis of this? Why would they not include this in there?

*(14:40)

They have such a disregard for food production, for agriculture in Manitoba that they won't answer any questions about the impacts of the proposed line across southern Manitoba, some of the most productive land in all of Canada where we have the irrigation potential. And, again, if we had some semblance of water management in this province we could even have more irrigation. And, again, if we had some semblance of water management in this province, we could even have more irrigation. And that's right in the heart of where this line is proposed to go. And for those of you who are not aware, the

irrigation line—irrigation pivots and hydro lines don't mix at all. And it's just unfortunate that this government is so afraid to put this debate out in the public that they have to hide behind their Clean Environment Commission.

Hydro communicators now are trying to spin their way out of this. They will not engage in meaningful dialogue, so we'll have to—believe me, the landowners are very adamant about this, that they are opposed to this coming across their land. So it—I don't think it really matters if they send some of their 192 communicators out across southern Manitoba where this line is proposed. It's not going to help them. There is still opposition to the line.

So—and it's—today in question period, the member for St. Paul (Mr. Schuler) asked about blackouts in St. James, and the Minister of Innovation, Energy and Mines (Mr. Chomiak) jumps up and first thing out of his mouth—he says, it's wildlife causing this. My goodness, I knew there was a lot of deer in St. James, but I didn't think they were capable of jumping up and taking out lines. Maybe it's Santa's reindeer, I guess, that they figure is causing the blackouts. So—but the point was—is that we have an infrastructure within Hydro that needs rebuilding, both within the city and in the rural areas. If we were to do the smart thing and build Bipole III on the east side and save a billion dollars, think of how—where that money could be spent in terms of infrastructure.

I have an h-line—transmission line, an AC line that goes through my constituency out by St. Claude, and it still has the red tuck tape around the poles, the wooden poles trying to keep the cracking from happening anymore. Is that how Hydro has to repair things now, using tuck tape instead of permanent maintenance? They've crippled this company so bad with this capital project that they've got that they cannot go out and begin to explain it, that this is—it really is a sad day in Manitoba when we have such a Crown jewel such as Hydro being run into the ground.

So, Mr. Speaker, there's—there is just no end to the issues that we could debate in here on the—what was lacking in this Throne Speech. Agriculture got a mere mention in it. There is no substance to their—although perhaps given their record on agriculture, maybe by ignoring it, they'll—it'll—probably be better off than with their negative programs that they've had out in the past.

They've—again, when it's convenient, they've always blamed somebody else and anytime agriculture issues come up, they've always blamed the federal government or they've blamed Alberta or they've blamed somebody else. And it's time to stop blaming everybody else and take the matter into your own hands when you can solve your own problems. Don't—it's a credibility issue, and it's—there is no credibility within this government, Mr. Speaker.

So, you know, one of the other issues, apparently, this government does not like the thought of raising the basic personal exemption to the Canadian average at least. And it's only the NDP can think of that paying less taxes would cost Manitobans.

They want to allocate blame. They keep going back to the previous government. They blame the federal government. They blame floods. They blame the global economy, but really what we were talking about is basic personal exemption, where each and every taxpayer—and that includes the low income, the single mothers, the families—they would have a little bit more money to spend or to save. It is—it would be their choice. It's their money that we're talking about. It's not—that money does not belong to the NDP, even in spite of what they may think.

So, Mr. Speaker, I just would urge this government to stop blaming everybody, to start—take some responsibility for their actions. They have a long enough history now, they can see that they've doubled the debt and that they've—they are spending beyond their means. Stop blaming everybody else, take control of the situation yourself and help make Manitoba a better place to live.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Kevin Chief (Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities): It's an honour to be able to stand here today to support the Throne Speech. We, as a government, continue to focus on what matters most to Manitoba families. And I got to say, as a new MLA for Point Douglas, and a new minister leading a new department, it has been quite a year. And it's certainly an honour to be able to represent the constituents of Point Douglas.

I was very proud to hear all the investments and our continued work with, in health care, reducing cancer wait times including more pathologists to speed up testing and launching more rural CancerCare hubs, Mr. Speaker. I said as part of an announcement when we were able to launch the

QuickCare clinics in Point Douglas every time our Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) comes into Point Douglas our community gets healthier, and we've been able to see that all throughout the province of Manitoba with quick 'clare' clinics.

And I'd like to say that since January, since opening that QuickCare clinic, over 7,000 patients have used that site and it's become a big part of Point Douglas, as well as I was very proud on the commitments to ensure that we're going to work to give access to more family doctors by 2015.

And I've got to say there was another announcement in Point Douglas on Get the Shot, Not the Flu—and I want to proudly say that many members of people that I've heard here and there got the flu, but I haven't got the flu—and I want to say how important that was, because in our area we do have some low-income seniors and we have Aboriginal people—people who are very vulnerable to get the flu. And, as we know, the flu shot's not just about ourselves; it's about keeping our loved ones healthy as well.

Also very excited about the announcement we had with the Minister of Housing and Community Development (Ms. Irvin-Ross) as well as our Premier (Mr. Selinger) on the redevelopment of the Merchants Hotel—20 North End organizations coming together. Organizations like North End renewal corp, Urban Circle, Mamawi, the University of Winnipeg all coming together to build upon all the investments we're making in the area.

It was a wonderful announcement, and the people are very excited about that announcement, Mr. Speaker, as well as the Makoongsag Intergeneration Children's Centre. Once again, it's something that we've take on the teachings of our elders and that's part of that child-care centre. It builds on the 900 more subsidized daycare spots as well as the 11,000 more funded spaces since 1999. You know, and we continue to be one of the most affordable child-care places in the whole nation.

I was also part of the North End Business Development Centre. At one time, we were able to see this redevelopment on Selkirk Avenue. At one time, there was lots of businesses and we were able to launch and open the North End Business Development Centre where entrepreneurs and artists and—we're seeing a lot of people come back and invest on Selkirk Avenue. And people are very excited about that. It maintains the tradition of Winnipeg's North End.

Also, of course, we're very innovative; we continue to take a lead. And we were able to launch, in Lord Selkirk Park, the Abecedarian approach, the ABC approach—an enriched child-care centre where a majority of the kids are on social assistance. I was able to spend some time there. We're able to see the literacy, the language, the numeracy of these young people before they enter school. We know that some of the short-term results for those young people is they're better prepared for school, but the long-term results are also remarkable; you see increased graduation, access to post-secondary as well as you see that parents are being inspired by their children, Mr. Speaker, and they're going back to school and getting educated and trained.

The opening—our Cabinet has been able to do some outreach and host Cabinet meetings. We were able to host a Cabinet meeting at United Way. We also hosted a Cabinet meeting—we were hosted in Steinbach. But we also held one at our brand-new Social Enterprise Centre right on Main Street in Point Douglas. And that's organizations like BUILD, Manitoba Green Retrofit, Pollock's Hardware Co-op, and other organizations coming together to build on—to build the education, employment and training of people in our neighbourhood. And it's very, very exciting. It was wonderful to be part of our—and have a Cabinet meeting there.

Also, too, as part of Manitoba's long-term housing strategy, is which we heard in the Throne Speech, continued investments were a part of Neeginan Village where students at the Aboriginal centre now can have an affordable place to live right near their campus. This goes in part of our 1,500 new affordable housing units over the next five years.

*(14:50)

And also, tying into building safer, stronger communities, the mention of the William Whyte initiative where we're going to be working with law enforcement and members of the community to make sure that we're building safer communities, and I just got to say, as a new MLA, very proud of the work of our government, very proud of the work that we see with everyday people in our neighbourhoods.

One of the first things that I was able to do was to travel the province, and I got to travel all throughout Manitoba in the southern, in the eastern, in the northern. I spent a lot of time talking about how we build safer and stronger communities, and I got to hear first-hand what people were saying and, you know, Mr. Speaker, I got to say, people are

telling me all throughout this province—didn't matter if it was a seat held by us or our Conservative colleagues over there—people said that the investments we are making are making a difference.

And one of the things I want to say about our public consultations is that they were robust. I was able to talk to thousands of Manitobans, and one of the great things I think we all know about Manitoba is how diverse it is. And so when I was at these consultations, there was never a dominant ethnic group; there was Aboriginal people and Filipino people and Ukrainian people. There was single parents there with grandparents. There was law enforcement that participated in it, and I got to say that hearing their thoughts and ideas, that's how we are able to continue to focus on what matters to Manitoba families, Mr. Speaker, because we listen to them and we take their advice and we work first-hand with these communities.

I was also able to meet with many people who work with youth serving organizations, multifaith groups, people in law enforcement, our elders and our seniors, and I got to say it was wonderful as a new minister and a new MLA to get to travel the province and listen to what people have to say and then act on that, Mr. Speaker, and that's what we hear in the Throne Speech and that's why I support the Throne Speech.

I—we all know that the investments that we make in early child care and in our schools and the early years pays off economically. Every dollar that we invest in the early years, Mr. Speaker, we get a return of \$14. And, you know, a couple of programs I want to highlight is our Healthy Baby program, you know, the Prenatal Benefit program where families—close to 5,000 families get touched by this program. And it sounds like a number, but when you actually get to know these families, you get to know these mothers that are about to have a baby, how big of an impact that has and, you know, we measure these kinds of things. We are evidence-based and we make sure that we collect the data to see the impact that it's having and we know that that prenatal benefit increases healthy baby rate, it reduces preterm births, it increases breast feeding which we know has a big economic impact on families. It also connects families to communities. Close to over 1,500 families are part of the home visiting program.

I got to say my wife and I, Melanie, we had our son, Hayden, and a nurse visited our house, and I can tell you that the impact on someone coming into your

home, the self-confidence and self-esteem it builds for families is unbelievable, and these are the kinds of investments that we're making, Mr. Speaker, and we know they're making—we know where they're making a huge difference.

We're very proud to announce in over 200 schools, the first in the nation, it was covered by—on the national news, the PAX Good Behaviour program. You know, we piloted it first in Seine River, so we didn't just invest, we wanted to make sure it worked. And we found out from superintendents, from principals, vice-principals, teachers, educators, telling us that they want the resources to continue that. We've been able to expand that throughout the province in over 200 schools. The short-term results are amazing; you know, behaviour, of course, improves which then has a direct connection to learning. But also it increases graduation rates. It improves access to post-secondary. It decreases addictions. It just builds safer and stronger communities, Mr. Speaker, and those are the kinds of investments that we're making.

I do want to say once again that, you know, I get to chair the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet where we bring 10 Cabinet ministers together to discuss many of these issues on how we're going to make these investments, and I want to say there's 34 partners as part of that, that make up health services and family services and public education. You know, these are people that we're working with, Mr. Speaker, and I want to say for the record very, very proud of the work of Strini Reddy, an individual who has made a major commitment to children and young people throughout the province of Manitoba. Twelve years he's chaired that and has been able to bring, as part of our government, more and more partners on. He's one of the gentlemen who championed the idea of summer learning loss, you know, the idea that for some young people that don't have access to a lot of resources that when they're done school in June, when they go back to school in September, if they don't have a lot of enrichment that they'll actually be further behind in terms of where they are academically.

And so I want to say on the record the amazing commitment and dedication of people like Strini Reddy, and our government has been proud to work with people like Strini. As part of that, we—very proud to say that we have a new chair, Jamie Wilson, originally from Opaskwayak Cree Nation, somebody else who has dedicated his career to supporting young people. Obviously, what—very well versed in

the issues dealing with young people up in northern Manitoba, particularly in First Nations communities, but he's also somebody who reaches out to many different organizations and works very well with people. And so we're very proud of Jamie Wilson taking on the chair there, also, 26 parent-child coalitions that we work with all throughout the province to make sure that we're providing the services and resources in the most accessible way, Mr. Speaker. So we're bringing people together.

We continue to make investments in early childhood education, in early childhood development, and we know that that makes a huge difference. You know, often when you talk about early child care and in schools, the—you know, the universal value that people continue to talk to me about throughout Manitoba was that of belonging, have a—having something really positive to belong to in their neighbourhoods. And that's the kinds of investments we're making in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker.

Also, I was able to travel—you know, one of the things that came up as I travelled the province, through the consultations, is people would say, well, when are you coming back? We want you to come back and see the kinds of work we've been doing for the past 12 years, come and see the successes we're having. So I did a tour of—another tour, a Children and Youth Opportunities tour, and we worked with over 200 organizations, neighbourhood organizations, and I was able to see first-hand youth employment, mentorship programs, clear expiration, youth internships, youth entrepreneurship, children's enrichment, to the point that, you know, when we look at summer enrichment, the idea of dealing with summer learning loss, 60,000 young people busy every summer from our investments, from our partnerships—60,000.

You know, Mr. Speaker, and it's evidence based, and you—if you go and look at these programs—and I got to see them first-hand all throughout the province of Manitoba. Great supervision, unbelievable leadership and supervision, really good skill building for the children and young people that are participating in these programs, and really good structure. That's the kinds of investments we're making; that's the kind of investments that we know are making a difference.

We want to continue to make sure that we build on the gifts and talents of all children and youth in Manitoba. We understand that the cornerstone of building strong, resilient communities starts with

having role models, giving young people someone to look up to, Mr. Speaker, and we got to see—I got to see first-hand the investments we're making. One investment that we see in 2001, is—since 2001, our Lighthouses initiative. There's 71 of them throughout the province of Manitoba, over 1.2 million visits to our Lighthouses. Many of these places, in 2001, weren't open. These are facilities now that are not only open, that are—become vibrant.

You're seeing the federal government making investments and municipalities making investments. They've become hubs of activities for all sorts of things, but, Mr. Speaker, the point that I want to make is that we led that initiative and now you're seeing all sorts of wonderful activities that—things that build on the gifts and talents of young people.

We continue to make major investments in supporting recreation and healthy communities. I'm very proud of the announcement we were able to make with a group of young people, with teachers, with educators, with law enforcement, on \$500,000 for sport opportunities that provides a low—that provides upgrades to facilities as well as sports and recreation and neighbour—supporting neighbourhoods—the support that they need, Mr. Speaker. Very proud to make that announcement.

You know, I also—when I was talking to many Manitobans, and we understand, as an example, how challenging FASD can be, Mr. Speaker, and I got to hear a lot about, you know, the investments we're making are making a difference. We've got more work to do, but they're making a difference: \$13.3 million invested into FASD prevention, intervention, support and research. Those are the kinds of investments that we're making that are making a big difference in people's lives.

Making sure that—you know, that people have access to information to understand the dangers of drinking while pregnant, making sure we're doing the outreach, making sure that we're getting good diagnosis, multidisciplinary diagnosis, and making sure that it's accessible all throughout the province. I got to meet first-hand some of these families that are part of the vision and voices where people that have FASD are sharing their stories and the impact that that's having for them and our community. Stepping out on Saturdays, that's—that provides respite for parents, but also socialization skills for children.

And I got to go first-hand, in my neighbourhood alone, at David Livingstone, where they're supporting young people with FASD around

academic achievement. That is not only something that we should be all proud of, it's something where, nationally, people come to visit that classroom. Nationally, people—internationally, people come and visit. It's an award-winning partnership that we have with them.

* (15:00)

Mr. Speaker, also another subject that's often tough to talk about, and it was—I was able to do this work long before I came into the Legislature, is around mental health. And we understand the challenges around youth suicide and some of the—those—some of the issues that come with that. And, as part of our Reclaiming Hope strategy, I got to work first-hand before I got into government, but I got to see first-hand the investments these are making.

I was able to speak very proudly at We Day and talk about an isolated First Nation community that's making a big difference from that partnership. These are young people who have been trained, who got the leadership, who are building skills, are now working in their communities. And what they're able to do is provide enrichment. They keep their gym open four nights a week to provide opportunities for young people. They're making valuable contributions in their communities. They're doing fundraising initiatives to honour their elders. These are the kinds of investments—we're bringing people together to provide hope and opportunity for families, for children all throughout the province of Manitoba.

I know that sometimes with that—when we're in here, particularly when I get to hear members opposite, it sounds—often when you hear the Speech from the Throne—how cynical it can be. Well, Mr. Speaker, for me, while I was travelling the province, I seen lots of potential, I seen lots of possibility, I seen lots of young people making huge differences in their neighbourhoods. And that's why I support the Throne Speech.

I just want to be able to say as a new MLA, as a new minister leading—new department, how very proud I am of our government. We're going to continue to work with our partners in the community, and thank you for allowing me to have the opportunity to speak, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): Mr. Speaker, and good afternoon. It's certainly a pleasure to see you back in the Chair. It's certainly a pleasure to be back in the Chamber and have the opportunity to debate this year's Throne Speech. And I want to take

the opportunity to welcome the clerks and the staff here at the—in the Chamber, certainly all that good work and advice they provide, and it's certainly good to see the familiar faces back joining us again this fall.

I do want to also mention the new pages. It's certainly good to see them here. This is a great opportunity for pages to get a sense of democracy in action, hopefully in action here, and then that's certainly a pleasure to see them.

I also want to make note of the interns we have here this year. I think we've got a tremendous bunch of interns. Certainly, I've heard some great reports from the interns on the opposition side, so I'm certainly happy to hear those positive comments. And I've heard some positive comments from the—pardon me—interns that are involved on the government side as well. So, it's quite an undertaking to go through that process. There's many gifted people that come forward, and to pick only six is certainly a difficult task. But it's great to see a good quality bunch of interns with us this year, and hopefully they will glean some information and valuable information during their time here in the House as well.

Mr. Speaker, interesting Speech from the Throne this year. You know, we've seen some of the items in the Throne Speech brought back time after time, so not a lot of new things. A few new ideas floated, and that's pretty typical with the NDP government over the last few years. And it happens not just with the Throne Speech, but it also happens during budget time. They will float an idea, quite often a day or two before the actual either budget or the Throne Speech, and they'll float an idea that's something new and different. And the people get fascinated with that particular idea. And it's a good political tactic because what it does, it takes people's minds off of the bad news that's located either in the budget or in the Throne Speech, so people get caught up and they get debating those particular ideas and quite often miss the message and the context of either the budget or the Throne Speech.

Mr. Speaker, certainly there's a—there's a lot of repetition in this one and, you know, the government is pretty good at not taking responsibility, not taking credit for the actions. And the NDP government has been in power here in Manitoba for the last 13 years now but never seem to really want to take responsibility for those last 13 years. It's either somebody's—else's fault, whether it be a previous

government, previous government going back to the 1990s, 13 years ago, or it could be another government, whether it's the US government, or it could be another government in another country miles and miles away. Or it could be the federal government's fault in Ottawa as well.

Well, we know over the years the federal government has been very generous in terms of transfers to the province of Manitoba, and there's no sign that those transfers are going to stop coming. There certainly looks—and the signal is from the federal Minister of Finance just last week that he has no intention of reducing transfers to provinces. So that should—certainly should be good news to the Province of Manitoba. And they've had record transfers into the province over the last 13 years.

The problem the government has is a spending problem. There's never—never seems to be enough money in the budget for them, and they're always spending more than they're taking in. It's happened just about every year. They actually spend more than what they've actually budgeted for, Mr. Speaker, and clearly, when you continue down that road, it's very unfortunate. And these situations compound themselves each and every year.

Now, as a result, we have doubled—this NDP government has doubled the debt of the Province in the 13 years that they've been here. They've also managed to more than double the budget of the Province in that amount of time as well. So you'd think with a budget that's more than twice what it was back 13 years ago, they would be able to live within their means, but, Mr. Speaker, the exact opposite is true. They're still spending more than they're taking in.

And you would think, when that situation arises, that they would address that particular situation in their Throne Speech. I think it's a fairly substantial red flag, and a lot of the media are talking about it. Other governments recognize that you can't continue to spend more than you take in without having some kind of a plan in place. And I think that's what Manitobans were looking for in terms of the Throne Speech. They were looking for a vision for Manitoba. How does the province of Manitoba and the government of Manitoba get back on track and stop the excess spending? And that's really what I think Manitobans were looking for. And, unfortunately, we didn't see a lot of that in this particular Throne Speech.

Now, I don't know, Mr. Speaker, if it's a sign that the current government is tired. They're certainly self-serving. They're certainly looking after their own interests. Today we talked about the NDP having 192 spinners or communicators within the government. Clearly, they're going to be out there spinning whatever messages they're being told to spin by the NDP government.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, that—when we look at the big picture here—and people do read the Speech from the Throne—it comes back to the element of trust. Can Manitobans actually trust what the government is saying in their Throne Speech document? And I raise that because it—I think it's a very important issue.

We just had a provincial election here, and there was a lot of promises made by the NDP government and the Premier (Mr. Selinger). A lot of promises were made. And unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, a lot of those promises were broken within months of the election. We witnessed the provincial budget last spring, and in that provincial budget we saw the biggest tax hike we've seen in over 25 years. Contrast that with what the government said during the election campaign a mere months earlier where they said there would be no new taxes. Well, we know there's at least \$184 million of new taxes in the provincial budget, and that really reflects back on the integrity of the government, in my view.

Mr. Speaker, I have a great amount of pride for the people that I represent in the constituency of Spruce Woods, and, you know, they take what the government says now with a grain of salt because they've been led down the—this path before.

Another comment that was made during the campaign and during the flood last year was that—the Premier said all Manitobans, they will be looked after once the flood is over. And we took him at his word then. But now we are—here we are a year and a half later and many Manitobans are still looking for assistance in dealing with the flood.

Certainly, my communities, a number of them, were impacted fairly substantially with the flood. I have both the Souris River and the Assiniboine River running through my constituency. Certainly, a lot of the farmland was not seeded last year because of the excess moisture conditions, and there certainly was a major impact to the—those communities.

* (15:10)

A lot of people also were impacted by high water tables, having water in their basements. And to us, you know, we've had that problem happen before, and we went through the Emergency Measures Organization, through the disaster financial assistance program, and people were relatively happy with the way it worked. And this goes back to 2005, when we had excess moisture conditions back then. We assumed—and everything seemed to be coming together quite nicely last summer—we thought people were going to get compensated; some were, but then some homeowners were denied their claims. And, Mr. Speaker, I wondered why these homeowners were being denied their claims and had quite a few discussions with the minister, the senior staff in EMO trying to ascertain why these people were being denied. Finally, it came out that EMO decided that sand points were an—were insurable under homeowner coverage.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I do have a background in insurance and I'm quite familiar with the wording documents there, and I think what happened was, unfortunately, senior staff in EMO decided that, under kind of a narrow guidelines they were looking that, that these particular situations would be insurable. As a result of being insurable under a homeowner's claim they would not be covered by the disaster financial assistance program. Well, I offered my advice to the minister and to the staff. Unfortunately, they didn't heed my advice. Eventually we had to go back to the insurance companies; we had to go back and prove that the decisions EMO were making were wrong. We had those—that particular ruling overturned by the appeal board. Hopefully, now, we can move forward and have those cases adjusted and we can move forward in terms of getting those people properly compensated.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of the flood, we still have situations—we have a couple of bridges in my riding that are washed out. They are not being—can't be used and, unfortunately, we're not getting any word from the government whether or not they will be considering replacing or repairing those two bridges. And it's quite concerning because they—the Province should be sending a message to the federal government because a lot of this infrastructure damage could be covered under the federal disaster financial assistance program. So in my view, you know, the Province can come up here and with 10-cent dollars replace these structures.

But the government won't give us any word whether they actually are considering replacing or repairing those structures at all and, certainly, it leaves people wondering what's going to happen down the road and it's certainly a concern. *[interjection]* Well, there's no—the federal government has not said that they won't cover them to our knowledge, and it's clearly—would fall under the disaster financial assistance program. I'm hoping that the Province is having some kind of a discussion with the federal government in moving that forward, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, you know, clearly, the—a lot of the communities that were impacted by the flood last year were—are back in pretty good situations. I know there's some communities that are still working on remediation and those types of thing and some work with their homeowners, and there is a lot of work to do in some communities, but a lot of them have bounced back in pretty good condition. But there still is some claims out there that do have to be addressed.

Mr. Speaker, the budget—or, pardon me—the Throne Speech did talk a little bit about health care and, clearly, there is some concerns that remain and, then, obviously the—there's different messages coming from the government and, clearly, different messages than what my constituents are telling me as well in terms of what's happening in health care. First of all, I was at a municipal meeting just two weeks ago and they are concerned in their community about pending closure for some of the hospital beds there. And that's certainly disconcerting, and the excuse they're using is there's a shortage of nurses in that particular facility. And that is one of the larger facilities in my riding, which it's certainly a concern if they're going to be closing beds because those particular beds in these communities are already full and resources are stretched already.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing that, you know, we talk about today—and I appreciate the member for La Verendrye (Mr. Smook) raising the issue today. He's facing an emergency room closure in one of his communities. We certainly have had that occur in a number of our communities where the emergency rooms were closed a number of years ago and those emergency rooms still are closed today. I'm not sure the count we're at here in Manitoba; we're somewhere about 19 or 20, I would think, with the discussion about Vita.

So we certainly look forward to the—what the minister said today in terms of their working on the process, but we know that a lot of these ERs have been closed for quite some years and I don't see a strategy, moving forward, to address those.

And the other important part about health care in our communities is the emergency medical services, and I know one of my communities has actually lost that particular service. The volunteers have come to the end of their patience in dealing with the system, you know, as a result, a—down to one or two volunteers. They can't sustain the system any longer. And we've been trying to encourage the Province to take steps to make sure that emergency medical services are supplied in that regard.

Mr. Speaker—and I talked about, you know, the red herrings that were thrown out just prior to the Speech from the Throne, and this year it was the concept of amalgamating municipalities. And, certainly, there's been discussion within municipalities for quite some time about that particular process, and obviously there's going to be a lot of discussion this week over at the Association of Manitoba Municipalities on that process. So quite interesting how the government brought that idea forward just the day before the Speech from the Throne.

And it's quite interesting, too, to hear the comments from the member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff), where he quite clearly talks about municipalities having fewer than a thousand people being dysfunctional. And I'm sure that's going to get some discussion and some comments over by the many municipalities that are less than a thousand people. And I look forward to having that discussion with some of my constituents tonight, as well, once I get over to the AMM event later tonight.

Mr. Speaker, you know, we're talk about broken promises, and we've certainly seen a lot of broken promises through the last few years with this particular government. You know, I look at Manitoba seniors—there was a promise by this Premier (Mr. Selinger) that he would increase the property tax rebate to Manitoba seniors, and, quite frankly, Manitoba seniors have not seen that increase in their rebate occur, and I know Manitoba seniors are looking forward to that.

Mr. Speaker, we saw some very disturbing reports on the use of food banks just this past week. We know more and more seniors are using food banks than ever before. In fact, we're—in Manitoba,

we're the highest per capita use of food banks anywhere in Canada, which is a very disturbing trend. And in terms of food bank use, it's very disturbing to see that almost 50 per cent of the people using food banks are, indeed, children. So there's certainly a lot of work that has to be done in that regard.

In talking about seniors, Mr. Speaker, I had a note from one of my constituents who's very close to retirement and recognizing that they have to make some choices and, clearly, they recognize that they're—we're fairly heavily taxed here in the province of Manitoba. So they're facing some choices: either they stay in Manitoba and have to work an additional three or four, maybe five years, or they can choose to retire now and move to another jurisdiction in Manitoba which is less—has less tax burden to them. So they're facing a pretty significant challenge and they—what they're telling me, is they feel that they're going to have to leave the province and go to another jurisdiction which is less highly taxed. And it's certainly unfortunate and they—it's unfortunate that our seniors who have worked here or worked in other provinces would like to retire here, but because of the tax burden and the policies this government has, they're being forced to retire to other jurisdictions.

And, you know, it's not me making these stories up. These constituents are telling me this is the way it is. These are the cold, hard facts, and they clearly lay the—their decision, their tack—the tax policies we have at the hands of the current government, in terms of their tax policies. So it's very 'unfortuning' and very troubling to see that—those sort of situations unfold, Mr. Speaker.

The other thing I wanted to just briefly mention was the whole idea of economic development, and it was interesting to see the comments from the government in terms of the amalgamation of municipalities and this was going to somehow help economic development in rural Manitoba. Well, think if the—we really look at the facts of economic development here in Manitoba over the last year and what the government is saying about economic development in Manitoba, I think those words speak fairly loud. Is what they've done, Mr. Speaker, they've clawed back the Community Works Loan Program grant that had been available for the last—close to 20 years, I think, and they've clawed those—that money, that grant money back from local community organizations who had been loaning that money out to local organizations, and it's been a very

successful program. So clearly clawing back that money is not going to help the local communities in terms of their economic development.

* (15:20)

The other thing they've done, Mr. Speaker, is they have cut the funding to the regional development corporations as well. So in my mind they're sending a message to rural Manitoba that they're not ready for economic development here in the province of Manitoba.

The other thing, too, Mr. Speaker, if you look at the provincial budget, the portion that's allocated to rural initiatives, which is the rural economic component of Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, that particular budget amount has been reduced, I think it was 3 to 4 per cent, a reduction in economic development. So pretty clear that they are—they're sending the message that they're not interested in rural economic development in Manitoba. So those are a few of the—what I find—kind of a disturbing trend in terms of the NDP government going forward.

Mr. Speaker, there is certainly a lot more that can be said in terms of this particular Speech from the Throne. I just wanted to highlight a few of those comments, as it certainly reflects back on the constituents in the great riding of Spruce Woods. And I thank them for allowing me to represent them and, certainly, we look forward to having better things and newer ideas coming from the NDP across the way. And, as a result of the current Throne Speech, we will not certainly be voting in favour of that. But I hope that the members opposite will reflect on the amended motion put forth by the leader. There is some—certainly some positive food for thought in that. And, with that, I thank you very much for this opportunity.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade): Mr. Speaker, it's my privilege, indeed, to stand in this House and speak to the 10th Throne Speech I've had the opportunity to speak to as the member of the Legislative Assembly for Gimli. And I want to start by thanking again the fine constituents of Gimli for putting their trust in me to continue to represent them. And also the heart-people that worked really hard to make that happen over a year ago today for the third time being elected to this fine Assembly.

Also like to say welcome back to you, Mr. Speaker, and to the table officers and the new pages,

as it'll be—certainly a very interesting experience for these pages indeed. I see that behaviours continue the way they have in the past, and they're getting exposed to the system that we have, that it—flawed though it may be—is still the best system in the world, as far as I'm concerned, for opportunity to debate and have our differences played out on the floor of the Legislative Assembly here.

I was thinking about a lot of things about my constituency this past couple of weeks, Mr. Speaker, because—and I'd first like to thank the First Minister, our party leader, as well as the Leader of the Opposition, who congratulated me on an article that appeared in the Winnipeg Free Press on the weekend, celebrating the Icelandic community in Manitoba. It was a privilege to be asked to write an op-ed piece for that feature on the Icelandic community.

And I've been reflecting a lot, as there have been a lot of celebrations of late about the Icelandic community in my constituency—first of all, Jon Sigurdsson Day being celebrated here in Manitoba, a private member's bill that had been brought forward by my colleague from the Interlake and seconded by myself. And we've done that for two years now, but also the recognition of Sigtryggur Jónsson, as a person of national, historic significance, who, at 25 years of age, was the leader of the community of New Iceland. And you put that in context, that a man of 25 years of age could be such a significant figure and demonstrated such incredible leadership for the people of the Icelandic community.

So he was commemorated with a statue that was unveiled on the banks of the Icelandic River on a very cold, windy day, which was quite appropriate, because it was that cold, windy day in October, 21st of 1875, that caused the citizens to choose Gimli, somewhat by accident, as opposed to design, because we had a north wind and the barges were at risk, being towed up to what should have been the Whitemud River, which would become the Icelandic River. But the captain said we're going to cut the barge loose and you guys are going to go ashore and this is where we'll come and get you the next day. Well, those 285 settlers, one of which was an ancestor of mine, arrived on those shores on October 21st. And that night a child was born in a very cold, windy environment, and they said this is where we'll stay.

And, of course, they moved up to Riverton and Hecla, which used to be called Mikley—which is big

island but was changed to Hecla, and settled throughout the areas that we've come to know as Bifrost and Arborg and Lundar, as well, and Riverton, of course, and Hnausa. Throughout the Interlake area, the community certainly has left its stamp.

And I thought the Sigtryggur Jónasson statue really embodies that spirit of the pioneer. And I was thinking a lot about those pioneers—how they came here with virtually the shirt on their back, and in the case of my ancestors, a box that was full of very few personal effects but full of books. They put a lot of emphasis on learning and literature and they learned very quickly that it was less than a hospitable climate, but they were able to carve out a fishing industry that today contributes over \$80 million to our economy. They worked side by side with the Ukrainian settlers who came some 17 years later and settled in the area and carved out a very good agricultural enterprise in a very unforgiving environment. And my ancestors have contributed in every way, shape or form to this community and this province and this country that we call Canada.

So I'm very pleased have the privilege to represent what had at one time been Nýja Iceland or New Iceland and all the fine constituents in the area, as well as the St. Andrews parish, of course, which is predominantly ancestors of the Selkirk settlers and some Metis communities and whatnot—a real mixture of cultures in the Interlake area that make it such a fine place to be. And you know, I was thinking a lot about these communities because when you think about the prairie experience, you're coming into a very wide expanse, a very unforgiving climate and you need to work together with your neighbours to make a living in a harsh environment like that. And that's what made the prairies such a unique experience for prairie settlers, but I think it also defined us as a people.

I think, when you look back to Friday's question period, the opposition was standing up and talking about all these great culture organizations and volunteer organizations and how they fundraised and worked together and raised a lot of money and did all these things that made their community a better place. And that's something we should be proud of. As minister responsible for the Bureau of Statistics, every year I hear the same thing. That Manitobans donate more money per capita than any other jurisdiction in Canada. Manitobans give more time per capita as volunteers than any other jurisdiction in Canada. And that is something that we should be

very proud of, Mr. Speaker—very proud of. Now, it was curious, the line of questioning last Friday, because they're tying it into public financing of political parties. Now, it got me thinking a lot over the weekend about why is it that we're the most generous people in giving of our money to non-profit organizations.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's because we have a very affordable province in which to live—one of the most affordable in the country. I think it's because—as mentioned today in question period and repeated and worth repeating again that we have had over a billion dollars in tax relief to Manitobans. So Manitobans take that \$1.2 billion in tax relief that we have been providing and they choose to support organizations that they feel free to support for whatever reason they feel free to support those organizations. I—my wife and I, we contribute to a number of different charitable organizations. We do so on a monthly basis, because we have the privilege to do so because of our means and because of our priorities that we put on some of these organizations as being important to Manitoba. It's the Manitoba way to do things.

And why is it that Manitobans are able to contribute to things like cancer care? Well, I can tell you it's because there are many Manitobans now who don't have to pay for cancer drugs in Manitoba, and they choose to support a cause that's very important and near and dear to them, and they're supporting cancer care because they don't have to pay for those drugs anymore. That's a decision we made as government. The opposition, during the election, was asked if they'd be willing to do so. They said no. But we made the choice and we're supporting providing cancer-care drugs to every Manitoban who needs them whether they have them in the hospital or whether they have them at home. So what does that mean, Mr. Speaker? It means that they can make those choices to give more of their time and their money to other organizations, because they don't—they're not going to face economic hardship because they have to pay for drugs while they're watching their loved ones suffer.

Maybe the money that's being donated by 106,000 small businesses to support good causes is donated by many—maybe the 15,500 small businesses that aren't paying taxes anymore because we've cut the small business tax, Mr. Speaker. Maybe they're choosing to support all kinds of different programs because they're not paying small business tax anymore. In my role as Minister of Entrepreneurship,

Training and Trade, I have the privilege of going to a number of dinners. Now some people might say, really, just looking at you we never would have guessed that. But I have the privilege of going to a number of gala dinners where we celebrate our business community. And every time I go to these gala dinners to celebrate our business community or every time I go to gala dinners that are supporting a worthwhile cause and community organization in our community, our business community steps up to the plate and they donate a lot of their money and resources in kind to support these worthwhile causes.

*(15:30)

Why are they able to afford to do that? Because we've been cutting taxes on small businesses; we've been cutting the corporate taxes on businesses; we've been cutting the corporate capitalization tax on businesses, Mr. Speaker. And, perhaps, there's a sense that we can give back to our community and that's something that is fundamental to the prairie experience: we work together with our neighbours to make life better for one another.

So, it was rather interesting to hear that argument last week. And the other part of that argument that really stuck out with me was, why is there public funding of political parties? Well, Mr. Speaker, members opposite might recall an inquiry a few years ago that talked about accountability and transparency—accountability and transparency—for political parties and for the political process. Clearly, there are some people who still need to learn from that as we look at the world around us in terms of accountability and transparency. But that comes with a cost, Mr. Speaker. It comes with a cost for accountants, it comes for—with a cost for audits, it comes with a cost to enforce the rules and regulations that we decide are part of who we need to be as politicians, to be accountable and transparent.

And I would much rather have a system that puts those demands on political parties, financial and otherwise, to be accountable for who we are and how we run our elections and how we get elected, then to go back to the old days when those rules were not the rules that we have today. When those rules allowed for corporations to contribute huge amounts of money to political parties, and yes, unions as well, contributing to political parties. But democracy should be up to the individual to contribute to what party they choose to contribute to, a cap on how much so it's not the very, very rich that will control the outcome of an election.

I think it was really interesting to hear the members opposite belittling public funding of political parties after watching that incredible American election, Mr. Speaker, and those super PACs spending, I think—it was a ridiculous figure—over \$854 million, I think, was one of the figures that I heard for messaging, where there is no accountability on who is responsible for the message. So, billionaires and multi-millionaires could say whatever they wanted and put it on the—out the public domain, to state their position about a political party or a position on a political bill or a position on a proposition that might have been presented in front of a state electorate, without having any accountability for who it was that was paying for that message.

So it really is a contrast between two political parties: one that believes that the democratic process should be a process of the individual or one that believes that the democratic process should be confined to those who have the deepest pockets, Mr. Speaker. So it was rather interesting to hear that.

There are lots of contrasts that we can draw, Mr. Speaker, from what we seen the first week here, and in the first week we've been introducing very progressive legislation. Yes, there is some concern expressed by the member opposite about amalgamation. Well, I have the privilege of serving on the council in Gimli as a councillor for the Town of Gimli when we went through the historic amalgamation between the council of the Town of Gimli and the Rural Municipality of Gimli. And we knew at the time, as one of the first municipalities to do that, that it was a right thing to do. That process started in 1998, and we drew it to its successful conclusion in 2002. The members opposite don't recall, perhaps, that there had been a report that had been prepared when they were still in government back in the '90s that talked about the efficiencies that could be realized by an amalgamation, and they chose to do nothing.

Well, we're going to do something about it, Mr. Speaker, because we realize that there are municipalities that are struggling. There are municipalities that are losing out on opportunities simply because of the economy of scale and their inability to access different federal provincial programs, their inability to attract and hire and retain people of certain skill sets that'll help the economic growth and development of those municipalities. So we're going to move forward on that.

And I think as somebody coming from rural Manitoba, who went through that process, it is the right thing to do. And, Mr. Speaker, it was not that the town of Gimli, at the time, was less than a thousand and the municipality of Gimli was not less than a thousand. It was about communities that had boundaries that were becoming blurred, and people didn't realize, oh, that's the town, that's the RM. Some people didn't realize that.

I grew up across the ditch from the town of Gimli. The ditch was a boundary. I didn't know that. I always said, where you from? I said, the town of Gimli. The boundaries have been blurred for years, and now there is no boundary and the community is thriving.

So, Mr. Speaker, we're going to make a lot of progress in doing something that should have been done years ago, and working with the municipal partners to make it happen and bring a lot more efficiencies to the municipalities. And one of the things that we have said, which members opposite haven't acknowledged, is the fact that this will allow us more consistency in planning for emergency measures. The flood of the century was allegedly in 1997, but here we are having the flood of the millennium this past—a couple years ago, where—how many municipalities were affected? Over 80 per cent? When you think about it in those terms, when you have a municipality of less than a thousand people involved in this incredible, historic event, the capacity to deal with that event in the microenvironment of that municipality is very challenging. But, when you take those smaller municipalities and combine them, there's a lot more resources that can be collectively put in place to address a disaster of that magnitude. So it's not just about economic development; it's about emergency measures and planning for these municipalities.

Another contrast, when you consider all the things that we brought forward in the Legislature, Mr. Speaker, compared to members opposite, their vision thus far, legislatively, is to cut red tape. Well, that's a been-there, done-that scenario. We've been down this road before, and I guess we'll continue to travel down this road as long as members opposite seem to think this is the priority for small business. Well, in the meetings that I've had with small businesses all over the province, their biggest concern is a skilled workforce. That's what they're concerned about. In the last election we were the only party that talked about training and opportunities for Manitoba youth. In this Throne

Speech we talked about 75,000 more jobs—75,000 more jobs—for Manitobans and the training that is necessary to make that happen.

We've talked about Skill Build, going into the rural areas where we're trying to align the skill sets that are being taught at the high schools through their shops programs with the opportunities that are presenting themselves in rural Manitoba. And I had the opportunity, I was very pleased to be in Gimli where a CNC machine was purchased through this initiative and—a CNC machine plasma cutter. And just 20 minutes north of Gimli is a community with 380 industrial jobs where they're using CNC machines in, I believe, five out of the six shops that are in operation in that community. Now, that makes sense. When I was going to high school in Gimli, I learned how to fix a Briggs & Stratton lawn mower engine. Now these kids are using plasma cutters that they program with a computer and they're going to be using that skill. I have to admit, I've never fixed my lawn mower, but I know these kids are learning skills that they are going to apply in the real world making very good money in manufacturing jobs in small- and medium-size enterprises and enterprises that are becoming large enterprises in Manitoba. And they can do that right at home in their backyards, literally, Mr. Speaker.

So they talk about cutting red tape for small businesses being the big be-all and end-all. We talk about training, Mr. Speaker, and supporting a skilled workforce, and working with the sector councils and making things happen all over the province of Manitoba where skills are needed where it makes sense to invest in certain skill sets, including—and I was very pleased to be there this past fall to open up the mining academy in—*[interjection]*—Flin Flon, thank you, thank you—up in Flin Flon to open the mining academy, a great partnership and investment with the federal-provincial and the co-operation of the educational institutions to ensure that we're able to take the skill set that is needed and develop it locally so people growing up in their communities can stay in their communities and have meaningful employment in those communities.

* (15:40)

So they want to talk about cutting red tape; we want to talk about doing things that are meaningful for business and, yet, we've issued that challenge, if there is duplication in rules and regulations, that we'll look at that. We've agreed to do that. But it's not just about creating jobs and about providing the skills; it's

about doing things that matter to Manitoba businesses, such as cutting the small business tax, and it's worth saying again: 9 per cent when they were in office, zero since we've come to office, Mr. Speaker. Incrementally, in a sustainable way, cutting the taxes, that's what we did and that has tremendous impact on 15,500 small businesses that are no longer paying small business tax. Cutting the corporation tax, cutting the corporate capitalization tax, these are meaningful things and we do so in a responsible and incremental way. And that's what we'll continue to do: find ways to support our communities, find ways to support our business communities, find ways to provide meaningful training.

At the end of the day, if you want to talk about a poverty strategy, the biggest equalizer is education and employment opportunities, Mr. Speaker, and that's what we've been talking about. Members opposite are not talking about that at all. They say the solution: cut red tape.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we take a bigger global view of how to make things better here in the province of Manitoba. There's no quick fix for some of the problems that we have, but we take a bigger global view and we work with our partners to make it happen here in Manitoba, and I think that goes back to how I opened my comments today.

It's that prairie mentality, where you have to work hard with your neighbours to carve out that agricultural plot in the middle of the big, bald prairie, to cut that hole in an ice and create a fishing industry that has evolved from the first Icelandic fishers and First Nation fishers in the 1880s to a very large commercial fishery. It's about working with our neighbours to make things happen and that's what we do best in—here in Manitoba.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I know the clock says I have more time and there're a lot of things that I could say, but there's a lot of people who want to speak to this Throne Speech because it's a very positive speech about what we can do together in very uncertain times, keeping our priorities on what is important to Manitoba families, to continue to grow this province, and I'm proud to be part of a government that's been growing this province for the last—how many years we've been in office now? *[interjection]* Ah, 13 years, and we'll continue to grow this economy and grow this province and do what matters most for Manitoban families, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today and—to speak to the Throne Speech and to—also to the amendment brought forward by the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Pallister), the new leader of our party. And I just want to start off by welcoming him to his new position and congratulating him on his victory in Fort Whyte and for becoming the leader of our party. And I just want to welcome him to the Manitoba Legislature and wish him well in his new position.

I also want to welcome the new pages to the Manitoba Legislature and I hope that each and every one of them enjoy their positions here and that they learn a lot from those positions. So I want to welcome all of you here today.

I, of course, want to welcome the legislative staff, the table officers and everyone back, including yourself, Mr. Speaker, and we look forward to the debate in this Chamber over the course of the next couple of weeks and on to the—to carry on to the spring session as well.

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, I am not going to be able to support this Throne Speech. I believe this is the 13th Throne Speech that I've had the opportunity to put a few comments on the record about in this Legislature and, unfortunately, once again, I will be standing in this Legislature with my colleagues and voting against the Throne Speech.

And I will encourage members opposite, though, to take a look at the amendment brought forward by the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Fort Whyte, and have a look at what is in that amendment, Mr. Speaker. I think that there are many things that need to be addressed and they are addressed in that amendment to the Throne Speech that are not addressed in the Throne Speech itself, and so I think it is a more accurate reflection of what is happening in Manitoba, rather than the Throne Speech itself. So I would encourage members opposite to have a second look at it, maybe a third look, and to consider supporting that amendment here in the Manitoba Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, I have been given the opportunity to be the critic for a couple of new portfolios which I'm very excited to be—to take on. I'm responsible for Aboriginal and Northern Affairs as well as Sport and the East Side Road Authority, and I'm very excited to take on the—this new role here in the Manitoba Legislature. And I take my job very seriously as the member of the—Her Majesty's loyal opposition here, and we do have a job to do and that is to hold this

government's feet to the fire, and we will continue to do that and I will continue to do that in my new role.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to meeting with many stakeholders of the Aboriginal communities across this great province of Manitoba and I've already had the chance to meet with many of them. And already I see a couple of themes coming forward from what I've heard from members of the Aboriginal community. First of all, I've—what I have heard from many members of the Aboriginal community is that this government seems to be very quick to jump out in front of an issue, the positive issue and get their photo op, and where it's positive they're quick to jump out there and take credit for it.

But, when the times are tough, the issues are not so positive in the Aboriginal communities and the First Nations communities, the government, unfortunately, tends to run the other way. They're nowhere to be seen. They're nowhere to be found for comments by the media here in Manitoba, and what they do, Mr. Speaker, if it's—if they can't take credit for it and they don't want to take the blame for it, what do they do? They blame the federal government, and that's what we see time and time again from this government and it's not only to do with Aboriginal and northern affairs.

We see that across every single government department. We see it—*[interjection]* Oh, yes, the minister is going to be out for a great photo op and a great announcement today on whatever their latest pet project is, Mr. Speaker, but tomorrow when the times are tough and the chips are falling, where's the minister responsible? No, instead they send out a government spokesperson there to take the blame, and I think it's extremely unfortunate that members opposite would do that.

They are responsible for their various ministries and their departments, Mr. Speaker, and whether or not it's a good announcement or whether or not it's tough times and they have to face the media in those tough times, they are the spokesperson. They should be out there handling this in the media, not blaming the federal government, not blaming everyone else, but taking responsibility for what's happening in each and every one of their government departments, and that is not something that we see happening in this government.

Mr. Speaker, the other—one of the other common themes I've heard from members of the Aboriginal community, whether it's the Metis community, First Nations communities and other Aboriginal

communities, is the lack of consultation that—certainly what I've heard from the Metis community is the lack of consultation that has taken place by this government, and one example of that has to do with the Bipole III. And we know that the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Robinson) has been out. He's been on the record saying that it's very important that members of the First Nations community be adequately consulted when it comes to Bipole III, and we agree with him on that. We agree. We don't believe that that's actually taken place, but besides that, I wonder if he will also say that it's just as important to also consult members of the Metis community when it comes to Bipole III. Because we have not heard that from members opposite, and the Metis community is looking for that kind of leadership and something like that from this government and they have not yet seen it. So I would encourage members opposite to listen to members of the Aboriginal community, to consult them, to take responsibility for their actions, not just to blame the federal government for things in tough times.

Mr. Speaker, one of my other portfolios is one of Sport, and I'm very excited to take this on. I know I have two very active kids that are very much—that are actively involved in many sports in Manitoba. And I know when I go to the community centres in my own community, and I visited the community centres of many communities across this city because that's what we do when our kids are playing hockey. We'll go out to Southdale and we'll go out to all different areas of the city and the province and we compete against each other in different areas of the city and the province. And it's great to have kids that are active in hockey, that are active in soccer, in basketball, volleyball, all sorts of sports out there, and that's what we want to see is our kids being active in the communities.

* (15:50)

But what also makes this happen, Mr. Speaker, is those volunteers in the community that make this all happen, and that's how these community centres are run. They're run by volunteers and volunteer parents who are actively involved with these teams and these—in the sports in Manitoba. And that's what we want to make sure is that we're teaching our kids healthy living habits, healthy living lifestyle. That's what this is all about and I look—I very much look forward to working with all aspects of Sport Manitoba and for children and teaching them and helping and being a part of shaping what the future is

of sport here in Manitoba. So that's the kind of dialogue I look forward to having over the course of the next little while with the minister.

Mr. Speaker, there are many things with this Throne Speech that I take issue with, and much of it has to do with whether or not it's the financial situation of our province which I think is not in a great situation given the deficits of choice that this government is making which is unnecessary. They're not necessary deficits; they're deficits of choice, and I think it's unfortunate that we have a Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) that doesn't seem to understand that.

This government doesn't have a revenue problem, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is they have a spending problem and that's why Manitoba has a deficit today. Again, these are deficits of choice, not of necessity. It's this Minister of Finance and the Premier (Mr. Selinger) of this province that have made the decision to run deficits because of their out-of-control spending problem.

Mr. Speaker, federal transfers from other Canadian provinces to the NDP in this province have doubled and income and sales tax revenues are up over 60 per cent due to the NDP tax hikes. But this still is not enough to keep up with the NDP's spending increases of 5.1 per cent year over year, and that's why more tax increases are coming, because they've got that out-of-control spending problem spending beyond their means. That is why we are in the situation, the financial situation that we are in in this province.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to health care, since the NDP took office more than 1,800 doctors have left Manitoba to practice in other provinces. Within the last three years alone 227 doctors have left our province for other Canadian jurisdictions. Manitoba has one of the lowest doctor retention rates in Canada. Of new physicians that first registered in Manitoba between 1999 and 2000, only 31.4 per cent were still practising in Manitoba 10 years later. The Canadian average of this is 57.5 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, in 2011 only 49.4 per cent of medical practitioners in Manitoba were Manitoba graduates, which means that many Manitoba medical graduates are choosing to do their residency and practice in jurisdictions other than Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, currently in Winnipeg there are a total of 547 persons waiting for placement in a

personal care home. These are the worst numbers we've seen.

More Manitoba nurses work in administrative positions. It's 13.2 per cent than any other province other than Québec, Mr. Speaker. In 2011—and we've been asking about this issue in question period of the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald)—in 2011, ambulances waited at Winnipeg's emergency departments for 36,847.85 hours. This is equal to 1,535.33 days, which is equal to 4.21 years of waiting.

Mr. Speaker, so far in 2012 ambulances have waited at Winnipeg's emergency departments for 35,912.19 hours. This is equivalent to 1,496.34 days, which is equal to 4.1 years of—and still waiting. We still have too much left to go in 2012. How much worse can the numbers really get?

Mr. Speaker, these numbers are alarming, and we could go on. We know that wait-lists continue to rise in health care, that Manitobans are forced to—well, we know what members ran on in 1999. They ran on ending hallway medicine in six months with \$15 million and, of course, we went from that—that was one broken promises, and we could go on all day about broken promises by this NDP government. But certainly that was one of the biggest, most glaring promises that they made in the 1999 election. Of course, that never happened; they didn't end hallway medicine. They went from hallway medicine to highway medicine and now we're on to parking lot medicine, and it's extremely unfortunate that this is what they're doing to patients in Manitoba who are waiting, waiting patiently to get the health care that they need, want and deserve in this province.

On to justice, Mr. Speaker, just briefly. Our catch-and-release justice system isn't doing our province any favours. And to cover up its failure the NDP decided to redefine recidivism so it didn't look like as many people were committing crimes after they were released from jail. Manitobans know by reading the headlines that our province is the violent crime capital of the country, but do they know what that means?

Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to tell you. According to the 2001 crime severity index, Manitoba had the highest level of violent crime among the provinces. Manitoban—Manitoba had the highest homicide rate of the provinces and Winnipeg had the highest homicide rate among all Canadian cities. Manitoba had the highest sexual assault rate,

and police estimate that only one of 10 sexual assaults are actually reported.

Winnipeg has by far the highest robbery rate in Canada, as does the province as a whole, Mr. Speaker, and Manitoba still has the highest youth violent crime rate and the second highest overall rate—youth crime rate in Canada. Manitoba had the second highest break-and-enter rate in the country. It also had the third highest firearms offence rate behind Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia.

Mr. Speaker, the list is endless of all of the things that are happening in crime in our city and in our province, and I could go on. There are so many things to do with education; we're almost dead least across the country. We have the lowest graduation rates in the country. We have the highest dropout rate of high school. We have the lowest graduation rate at the post-secondary level. I could go on and on and on, and that is exactly why I will be voting against the Throne Speech because it doesn't matter what they put in their Throne Speech; they either break their promise and don't follow through with it or they don't touch on the things that, really, Manitobans want to see.

And so for those reasons I will be supporting the amendment made by the Leader of the Opposition before this House today; I will be supporting that, and I will not be supporting the Speech from the Throne.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs): First, I'd like to say thank you to my constituents. It remains a pleasure and honour to continue to represent the fine community of Assiniboia. It's been a pleasure over the last 13 years. It's nice to be able to see how local projects have really made a difference to the constituents, whether it's housing projects at Kiwanis, whether it's the new expansions at Grace Hospital and the new access centre and new MRI and, of course, the new emergency room that's being planned, whether it's the whole idea about making sure that we have the programs, the home care and the other supports that are necessary for individuals, or simple things like the play structures which, when I got into the office in 1999, there were virtually no play structures that met code, and I'm pleased to see that every single school's got play structures and a new walking trail, the Yellow Ribbon trail. And so things are really moving forward and I'm pleased to

see the progress and continue to represent the community.

I'd like to welcome the new Leader of the Opposition. It's always interesting to read his comments in Hansard, both when he was in this House and in the federal government, and I look forward to getting to know him better.

I'm also pleased to talk a little bit about my department and why I like what I've been doing. I think I have a great department because it's focusing on prevention. It's focusing on healthy living. It's focusing on making sure people have a good quality of life.

* (16:00)

First, the Ministry of Healthy Living. We start talking about our investments in food. If you're going to look at chronic disease, if you're looking at quality of life, you need to look at health and in food. We just were talking about the Farm to School program. It's a co-operative effort between Peak of the Market and ourselves. What we've done is we've engaged about 450 schools that are now selling vegetables—\$10, \$20 bags. Schools get half the money and people get healthy vegetables that are produced here in Manitoba. And just let the members opposite know, we're at about 680,000 pounds and we're on our way to a million pounds of vegetables, which is a 'pos' thing.

The 700 gardens and greenhouses in northern Manitoba through the healthy—Northern Healthy Foods Initiative, that's a very, very positive step. It's bringing healthy food and good food to the north, and that's wonderful, supporting wonderful, local food groups, whether that's with initiatives or funds to help sure that people have appropriate food. Things like The Winnipeg Foundation, where we're providing a million dollars to make sure that they have healthy food programs, and that's interest to note that that's been grown to about \$5 million through other sources so that there's sustainable healthy food programs, whether that's in communities, schools or otherwise. And I'm also pleased to say that we also are supporting a school breakfast program that are healthy food, so that kids can learn; they have full stomachs, it creates a better learning environment. So those are all things that we're doing. And it's very, very pleasant to see the progress that we've made in a very short period of time, looking at in motion and healthy living partnerships.

I'm pleased to support this Throne Speech, because what we're trying to do is work with businesses to create a healthy environment, whether that's food or activities, et cetera. In motion and partnerships and healthy living partnerships with business, is absolutely essential. There's 39,000 businesses in Manitoba. We believe this is a win-win situation for both government and business.

One of the things that isn't spoken much about, was back in 2003 I made a commitment that we would become active—more active. We were the first province to increase physical activity from 41 to 51 per cent, and we actually moved forward where more people are being active and participating in the trails, in our investments, in recreation facilities, et cetera, and that really makes a big difference. And I've noticed the difference in investments. We've worked on the centennial pool, we've worked on the walkways, we've worked on a lot of facilities to make sure that's easy and appropriate activities that you can actually get involved in.

Tax credit for the youth to remain active, become very, very impressive. And I'm pleased to see that we've extended the tax credit so that young people, when they hit university, college, et cetera, continue the activities that we've done through the K-to-12 facilities—or system, so that they are active between K to 12. They—we're one of the few jurisdictions that have mandated that. People are active and they're healthier, and now with the tax credit, they get to remain active and participate in good, positive activities when they go into post-secondary or when they start in the workforce. And, to be blunt, Mr. Speaker, those are all initiatives that are new. They are positive initiatives and they're initiatives that we have funded and supported and, actually, initiatives that the Conservatives continue to vote against every budget after budget after budget.

So I think those are all positive things: things like support for KidSport, support for community centres where we provide \$300,000 for community centres here in Winnipeg. We have programs that support the renovations and other programs throughout the province. And here's an example, just simple: we have a chronic disease—a prevention initiative; it was a pilot program by both us and the federal government. I have to compliment the federal government for initiating that project. It worked for three years. We found that it was one of the most cost-effective, positive programs yet, and I have to compliment them. I encouraged them, now that it's

gone from pilot, and a very, very successful pilot to actually fund the program. We've stepped up so far to fund the federal contribution that was eliminated, but we do hope that they come back and fund it, because it is one of those things that I think we can work with the federal government as a positive sign. We set up the pilot—it was hugely successful on activity, eating, tobacco reduction, and so it really prevented chronic disease and it was very, very cost effective. Now I have to compliment them for the initiative that they started.

As far as my portfolio on seniors, I look at what we're doing and the innovative supports that we continue to do. The caregivers tax credits started out at about \$1,050; now it's twelve seventy-five. What it is is it's supporting caregivers financially. We know that people can become caregivers throughout their life. People care for disabled parents or people who have health concerns. They care after children, and so this becomes very, very important because it takes time, love and compassion, but it also takes financial. It takes away financially from the family and from individuals, so we think that this first of a kind is a very positive innovate legislation. It's worked very, very effectively and I think it's a real good step in the right direction. I've got—I've received letters from around Canada and North America that said that this is a very positive initiative. They're looking at how our legislation's being implemented and it's really moving forward positively.

I also looked at elder abuse. I'm pleased that over the last number of years we've put supports: a 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week call centre to provide assistance, guidance and support for people experiencing abuse or just needing information; the fact that we actually fund organizations like Age and Opportunity to provide support across the province; the fact that we have elder abuse specialists that provides in-services and training and talks about how to spot elder abuse and what actions to take, and I really think that this is a wonderful program that works with all organizations and seniors supporting organizations to make sure that people can identify it and take action in real time.

Age-friendly: I'd like to let all members know that we've been able to work with AMM and other organizations, partners like the chamber of commerce to ensure that 80 per cent of our population are in age-friendly communities. This makes sure that there's programs and service supports for all people, regardless of mobility issues, age, et cetera, and I think that's very, very

progressive. In fact, we've moved from having Portage la Prairie work with Calcutta and London, England, and now we're covered—cities of Winnipeg, Steinbach, et cetera. We're all over the province. We have communities that are age-friendly in initiating programs like that which only in 2008 started and now we've—we are actually are world leaders on age-friendly communities. Simple programs that support people like the 200 more personal care beds are essential. We want to make sure that our loved ones, if we've gone past where we can look after them, that they have positive care and appropriate care. So these—the 200 personal care home beds will be wonderful.

And also the fact that we want to make sure that there's services, Aging in Place services so people have assisted living, supportive housing, et cetera. And Mr. Speaker, one of the major differences between us is we believe that these services should be available for—by all that require it, not just for those who can afford it. So the difference between the NDP and the Conservatives: of course we believe that these services should be provided to those who require them free of charge.

And, then, in the case of the Conservatives and the new leader, when he was in the House he was very supportive of privatizing home care and that was a huge issue. And why was it a huge issue? Because then it would be where you have the size of your wallet decide what service you get, not the need for care. And I am pleased to say that in health care or in home care we want to make sure that need is the reason why you're getting the support that you have.

And simple things, our support for seniors has continued to move forward. The seniors property tax credit has moved—sorry—the seniors tax credit has moved from ten twenty-five this year to \$1,100 last—the next year. So next year there's \$1,100 credit and, again, our government continues to support seniors by expanding the seniors tax credit. The property tax credit, under the Conservatives, moved from three twenty-five to \$250, less money in seniors' pockets. I'm pleased to see that we've expanded that property tax credit for many years, and so it's now six hundred, moving higher over time. And so what we're continuing to do is help provide support for seniors who want to remain in their homes. And, by the way, it's not just homeowners; it's renters that get this money, and we think that's very, very progressive.

* (16:10)

So, to be blunt, though, the Conservatives have voted against every single tax measure that we have provided for assistance. I believe that, right now, it's \$16 million just for seniors alone. That's not counting other tax credits; that's just the property tax credit and the seniors tax credit.

Other programs that I'm very proud of initiating and moving forward was the SafetyAid. Every single year we have a group of two people who go out and evaluate homes. They make them safe; they make them secure; they make sure that people don't fall as much; they make sure that hazards are looked after. Eight hundred homes are evaluated and renovated every year. This is throughout the province, and those who are lower income get that service free.

I look at Consumer Affairs, where we're talking about cellphone legislation, car repair legislation so that people are appropriately informed, new home warranty, the payday loan legislation. All these pieces support the individuals, look after the average person by providing them information to make a positive financial decision, and those are very, very well taken up.

And I'm pleased that we continue to move forward on a very innovative and aggressive front on consumer protection. I look forward to continuing to support that on the government side. I am pleased that we were able to move forward on these important popular initiatives, and I hope that the opposition for once will continue to support us.

And I hear, day after day, from members opposite about taxes and how taxes are evil. They—I hear about them, about how it should be about the survival of the fittest. And the—it was interesting because both at church this weekend at Lighthouse Mission, the dinner, I had the pleasure of hearing people express the importance of community, express the importance of caring for our fellow man, how it's not about how much you accumulate but what the legacy you leave, how much humanity you leave.

And it's interesting, because people who measure by dollars alone will never have enough. They will never be content. People have to understand that we have a large purpose in life. And part of that purpose is to make sure that we have a fair system. So whether it's health care, whether it's taxes, whether it's a justice system, these are systems that we grow to rely on.

It's interesting that the members opposite think you shouldn't have services without paying for them. And what'll often happen is the Conservatives will starve the system and say, oh, we can't afford to pay for those systems.

I believe we need to have a justice system and a health-care system and hoe-care system. I think we need supports for seniors to live home and live well. I believe we need good highways. And taxes ensure that a good education system is able to be financed, and an education system is the best equalizer you can possibly have because education allows a good solid support in the future.

So it's amazing how in the 1990s we had all the young people leave. We had no economic growth. We had one of the oldest provinces in Canada, and now people are moving to Manitoba. The economy's growing. We're a Manitoba miracle. And what's interesting about it is that the growth is happening in all aspects of the province. In short, I think Manitoba's a great place to be. I think people are moving here because they know we have a good future. I'm here because I think it's a great province.

So, in short, I'll be voting for the Speech from the Throne. I'll be voting against the amendment because I believe in good financial responsibility, but I—also I believe in good human responsibility to my fellow man, and thus I'm not going to make penny-wise, pound-foolish decisions that happened in the 1990s. What I'm going to do is make sure that all people have a good standard of living, we invest in the future which is the economic and human capital that we have in the province because we don't want what happened in the '90s because if you look, people of my generation, that's where the bulge went away. People went away to other provinces. Now, people are moving here. They have a good, solid future, and I'm pleased to be with a provincial government that cares about people and has plan for the future.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to hearing other members.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I want to first start by thanking those in River Heights who I represent in this Chamber. I want to note the progress that's being made in River Heights in bringing together the former three community centres in the central Corydon Community Centre and the new name of their teams, the Corydon Comets.

I also want to recognize that Kelvin and Grant Park high schools did well recently in football and competed in the Free Press Bowl with Kelvin coming out ahead. Their efforts, of course, were spurred on by the memory of the recent loss of Julia Romanow-Bear.

Now, today I want to start talking about A Tale of Two Cities and a Throne Speech that demonstrates a government that doesn't seem to care. Perhaps this government could take some guidance from Charles Dickens: It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.

In the Throne Speech, the government spoke with pride and optimism of signs of economic growth and prosperity. They pointed to boardwalks, washrooms, express liquor marts and parking lots. Is this what they see as the best of times, a time from which we can draw hope for the future?

Unfortunately, for many in this province, it's not the best of times. While the government points to the most mundane of economic elements as evidence of a prosperous province, there is another side to this story. It's a side that can't be ignored.

Today, in our prosperous province, there are currently more than 10,000 children in care. It's a city created of despair, filled with the young and needy and our government sits idly by. We—thousands more who are reliant on food banks to feed them. For these children and families, this is nothing short of the winter of despair. For these citizens in need of help, these are the worst of times. For these families, the system has failed them. It is not enough to take pride in progress that benefits only some of our province's citizens. We must care for all.

It's time that we found real solutions for the people of Lake St. Martin, solutions that are reached with members of the Lake St. Martin community participating in the discussions and in the decisions, so that they can trust the decisions and so that the decisions are sustainable.

We need higher shelter allowances so people can live in dignity and provide for their families. We need a long-term strategy that will lead to the elimination of the need for food banks in our community.

It is the height of incredulity for a government to talk with pride about a Maclean's article citing the Manitoba miracle, boasting of the strength of Manitoba Hydro while it stands by and does nothing to save the critical research being done at the ELA.

This is a government that promises a family doctor for every family by 2015, but can't keep its own promise to balance the budget by next year. How can this government promise daycare spaces in Waverley West when it's demonstrated that it's unable to get schools built? How can it seek higher immigration rates while it's unable to support the new citizens already living in our province? What's the benefit of promising more community policing programs at William Whyte before we've addressed the very basic needs of food and shelter for the people that live there?

Mr. Speaker, the people in our community who need our help won't be fooled by a government that doesn't heed the needs of all the people of Manitoba. A brighter future is possible. The best of times can be ahead of us, but not until we've a government ready to find new solutions for all of its people. I see a beautiful city and a beautiful province and brilliant people rising from the current abyss.

Mr. Speaker, rather than proceed on in this vein, I've decided than instead of just criticizing the NDP, I will present an alternative Throne Speech and, I believe, a course of action that many Manitobans deserve. The rest of my remarks, then, are my alternative Throne Speech.

Welcome to the opening session of the 40th Legislature. We meet at a time when great change is needed to assure Manitobans the place in our country that we deserve. Manitobans have been just-become 'justifiably' concerned about the direction that our province is heading. We have an incredible province, but more and more Manitobans are concerned about our province becoming the child poverty capital of Canada, the homicide capital of Canada, the very high number of children in care, the site of one of the planet's worst ecological disasters and the province with the highest rate of diabetes in Canada.

First of all, the Province is embarrassed to admit that Manitoba's the child poverty capital of Canada. As a recent child poverty report card developed by more than 90 organizations across Canada shows, 17.6 per cent of Manitobans are poor, as measured by the low-income cut-off measure, and 11.1 per cent of Manitobans are poor, as measured by the LICO after tax.

* (16:20)

While one can debate which measure is best, there's no denying, whichever measure's used, Manitoba has the highest number of poor children of any province in Canada. In particular, it's with chagrin that we note that the economic powerhouses of New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island have only 3 and 2.3 per cent of children in poverty, using the latter measure, a rate of poverty, which is only one fifth to one quarter of Manitobans.

Our Manitoba provincial government is ashamed at the lack of attention it's paid to poverty in the last 13 years. We're announcing major changes. First, starting today we're raising the shelter rates to a level of 75 per cent of market prices as asked for by Manitoba's widely supported Make Poverty History coalition. Seven-second-given that the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of housing first for those with serious mental health issues has been so clearly demonstrated, in the At Home/Chez Soi research trial we're committing today to invest the resources needed so that anyone in Manitoba with a serious mental illness who is also homeless will be helped using the housing first approach. Thirdly, we commit today to develop a partnership with the federal government and the First Nations communities so that by the end of 2013 the more than a thousand homes in northern Manitoba First Nations communities without running water will have that running water.

These three measures will address housing needs in a significant way, will represent the initial step in ensuring that mothers on social assistance will no longer be forced to use their children's food money to pay their rent and that all Manitobans including the mentally ill and those in remote areas of the north will have homes with running water.

Mr. Mohinder Saran, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

The Province will also set a target to reduce poverty in Manitoba by half, by 50 per cent over the next four years and will work with organizations around our province to achieve this goal.

Secondly, the provincial government recognizes that it's let Manitobans down when it comes to improving the overall health of Manitobans. Due to the Province's most unfortunate neglect of the diabetes epidemic, Manitoba has the highest incidence of diabetes in Canada. The diabetes epidemic has been going on since 1996 in Manitoba, but due to our fractured response there were never

any province-wide standardized best practices established. And while some RHAs have done their best to develop programs, others have done poorly. The result is that under the watch of the present provincial government the number of people in Manitoba with diabetes has approximately doubled from about 50,000 in 1999 to about 100,000 today.

Due to the provincial government's unfortunate oversight in addressing the epidemic, the cost of diabetes treatment to our health-care system has approximately quadrupled. Starting today, this will change. First, to ensure mothers, infants and young children have access to more nutritious food, including fairly and equitably priced milk instead of having to drink pop. A single price for milk will be introduced province wide, similar to the single price for liquor which has been in place for many years.

A provincial 'diabetes' epidemic centre will be established within the next week to deal with the epidemic; reporting of new cases of diabetes will be mandatory; and a monthly report will be issued with the number of new cases each month. While measures to reduce diabetes in individuals are well established, it's not yet certain what are the most effective approaches to reduce diabetes in whole communities.

To address this issue, six community action plans will be implemented with—working in partnership with the communities within the next year, each designed to test varied approaches to preventing and reducing diabetes at a community level. The approach will be similar to At Home/Chez Soi's testing of optimum approaches to helping those with serious mental illnesses. Additional communities are to be added each year.

As soon as approaches to preventing and reducing diabetes at a community level have been scientifically demonstrated with good outcomes they will be implemented province wide starting in areas where the incidence of diabetes is highest.

Thirdly, as Phoenix says—a Phoenix Sinclair inquiry is demonstrating, the Province acknowledges that the child and family services system is broken and badly in need of attention. As reporter, Paul Turenne observed, Phoenix Sinclair is the little girl whose tragic life and horrific murder outraged an entire province. The provincial government acknowledges that its efforts have resulted in Manitoba's child and family services system being dramatically different from and out of line with other

child welfare systems in Canada and elsewhere in the western world.

In Manitoba, we have 40 children in care per thousand children, more than four times more than the Canadian average of 9.2 per thousand and more than 10 times more per capita than the progressive system in Western Australia. Indeed, in poor parts of Winnipeg the rates rise up to the horrific level of 141 children in care per thousand children. The Province acknowledges that high rates of poverty and high rates of children in the child welfare system go hand in hand. The government will no longer tolerate what is happening in our province. The government will return the primary focus of child and family services to helping and supporting families and will work together with other health and social service providers to ensure that each family has a network of health and social service support which includes a family physician, a public health nurse and community workers who can work as a team to better support families up front so that fewer children have to go into care.

The holistic support system in Nelson House will be used as a model for family support and for decreasing the incidence of FASD. The St. Norbert Behavioural Health Foundation program will be used as a model for family-centred addictions treatment, and the government will ensure that access is available quickly to addictions treatment when it's needed.

As well, the government will invest in a family enhancement support approach, which will address housing and other issues so that fewer children will need to be taken into care because of housing problems or poverty. While investments will be needed up front, the savings in having fewer children in care will be considerable over time.

The government also admits it has handled relations with the First Nations people of Manitoba very poorly. The government admits it's failing to listen to the three Grand Chiefs on issues like the Children's Advocate and that this has led to a deep rift between the government and the First Nations communities.

The government, furthermore, admits, that its takeover of the southern child and family services authority is completely against the spirit and the intent of the legislation which was designed to ensure the First Nations had input into the selection of board members of the southern authority. The Province will therefore act in an accelerated fashion

to ensure the choices of the chiefs with the respect to the board of the southern authority are proceeded with as fast as possible, and the due position and leadership of the chiefs with the respect to the southern authority is restored.

Fourthly, the Province acknowledges the shortfall in attention to children's health during the last 13 years. The Province will act immediately to implement universal newborn hearing screening to ensure no more children are missed and grow up with speech and language and learning problems as a result. The Province will also fully implement Jordan's Principle. As well, the Province will implement the Canadian Paediatric Society's recommendations which include initiating an enhanced well-baby visit at 18 months with standardized 'guidelins' and—guidelines and a special fee code; starting a rotavirus immunization program and adding a second dose of varicella vaccine; strengthening the engagement of pediatricians in mental health as well as set benchmarks for service delivery; develop a pediatric-specific human resource plan; develop a graduated licence and learning approach to ATV and snowmobile use, which will make helmet use and vehicle training mandatory, with full licence not available until age 16; and grant the Children's Advocate the power to ensure compliance with findings and recommendations and to represent all children and youth who receive government services.

Fifthly, the Province recognizes that recovery from the very large flooding in 2011 has been far too slow. We are now a year and half after the flood of 2011 and still about 2,000 people remain evacuated from their homes. The Province acknowledges that its programs were poorly organized and slowly delivered to the point of being chaotic.

The Province also acknowledges that it was slow to set up a taskforce to review the flood and one to look at the regulation of Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin, and that since these have not yet reported, many critical decisions have been delayed which have contributed to the number who are still homeless and the 30 per cent of people who were affected by the flood who still have not had their claims fully processed. Specifically, the Province acknowledges that only about 20 per cent of the claims around Lake Manitoba have been paid out, and that around Lake St. Martin, the communities of Little Saskatchewan and Lake St. Martin have suffered unduly as a result of these delays.

Further, the Province acknowledges that the flood on Lake Manitoba and the flood on Lake St. Martin were artificial floods and apologize to residents around these lakes. And the Province will be making revisions to compensation programs to recognize this. The Province, in acknowledging the problems, will also act to implement as soon as possible the 65 recommendations of the Liberal Party final report on the flood of 2011. Included in the government effort—government's effort will be a new location for the community of Lake St. Martin at a site of their choice as they have asked for.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Sixthly, the Province is ashamed that for the past 13 years, there has not been a rational water management policy in Manitoba. The Province recognizes it is at fault in promoting a drain, drain, drain approach to water management which has directly contributed to 30 per cent more water coming off the land in southwestern Manitoba and which has directly contributed to the massive extent of the flood of 2011.

* (16:30)

The Province also recognizes that it made a major mistake in not acting immediately in 2011 to change directions because 2011 and 2012 have seen very extensive amounts of increased drainage without any balanced water storage in many parts of southwestern Manitoba.

The Province is now determined to change directions to give a rational water management policy which promotes water storage and which will provide a much better balance between water storage and drainage. This policy will include major investments in water storage throughout southern Manitoba to hold back water on the land and reduce flooding. It will implement immediately an LS [*phonetic*] or ecological goods and services program which will provide farmers income for land which they hold which is used to store and hold back water using a modification of the approach which was used in Blanchard municipality, but which was mistakenly and unceremoniously dropped several years ago.

The Province will introduce limits—legislation as well to implement a no-net-loss-of-wetlands policy. The Province is determined, through these actions, to decrease the risk of future floods rather than increasing the risk as has happened from policies in the past.

Seventh, the Province recognizes that rapid transit has progressed slowly during the last 13 years at an average rate of 0.3 kilometers per year. The Province also recognizes the development has been slowed down by the failure of the Province and the City of Winnipeg to agree. However, notwithstanding the slow progress, the government is determined to proceed expeditiously with completing a rapid transit system for all of Winnipeg. The government recognizes that completing a city-wide system is important to complete the backbone for the city of Winnipeg, the backbone on which people will move and the backbone on which future planning will occur. This will be done to help all Manitobans, but most particularly those who are students, who are new immigrants, who are elderly, in having a rapid, efficient and easy way to get around our largest city.

To provide additional help to students, the Province will implement, with them, a U-Pass for university and college students. Advancing rapid transit will also help those from outside of Winnipeg through approaches which will allow people to get around more easily in Winnipeg so that people from out of town can bus here or park and ride easily.

Eight, the Province recognizes that a series of actions by the Province and the federal government has slowed development in Manitoba around one of the most important areas for the future. Science- and engineering-based innovation and development of new ideas, new products and new services. The federal decision to close the NRC Institute for Biodiagnostics has been a disaster for Winnipeg, as IMRIS and other innovating firms are now leaving to go elsewhere, in part because there's no longer the base of research, of training and of critical mass to keep innovative firms here.

The closing of the Cereal Research lab and the Experimental Lakes Area research lab have added to the problem in research and innovation in Manitoba. Added to this, the government realizes that investment in research and development as a proportion of gross domestic product is low in Manitoba. The government is determined to change this through the implementation of a Manitoba science and engineering research fund to stimulate research activity in the natural and social sciences and in engineering in our province.

A small business investment in research fund will also be initiated to take advantage of the potential for major research and innovation gains by small businesses. In addition, the government will

address issues of red tape though an initiative which measures and reduces red tape and will signal its intent to reduce the payroll tax burden in Manitoba as a first step in reducing—it will reduce the payroll tax on universities and colleges to allow universities and colleges to improve the post-secondary education to be delivered for Manitobans.

Ninth, when it comes to the environment, the Province recognizes that Lake Winnipeg has been getting worse and worse in the last 13 years. The Province is ashamed that it was unable to fulfill its commitment in August of 2003 when it promised that within two or three years Lake Winnipeg would be well on its way to recovery. Three years have long passed and the situation of Lake Winnipeg continues to deteriorate. As international authority, Bob Sandford, has indicated, the sheer size and scale of this environmental catastrophe on Lake Winnipeg, at 23,750 square kilometers, the 10th largest lake in the world, makes it one of the largest environmental disasters on the planet.

The Province will now ensure that this crisis on Lake Winnipeg is addressed with the seriousness and the effort it deserves. At the present time, it's not even clear what proportion of the current problem is due to new inputs of phosphorus each year and what portion is the result of mobilization of phosphorus from sediments in Lake Manitoba—in Lake Winnipeg each summer. The government will fully support the research effort to provide this information during the coming summer season of 2013.

As well, the Province recognizes that climate change leading to increased wet weather events is contributing to the extent of the crisis. Thus, in addition to speeding up the treatment of the City of Winnipeg's removal of phosphorus, which has proceeded at a very slow rate during the last 13 years, and a further delay being just announced, the government will also implement a major effort at water retention in southern Manitoba as already described, which will decrease the amount of phosphorus coming off the land and into Lake Winnipeg.

Further, because there remain considerable uncertainties as to the most effective options for reducing phosphorus coming off the land, the government will undertake five model research trials to test the optimum way to reduce phosphorus inputs and phosphorus levels in five small lakes and their watersheds, including, as an example, Killarney Lake. The result of this intensive research will then

be used on a larger scale to reduce phosphorus going into Lake Winnipeg and to provide an effective solution to the current catastrophe.

Tenth, it is important to reflect on the situation we are in at the moment. With large provincial deficits several years in a row and a rapidly growing provincial debt, the Province apologizes for the poor level of financial management in recent years. The approach to financial management would change—will change. Instead of spending more than is budgeted every year, the government will spend at or below its budgeted spending targets. Instead of running programs which are not effective, the government will make changes so that any program which is not achieving its objectives will either be changed so the objectives can be met or eliminated.

Spending will be focused on several areas. First, on areas where the quality of services delivered can be improved and cost-reduced at the same time. Second, on addressing and preventing big cost threats such as future floods and the diabetes epidemic and the high number of children born with FASD. Third, on areas where there's a large economic return on investment for Manitoba, including areas like improved water management, research and development and rapid transit, there will be a focus. Addressing these areas will allow the government to reduce the deficit rapidly and return to a balanced budget, even as the economy is stimulated and government made more efficient.

Eleventh, the government recognizes that the energy situation for Manitoba has changed dramatically in North America in the last three years, with large amounts of shale gas becoming available. This means that Manitoba Hydro is now operating a loss this last quarter. The government will spend an intensive three months reviewing the situation and evaluating alternatives to the present plan for major continuing hydro development in Keeyask and Conawapa in the short term. While these projects are expected to be viable in the long run, it's important to have a critical look at other options, including the use of electricity generated from gas or the use of a feed-in tariff for wind power. The government will be looking at these options in depth over the next three months before making major decisions.

Lastly, the government recognizes that there's far too much crime in the inner parts of Winnipeg and that the approaches taken to date have not been as effective as needed to ensure the safety of Manitobans living, working and visiting in these

areas. The Province is impressed with the work of community members like Sel Burrows, and will fund three community-based crime reduction approaches in which local leaders in inner-Winnipeg's communities, like William Whyte, will have a major input into the type of crime reduction approach taken, whether using community networks combined with poverty reduction and sport and community participation enhancement processes which we'll undertake.

The Province will work to ensure that there is ongoing reporting of results and that measures which are proven effective will be more broadly implemented to achieve a city-wide crime reduction. These measures will work in conjunction with the improvements described above in areas like reducing poverty, reducing the number of children who need to be in Child and Family Services and reducing FASD.

The government expects that these measures will finally address the various crises that have arisen in our province in the last 13 years. We make these changes so that Manitoba can move forward in no longer being the crime capital of Canada, the child poverty capital of Canada, the location of one of the world's worst ecological catastrophes on Lake Winnipeg, and the location of the worst floods in Canada. Manitobans want to be able to hold their heads high and be proud of the progress made, and that is why this Throne Speech marks a major turning point in the history of our province.

I trust, Mr. Speaker, that Divine Providence will guide our deliberations in the best interests of all our citizens in the days and years ahead.

Thank you.

* (16:40)

Ms. Sharon Blady (Kirkfield Park): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed an honour and a privilege to rise in this Chamber today and to respond to the Throne Speech and address the amendments and alternatives put forward by the most recently arrived but certainly not the newest member of this Chamber.

Before I begin, I would like to thank my friends and neighbours in Kirkfield Park for the very enjoyable summer and fall that we have shared since I was last in this Chamber. It was a time that blended the opportunity to catch up with old friends, welcome new neighbours and, most importantly, stay connected to the people who put me in this Chamber to speak and work on their behalf. Whether it was at

the two barbecues that I hosted at Kirkfield Westwood community club and at Grant's mill, where I was able to meet with over 200 neighbours, or at the variety of events and celebrations over the summer or even when I was out with the kids running errands on our bikes, there was always the chance to connect with people that I have the privilege of representing. And I find it doesn't matter how many times you get to meet or interact with the people that you know, there are—there's always something new to learn about what matters most in their lives.

Mr. Speaker, as someone that never aspired to this position until I was asked to run in 2007, I had instead chosen at an early age to contribute to the betterment of our society as an educator and a social justice advocate. So I find it is this part of the job, learning from my neighbours, that is the most rewarding part and what guides me daily, and I don't know what it's like for other members of this Chamber, but having been born and raised in the area that I have the privilege of representing, there is a pattern that repeats itself every time I head out onto the doorstep, and some of my colleagues who have come out onto the doorstep can verify this.

But, regardless of what part of the neighbourhood, I visit this will surely happen and the pattern is best summarized in five key features:

One: I will talk to someone that knows my parents, and this usually involves relaying updates, messages and often couriering items, and sometimes I'm convinced, Mr. Speaker, that there are certain streets, apartment blocks and 55-plus residences where really I should just bring my mom. It would just be simpler.

Second of all, there will at least be one visit with someone who has taught either me or one of my sons or some combination of the three of us.

Third of all, I will cross paths with at least one classmate or childhood friend of mine.

Four: there will also be undoubtedly parents or grandparents of my son's classmates, and that's when my arrival on the doorstep in any official capacity is pre-empted by being Zach's mom or Heiko's mom. Usually involves trying to book play date as well, but—

And, finally, at least one of these people will be some combination of the above.

So, now, Mr. Speaker, you and other members of this Chamber might wonder why I mention this pattern, and the reason is that in representing a neighbourhood where I grew up and where I'm raising my boys it means that while my office door is always open and accessible to everyone, these people know me first as a friend and then in my official capacity as their MLA. It means that we will see each other on a regular basis but not just on their doorsteps but as part of our daily lives. It also means that to me my obligation to serve them goes beyond the obligations that we all have to our constituents to one that means my concern for what matters most to them predates my life as an MLA and goes beyond my duties as their MLA. It is a personal commitment from one neighbour to another.

It also means that the time on the doorstep may be quick, as there was one time where a conversation was interspersed with helping to get a toddler into a car seat so my friend could get her kids off to swimming. It also meant one time—I don't know if anybody remembers the wonderfully odd day we had earlier this fall when the weather seemed to change in five-minute intervals and so it meant this odd mixture of sunshine and snow, and that particular day in this mixture of sunshine and snow I got to have a wonderful conversation with a great retired couple in my neighbourhood about their garden and their grandchildren and the schools in the neighbourhood while they shared some wonderfully cold and refreshing grapes straight off the vine. So it was an interesting Manitoba moment there. But either way this is the best part of the job, and this is what I carry into this Chamber on a daily basis.

Pour moi, monsieur le Président, je ne suis pas seulement la députée pour ma circonscription, mais aussi je travaille comme un voisin, une amie et une bénévole pour le bénéfice de mon voisinage. Chaque section, école, garderie et rue possèdent une signifiante et une mémoire personnelles. Pour moi, de répondre au discours du Trône en deux langues est important, parce que je viens d'une famille francophone maternelle et une ancienne paroisse francophone à Kirkfield Park, et mes fils et leurs aimés vont à l'école immersion française. Être capable de parler français dans cette chambre est un privilège et un droit pour bien représenter et servir ma circonscription, mes voisins.

Translation

For me, Mr. Speaker, I'm not only the MLA for my constituency; I also work as a neighbour, a friend

and a volunteer for the benefit of my neighbourhood. Each district, school, daycare and street has a particular significance and a special memory for me. Being able to reply to the Throne Speech in two languages is important for me because I come from a Francophone family on my mother's side and I also belong to a former Francophone parish in Kirkfield Park. My sons and their friends go to a French immersion school. Being able to speak French in this Chamber is a privilege and a right in order to represent and serve my constituency and my neighbours well.

English

So to my neighbours I am grateful to be their representative, and today and every day I renew my pledge to them to work hard for our neighbourhood and what matters most to them: to keep Kirkfield Park and Manitoba as a whole one of the best places to live.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will move on to my more formal response to the Throne Speech and the amendment provided by the new member for Fort Whyte.

I begin, Mr. Speaker, by reflecting on what I have learned from my neighbours not just this summer on the doorstep but in the five years I've had the privilege and the duty of representing them, and what I have learned is that they are generally very happy here in Manitoba and in Kirkfield Park. Many have lived here their entire lives. Others like myself return after a time away, and still others are both new to the neighbourhood and to the province and came here for the very reason the rest of us stayed or returned: the affordability of life here, the opportunities they found here and the quality of health-care services that they had come to expect here. What matters most to them is that their quality of life remains one where they can set down roots, raise children, retire securely and know that throughout the changes of global economic tides that they are buffered here in a way that is not found in so many other places around the world.

This summer especially presented the opportunity to talk about the choices that were faced in the last budget and that were faced in the current Throne Speech. What was interesting were the conversations regarding how priorities were being adjusted to ensure that commitments were kept, whether it was those that live by the Grace Hospital seeing the daily progress of the access centre or families that have used the new birthing centre or

young families who appreciate the increasing daycare spaces and the ParentZone website and the online daycare registry. Each of them knew that, seeing austerity measures used elsewhere, these could have been cut to balance the books had others been at the helm, and they appreciated the continuing investments, knowing the long-term value of such investments versus the short-term savings that cuts would provide.

Mr. Speaker, this Throne Speech recommits to those things that matter most to my neighbours, and they appreciate the commitment to increase access to family doctors, the opening of the most recent QuickCare clinic, along with funding of new front-line positions because they know that true leadership comes not just in stable economic times but what really matters is what is done when financial challenges are faced. So many of them remember parsimonious cuts to health care in the 1990s, and to know that the current Leader of the Opposition was a Cabinet minister at that time does not give them great hope in the alternatives he might provide. I would suggest that my neighbours are quite correct in their early assessment, as what I've heard from them so far both inside and outside of this Chamber draws to mind the irony of his selection in a lyrical reference that would not be lost on his predecessor, my old classmate Hugh McFadyen, someone who appreciated the British band The Who: Meet the new boss / Same as the old boss. And, if the members opposite don't like references from the past into the '90s specifically, maybe they should stop picking leaders of that vintage.

Les soins de santé demeurent la priorité essentielle de notre gouvernement, tout comme ils demeurent la priorité la plus importante pour les familles de Kirkfield Park et du Manitoba. Nous avons fait de gros efforts pour stabiliser et rebâtir notre système de soins de santé. Depuis 1999, les temps d'attente ont diminué et le Manitoba a acquis plus de 500 médecins et 3 100 infirmières additionnels. Aujourd'hui, l'amélioration du système de soins de santé continue dans ce discours du trône, avec de meilleurs soins pour les personnes âgées grâce à des améliorations du système de soins à domicile et 200 places en plus en foyers de soins personnels à Winnipeg.

De plus, on a un accès plus rapide et plus pratique aux tests et traitements pour les patients atteints de cancer, grâce aux nouveaux centres Action cancer dans les régions rurales du Manitoba. Et dans un contraste clair au gouvernement de

Filmon, et au membre de Fort Whyte, on a amélioré l'accès aux médecins de famille grâce à l'ajout d'infirmières praticiennes, d'auxiliaires médicaux, d'infirmières et de diététistes dans les cliniques médicales qui acceptent des nouveaux patients.

Translation

Health care remains our government's main priority, just as it remains the main priority for the families of Kirkfield Park and Manitoba. We have made great efforts to stabilize and rebuild our health-care system. Since 1999, wait times have been reduced and Manitoba has hired more than 500 additional doctors and 3,100 additional nurses. Today, improvements to the health-care system continue with this Throne Speech that includes better care for seniors thanks to improvements to the home care system and 200 additional spaces in personal care homes in Winnipeg.

There is also faster and easier access to tests and treatments for cancer patients thanks to new CancerCare hubs in rural regions of Manitoba. And, in clear contrast to the Filmon government and the member for Fort Whyte, we have improved access to family doctors by adding more nurse practitioners, paramedics, nurses and dietitians in medical clinics that accept new patients.

English

The development of a long-term strategy that addresses the ever-shrinking financial commitment of the federal government to universal health care demonstrates forethought and ongoing commitment to health care that is appreciated by my neighbours.

When members opposite faced fiscal challenges, they sought to balance budgets on the backs of nurses, doctors and ultimately on the backs of patients. In my neighbourhood, many remember when the Grace ER closed its doors at night, and they see that we are taking a very different approach, reducing administration costs by reducing the number of RHAs and choosing to preserve and grow our front-line services.

Rather than fire front-line medical practitioners, as Conservatives did in tough times, we are improving access to family doctors by expanding the range of medical professionals with additional nurse practitioners, physician assistants, nurses and dietitians for medical practices taking new patients.

* (16:50)

As a cancer survivor and someone who has known far too many others who have been impacted by this disease, I know how important convenient access to testing and treatment for cancer patients can be. And, for those within my neighbourhood with family outside Winnipeg, knowing there will be CancerCare hubs in rural Manitoba gives them greater peace of mind.

Mr. Speaker, Kirkfield Park has a growing number of seniors, many of whom are family friends, former teachers, principals, employers of mine and my friends. They want to have options available to them to ensure that they get the most appropriate health care.

And today the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) renewed that commitment to my neighbours, to all of our neighbours, with the announcement that took place today at the PRIME unit at the Deer Lodge Centre, that I had the pleasure of attending with my colleague the member for St. James (Ms. Crothers). Today's announcement committed to three areas of care that matter to my parents, their friends, and so many in Kirkfield Park. First, there is the expansion of the home-Hospital Home Teams initiative, which allows seniors currently on home care, with fragile, unstable health conditions, to stay in their homes while receiving house calls from a co-ordinated team of health professionals, including doctors, nurse practitioners, and other allied health staff, whose services would traditionally be provided in hospitals. The pilot project demonstrated that this model reduced ER visits and hospital admissions by 50 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, that is the kind of solution that my neighbours want to see from their government, one that saves money by reducing ER visits, hospital admissions, and stay times, and also provides more comprehensive responsive care to seniors in their home.

In addition to this expansion of the Hospital Home Teams, this government committed to the introduction of more home-based rehabilitation services to help seniors after events like a stroke, injury or surgery, to improve their independence and well-being. Again, this will involve house calls from physiotherapists, occupational therapists and rehabilitation aides, depending on what is best for their recovery.

These are the investments that make a difference, not only for the quality of life for the

individuals who will be supported by these services, but also for the loved ones who are a part of their care and support network.

Sometimes, Mr. Speaker, even with these supports, staying in one's home is no longer a viable option and more intense care is needed. So, today, in addition to the 174 personal care home beds that are already under development, today's announcement included 200 more personal care home beds to meet growing needs and to better care for those who have done so much for us, our elders and our senior family members.

Mr. Speaker, it matters to my neighbours and to all Manitobans, that choices—what choices are being made by this government and the impact these choices have on their daily lives. So many of my friends have children, and we discuss the differences between our school days and that of our children. We are sending our children to the very schools we attended, and we are all impressed by the progress that has been made, especially in the past dozen years or so, to see the presence of programs like Roots of Empathy and PAX or the move to standardize report cards, parent-friendly curriculum tools and smaller class sizes. My friends and neighbours know that I believe in these investments, not out of any partisan affiliation, but because they are what's best for all of our children. It is about investing in our children so that they will be able to embrace any and all possibilities for education, training, and professional development that the future holds. And, it is certainly better than the prospects children and youth faced in the 1990s, when financial challenges were paid for on the backs of teachers and students. Some, like me, still live daily with the legacy of the new Leader of the Opposition, when he held a seat in government, in the shape of \$620 a month I still pay in student loans, thanks to the tuition hikes that occurred under their watch.

So, when the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Pallister) asked if there's anyone here who is a student of history, I can assure him that there are at least two of us with graduate degrees in history on this side of the House, not to mention some high school history teachers.

We are all familiar with the words of philosopher George Santayana: Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

So, as educators and historians, we know the value of reminding Manitobans of the past actions of

their new leader because I have yet to meet anyone in Kirkfield Park that hearkens back to the 1990s as any kind of golden age of provincial governance. And I would like to spare my friends and neighbours the condemnation such a memory lapse could provide.

Monsieur le Président, je prends la parole avec un air d'espoir parce qu'on a devant nous un discours du trône qui nous donne une vision claire et vraie vers un avenir plein de nouvelles possibilités. Pour mes voisins, ce qui compte le plus sont des meilleures possibilités d'éducation et de formation grâce aux nouvelles écoles primaires et aux nouvelles ressources pour permettre aux élèves du secondaire d'entamer un programme d'apprentissage. Nos enfants sont l'avenir du Manitoba et il faut investir en eux.

Translation

Mr. Speaker, it is with a sense of hope that I speak today as we have before us a Throne Speech that gives us a clear vision, a real vision, toward a future full of new opportunities. For my neighbours, what counts most is better possibilities for education and training thanks to new elementary schools and new resources that will allow secondary students to start apprenticeship programs. Our children are the future of Manitoba, and we must invest in them.

English

Mr. Speaker, investing in health care and education opportunities, all the while keeping our province affordable, are things that my neighbours value. They know the value of Crown corporations as a means of keeping rates reasonable and service standards high. Manitoba Hydro's Pay As You Save program is the first of its kind in Canada and builds on previous Power Smart initiatives, ensuring our commitment to affordability through energy efficiency combined with low energy rates.

We are so committed to ensuring that Manitobans have the lowest rates for combined costs of home heating, electricity and auto insurance, that we enshrined it in law. As was mentioned by some of my other colleagues, it would have been nice to include telephone rates in that bundle. But sadly members opposite balanced their budgets by selling off MTS to their friends, rather than possessing the foresight to protect the interests of all Manitobans in the long term.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that actions speak louder than words and that those actions of the past

cannot be undone, nor drowned out, even when the member from Charleswood has the audacity to shout out in this Chamber that we, as government, should just buy back MTS. To call such a suggestion impractical only begins the possible descriptions. Words like flippant, irresponsible, reckless and incredible are also those that come most immediately to mind.

Unlike those across the way, this government believes in creating an affordable province through long-term investment and one where Manitobans are also protected as consumers. Legislation was introduced just last week to protect families buying new homes, and consumer protection will expand beyond recent cellphone contract legislation to address issues related to vehicle purchases and cable bills. These are the actions that speak to our commitment to Manitobans. These are the things that speak to my commitment to my neighbours.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to again thank my neighbours for returning me to this Chamber to work on their behalf, and I would like to thank you and all of the staff here in the Chamber that make the work we do here flow efficiently. Each of us in this Chamber is privileged to be called to serve our neighbours and all Manitobans. While some in this Chamber may naysay and criticize, there are others that know that our goal here is to ensure that Manitobans retain the quality of life that they have come to expect.

We are fortunate to live in a province rich in green renewable resources, such as hydroelectric and wind power, but, more importantly, we are fortunate to live in a province that is continuing to welcome new Manitobans, provide opportunities and training for all Manitobans to succeed, and to do so in the context of a society with a truly universal health-care system that looks after everyone, from the newly arrived refugee to the centenarian who helped build this province, a system that continues to grow in response to changing needs and circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, we are a fortunate province, and much of that comes from investing and planning through good economic times and now in challenging ones. I promise to my neighbours that those of us on this side of the Chamber will continue to build for the future, and that we will continue to

protect and invest in what matters most to my neighbours, their families and all Manitobans. And, as such, I cannot in good conscience support the amendments put forward by the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Pallister), and I will be supporting the Speech from the Throne for the betterment of our neighbourhood and our province.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, it's my privilege to be able to put a few words on the record in regards to the 2012 Throne Speech. This is a critical area. It's an important part of our role as legislators to be able to have the opportunity for our government to bring forward a Throne Speech and a budget each year. One is the vision; one is the practical implementation of that vision. And the vision is sadly lacking in this particular speech. It sounded to me when I heard it, that it was quite a repetitive process from, at least, last year when we had a Throne Speech that was called on very short notice right after the election. It didn't seem the government was prepared. I thought 13 months later they would have had a better chance to become prepared, and they weren't.

And so I guess we can only hope that they don't do the same thing as they did last year, Mr. Speaker, and that is increase debts—or taxes, fines and fees by \$300 million, as they did this spring. And we—I know our Finance critic has been indicating to the—asking the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) when he will balance the books now that he said he won't balance the books when he said he would earlier. And so it's very telling, I think, of the lack of planning that the government has put forward that they can't figure out that they were the ones that made this promise, and now they're the ones that will break it.

I just want to say welcome to you again, Mr. Speaker, and to the clerks at the tables, our staff in the Legislature, our interns that are working with us, as well as the pages here in the House, for the fine work that they have, and I hope that they get the experience—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Arthur-Virden will have 28 minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, November 26, 2012

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