



Third Session - Thirty-Sixth Legislature

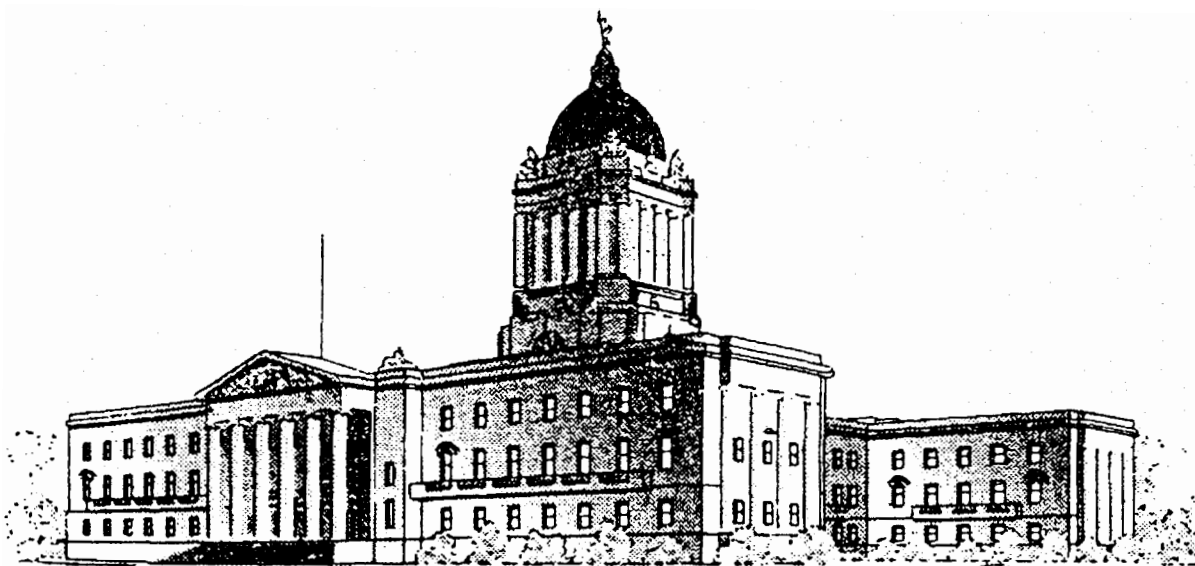
of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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The Honourable Louise M. Dacquay
Speaker*



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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Sixth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ASHTON, Steve	Thompson	N.D.P.
BARRETT, Becky	Wellington	N.D.P.
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CHOMIAK, Dave	Kildonan	N.D.P.
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DACQUAY, Louise, Hon.	Seine River	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard, Hon.	Roblin-Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary	Concordia	N.D.P.
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DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
ENNS, Harry, Hon.	Lakeside	P.C.
ERNST, Jim	Charleswood	P.C.
EVANS, Clif	Interlake	N.D.P.
EVANS, Leonard S.	Brandon East	N.D.P.
FILMON, Gary, Hon.	Tuxedo	P.C.
FINDLAY, Glen, Hon.	Springfield	P.C.
FRIESEN, Jean	Wolseley	N.D.P.
GAUDRY, Neil	St. Boniface	Lib.
GILLESHAMMER, Harold, Hon.	Minnedosa	P.C.
HELWER, Edward	Gimli	P.C.
HICKES, George	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
KOWALSKI, Gary	The Maples	Lib.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LATHLIN, Oscar	The Pas	N.D.P.
LAURENDEAU, Marcel	St. Norbert	P.C.
MACKINTOSH, Gord	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	N.D.P.
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MIHYCHUK, MaryAnn	St. James	N.D.P.
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NEWMAN, David, Hon.	Riel	P.C.
PALLISTER, Brian	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
PENNER, Jack	Emerson	P.C.
PITURA, Frank, Hon.	Morris	P.C.
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RADCLIFFE, Mike, Hon.	River Heights	P.C.
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SANTOS, Conrad	Broadway	N.D.P.
STEFANSON, Eric, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	P.C.
STRUTHERS, Stan	Dauphin	N.D.P.
SVEINSON, Ben	La Verendrye	P.C.
TOEWS, Vic, Hon.	Rossmere	P.C.
TWEED, Mervin	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
VODREY, Rosemary, Hon.	Fort Garry	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, March 17, 1997

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mobile Screening Unit for Mammograms

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): Madam Speaker, I beg to present the petition of Christine Playfoot, Connie Beaudry and Ray Wotton in requesting that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba request the Minister of Health (Mr. Praznik) to consider immediately establishing a mobile screening unit for mammograms to help women across the province detect breast cancer at the earliest possible opportunity.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Mobile Screening Unit for Mammograms

Madam Speaker: I have reviewed the petition of the honourable member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk). It complies with the rules and practices of the House (by leave). Is it the will of the House to have the petition read?

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Madam Speaker: Dispense.

WHEREAS medical authorities have stated that breast cancer in Manitoba has reached almost epidemic proportions; and

WHEREAS yearly mammograms are recommended for women over 50, and perhaps younger if a woman feels she is at risk; and

WHEREAS while improved surgical procedures and better post-operative care do improve a woman's chances if she is diagnosed, early detection plays a vital role; and

WHEREAS Manitoba currently has only three centres where mammograms can be performed, those being Winnipeg, Brandon and Thompson; and

WHEREAS a trip to and from these centres for a mammogram can cost a woman upwards of \$500 which is a prohibitive cost for some women; and

WHEREAS a number of other provinces have dealt with this problem by establishing mobile screening units; and

WHEREAS the provincial government has promised to take action on this serious issue.

WHEREFORE YOUR PETITIONERS HUMBLY PRAY that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba may be pleased to request the Minister of Health (Mr. Praznik) to consider immediately establishing a mobile screening unit for mammograms to help women across the province detect breast cancer at the earliest possible opportunity.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Finance): I am pleased to table the statement as to fidelity bonds on deposit with the Minister of Finance and prepared pursuant to Section 20 of The Public Officers Act.

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to table pursuant to The Regulations Act a copy of each regulation registered with the Registrar of Regulations since the regulations were tabled in this House in April of 1996, and I believe the Clerk has those regulations before him at this time.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have this afternoon sixty-five Grade 11 students from Gimli High School under the direction of Mr. Mohammed Hawash. This school

is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Gimli (Mr. Helwer).

On behalf of all honourable members, I welcome you this afternoon.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Health Care Facilities Funding

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, the hospital operating budgets have decreased by some \$130 million or 14 percent, included in this last budget that was tabled by the Minister of Finance on Friday, over the last five years.

Madam Speaker, last week people were commenting on the bed shortages and the ambulance diversions that were taking place in Winnipeg as a result of this cutback and bed shortage in our communities. In fact, Mr. Stone, an ambulance inspector, stated that situations used to be rarer, now they are commonplace.

Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the Premier (Mr. Filmon) why have his policies and funding led to this practice being commonplace.

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, there is no doubt that over the last number of years, as the requirements for services within health have changed to accommodate new technology, the budgets for hospitals as a percentage of the overall budgets of this department are going to decrease as those for community support tend to grow. The Leader of the Opposition does know that more and more services are provided on a day basis. I think Victoria Hospital now has two-thirds of their surgeries as day surgery and only a third in-house, and so there is certainly a shift in needs. The need for acute care beds in our system has constantly decreased.

The Leader of the Opposition referred to some issues surrounding emergency, and it is certainly our intention as we establish the Winnipeg Hospital Authority to make sure we are best using all of our emergency services to their full extent before we assess whether or not they are adequate for the needs of the citizens of the city of Winnipeg.

Mr. Doer: Madam Speaker, I am sure the families will find cold comfort in the answer from the Minister of Health. It is the same answer we received from the previous minister and the previous minister before him.

Community Clinics Funding

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): How can the government claim that they are putting resources in health care into our communities when in fact the community clinic budget in the Department of Health has been reduced from \$31 million in '95-96 to \$22 million? Is it not true that they have laid off close to 1,800 nurses, and they are also reducing the investment in our communities for preventative health? They are cutting health care at both ends.

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, I am not going to accept those comments at all from the Leader of the Opposition. We will have a chance to get into those numbers in greater detail in the Estimates debate.

As the member for Concordia may be aware, as part of the whole evolution of this process, the development of a new primary care model which includes contracts for physicians, a better mix of physician provider or medical providers including nurses, basically the Assiniboine Clinic model that my predecessor began last year that we are now testing and hoping it will work to expand across the province, means in fact just the opposite, that we will see I think a better mix of services developed or provided at that community level than we have ever had before in the past.

Mr. Doer: Madam Speaker, there is no answer again to the people of Manitoba in terms of the contradictions that continue daily from this government and the priorities they have.

* (1335)

Health Care Facilities Capital Projects

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): Before the election campaign, the Premier (Mr. Filmon) promised capital projects to a number of communities

across the province. There were sod-turning ceremonies; there was great fanfare and announcements, great pre-election campaigns. In fact, some of them were cynically reannounced from the election campaign in 1990. After the election campaign, the government froze those capital projects and now, again, some of these capital projects may or may not go ahead.

I would like to ask the Premier why did he not promise the communities and the people in those communities the capital projects would go ahead with the new funding formula that he had just announced last week. Why did he keep this secret in the election campaign? Why does he have one promise in an election campaign and another reality after he is elected?

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, I listen to the Leader of the Opposition speak about announcements in health care. I remember growing up in Selkirk where our former MLA Howard Pawley promised a new hospital in the 1969 election, in the 1973 election, in the 1977 election, and it was the Conservative Health minister, Bud Sherman, who ended up filling the promise for Howard Pawley and building the hospital. So let us not debate, get into debating cynicism, because there is certainly another side to that story.

There is no doubt that we faced a difficulty in our capital budget in terms of the level of programming and where it would have placed us. We now spend about 10 percent of our facilities budget on servicing capital. We did not feel we could move much beyond that, so we put the freeze in place. We have worked with Treasury Board over the last number of months, both my predecessor, the member for Brandon West (Mr. McCrae), and myself, and we have now seen a significant increase in dollars to that which will see a very significant capital program in the province over the next number of years.

Post-Secondary Education Funding

Ms. MaryAnn Mihychuk (St. James): Madam Speaker, the continuing cuts to post-secondary education grants, especially to Manitoba's universities,

stand in contrast to the minister and this government's rhetoric in support of a strong and modern education system. This year's budget alone to universities cuts \$4 million, which means a further reduction to the University of Manitoba alone of \$8 million.

Will this minister acknowledge that this year's cut will contribute to the deterioration of our education system that Manitoba students will receive?

Hon. Linda McIntosh (Minister of Education and Training): Madam Speaker, the member's figures are not quite correct. The University of Manitoba may have a shortfall, but that is not because of decreased funding in its entirety. The funding, as she indicated, is going down some 3.8 percent. She should understand as well that on a per-pupil basis the operating grants have actually increased by 8 percent and that the University of Manitoba has committed expenditures that have created a shortfall for them. It is not a revenue problem so much as an expenditure problem. I have to indicate that she should also be aware that enrollment over the last three years has decreased by some 12.5 percent.

If my time is up, Madam Speaker, I will continue with the next question.

Ms. Mihychuk: Madam Speaker, to continue on this line of questioning, will the minister acknowledge now that this budgetary cut to universities will actually mean a continuing of the declining enrollment in post-secondary institutions given that tuition fees have more than doubled under this government? What this does is guarantee that fewer students will go to university and post-secondary institutions.

Mrs. McIntosh: Madam Speaker, the member is conveniently neglecting to mention the extra money, the five point million that is going into the University of Manitoba for building upgrades and the \$400,000 into the University of Winnipeg for Wesley Hall, et cetera, et cetera.

However, I can indicate in terms of students that we have in Manitoba the third-lowest tuition rates in Canada, that we have brought in the learning tax credit, that we have increased the amount of money for that learning tax credit which will see students being able to

reclaim at income tax time a sizeable amount of their tuition fee. We have also now brought in \$1 million towards a scholarship fund which universities can match two to one, and that was a direct request from students. We have a number of things like that in place that will offset any potential increases that might occur. I would indicate to the universities, however, that they should make sure that they prioritize their spending and look for increased co-operation with other institutions to address their shortfall because of increased expenditures.

* (1340)

Ms. Mihychuk: Madam Speaker, my final supplementary to the minister: how can the minister support a budget that decreases accessibility and increases tuition fees, a burden for Manitoba students and their families?

Mrs. McIntosh: Madam Speaker, we are actually reducing the burden. We are encouraging accessibility to universities. You can see by the addition of some 40 percent more for the learning tax credit that we have expanded opportunities for students. I would also indicate we have put in place a number of things, such as the ability for the university to now begin to negotiate age-relating policies with their professors' union on campus, that we will then maximize opportunity for many more millions to be realized from the university to help it in its attempts to get its spending under control. I reiterate a very important point, and that is enrollment has gone down by 12.5 percent but the operating grants for standard students have actually increased by 8 percent in addition to all the other incentives they put in for students to attend post-secondary education in Manitoba.

* (1345)

Budget Accounting Practices

Mr. Leonard Evans (Brandon East): Madam Speaker, in 1992-93, we had the largest deficit in the history of our province, but because the government took \$200 million from the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, it reduced the bottom line that year. It reduced the

bottom-line deficit from about three-quarters of a billion dollars to \$566 million.

In 1996-97, the government put \$260 million from the sale of MTS assets into the fund instead of general revenue and therefore showed a surplus of only \$55.7 million. In '97-98, the government has shown a surplus of \$26.8 million because \$100 million was moved into general revenue from the fund. Without that transfer there would have been a deficit of about \$73 million.

My question to the minister and the question put by the people of Manitoba is will this minister now admit that the government is engaged in a big shell game—now you see it, now you don't—instead of straightforward, honest accounting.

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, the short answer to the question is no, I will not admit any such things. Even if you want to accept the approach of the member for Brandon East to compare apples to apples, he should be factoring out the debt repayment then of \$75 million which still generates a surplus and even if he is reading the comments of any of the investment dealers or the economists.

I think what is the most important to Manitobans is that we now have three budgets in a row where we have not added one cent to the debt of Manitoba, and for the first time in 40 years we are starting to pay down that debt in a very sustained way. That is what counts, unlike what happened for eight years under their administration where we ran nothing but deficits each and every year and our debt quadrupled. Unacceptable.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member for Brandon East, with a supplementary question.

Mr. Leonard Evans: I have a supplementary for the minister and, in asking it, remind him the idea of a budget stabilization fund came out of the Socred government in B.C., and they call it the budget stabilization. the B.S. fund. It is a good name for it.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member for Brandon East, to pose his supplementary question.

Mr. Leonard Evans: How can this minister refer to the announced debt repayment as a milestone when the government could have used \$56-million surplus in 1988-89 available from the previous NDP administration and paid down the debt at that time but instead chose to reduce revenues arbitrarily by \$200 million and put them into the so-called Fiscal Stabilization Fund? You had a chance and you did not do it, 56—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, try as the member for Brandon East might to sort of revise history, I think Manitobans know very well how well the Fiscal Stabilization Fund has served us and will serve us. It is something to be proud of today. It gives us the opportunity to deal with the pressures from significant reductions in funding from Ottawa, pressures that might come forward in terms of any of our spending requirements.

I encourage the member for Brandon East, along with his Leader, along with all members opposite, to read the kinds of responses that are coming from the community at large, from the people in the financial communities.

I will cite him one example. One of the investment dealers: A winner in Winnipeg, Red River turns to black ink, flood of surpluses in store—unlike the 1980s under the NDP with nothing but deficits and debt.

We are fortunate that we can finally stand up in this House and talk about surpluses and talk about paying down the debt in Manitoba, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Leonard Evans: How can the Minister of Finance indicate once again in this budget document that we had a true surplus in 1995-96 when he used lottery revenues accumulated over several years, then transferred them into a lump sum into that year, contrary to good accounting practices, and which caused the Dominion Bond Rating Service to say that

those revenues should have been spread over years and 1995-96 should have showed a deficit if they were honest with the people of Manitoba?

Mr. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, try as they might, Manitobans know the real story. They know that for three consecutive budgets there have been no additions to the debt in Manitoba. For the first time in many years, we are going to be paying down that debt in Manitoba, starting this year in a very sustained way, unlike the kinds of government that we had in the 1980s under this administration. So try as they might to sort of revise history, I stand before them today and say how proud we are to be able to talk about surpluses, something we never had the opportunity in their days in government and never would have had the opportunity had they stayed in government.

Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Strategy

Mr. Gord Mackintosh (St. Johns): My question is to the Minister of Justice. The government is so insensitive to safety concerns that neither the throne speech nor the budget so much as even mentioned the two most threatening developments in this province, and those are gangs and motor vehicle theft. We have now obtained the latest statistics on motor vehicle thefts, and just when we thought the rate could not get any higher, it jumped 6 percent last year, Madam Speaker. That is over 8,300 victims, one year alone in one city; 246 percent increase, four years.

My question to the minister is why will the government not recognize that we suffer the worst motor vehicle theft rate in all of Canada, likely North America, and will they just do something about it?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): The rate of motor vehicle theft in Manitoba is a great concern to us, and we certainly do want to work with the police forces to stem that problem. I noted with interest that this is not simply a problem related to Manitoba but, indeed, Saskatchewan now is experiencing a similar problem, as is British Columbia, which my understanding now has the highest rate of motor vehicle thefts. [interjection] That is not something to be proud of, who is the first. The fact is we do have to take steps to work together with our police to bring that down.

* (1350)

Mr. Mackintosh: Will the minister, who knows darn well that Manitoba has the highest incidence of motor vehicle theft, explain to Manitobans, if the government is indeed so concerned, whatever happened to their big election promises on auto theft? I count six of them that have disappeared, Madam Speaker. Is that how much they care?

Mr. Toews: Madam Speaker, we care about that problem, and as I indicate, we want to work on that issue, we are working on that issue.

Autopac Deductible

Mr. Gord Mackintosh (St. Johns): Would the minister then explain why it is this government's most recent response to this worsening epidemic of auto theft to blame the victims, to put a tax on these victims of auto theft with a \$500 deductible? Is that what they meant in their throne speech by their promise of new programs for victims?

Hon. James McCrae (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Act): Madam Speaker, using the honourable member's own figures, one has to conclude that there is an alarming rate of car thefts going on in this province. What the honourable member needs to understand is that almost half of the vehicles stolen in Manitoba are vehicles that are left either unattended while running and have the keys in them, or the doors unlocked, and these are all reasons why the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation has engaged in a public-education, public-information campaign to try to address this very problem in our society.

Betaseron Approval

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): My question is for the Minister of Health. Madam Speaker, MS is a devastating, crippling disease that affects many Manitobans. As they try to have reason to have hope as new drugs are found that could address some of the pain that is endured, there is a new drug that is on the market known as Betaseron, which is a drug which the provinces of B.C., Ontario and Quebec have accepted.

My question to the Minister of Health: is the Department of Health and this government prepared to accept this as a drug to allow Manitobans that have this crippling disease some comfort?

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, the member for Inkster raises a very important issue for people who suffer from this particular illness. I know at the current time the Ministry of Health is assessing the medical value of this particular drug. It comes at great expense, as the member can appreciate, and the question that one has to consider is does it produce a result that contributes to the health of those patients. The information that I have been provided to date is one of very, very mixed reviews or very limited result. I am certainly considering at this time the information that is coming to me, and I do not have today a definitive answer for the member for Inkster.

* (1355)

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, will the Minister of Health at least make a commitment to do what Mike Harris in Ontario has done, gone by a case by case? For example, I spoke to an individual today that had a doctor recommend the use of this drug but does not have the finances because of the cost.

Will the Minister of Health make the commitment at the very least that his department will go case by case like Mike Harris in Ontario?

Mr. Praznik: Madam Speaker, that is certainly one of the options before me at this current time. That recommendation is included. In fact, in asking staff to canvass what other provinces are doing, I understand some of the provinces that he has mentioned that have approved it have not approved it in an entire way but only on a very, very limited basis, because again the matter at hand is whether or not it makes a significant or even a contribution to the quality of life or health improvement of the individuals who take it.

I would be more than pleased to share a greater discussion in detail with the member for Inkster. This is not a simple matter; it is a very complicated one.

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, can the Minister of Health provide some sort of a concrete, tangible time

frame of when we can anticipate that there will be an answer from this government, because we have so many individuals that would like to know in terms of whether or not they are going to be able to use this drug?

Mr. Praznik: Madam Speaker, I think if this particular drug was a cure for the illness or provided a very significant improvement of the quality of life, the answer would be a very simple one to give, but the debate of those who study this—and I think both he and I, the member for Inkster and myself, are not experts in this field; we only act on the information provided to us by those who are experts. The information that I am being provided is that this drug, in fact, has very, very limited effect on the health of the people who receive it. It is an area in which I have asked for more information from my staff, and I would be prepared to enter into a discussion with him in order to share the information I have with him.

Provincial Parks Entrance Fees

Mr. Stan Struthers (Dauphin): Madam Speaker, when this government announced drastic increases to park fees last year, it promised that the money would go towards, and I quote from the government news release, costs of developing, operating and maintaining our parks campgrounds and the various services provided in each campground.

My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. In Friday's budget we learned that of the \$1.6 million raised in fees, of that money, only \$300,000 would go back to parks. That is a \$1.3-million tax grab by this government.

Why is this government taking the \$1.3 million and using it as a tax grab when it promised to put it back into the parks?

Hon. Glen Cummings (Minister of Natural Resources): Madam Speaker, not only are we making sure that we are returning monies to our parks to improve them and provide quality of service, but we want to make sure that, in all aspects of service that we provide in the area of natural resources and the assets

that we are responsible for, we provide adequate funding, and that is what we are doing.

Mr. Struthers: Madam Speaker, why is this government charging seniors a park entry fee and not rolling that money back into the parks?

Mr. Cummings: Madam Speaker, the member conveniently ignores the fact that the Natural Resources budget for the forthcoming year is up \$1.5 million.

Mr. Struthers: Why not use this recreation tax then, this \$1.3 million, to improve parks and make them affordable for average Manitobans instead of using this as yet another Tory tax grab?

Mr. Cummings: Madam Speaker, does the member for Dauphin suggest that we should be using revenues that we want to put into health care, that we want to put into education, to make sure that those dollars are going where they are needed? He conveniently forgets that Manitoba's great parks rates are very much in line with the rest of the country, that our rates are such that our parks are very accessible. When the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) chirps from his seat that we like to put people on waiting lists in health care, maybe he should look at where the money is going in this budget.

* (1400)

Urban Aboriginal Strategy Status Report

Mr. Oscar Lathlin (The Pas): Madam Speaker, my questions are directed to the Premier (Mr. Filmon).

In 1989, this government first promised an urban aboriginal strategy. I was around then; I was chief of my reserve, and I had heard about the strategy. Following a conference in May of '89, that promise unfortunately evaporated just like those promises that were made on the AJI, the Northern Economic Development Commission, the Postl report and now the Royal Commission on aboriginal affairs.

I would like to ask the Premier just what is the current strategy of that particular urban aboriginal

strategy. If you have abandoned the strategy, why do you not just say so?

Hon. David Newman (Minister responsible for Native Affairs): Madam Speaker, since an urban strategy workshop in June of 1989, there have been a number of projects which have been introduced. In the field of education, there was a preschool program supported by the Manitoba government and the Winnipeg School Division. There was a Children of the Earth High School, Winnipeg School Division. In economic development, there was the Aboriginal Centre of Winnipeg, the development of that CPR building on Higgins. Social development: Ke-Ki-Nan Centre, the housing for aboriginal seniors, funding sources both federal and provincial; and Ni Tin Away, the Native Women's Transition Centre, two other examples; in health, consultation and study to determine the viability of the Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre, which has come into being just recently and was mentioned in the budget, involving \$1.3 million of provincial funding.

Those are some examples, and emerging again and again are more to be announced shortly.

Aboriginal Programs Funding

Mr. Oscar Lathlin (The Pas): Madam Speaker, my second question to the Premier is since the throne speech for the first time has acknowledged that much damage has been inflicted on aboriginal people, their families and children by government policy, is this government now willing then to restore funding to what I call people development programs like the friendship centres and the New Careers and the Access programs and the children's dental program?

Hon. David Newman (Minister responsible for Native Affairs): Madam Speaker, the Partners for Careers program, which has just been announced in the budget again involving \$1.4 million over the next three years, is the kind of thing which is going to set an example. These are the mentors that show and give hope to the young people coming along.

Other programs which are working at a more basic level are included in the \$300,000 nutrition program

and the \$500,000 program which is directed at children in the urban area, the basic needs in the urban area of this city of Winnipeg. A large number of those are aboriginal children who are going to benefit from that.

Mr. Lathlin: My final question to the Premier (Mr. Filmon) is I would like to ask him why his government so far has refused to make any commitments to work with the aboriginal people of this province and their organizations to develop First Nations communities as a vital part of the Manitoba economy, much like what industry has done already or is trying to do.

Mr. Newman: Madam Speaker, I am glad that question has been put, because there has not been enough public attention directed at this through the media. This is an opportunity to indicate that in our multicultural society of Manitoba, with the wonderful framework and environment created by the budget and the heritage of no tax increases, this being an attractive place to do business, the aboriginal people of this province are going to be beneficiaries just like everyone else and, I would submit, even to a greater extent because they are now gaining an interest through their leadership and a knowledge and understanding through training, which has been given by this government, which is going to allow them to access things that they have not been involved in traditionally, like mining, like oil development, like elk ranching. There is a whole variety of new areas, like agriculture.

As the treaty land entitlements come to a conclusion and the Northern Flood Agreements are implemented, I would suggest that the aboriginal people in this province are going to be positioned like never before to become part of the emerging developing strong economy of Manitoba and benefit from that.

Video Lottery Terminals Computer Programming

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, on Thursday I took a question as notice from the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Doer) regarding some of the features of gaming machines in Manitoba. I want to put some facts on the record. First of all, there are no deceptive features in any of the slot machines or video lottery terminals operated by the Manitoba Lotteries Corporation.

An Honourable Member: Wrong again.

Mr. Stefanson: I would think the members want to hear this. The near-miss feature which was highlighted on ABC prime time news was a game feature that was manufactured in the late 1980s for a period of 18 months. This feature was not manufactured by IGT, the supplier of Manitoba's VLTs. This feature is not manufactured in any gaming jurisdiction in North America and was never available in Manitoba. ABC PrimeTime Live was erroneous in its allegation that IGT manufactured this game feature. All slot machines and VLTs in Manitoba are tested by an independent gaming laboratory, Gaming Laboratories International, to ensure the integrity of play prior to being placed in the marketplace.

In summary, Madam Speaker, I can assure the honourable Leader of the Opposition and all members of this House that all slot machines and VLTs in Manitoba are tested by an independent gaming laboratory and do not have any deceptive features.

Workers Compensation Fehr Decision

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): Madam Speaker, Mr. Bernard Fehr, a WCB claimant awaiting spinal fusion, had his wage loss benefits cut off by the Workers Compensation Board in June of '92. Mr. Fehr appealed based on support by his orthopedic surgeon, Dr. Birt, who opposed the WCB doctors. A medical review panel comprised of two private-practice orthopedic specialists, one chosen by the employer, one by the claimant, and a general practitioner acting as a chairperson ruled unanimously in Mr. Fehr's favour that the effects of the compensable accident continued and he was unable to work.

My question for the Minister of Labour is can the minister who is responsible for the WCB explain now, since he would not when I wrote to him some months back, why the WCB refused for three years to honour the unanimous decision of the medical review panel and appears instead to be doctor shopping for another opinion opposing the claimant?

Hon. Harold Gilleshammer (Minister of Labour): My honourable friend knows that I cannot discuss

individual cases in the House. I would assure you that there is a process in place for cases to be reviewed. This case has been before the Workers Compensation Board, and there are still some issues surrounding it that have not been finalized. I will assure you that this individual will get fair treatment.

Mr. Reid: Since the unanimous decision of the MRP has never before been overruled and if the WCB is not now doctor shopping, why has Mr. Robert MacNeil of the WCB Appeal Commission struck a new medical review panel with different doctors instead of referring to any outstanding issues that the minister just talked about to the original MRP which was comprised also of orthopedic surgeons? Why not go back to the original instead of doctor shopping for a new panel?

Mr. Gilleshammer: Many of the cases that come before the Workers Compensation Board are very complex. I have already assured the member that the cases before them are in process and that I will ensure that all people who apply for compensation through the board do get fair treatment.

* (1410)

Mr. Reid: If the minister believes in fair treatment for Mr. Fehr and others, if the second medical review panel finds against the original decision, which was unanimous in Mr. Fehr's favour, will the minister order a third medical review panel to oversee the differences in medical opinions between those two panels? Is that the policy of your government, to have another medical review panel?

Mr. Gilleshammer: My honourable friend, who sometimes poses as the deputy House leader on the opposite side, knows that hypothetical questions are not allowed in this Assembly. I have already indicated that there are complex cases before the Workers Compensation Board and that I will assure him that this individual will get fair treatment.

Point of Order

Mr. Steve Ashton (Opposition House Leader): On a point of order, Madam Speaker, indeed it is not in order to ask hypothetical questions, but the member for Transcona (Mr. Reid) asked a very specific question

about the policies of this government. It is very clear to anyone looking that workers are not getting a fair break in Manitoba under Workers Compensation.

I would like to ask the minister responsible for Labour to answer a very serious question, asked on behalf of someone who has clearly been shafted by Workers Compensation.

Madam Speaker: The honourable government House leader, on the same point of order.

Hon. James McCrae (Government House Leader): On the same point of order, the opposition House leader has acknowledged the impropriety of asking hypothetical questions and wants to bring into his point of order some further political points to be made.

The point is that the honourable Minister of Labour has responded that there are processes and appropriate processes. His job, as he has pointed out, is to ensure those processes work properly, not to interfere politically, as New Democrats would suggest.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) did not have a point of order. Even though the minister attempted to portray that it was a hypothetical question, he did respond to the question asked.

Reh-Fit Centre Postcardiac Program

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Radisson, with a very quick question.

Ms. Marianne Cerilli (Radisson): The Speech from the Throne said that more services such as cardiac surgery rehabilitation will be provided closer to home. This is only the case if your home is in Charleswood or River Heights because I have information, including a letter from the former Minister of Health, confirming that postcardiac surgery rehab is being transferred out of St. Boniface Hospital to the Reh-Fit Centre.

I would like to ask the Minister of Health will the Department of Health continue to fund this pilot project at the Reh-Fit Centre, or will the postcardiac patients now have to pay for the program which includes

physio, supervised exercise, nutrition and lifestyle counselling?

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, I find it somewhat ironical that the member would try to leave on the record that there is some great problem, because one service that is now being offered in one facility, in the city of Winnipeg and St. Boniface, may be offered at another. I would suggest, given what rural members—there are constituents that have to travel to find facilities. A few minutes more of travelling time into Winnipeg is not exactly a great difficulty. As to the detail that the member asks, I will take that as notice and get the detail for her.

Madam Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

NONPOLITICAL STATEMENTS

High School Curling Championship

Mr. Edward Helwer (Gimli): I wonder if I may have time for a nonpolitical statement.

Madam Speaker: Does the honourable member for Gimli have leave for a nonpolitical statement? [agreed]

Mr. Helwer: On February 28, March 1 and 2, the Manitoba high school curling championships were held at the Gimli recreation centre. I would like all honourable members in the House today to join me in congratulating the girls team from Gimli that won the event, which is the provincial high school curling. The team members include Corrine Suchy, Amber Narfason, Wendy Lewick, Kathy Semenchuk and coach, Donna Suchy. The bonspiel chairman, Lyle Eyolfson, and draw master, Peter Froese, did an immaculate job in keeping the annual championship running without a hitch. As well, volunteer Leona Groot should also be commended for making the championship a first-class event.

Female entries came from the Garden Valley high school in Winkler, the Pierre Trudeau school in St. Boniface, Vincent Massey in Fort Garry, Crocus Plains in Brandon, William Morton in Gladstone, from Deloraine, Stonewall, Joseph Kerr school in Snow

Lake, the Lord Selkirk, Thomas Greenway and Crystal City, Strathclair, Swan Valley, Churchill, and also Gimli, and Oak Park in Charleswood, and the Edward Schreyer school in Beausejour. This annual event is a great opportunity for young people, who both enjoy and excel at the sport of curling, to meet one another and to partake in friendly competition.

As well, Gimli is an ideal location for such a competition as it hosts many sporting events. A number of rinks and facilities are located in the area. As a result of Gimli's excellent facilities and hospitality as an events co-ordinator, in 1998 the town will also be hosting the Manitoba Winter Games; also in June 1997, the Manitoba Society of Seniors Games.

Madam Speaker, I would again like to congratulate the Gimli high school girls and their coach for their hard work during the season, and for their victory on March 2. I would also like to commend all volunteers and, notably, bonspiel chairperson, Lyle Eyolfson, for their organization and dedication to this event.

Provincial AA Hockey Championship

Hon. Leonard Derkach (Minister of Rural Development): Madam Speaker, do I have leave for a nonpolitical statement?

Madam Speaker: Does the honourable Minister of Rural Development have leave for a nonpolitical statement? [agreed]

Mr. Derkach: Madam Speaker, I rise today to extend my congratulations, along with those of my constituents, to the Russell Major Pratt Trojans high school hockey team for winning the provincial AA championships in Morden this past weekend. I have watched this group of young Manitobans play since they were about five years old. They have demonstrated time and time again how team work and ability can earn tremendous rewards.

I must commend all those who took part in this exciting tournament for playing to the best of their abilities. I also tip my hat, Madam Speaker, to all of the coaches, the managers and the parents who also put much of their time and energy in ensuring that our

youth are able to enjoy a healthy, competitive sport in our rural communities.

I would like to take this moment to also congratulate, along with my colleagues the member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck) and the member for Morris (Mr. Pitura), the Carman and Morden high schools hockey teams for winning the silver and bronze medals respectively.

Madam Speaker, as the MLA for the Roblin-Russell constituency and as a parent of two of the boys on this hockey team, I would like to congratulate each and every one of the team members, their coaches, their managers and all the parents who enjoyed this weekend for a tremendous victory. Thank you very much.

* (1420)

St. Patrick's Day

Hon. James McCrae (Minister of Environment): Madam Speaker, I wonder if I could have leave to make a brief nonpolitical statement?

Madam Speaker: Does the honourable Minister of Environment have leave to make a nonpolitical statement? [agreed]

Mr. McCrae: Regardless of one's origin, today seems to be a day on which all of us like to claim a little bit of Irish origin, and I certainly do so with pride today. I see there may be some exceptions, but most people have that feeling today that we should be celebrating whatever Irishness there is in our society.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Roger Brown and the staff at the Department of Government Services for providing us all with the shamrocks that we have on our desks today. I would like to give a little advice. If you take a whole lot of commitment and a whole lot of hard work and a whole lot of dedication to the things that we do, Madam Speaker, these shamrocks can help bring us a little bit of luck as well.

I had occasion, along with Mrs. McCrae, to attend an Irish association celebration on Saturday night in the Westman area. I know that there are other Irish organizations in the province of Manitoba, and it is a good time for us all just to ponder about the

contribution that Canadians of Irish extraction have made throughout the history of our country, so I think all honourable members would like to join in that sentiment.

Mr. Leonard Evans (Brandon East): Madam Speaker, if I may have leave to make a nonpolitical statement.

Madam Speaker: Does the honourable member for Brandon East have leave to make a nonpolitical statement? [agreed]

Mr. Leonard Evans: I am very delighted to join with my colleague the member for Brandon West in congratulating all the Irish people today in celebration of St. Patrick's Day, which is a great event in the lives of many people of Irish descent.

My mom and dad came from north Wales. In fact, they spoke Welsh. This was at the turn of the century. They told me that St. Patrick was originally a Welshman who went over to Ireland and converted the Irish to Christianity. So there is some affinity between the Welsh and the Irish that will never be parted.

So congratulations to the Irish.

Committee Changes

Mr. George Hickes (Point Douglas): I move, seconded by the member for Transcona (Mr. Reid), that the composition of the Standing Committee on Public Utilities and Natural Resources be amended as follows: St. James (Ms. Mihychuk) for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) for Tuesday at 10 a.m., March 18, 1997.

I move, seconded by the member for Transcona (Mr. Reid), that the composition of the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections be amended as follows: Burrows (Mr. Martindale) for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak); Wellington (Ms. Barrett) for St. Johns (Mr. Mackintosh); Osborne (Ms. McGifford) for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen). Thank you.

Motions agreed to.

Mr. Edward Helwer (Gimli): I move, seconded by the member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Tweed), that the

composition of the Standing Committee on Public Utilities and Natural Resources for the Tuesday 10 a.m. sitting be amended as follows: the member for Riel (Mr. Newman) for the member for Springfield (Mr. Findlay); the member for Sturgeon Creek (Mr. McAlpine) for the member for Morris (Mr. Pitura); the member for St. Vital (Mrs. Render) for the member for Kirkfield Park (Mr. Stefanson) and the member for Gladstone (Mr. Rocan) for the member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Tweed).

Motion agreed to.

House Business

Hon. James McCrae (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, on a matter of House business, I am announcing today that on Thursday, March 20, at ten o'clock in the forenoon, the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections will meet to consider the review of the Office of the Children's Advocate.

Madam Speaker: To repeat, the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections will meet Thursday, March 20, at 10 a.m., in Room 255 to consider the Children's Advocate.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET DEBATE (Second Day of Debate)

Madam Speaker: Adjourned debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) that this House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government, standing in the name of the Leader of the official opposition.

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, there are two terms that come to mind when reviewing the budget of 1997-1998. One of them is "heartless," and the other word that comes to mind all the way through the budget is "cynical." Both terms, unfortunately, describe the essence of the facts in the budget.

Let us look at "heartless" for one moment. The Tories have announced virtually the crumbs off the Tory banquet table for our children at a time that they

cut programs to kids in successive budgets. The assessment programs, audiology programs and speech therapy programs that have been cut and the line-ups for rural and urban children have been growing longer and longer. The Children's Dental Program has been cut by \$11 million by this government; daycare last year and child care has been cut by some \$4 million. Of course, the Tories do it in a cynical way. It is heartless and cynical together, because on the one hand they raise the costs for families in single-parent families to have their children in daycare, and then, later on, when the enrollment goes down because people cannot afford it anymore, they chop the money out of the daycare budget.

We have more single mothers in the country living in poverty than any other province. Our income support programs were cut by 10 percent, and the largest cut was for babies under one year of age, all under the guise of standardization. This is the standardization we see from the Tory party. We have had a youth strategy but foster parent fees have been decreased. Madam Speaker, \$10 million was promised in the election campaign by the Premier (Mr. Filmon), the so-called Filmon team of cynics across the way, and in a heartless way we see the money being cut year after year after year. What do we see in this budget with great fanfare? A \$500,000 amount of money to go to the interdepartmental committees of the Youth Secretariat program.

Madam Speaker, this is truly a heartless set of initiatives, because on the one hand the government cut successively over the last number of years and builds people up this year to expect some programs, and it does not even meet the basic fulfilments of the Premier's word two years ago in the last election program. It is just a little toss away in a provincial budget to say: oh, look at us, look at how nice we are, we are doing a U-turn to provide ourselves a heart. But really it is nothing of substance.

(Mr. Marcel Laurendeau, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, aboriginal people feel the same way, and they have already commented on this budget. After again building them up and expecting to have some real substantial investments in the future of First

Nations and aboriginal people in our province, we see a modest amount of money coming out of a budget line in community health that is no higher than the year before. The community clinic line in the Department of Health is some 35 percent reduced from two years ago. We still do not know how the so-called Aboriginal Wellness Centre will operate except it will be a three-year budget item with no extra funds.

What program are they going to cut? Are they going to cut Klinik? Are they going to cut a program in Winkler? Are they going to cut a program in the inner city to pay for this new budget announcement? Again, aboriginal people expected a lot more after hearing the great words of the Premier (Mr. Filmon) before the Speech from the Throne. Their budget again is real proof that there is absolutely no heart and no commitment to the people of this province.

* (1430)

We have seen the Northern Youth Corps cut. We have seen the Jobs Corps cut. We have seen the New Careers program eliminated. We have seen friendship programs cut. We have seen the reduction in grants to the MKO organizations. We have seen the reduction in grants to the Manitoba Metis Federation. We have seen cuts to the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs. We have seen an AJI report that has been manipulated politically by this government, going great fanfare, the Deputy Premier (Mr. Downey) saying, oh, we do not want another report to gather dust, but year after year that is all it does, is gather dust. Fine words, but no action from this government. Of course, there is no initiative to implement the many recommendations of infrastructure to deal with sewer and water and other needed programs in First Nations communities as recommended by the Royal Commission.

This is a heartless and cynical government. At the same time, the kids get crumbs off the table from this government, businesses get tax breaks from this Tory government across the way. The only people smiling on Friday afternoon were those of the business community. They were all doing the hallelujah chorus: more tax breaks, more business subsidy programs. At the same time programs for people were being cut and cut.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, ambulance drivers were going from hospital to hospital the night before as the ink was drying on this budget, saying that something desperate will happen if something does not take place in terms of action from the government. The government again cynically promises to deal with this issue in their budget documents tabled by the Tory royal family over there, by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson), they in their documents who say: we will ensure there is co-ordination between our hospitals.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the night before that is the real co-ordination we see, where ambulance drivers are saying, it used to be an occasional occurrence, now it is happening on too regular a basis. People were backed up in hospitals three or four deep, and this government has the gall to talk about health care spending and health care co-ordination.

Business subsidies up 35 percent and hospital operating budgets down. Business subsidies up 35 percent and funding for public education in most school divisions down. Property taxes up; business taxes down. That is the real face of the Filmon team, and that is why people are not going to buy you anymore.

The government talked about this budget being a milestone. That was the word that was used continually by the members opposite and by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson). It was a milestone; indeed, it was a milestone. It was a milestone for the cynicism of deceit in the numbers that we have seen in a budget. I have never seen more deceit and dishonesty in numbers I have seen presented to this Legislature than any other budget over the last nine years that I have been in this Chamber.

Of course, the member for Brandon East (Mr. Leonard Evans) talks about the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, a fund which I thought was not a bad idea, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to look at the commodity market swings, but this is not a Fiscal Stabilization Fund that is used to deal with the commodity prices; this is a rainy day fund only for the rainy days of the Conservative Party and the election fortunes of the Premier (Mr. Filmon). It is now a definite slush fund. I find that abhorrent and absolutely immoral, and I believe most Manitobans do, as well.

Let me just look at some of the statements made by the Minister of Finance: Most jobs in this budget are full-time from a year ago. Now, the definition of most to me is 50 percent plus one. They are not. Most of the jobs in this budget are part-time. In fact, when you look at 1988 and 1989—and I was just looking at some numbers the other day—there is no growth in full-time jobs.

This government has the gall to stand up on other facts and figures like housing starts. Oh, we are 50 percent up from last year; this is wonderful. Now last year we had a 50-year low in housing starts. You would think a government that was trying to be honest would keep quiet about it, but not this bunch opposite. They are so desperate for some good-news numbers that they talk about a 50 percent increase over a 50-year low.

I do not have to look at books to recall that when we were in office—I was Minister of Urban Affairs—there were 7,000 or 8,000 new housing starts a year. What is it this year? Is it going to climb over 2,000? Is it going to climb over 25 percent of the performance of the New Democratic Party? Is it? The Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) knows these numbers are being used in a deceptive way. He uses 1988 back and forth. Why does he not stand up here and give us the 1988 numbers on housing starts? Why does he not do that if he is going to be honest? He cannot do it.

He will just pick and choose a number to make it look like he is doing great. He will just pick this number on housing starts and that number over there. You know, there is an old saying, and the Minister of Finance knows this, but a high percentage increase of zero is still not very much, and that is what we see with the minister opposite and his cynical use of statistics every time.

Let us look at another number: Our revenues are up because corporate income tax is increasing because of the growth in the province. That is what the minister says. Well, let us look at the corporate income tax in 1988. It was over \$200 million. Corporate income tax was over \$200 million. What is it now?

An Honourable Member: They all left.

Mr. Doer: Yes, they all left under the Conservatives. That is absolutely right.

An Honourable Member: Give us another line, Vic.

Mr. Doer: Nobody has listened to the former Minister of Labour since he threatened workers with seven days longer in strike and then denied it.

So here we are again, corporate income tax. The real revenues that have gone up—there are revenues that have gone up in this budget, and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) is correct to say so, but the real growth in revenues over the last six or seven years has been in personal income tax revenues. And where have those personal income tax revenues gone up? It has been in a thing called bracket creep, something that changed what, 1989 or 1990, where people move into brackets at a rapid—hopefully, at a rapid—basis because their salaries are going up, but the massive increase, some 38 percent increase in revenues since 1988, has been in personal income tax.

But you would not want to say that, would you? Because that would be telling the truth to Manitobans that there is more personal income tax revenue. So you have to selectively state that the tax growth is coming from personal income tax, but you fail to mention that corporate income tax is down since 1988.

When you look at some of the financial indicators in the budget, land transfer taxes, corporate income taxes, a number of other factors, the number of full-time jobs, you will actually find that there is not a lot of growth going on. It has been a better year this year than last and slightly better last year than the year before, but if you look at it from 1988 to now, you are going to find that most of the financial indicators have indicated that we are on a virtual Tory treadmill, going nowhere in terms of economic growth.

Let us look at the manufacturing numbers. Now, I actually thought that manufacturing numbers would be going up because I have talked to a lot of business people and a lot of workers at plants where they are expanding. There has been some expansion in some places in the last while, but there have been a lot of plant closures in the last while. Well, when I talk to people, they tell me that the reason why they are

expanding is because the dollar is at 73 cents or 74 cents. Now how do you explain when the NDP left office in 1988 there were 2,000 more manufacturing jobs at an 89-cent dollar compared to now?

One would think, if the economy was growing and manufacturing was growing, we would find a significant growth in manufacturing, as I would hope, as all members would hope, because these are our friends, these are our neighbours, these are our constituents. We want these jobs to grow. Again, we do not see this. You never hear mention that we should be doing much, much better in the manufacturing sector. With a 73-cent dollar, we should be over a hundred thousand manufacturing jobs. There is no reason why this province should not do much, much better, at least 50 percent better, with the dollar that is way, way better for competitive purposes for exports.

You will not see that in the kind of cynical deceit of the government on dealing with the provincial budget. Let us look at debt costs in terms of deceit. The member for Brandon raised some of these issues today. If you are concerned about paying down money on the debt, there was a surplus in 1988-89. We would argue it was because of us, and legitimately so. Members opposite take a different and a contrary position, but the bottom line was, as one of the commentators said to Clayton Manness, why did you buy a pair of new shoes? You just xeroxed the old budget from the NDP, and you did. There were a couple of variations, and partly the budget surplus was a continuation of a reduced debt as the economy improved, growth in the economy. Partly it was due to mining commodity prices, their mining tax revenues, and equalization grants because of the adjustment in the population numbers.

* (1440)

If the government thinks this is a huge deal to pay down the debt, why did they not do it in 1988 and 1989? Why did they claw the money back? This is almost bizarre, in a way, where they clawed the money back in '88-89, only to pay down the debt in 1997-98. How did you pay down the debt? You did not even do it with operating revenue. There was operating revenue available to you in 1988-89. You had to sell the stove at a garage sale to pay down the operating debt in 1997-

98. Now there is nothing wrong with selling stuff you do not need at a garage sale, but it does not make any sense at all to sell a good stove at a garage sale if you are going to have to buy one next week, when, in fact, all you are doing is prepaying a payment on your mortgage. It does not make any sense at all. You could not even pay down the debt with operating revenue which was available to you in 1988-89.

The Minister of Education (Mrs. McIntosh) and members opposite like to talk about the high debt costs. Well, I was looking through the budgets. Let me just look through the budgets. When did the high debt costs peak? First of all, there is another reality, obviously. The debt costs are much higher at 15 percent or 16 percent in interest rates compared to 4 percent or 5 percent in interest rates. I would have thought that all the way through the 1990s your interest rate and debt cost payments would be radically down. [interjection]

Well, the Premier (Mr. Filmon) may want to know this, but the highest public debt costs were six years after he was sworn in as Premier in 1994-95 at \$597 million a year. The Premier is the king of high debt costs, and he tries to create a deceitful scenario to correct this.

Now, of course, this is the fiscal year where Harold Neufeld resigned when he said that the Filmon government, or the Filmon team, was running the highest deficit in the history of the province at 862, and, of course, that eventually showed up in the high debt costs. We do not need any lectures from members opposite about debt costs. If they want to lecture anybody, walk in front of a mirror, look in the mirror and start lecturing yourselves, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now, the other—[interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member for Concordia has the floor at this time. I would ask the honourable members who are trying to chat across the way to do so in the loge or out in the halls.

The honourable member, to continue.

Mr. Doer: I am glad to see the members get quite animated when they hear the truth, and I would be

disappointed if they did not. [interjection] Well, the Minister of Telephones, the former Minister of Telephones—are you still the Minister of Telephones? Well, the Premier (Mr. Filmon) is the Minister of Telephones. We have never held it against you, the member for Springfield (Mr. Findlay). We know where the broken promise came from. It came from the brokers' man of the year, the Tuxedo Tory, the Tuxedo tyrant. Jaguar sales are up and the Filmon team is happy.

The other issue is dealing with taxes, and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let us deal with a couple of factors with taxes. Number one, I have the Premier's briefing note from the 1993-94 budget, and it says that the tax increases in this budget would be equivalent to a 5.7 percent increase in the income tax in Manitoba or equivalent to a sales tax increase going from 7 to 8.4 percent. So this is not a tax increase. When you decrease the property tax credits, this is a spending decrease, not a tax increase, according to Tory mathematics. Seniors get clobbered, and, of course, that is not a, quote, tax increase.

Sales tax spread: I have been informed that the sales tax now in Manitoba which is lower than most other provinces has a much larger net or spread than any other sales tax in Canada. Taxing babies' clothing and other regressive measures, in our opinion, is a tax rate increase. Education taxes, a 65 percent increase in the property taxes for education taxpayers in Manitoba. That is a tax increase. We have other measures that have increased with the bracket creep that I have already mentioned.

Victims: This government has now waved a white flag for the victims of auto theft. The Premier (Mr. Filmon) talks a tough game in the election campaign, but he is waving a white flag to the crooks, saying I surrender by having the deductible paid for by people who are victims. Why do you not stand up for the victims instead of putting this tax on the victims here in the province of Manitoba?

Natural resources: Did you hear the fumbling and bumbling going on trying to answer the question about Natural Resources fee increases? You know, these provincial parks, what are they going to do next in terms of the provincial parks? They do not even hire

people to be on the gates anymore. They do not even put people on the gates. They do not even hire students to be on the gates anymore, so you have to run around—here, have a good time, come to Manitoba. Find somebody if you can if they are not on the gate and pay a lot more money to get into a provincial park. Even senior citizens have to pay to fish now. Surely, senior citizens can have free fishing here in Manitoba as a right of building our province and building our communities within, of course, the limits—within, of course, the limits.

This government continues to put little taxes here and little taxes there and little user fees here, little user fees there. They are so busy with this kind of myth that they do not raise taxes that they have clobbered people through the back door, and you know what, the public knows it. When we go door to door and when we listen to the people in communities—and even in Shoal Lake, Manitoba, where you broke your word about the Shoal Lake hospital. You broke your word on the Shoal Lake hospital.

I asked this question in the Legislature to the former Minister of Health. You made a promise in the election campaign. It is your job to get the promise through this person who made the promise. [interjection] Maybe the member for Roblin-Russell (Mr. Derkach) should stop his heckling and start fighting inside the cabinet room instead of just doing what he is told.

We get more fight for the Parkland Region from the member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk) and the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) than we do from the member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings) and the member for Roblin-Russell, nor do we need—[interjection] Well, the lap dog is at it again. Do you know what we need for the Parkland Region? Fighters, not lap dogs like the member opposite. And it is not very funny for the people who are affected at that hospital because they were in here today—I have not had a chance to talk about the substance. [interjection]

Well, you know, I have been out to Oakbank. I have seen the sign at the personal care home, how we will build the personal care home. You know, if you people want to start yapping from your seats, I will start talking about your record. I have been to Oakbank, and there is a big sign there. The Minister of Health—which

minister? Is it the former minister, the former, former minister or the former, former, former minister?

But I have been out to Oakbank, and do you know what the Kiwanis were told? Is it the Kinsmen or the Kiwanis?

* (1450)

An Honourable Member: Kinsmen.

Mr. Doer: Kinsmen. They were told that if they raised \$300,000, the personal care home would go ahead the next year.

An Honourable Member: What did they do?

Mr. Doer: Do you know what happened? The Premier (Mr. Filmon) broke his word. He broke his word in '95; he broke his word in '96; he broke his word in '97, and we do not need a “yes” man from the Springfield constituency or a “yes” person. We need a fighter for that community who will stand up to this Premier (Mr. Filmon), and that is the problem with members opposite.

The members opposite are so scared of the big two of that cabinet, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) and the member for Tuxedo (Mr. Filmon). They are so scared that they cannot raise anything in caucus. They have lost their political backbone; they have lost their political will; they have lost their fight; they have lost their energy; they have lost their passion; they have lost their commitment. They are all little quiet church mouses. They are so scared to what happened to the member for Steinbach (Mr. Driedger) and the member for Charleswood (Mr. Ernst). They are all so scared. It is yes, sir, Mr. Filmon; yes, sir, Mr. Stefanson; yes, sir, Mr. Benson. You can cut my hospital; I will not say anything. Shame on you. Shame on you.

I will continue on, on the deceit. You know, the one thing that really bothers me, that it is really raining for a lot of people now in Manitoba. There are hungry kids. There are communities that need help and support. There are people that need bridges of hope and opportunity rather than have them bombed out by the Tory government. There are funds available in a rainy day fund. There are monies available. There has

been money available two years ago, last year and this year. The government can say it is good management. We can say it is lottery revenue and the sale of the telephone system. I suggest there is more money in there from the sale of the telephone system and the lotteries than anything else, but we will let the facts speak for themselves.

But, you know, it is fundamentally immoral to cut the nutrition for babies by 24 percent and have a huge rainy day slush fund that is only concerned about putting a roof over future Tory candidates in the next election campaign rather than building a vision for the future and hope of Manitobans. That is why you people have been so cynical and been so heartless, and that is why the people see right through it.

Now there have been some positive bits of news in the economy. Interest rates are down. It is rather ironic, and the one thing I will give Paul Martin credit for is firing that Tory John Crow. I did not see the members opposite, when they were doing the Kim Campbell hallelujah chorus, say fire John Crow. I did not see John Crow get fired after you all jumped over your rails to give her a big hug after she won the leadership. The Premier (Mr. Filmon) was front and centre of that campaign. The former Minister of Justice was front and centre of that campaign. You know, not everybody was front and centre. Better be quiet, better be quiet.

Did you ever hear a Tory opposite say these interest rates are too high and John Crow should go? Did you see them on the convention floor in Ottawa saying that? No. And, thank goodness, an NDP policy of having low interest rates which we have been saying for the last 15 years is finally in place nationally, and I applaud Paul Martin for bringing in a more sane policy on interest rates. I will not applaud him for the cuts to health and education. He did not have to make those cuts on our provinces and on this province here in Manitoba.

I also think that the low dollar makes sense, and I am disappointed—I am happy we are getting some good results. I have talked to some people and some plants that are hiring a lot more people, and that is good news. But I think we should have a lot more people than we had in 1988. I am pleased that the economy has had

some growth in manufacturing over the last couple of years, but it is not yet up to the level of the mid-'80s when we had a much higher dollar. You know, a lot of companies tell me that if we ever go to an 80-cent dollar, they are gone. A lot of companies tell me that if they ever go to an 80-cent dollar right now, they are going to have to move a lot of their jobs to their American plants.

A lot of companies since free trade have established a plant in the United States, and they are kind of hedging between the low dollar here in Canada and the United States economy for purposes of their businesses.

What is the contingency plan of members opposite on the dollar? Do we have one? Do we have any kinds of ideas of what we are going to do, because I think a lot of what we have to worry about in terms of the national economy and the provincial dollar economy is hedged on some of the national financial situations. Low inflation, low dollar to our way of thinking makes sense.

We had proposed on Friday in Question Period—the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) was not here. He was doing his press conference. We respect that. Oh, I am not supposed to say he was not here. I am sorry, that was out of order. I retract that. But we proposed a number of co-operative ways of dealing with the economy. We have talked about—I met with some workers from Bristol this weekend. We were involved in some Boeing situations where there was more finger pointing than co-operation going on. I had to phone the federal minister who, I think, helped us out on that Boeing situation because it was all finger pointing.

Who is going to be at blame? Is it going to be the union, the big bad union? That was the only message we were getting out of members opposite, instead of finding some solution to that very major problem.

What about the sugar beet situation? What about the agricultural research, which has been cut by this government, a little add-on in this budget? But we are way below Saskatchewan in terms of value-added industries. We are way below Saskatchewan in terms of the biotech industries. They are locating around the University of Saskatchewan at Saskatoon. We cannot be left behind in the biotech industries. We cannot be

left behind on agricultural research. We have to be bold. We have to be assertive. We have to support whoever the Minister of Agriculture is and have a decent economic strategy on agriculture and value-added jobs.

We have to have a decent strategy on orderly marketing. These people want to be on the fence on orderly marketing. I did not see the presentation made by the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Enns) today, but the Premier (Mr. Filmon) has been all over the top of the fence. When Saskatchewan is fighting the Alberta court case, what does the Premier do? He disappears. He does not take a position to oppose the Alberta court case that would ruin orderly marketing here in the Canadian Wheat Board. We have jobs in this urban setting. We have jobs, we believe, in our rural setting. We believe in the Canadian Wheat Board as a fundamental principle of our economy, and we do not hesitate in saying that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this budget, even though it is a pre-election budget or a year-away-from-an-election budget, it has some very, very significant symbols in it, about the competing visions here in Manitoba. The one vision, of course, is the race-to-the-bottom vision of the Tories—slash spending, slash vital services and investments to people, give a tax break to business.

The other vision, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is our vision that says that you invest in our future by investing in public education. You invest in education and training. You invest in apprenticeship programs. You invest in health care as both an economic and a social priority. Decent health care in our communities is an economic advantage to a community like Shoal Lake. It is not an economic disadvantage, and that is why we tie health care together with a social and economic priority. That is why there is a different vision between the two parties and different alternatives to members opposite.

I would ask that the Liberals to join in with a vision for people, not to join in a vision for tax breaks to corporations as we see opposite from the Tory, heartless government across the way.

Look at our health care decisions. This health care budget, like last year's health care budget, is an exercise in smoke and mirrors. If John Diefenbaker was still

alive, what is that old term he used to use? Wind and rabbit tracks, that is all we see from members opposite on health care.

Let me give you a couple examples. Last year they announced a health care transition fee, a fund of \$35 million. Where is it? The transition was supposed to go from institutional care to community-based care. Where is it? You did not have one. It was just a PR attempt by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson), probably came out of their market research, oh, put something in there to placate people for the health care cuts. You cut \$135 million out of hospitals, and you have cut 50 percent of the community health budgets. That includes the add-on in this year's budget for the Aboriginal Wellness Centre.

The capital promises, another smoke and mirrors. You promised communities. How does the premier live with himself? How does he go to a community and promise capital and health care and change his mind after the election campaign?

That is as bad as Jean Chretien on saying he is going to scrap the GST. I am going to scrap the GST if elected in the next election. Well, what did he do? He did not scrap it. This Premier's GST is his health care capital. I am going to build this facility, I am going to build that facility. I am going to invest in the new operating rooms, Winkler, Morden, Shoal Lake, Bethel, on and on and on. If you do not intend on doing it, do not promise it. The public is sick and tired of all of us promising one thing before an election and doing the opposite after an election. I say, shame on the Premier (Mr. Filmon).

Well, the Minister of Health (Mr. Praznik) laughs. Eighteen hundred people have been laid off by his government; 1800 nurses have been laid off by his government. They do not care. They do not care about their livelihood. They do not care about the loss of patient care. This Minister of Health just cares about his headlines in the Beausejour Beaver and the local paper. He does not care about people, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we know that.

The costs of regional health care have not been calculated in. The personal care home situation, Mr. Deputy Speaker, has not been dealt with. We have

asked the member opposite on his personal care increase in cost at 4.1 percent. He goes out in the hallway and says there are more beds in '96-97 than '95-96. Then when he is caught with a mistruth, he says, I was just speculating. He should be apologizing to the House instead of yapping from his seat as he is doing again here today.

If the member opposite thinks we are going to stop asking questions about personal care homes, the connection to donations to the Tory party, the expansion of beds in profit homes, the expansion of the American system of personal care homes, he can bring that editorial into the House every day, because we are going to keep asking those questions on behalf of our constituents as we believe.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the government makes a good point about the infant mortality rate here in Manitoba. The government makes a good point about the infant mortality rate in this province. It makes other comments about the life expectancy in this province. I would like the government now, when they are in a massive expansion of profit, private services, whether it is in home care or in the personal care homes here in Manitoba, to start evaluating the difference between Manitoba's system and the profit, private system of United States.

* (1500)

I would like you to start evaluating what the life expectancy is and the infant mortality rate is in a private, profit system, because you are going to the private, profit system. The expansion in this budget is on the basis of private, profit areas of personal care homes over the last couple of years, some 21 percent increase, and on home care in the private, profit systems, they are going to be operating in many of our quadrants in the city.

I want to say to members opposite, when you bring out the statistics about Manitoba, about life expectancy and some of the programs now, you have inherited a legacy, an investment of health dollars into a nonprofit, universally accessible health care system. You have no right to brag about the successes of our health care system when you are doing more to dismantle those, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The nurse practitioner program has not been introduced. The lab transition, for-profit labs, has not been introduced. On and on and on we go, and we see a system driven by ideology and cutbacks with absolutely no transition plan whatsoever.

We see the same thing in public education. You know, there is no tie-in to the future. When the government announced a tax credit system for film and video, do they announce an apprenticeship program like we have in B.C. for the film industry? That is looking at the future. That is looking at the possibilities that we can develop in our own province and in our own communities. We do not see that from members opposite. All we see is 2 percent cut, 2 percent cut and a zero and a 2 percent cut and zero again for our public education system, \$43 million cut out of our public education system at a time when lottery revenues have gone, under this Minister of Finance and this Minister responsible for Lotteries (Mr. Stefanson), to an item that is up to \$230 million or so, or \$223 million, I am just going by memory, an item that is more than the corporate income tax here in Manitoba.

We have tremendous stress on our partners in education, the parents. Last week, the parents said to this government, you are starving our kids and our future. We have tremendous pressure on teachers who want to work in partnership to develop the curriculums of the future, and it will take a New Democratic government to give us decent textbooks and a decent partnership that will put money back into our public education system equal to the growth of the economy as we have promised, not a government opposite who is starving the public education system and does not care that kids who can no longer receive courses have doors shut on their future and doors shut on their future here in Manitoba.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have mentioned already the cuts to kids and to the Healthy Child program, an early intervention program. I have mentioned, of course, the cuts to aboriginal people, to see the aboriginal people receive just token kinds of efforts by members opposite. We believe that we have a serious problem to deal with. I know this government now is meeting with the business community that is quite concerned about our communities and quite concerned about the changing demographics here in Manitoba. I would have liked the

government opposite to be concerned about aboriginal people and First Nations people because it was a matter of decency and human rights, not a matter of what the business community feels is important for our future.

Where is the infrastructure program recommended in the Royal Commission? Where is the aboriginal justice program recommended? Northern communities are excluded; it is not there. All you have done is turned your back on many reports on the First Nations people. We see nothing but words, no deeds, no action, no reality, no partnership, just contempt and deceit in terms of what this government will do for First Nations. I hope I am wrong but if you are going to have any sincerity at all with members on this side, reinstate the Access program funding, accelerate the Access funding and bring back New Careers that gave people training and careers and dignity rather than social assistance and dependence.

This is a budget which had winners. You know, a picture is worth a thousand words. All around this Legislative Building on Friday you could see the winners and you could see the losers. The winners were those people with the big smiles on their faces. They were getting a tax break. Those winners were people who had subsidies being accelerated for their businesses, and the losers were people who were representing teachers and parents and their school system. The losers were people who were working with First Nations people on the front lines who expected the reinstatement of funding to our friendship centres rather than just cynical words with no action and no reality.

The member for The Pas (Mr. Lathlin) has accurately stated that this government has chosen to cut programs that are vital, that they had an urban aboriginal strategy some, what, six or seven years ago. What was the urban aboriginal strategy? Hire Tory consultants to write Tory reports and do nothing. That will not feed a First Nations child. That will not put sewer and water in Shamattawa. That is a cynical, cynical program and should be stated as such.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have a huge challenge ahead of us. The member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen) will tell you there are 324 evacuations a year from the Mathias Colomb community. The member for

Rupertsland (Mr. Robinson) will talk about the despair in housing and medical services and economic future for First Nations people all across his constituency, including in the community of Flin Flon. We have tremendous challenges. Why did the government not just state that they were going to work in partnership to implement the recommendations of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry? Why did they not announce the royal commission, Manitoba's role in implementing the royal commission? Why do we hear these false promises from the Premier (Mr. Filmon) with nothing to back it up?

Of course, all we get from members opposite are false promises. In the election campaign, we were told that they would not sell the telephone system. Now they have broken their word and, in fact, they had to use the sale of the telephone system to keep their promises under the balanced budget legislation to pay down the debt. What an absolute tragedy in terms of deceit, an absolute tragedy in terms of honesty.

We believe in implementing the Healthy Child program. We would have implemented the recommendations of the Postl report that would have put money into aboriginal kids, would have put money into our schools to have nurses in our schools rather than laying them off and having them go to Texas. We would have put money into nutrition programs and prenatal programs and given audiology and speech therapy programs. We would have put money into the future of our province by having a legitimate investment, and you know what? It does not cost; it saves money. It does not make any sense at all to have \$500 million in a rainy day fund for the rainy day of the Conservative Party. Let us put that money into the rainy day of our children and our communities.

* (1510)

This government is heartless. This government is cynical. This government only cares about its own deceitful attempt at getting re-elected, and wherever we go now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we know the people have the true measure of this government. The people want change. They want this government out.

They are heartless, they are cynical, they are deceitful, and everywhere we go people say when is the

next election campaign? We have to get rid of these people. We have to get rid of them because we cannot trust them anymore, and I regret, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak),

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

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

(a) withholding needed investments in health, education, children, aboriginal peoples, while increasing tax breaks and subsidies for businesses; and

(b) using the sale of public assets to advance the government's political interest.

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

Thank you very much.

Motion presented.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The amendment is in order.

Hon. Leonard Derkach (Minister of Rural Development): Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is a pleasure to respond to our government's budget presented by the honourable Minister of Finance, Mr. Stefanson.

I would like to begin by extending my heartfelt thanks to all Manitobans for their support of the approach that this government has taken in terms of fighting the deficit, for supporting us through these years in approving the economic sustainable development fund, and for the standards which we have applied in terms of approaching our fiscal responsibilities in a prudent and effective way.

I have to say that over the last nine, ten years, nine years-and-some-odd months, it has been an exciting time to be in government but, indeed, it has been a time when we have had to take our responsibilities very seriously to ensure that our actions indeed speak to the desires and the wishes that Manitobans want us to

address, that indeed we do what is right for Manitobans today and in the future.

I also want to congratulate the Minister of Finance for undertaking the extensive consultation process that he has done over the last two budgets, in meeting with Manitobans from all around the province and ensuring that Manitobans have a say in what Manitoba's budget should look like. This is reflected in the fact that this budget benefits all Manitobans. It provides a balance of support to our most vulnerable in our society and offers inducements, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for economic growth.

I just listened to the response from the Leader of the Opposition. As I sat here, I wondered whether he was present for the address from the Minister of Finance or whether he was listening to something else while the minister was presenting the budget. It almost seems that he was in a different world. I guess then we should not be surprised, because all we have to look at is the NDP record and what they did when they were in government. The kinds of solutions that they have been proposing over the last nine years certainly indicate that they are off track, they are tired, they have old ideas, they have no new thinking. Even their own party is beginning to speak out about the shambles that this group is in. That they have no vision, they have no direction, and they do not know where they are going.

I think this was very well reflected by Mr. Vic Grant on CJOB on February 25 when he said, over the past couple of years the NDP have consisted of much hot air and little else of substance. It is not a proactive party, it is a reactive party. When another party says something, anything, an NDP representative reacts, if for no other reason than to put the party initials before the public. It amounts to something of a simple battle plan, and now a poll has indicated the NDP has slipped to third position in the province.

The commentator goes on to say, one thing is established. The NDP battle plan since the last election is not working, and the voters are looking for something more than rhetoric. The party has also shown its word is not its bond. When you renege on a handshake, how can you ever expect to be trusted again? Now it appears the NDP do not even trust themselves.

I think truer words cannot be spoken about the state of conditions with the party opposite, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I listened this afternoon to the Leader of the Opposition talk about the fact that this budget does not address the needs of kids, that this budget does not address the needs of aboriginals and that this budget does not promise anything for the most vulnerable in our society.

I have to look at the Leader of the Opposition and ask him where he was during the 1980s when the NDP were in government. They quadrupled the debt of this province. They are the party that stole from the children of this province for the future of this province. They are the party who, because of the debt that they imposed on the citizens of this province, stole the programs that indeed could be taken to the children of this province and to the future of this province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is no question that if we did not have to spend \$600 million, or \$500 million plus, on interest in this province, we would be able to deliver some magnificent programs for the children, for the most vulnerable, for the educational system, for the health system in this province.

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Doer) also talks about the Shoal Lake hospital. Well, it so happens that that is my constituency. It is indeed an announcement that I was happy to make at the time, but the chapter has not been closed on the Shoal Lake hospital. Let me tell you that we will continue to work with that community and will ensure that through our regional health boards that the most effective programs and effective facilities are built for the people who need them and that the services in those facilities will speak to the needs of the people in those communities. So I do not need a lecture by the NDP with regard to the facilities that are needed in my constituency.

The Leader of the Opposition also says, well, he has been in my constituency. Yes, during the last election campaign he was in my constituency. It so happens that in that particular election my plurality improved, so I encourage him to keep coming back and talk about the old tired ways of the NDP because all that does is help our cause in the end.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to return to the budget which I think was a very positive one for Manitobans. Indeed, if you look at the clippings on the budget, Manitobans are pleased at the direction that we have taken. Manitobans are pleased with this budget because for the first time in 40 years we are going to be able to start repaying our debt. For the first time in 40 years, this province will make a payment on a debt. Unfortunately, that went over the head of the Leader of the Opposition because he did not even mention it. He talks about in his comments about the budget—

An Honourable Member: That is not surprising. He had trouble paying his university debts.

Mr. Derkach: Well, that is true.

He talks about this budget as being garage sale economics. Well, they should know about garage sale economics, because it is that party that sold off all our buildings. What did they do with that money? Well, we really do not know. They squandered it and they built up the debt in this province. So we do not need any lesson from the kings of the rubbish heap over there who have driven this province into the kind of debt that we are now beginning to repay. So when he talks about garbage economics, he knows what that is all about because he is the one who indeed has led this pack in the thinking that they have about which direction this province should go.

This budget also represents the third consecutive balanced budget and the third consecutive year for which a surplus—this time worth \$27 million—is going to be generated. Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we brought in the balanced budget legislation, we did it so that future governments can no longer build debt without indeed having some penalty to pay. Although the members of the opposition think that it is window dressing, as did the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) who called this balanced budget legislation window dressing and nothing but a gimmick—so that indeed no matter whether it is this government or governments in the future we will have to go back to the public if we want to increase taxes. There will be a penalty to pay for governments who want to run deficits, and it is only in this way that we can assure Manitobans that a budget like this is going to be one that they will endorse and that we will not return back

to the years when deficits were run and the debt kept burgeoning in this province.

* (1520)

I also congratulate the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) for continuing the approach in keeping taxes down. This is the 10th year in a row where we have no new taxes. This province is recording the longest running tax freeze of a decade in this country, and I have to congratulate my colleague the Minister of Finance for continuing that approach and indeed reducing the taxes. All of this goes to show that the Premier of our province, the Honourable Gary Filmon, has indeed a serious vision and a clear vision about the direction that this province should go, because it is his vision that has set this province on a course of reducing its debt and increasing the wealth of this province and allowing Manitobans to indeed become engaged in jobs which are going to generate not only wealth for them and their families but indeed for this province and this country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, getting our House in order enables us to do many things. If we, for example, consider the amount of interest that we are able to save on our debt from the \$600 million that we were paying annually in previous years to just over \$500 million in this current year, we know that that extra money that has been saved can indeed be put to programs, and that is exactly what we are doing. We are putting that money back into our economy, back into services that Manitobans need and Manitobans want. This is the kind of tradition and the kind of legacy that we want to leave for this province, a legacy that says that this province is a rich province, that it is not a have-not province, that indeed there is a lot of hope to people living in this province, and I think Manitobans are starting to pick that up very quickly, because this year the out-migration in our province was down to zero.

Now, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Doer) talks about 1988. We had people leaving this province in droves. We had companies leaving this province. We were the second highest taxed province in Canada. Today, after some long and difficult work, after nine years of concentrated effort, we have been able to enrich this province to invite back those companies that may have left, and they are coming. I simply reference

Palliser Furniture, who in 1988 were almost doomed to failure, but today they have just announced 400 additional jobs in that plant and, by the year 2000, there will be 2,700 people working in that plant. I think when we took office there were about 200 working in that plant. And they are all Manitobans, they are all paying taxes here in Manitoba. They are all providing for their families here, and we should all be proud of that.

Now, Mr. DeFehr said in his comments on radio that this was all part of the response and the reaction of the Free Trade Agreement. Well, we know what members opposite said about the Free Trade Agreement and, had we listened to them and had we gone along with them, today we would not have the jobs of Palliser Furniture or many of the other manufacturing jobs that we have in this province.

So if you compare us to other provinces, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we see that this province is operating with less government, significantly less government. We are the most cost-effective government in Canada, we are the lowest-cost government in Canada, and our staffing levels in government are pre-1980 levels.

What does that mean? Well, certainly that means that we are able to provide the services that are needed, we are able to reduce the cost of government, and that money can now be put into the hands of Manitobans who can put that money to work in their communities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, again on a positive note, we see that the private sector is the engine that creates the jobs in our country, and today we have more than 20,000 new private sector jobs in Manitoba that have been created in this past year alone. I just reference the example of Palliser Furniture, but there are many others in this province that are doing the same thing. They are not just in the city of Winnipeg, but they are throughout our entire province.

I have to reference an example that is quite interesting because, when I joined this department five years ago, I took a trip to a community in the North, the community of Lynn Lake, where we had a community in complete disarray. We had a community that did not know what to do. We were spending hundreds of thousands of dollars from the mining reserve to keep

that community functioning. So together with that community we embarked on a plan, a strategic plan where that community could become self-sufficient over a period of five years.

Then we also asked what kinds of things the community needed to do, and one of the things that came out of the meeting was that people who were on welfare were really sincerely looking for work. So together with the Minister of Family Services (Mrs. Mitchelson) we embarked on a small program—and the federal government I might add—to put people who were on welfare back to work. We did that, and the jobs that they were going to be doing was to restore some of the houses that had been vandalized and had been burned and were in complete disrepair. They were going to be taking those houses down and repairing those that could be salvaged and upgrading the looks of their community.

Well, I visited that community after the job was done, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I was absolutely amazed at the look of that community, and the pride that these people who were on welfare before had in their community, and things have happened in that community. We have a mining industry that has come back to that community. The reason that happened was because of the incentive programs that this government put into place into the mining industry. Today we have a very vibrant community. Now, they understand that mining is not going to be with them forever and that they have to look at alternatives. I returned to that community just a few months ago and met with their council, and they are now beginning to talk about the kinds of industries that can be harnessed that there is opportunity for in the North. Later on this year we will be sending more people, more economic development people, to work with that community to ensure that there are alternatives in place for when the mining reserves run out. For the first time in five years this community is now self-sufficient, where there are no funds required from the Mining Reserve Fund. That is an example.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is one small example of what is happening throughout this province. Why is it happening? Because we are empowering communities to set their own agendas, to find their strength and to build on those strengths. It is budgets like this one that

was presented by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) that give people of this province hope that indeed we are not going to be gouging them with our taxation policies as the NDP did in those early '80 days, and Manitobans are finding a confidence in this government. Wherever I go they talk about the hope that they have for their community, whether it is communities like Shoal Lake, who indeed are a small community in rural Manitoba who are looking for opportunity and who are looking at the strengths that they have within themselves to build on that foundation that they have set for so many years. They are reawakening to the reality that there are things, there are opportunities awaiting them, and they indeed can create jobs, can create wealth in their communities, and jobs that are the highly skilled jobs, jobs that are producing good wages and producing good opportunities for young families. We are seeing younger families move back to rural communities which is really a change from what it was 10 or 15 years ago.

Now, what does all this mean? Well, it means the improvement of the quality of life for all Manitobans. As I said, it is happening everywhere. It is happening in our small communities, on our farms, in our cities, and a part of the result comes from the fact that we formed the Community Round Tables in our small communities, Community Round Tables that brought together people from the economic side, from the social side, people who were farmers, people who were businessmen, people who were professionals, people who were in all kinds of walks of life who came together to talk about what they would like their community to become. We have some 84 of these operating in this province today. Mr. Deputy Speaker, they are setting their own agendas, they are setting their own visions, and they are embarking on developing those visions in a very sustainable and very effective way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we should also celebrate the successes of these communities and what we have achieved, but we do not do that in a way that we heard this afternoon from the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Doer). You know, no matter what it is, no matter what policy this government comes up with, the NDP cannot find one shred of good in it. Manitobans are starting to catch on to that very quickly.

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): If they did, we would be concerned about it.

Mr. Derkach: Yes, the Minister of Health (Mr. Praznik) says if they did, we would have to be concerned about it. But let us be practical and let us understand that Manitobans are asking governments to do some of the things that this government is doing. Manitobans are asking for no more debt, which we have responded to. Manitobans are asking us to pay down our debt, which we have started to do.

So where is the Leader of the Opposition coming from? He keeps saying that we should spend more, drive this province into debt. We come up with a surplus in our budget, and the member for Brandon East (Mr. Leonard Evans) says, it is not really a surplus; it is really a deficit. That is voodoo economics, I guess, because I certainly do not understand it. I am glad that he is not teaching my kids in university this year, because he would give them a real warped approach to economics. [interjection]

* (1530)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member for Brandon East (Mr. Leonard Evans) says that I do not understand. If we all listened to the approach that he takes, we know where we would be, because he was a member of a government that quadrupled the debt in this province, so if he were still a member of that government we would have a debt now that would be eight times what it was then. So we do not need any lectures. We do not need any ideas from him because his ideas are old-think, just like his Leader—of course, we are wondering who the Leader over there is, but indeed like the member for Concordia (Mr. Doer), who does not have any original ideas at all.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are some things in this budget that I think require mentioning because they are certainly there to create more jobs in our province. When the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) announced the corporate capital tax exemption for small businesses increasing from \$2 million to \$3 million, I think this was a signal for businesses, small businesses in this province who were ready to start employing people, because the tax exemption means

that as a small business I can now be comforted in the fact that I do not have to pay the tax, and that indeed I can start creating more jobs in my business. That is happening around our province. The payroll tax, we know the negative impact it had on the employment of this province, and just decreasing that payroll tax has created jobs in this province, and so will this particular approach to the corporate capital tax exemption.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the payroll tax, I spoke to a couple of businesses that were paying the payroll tax, and the exemption being increased to \$1 million now for these particular businesses takes them out of that bracket. Indeed, they think that is a very positive move, that indeed that will, down the road, help them to expand their businesses and hire additional staff. Again, these are jobs that are needed in our communities, whether they are here in the city or whether they are out in rural Manitoba.

The extension of the manufacturing investment tax credit for three more years will certainly encourage more manufacturing in our province and attract more private sector investment in this province, and we are seeing that happen, whether it is in the strawboard plant that is going to be built in Elie, whether it is in a proposed strawboard plant down in Killarney, whether it is in a gluten plant in my community, or whether it is in many of the other types of businesses that are looking to locate here in our province.

So this budget certainly does address the ways in which rural Manitobans and Manitobans right through this province can harness their energies and their creativity in developing jobs and businesses in this province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this budget also speaks to how we can address the social issues that we have in front of us. Our commitment has never wavered in terms of our responsibility to care for some of the most vulnerable in our society, namely, the children, the elderly, the sick, the poor, people with special interest groups, whether they are aboriginals or women. This budget provides for everyone and provides a comfort that indeed this government does care and does allow for spending in those areas which will address some of the needs of these particular areas.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I guess the \$100 million from our province's Fiscal Stabilization Fund to offset the federal reductions is an example to support health, education and services to our families.

We invest a significant amount in our education of our youth. Indeed, over the past number of years, we have not only invested in the educational opportunities of our youth, but we have also invested in opportunities for employment of these youths during the periods of time when they are not in their classrooms. That allows them to earn a few dollars and to then be able to spend those dollars in returning to expand their educational opportunities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the K to 12 side, we have said for nine years now that it is not a matter of simply throwing money at the problem but, indeed, it is a matter of ensuring that the results are effective at the end of the day. That is why more emphasis has been put on programs like language arts, like math, like science, more emphasis has been placed on technology, and now a \$22-million allocation for new educational initiatives has been announced which I think will take us to the leading edge of technology and innovation in our school system.

I have been around to some of the schools, and I have seen the results of what innovation does in the classroom. As a matter of fact, I think one of the schools I was in, Mr. Deputy Speaker, was in your riding, where some children were able to demonstrate for us what they have done with technology. It is really quite encouraging to see that our teachers, our youth and our children are really becoming very adept at using technology in the classroom, and indeed the support is there from this government.

The support this budget has for community colleges and our universities certainly indicates that we do have a serious approach towards education, towards post-secondary education and towards ensuring that our youth are equipped with the best skills possible when they leave our educational institutions.

Still on the social side, I have to indicate that there is, I think, some excitement about the new program called Partners for Careers for aboriginal people in this province. The \$1.4 million will indeed prepare some of

our aboriginal youth for jobs in the future, and it will make them mentors for others to follow suit and to take their place in finding meaningful jobs in our society so that they can indeed create wealth for their communities, for their families and for themselves. Those are the types of programs that I believe have a tremendous amount of excitement and a tremendous amount of acceptance within our communities in this province.

As I said before, our government has never wavered in its commitment to Manitobans. The facts are reflected in the budget. We do support the vulnerable in our society. We do support the elderly in our society, and we do support the children in our society. The NDP would make you think that this government has no care for those types of people in our society. That is absolutely wrong. The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Doer) is absolutely on the wrong track when he criticizes, when he talks about words like cynicism when he refers to the budget.

I think Manitobans know better. They know exactly the kind of support that we have for them and what we have been doing for them.

This year, in terms of health care, I think we are moving into a new era, a new, exciting era where our regional health care boards are going to take responsibility for the health delivery in our various regions of this province. I have had an opportunity to talk to some of the members of the Marquette Regional Health Board, who are quite excited about their role and their responsibility.

In talking to the various communities who now have joined the regional health care board from the entire region, we do not have a single hospital that has not joined the regional health care board. They are looking forward to a more effective way of delivering health services to the people in these areas.

My own hospital has an allocation of acute care beds. Some of those beds are not used for acute care. They acknowledge the fact that there could be a better usage of some of those beds. They acknowledge the fact that there is some spending that does not need to happen if we were to reallocate those beds to provide better

services in our area. That is exactly what communities are starting to talk about, that is exactly the approach that the regional health care boards are taking.

I know that the Minister of Health (Mr. Praznik) is going to be working very closely with these regional health care boards to ensure that we just simply do not put up buildings for the sake of putting up a building and then find that half of it is not being used for the intended purpose. We are going to be putting up buildings, hospitals and personal care homes that are going to provide the types of services that the people who live in those regions need.

* (1540)

We know that in my area, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a shortage of personal care beds. Now I do not know in which communities, but indeed in the whole region, if you look at the entire picture, you will find that because of our aging society in our rural communities, there is a need for more personal care bed space. I know in talking with the Minister of Health (Mr. Praznik) that he acknowledges this, and indeed this is one of the challenges that is going to be put before the regional health care boards on how we address those needs. It might mean that we reallocate space in some of our hospitals where space is not used, but that is fine because those facilities are there, and we need to ensure that we use them to their best efficiency and their best capability.

The other thing that I would like to congratulate the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) on is allowing for \$150 million from the proceeds from the sale of Manitoba Telephone System to be used to reduce the debt load of our hospitals and nursing care homes and to free up resources so that we can improve some of our facilities and build new ones. Ensuring that we spend money on health care is going to allow us to meet some of those critical needs that we have at this time.

We have to set our priorities; there is no question about that. Whether it is the Health Sciences Centre here in Winnipeg or whether it is the Boundary Trails hospital, those are real priorities that have to be addressed, and we understand that. No matter where you go, people find needs for facilities, and they find

needs for services, and one at a time we will address them and will ensure that they, in fact, are met in a reasonable way.

Later this afternoon I will be meeting with the community of Shoal Lake to discuss their needs. Indeed, we will be addressing their situation. [interjection] So the Leader of the opposition party, although he would like to make you believe that this member does not care about his constituents, is absolutely wrong, as he is with everything else.

He simply does not understand that indeed there is a way to approach some of these dilemmas and some of these situations, and we will do it. I encourage him to come on back to my constituency because all that does is help me in the end. I think those meetings that he has had in my constituency have done nothing but help me along the way because my plurality goes up every time he comes into my constituency. All I can say is, keep coming back. We welcome you to that part of rural Manitoba. As a matter of fact, it is probably helpful to him because it tells him exactly what is going on in rural Manitoba.

I would like to take this opportunity, and I wish the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Doer) would commit himself to coming to Rural Forum this year because that is an opportunity for rural Manitobans to showcase their successes and to showcase the kinds of businesses that they have embarked on and have been very successful in.

So, on the 8th of May, I invite the Leader of the Opposition and members of his caucus to join us at Rural Forum in Brandon where indeed businesses from right through Manitoba—and I have spoken to people in northern Manitoba, in Churchill, in Flin Flon and Thompson who will be joining us at Rural Forum to take part in the future, to take part in the seminars that are going to talk about the export opportunities that exist for Manitobans. In this way the Leader of the Opposition might then be a little more positive about what is happening in this province and about what is happening out in the rural landscape and the fact that we do have young people moving out to rural Manitoba and taking their place in our society and are adding to the wealth of this province.

I was very pleased last week to announce an increase of municipal tax sharing to our municipalities. This, again, points to the fact that we have a government that is committed to passing on the benefits that come from economic growth in our province. [interjection] Absolutely. The Minister of Family Services (Mrs. Mitchelson) says there is economic growth, and there absolutely is.

This is an approach we took when we formed government in 1988. We said that we would pass along the benefits for tax sharing to our municipalities, something the former government reneged on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and they did. The then Premier, Howard Pawley, was not passing along the benefits of the capital and the personal tax revenue sharing to our municipalities. We passed those along because it is important for us to share the wealth with our municipalities, because they are the grassroots organizations that help to provide the services in our rural communities and in our communities right through this province, whether they are cities or rural, that the residents want.

It is for that reason that we are also sharing with rural communities and with our cities the VLT revenues. Unlike any other jurisdiction across this country, this government believes in sharing its wealth with our other levels of government, being our municipalities. While others in other parts of this country are reducing their transfer payments to municipalities, this government is not only holding them at their levels but increasing our levels of support to our municipalities because our economy is improving, because we have economic growth, and that economic growth is generated by Manitobans, by our municipalities, by businesses in this province. That is why we are happy to share our wealth with them.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) has been up on his feet on a few occasions talking about some of the misfortunes that rural businesses have had. One of the businesses that he continually attacks is the failed Woodstone Foods of Portage la Prairie. I will never forget when there were some early signals about the trouble at Woodstone Foods, the member for Crescentwood was very quick to write a letter and publicly state that the solution for

Woodstone Foods would be to move that plant to Winnipeg. Then he came to the Legislature and started to talk about how he was supporting the workers of Woodstone Foods. Well, how in the world can you support workers in Portage la Prairie by moving the plant to Winnipeg? What would that do for those 36 families who depended on Woodstone Foods to raise their families, to educate their families and for their families' needs in Portage la Prairie? So I have to wonder where the member for Crescentwood is really coming from. Why is he attacking the rural families of this province? Instead of joining us and trying to find solutions to keep those jobs in rural Manitoba, he was promoting the demise, the closure of that plant, and having those jobs moved into the city of Winnipeg. Well, yes, maybe jobs are needed in the city, but they are also needed as badly in Portage la Prairie, as well.

The Grow Bonds Program has generated about 450 jobs in this province. We have invested in capital investment, both private and through government, something like \$24 million of new investment in this province through the Grow Bonds Program. Not a big program, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a new program, but 450 jobs in rural Manitoba is significant by any measure. There are some very exciting projects that are happening in rural Manitoba, projects that are innovative, projects that are adding to the manufacturing sector in our province, projects that are adding to the value-added concept and the value-added initiative that was undertaken by our government. All of these projects that are going on are going to allow us to gain our goal, which was set by the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Enns), of increasing our exports to \$1 billion by the year 2000.

The REDI program is very much doing the same kind of thing, where we have leveraged close to \$70 million in new capital investment in this province over the last couple of years, adding some 1,700 full-time jobs in rural Manitoba—again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, allowing young families to move out to these rural communities. Yes, we are going to have some problems with these programs. I am never going to be one who will stand up here and say that we will never have a failure and we will never have a problem, but we will overcome these problems. We will overcome these situations and these programs will be there for the benefit of the people in our province.

We embarked on a new program this year, again, one that empowers the people in local communities, and it is called the Community Works Loan Program. Not a large program, much like Business Start, but the decisions are made at the local level by local people so again more jobs will be created by people making decisions right in their own communities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am very proud to be a member of this government, to be able to endorse and to be able to support the budget of the Minister of Finance, because I think it is a budget for all Manitobans, a budget that is going to speak to the needs of Manitobans, a budget that will allow Manitobans to grow and to prosper and is going to allow us as a government to provide the services that people in this province need and deserve.

It allows us to start paying down our debt, it reduces our deficit and it balances our books. That is what rural Manitobans, that is what urban Manitobans have been demanding of us for a long time. It is not like the old-think of the members opposite, where they are mired in old types of approaches to solutions that do not work anymore. We are facing the challenges of the future and we are addressing them in a way in which Manitobans want us to address them and, indeed, they are very positive. I simply want to congratulate the Minister of Finance and, indeed, I look forward to working on the programs that he has announced in the budget.

Thank you very much.

* (1550)

Mr. Leonard Evans (Brandon East): Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is my privilege to get up and add a few words to this particular important debate on Manitoba's finances and our economy and where we are going from here and certainly how it affects the people of Manitoba. I listened for some time to the member from Shoal Lake, the Minister of Rural Development (Mr. Derkach), and I said to myself, my golly, he is talking about things and programs, he is bragging about, boasting about, and I seem to recall that we have been through this before, and what it is is *déjà vu*.

He talks about the great efforts to put welfare people to work, all these job sharing programs, all these

initiatives you are talking about. Well, I would advise him or ask him to look back a few years in the records and see that under our Department of Employment Services and Economic Security we set up a whole department to associate all the welfare rolls with all the job programs. We had a massive set of programs and we put thousands of people to work. We had it analyzed and, listen, some of the same staff are still there. They must have done a good job, they have not been fired. They are still there, but the fact is, the minister brags as though this is something new under the sun.

As a matter of fact, what he is saying is contradicting what the former Minister of Finance said, Mr. Manness, who took great exception to our initiatives to create jobs through various kinds of programs. He said they were all make-work programs and they were all a waste of money. Should not have anything to do with them, and yet this government is now bragging. I would like to have Mr. Clayton Manness come here and listen to this speech that we just heard and listen to the initiatives that this government pretends, or not pretends, is claiming to take on behalf of people who they want to see working.

Then when he talks about how we are going around the community consulting, we are consulting with people in rural Manitoba, we have got this community partnership and round tables and they are going to decide their own future, I would refer the member to 1973. In 1973 there was a regional analysis program done. We had 75 communities involved, and they were just that. They were people in those communities deciding where they wanted to go, what their priorities—in fact, we started with 75, and eight more applied to come in and we ended up with 83. So we had 83 and it was called the Regional Analysis Program. Go to the library, you will see the documents there, it is specific programs that they wanted us to engage in to help them.

So this is nothing new, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is nothing new, it has been done before. It is not a bad idea. I am not criticizing it. I am just saying, do not think that this is something that you only thought of and no one else ever has thought of this. And I agree with you. I am very pleased to see transfers to municipalities and to see that these monies maintain

and, indeed, increase. Again, I think back to the Schreyer years. We made a deliberate policy to ease the burden on municipal taxpayers, and this was one way to do it, and that is to dedicate so many points from income tax, put it in a fund, transfer it year by year, and if the income taxes went up, the municipalities would share in it and, of course, if the taxes went down they would get a little less money. But we thought that that was one effective way to help municipal taxpayers, and I am pleased that it is still around, but, you know, it goes back to the Schreyer years; it goes back to the 1970s.

There is one thing that I do regret, one initiative that we took to help municipal taxpayers, and that is that you reduced the property tax credit by \$75 in 1993, just a few years ago. That was tantamount to a tax increase, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When you eliminated \$75 from the property tax credit, you effectively increased the municipal tax bill of people in this province by \$75 per household. That is one initiative that I was sorry to see cut back on, an initiative again introduced by the Schreyer NDP government.

I just want to make one other comment about debt and the accumulation of debt. Nobody wants to accumulate debt for the sake of accumulating debt necessarily. The fact is that if you look back at what happened in the 1980s, what was happening in Manitoba in terms of increased debt was happening in other provinces. It was happening with at the federal level. I dare say, I could go to the library, get the statistics and show that our relative debt situation did not go out of line with the other provinces at that time. It did not go out of line.

For you to say, oh, by God, the debt went sky high, it is all our fault, we are so irresponsible and so on, the fact is that the debt was accumulated for a couple of good reasons. Number 1, we were in a big recession and debt does accumulate, deficits do occur automatically in our type of system throughout Canada. Secondly, interest rates were very high. When you have interest rates 17, 18, 19, 20 percent, that has an impact, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It has an impact on the interest burden of anyone who holds debt.

I want to make another point too, that some of that debt that the member criticizes did see put in place

certain assets that developed this province. We put additional monies into school construction under the jobs program, we put additional monies into a lot of specific science projects, research and development projects, specific monies to help municipalities improve their infrastructure to create some jobs. We had a provincial, municipal infrastructure program at that time under the Jobs Fund. I say, yes, there was some debt accumulated, but do not forget, there were a lot of assets that were put in place, as well. That is the other side of the coin.

When we talk about the national debt, I have to remind myself and others that there is such a thing as the national credit. There is the debt, but there are people and organizations that hold the debt. In other words, for them, it is the credit. They of course are the ones that are benefiting by the flow of interest payments from the Treasury to those organizations and to those individuals.

I wanted to refer briefly to the fact that in many ways what we are presented with by this government, ever since Mr. Manness, the former Minister of Finance, introduced the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, it is a bit of a shell game. We have got a moving target. Who knows really what is the bottom line for the budget? Is it a surplus or is it a deficit? It depends on what monies are in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund.

I would remind members that when this fund was first introduced, the then Provincial Auditor, Mr. Fred Jackson, I believe, wrote a comment. He actually put it in writing that he disagreed with how this money was being treated and that it was revenue, it should have been accounted for as revenue and, as such, you would have seen a surplus in that year instead of the deficit. He took great umbrage with how the then Minister of Finance treated those monies.

Since that time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have seen the government not only use the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, they have also got a lottery revenue fund that they have got aside there. There have been monies taken from that in a way that even the Dominion Bond Rating Service criticized as being improper accounting. You might recall a couple of years ago, they said we did not have a surplus, as the Minister of Finance was saying, but indeed we had a deficit because those

lottery revenues were accumulated over a period of years. It was not proper accounting to use them in that one specific year but, rather, they should be spread over a number of years. Indeed, they did in one of their reports. They did spread those dollars over. Lo and behold, we had a continued deficit, not a surplus in that particular year. I think it was 1993.

* (1600)

(Madam Speaker in the Chair)

As I said earlier, this government in '88-89 did indeed, for whatever reason—there were various reasons why, but when they came to office in the early part of '88, they discovered that they had more revenue than we thought we were getting the year before. Again, it is in the budget documents; it is not my numbers. They are right in here for anyone to see. We had indeed a \$56-million surplus. We said—I believe I said it at the time—that we could use that to pay down the debt if we wanted to. Remember at that time, that was before all these cuts took place in education, health care and social services, long before the restraint program was begun by this government.

In fact, this government did not engage in much restraint in the first couple of years. It was in a minority position, and it was very, very conscious of that particular situation. They could have been turfed out on their ear with one vote. With one sitting of this Legislature, one day you have a vote, and it is game over. The fact is that Mr. Manness at that time said, we will take all that money and more; we will put \$200 million of revenue, just take it out and put it in this new fund. He had to get legislation passed later to legalize it. Put it in this fund, and, lo and behold, we do not have a \$56 million surplus later, but we have something in the order of whatever it comes to, \$144-whatever, \$143-million deficit.

So I say that this was not a milestone budget because he could have—the government rather, this minister was not in place at that time in this particular portfolio—but the government could indeed have used that surplus to pay down the debt.

Relatively speaking, the province has been in a better position than it has been for some time. Why is that?

It is essentially because of the improved economy. Why is the economy improving? With all due respect, Madam Speaker, why the economy has improved somewhat, there are some very basic policy reasons for that. I will talk about that more later. There are policies that go beyond the control of this government. With all due respect, even though there are some miscellaneous tax changes, and miscellaneous credit changes, these really do not account for very much. They do not hurt. They may create a few jobs, but they really are not that fundamental. They are not fundamental as low interest rates. They are not as fundamental as a cheap Canadian dollar.

While there has been some improvement, we should not get carried away on these month-to-month figures that the members are using. The member for Roblin-Russell (Mr. Derkach) was talking about the number of jobs created. I think he was using February over February, and then you can use January over January. I say you are fooling yourself if you just use those month-over-month figures. The Premier (Mr. Filmon) was saying in January we have got 24,000 more actual jobs than we had in January in 1996. Then, if you look at the document for February, you see 529 versus 511, so now we have got 18,000 more jobs than in 1996.

What happened to the 6,000? In January we had 24,000 more jobs. By February it was only 18,000. So we lost 6,000. What this illustration shows is that it is folly to use these single-month figures to come to radical conclusions as to what is happening. You are far better off to deal with groups of months, or better still, annual averages. If you look at the annual average, you will see that in 1995, over '96, indeed there was some job increase, but it was only 0.8 percent. In other words, there were a few thousand jobs created in 1996. In fact, over 1995, something in the order of about 4,000-odd jobs that were created, not 24,000, not 18,000. It was a rather modest amount.

What is disturbing about this, Madam Speaker, is that the job increases in 1996 over '95 were essentially part-time jobs. There was an increase of 2.6 percent in people working part time and only one-third of 1 percent of people working full time.

So where are the big job increases? The big job increases, there are only four-odd thousand, but the

bulk of them were part-time jobs and, regrettably, these part-time jobs are also those jobs that do not pay very much money. Many of them are in the retail sector and restaurants and so on, and they tend to pay rather poor dollars, few dollars.

In fact, what you can do is look at the breakdown by industry for 1996, and you will see that, yes, there was this increase of 4,000- or 5,000-odd jobs, but where did the increase come? All the increase came or essentially came, the bulk of the increase came in trade and the community business and personal service area. In other words, the increases in the jobs tended to be part time, and they tended to come in the low-wage sector.

In 1996, we actually lost manufacturing jobs. In 1996—I am just reading this report from the Bureau of Statistics. It says minus 1.1 percent in 1996 over '95 in terms of the total jobs average for the year for manufacturing in Manitoba; likewise in construction. There was also a decline in jobs in transportation, communication and utilities.

So the full-time, higher wage jobs were the ones that we tended to lose in that year of 1996, and nobody is happy about this, but the ones we got were those that were lower paying, and they tended to be part time.

As a matter of fact, if you look at the manufacturing jobs, yes, indeed, they have increased the last few years over what they were in the earlier part of the '90s, but if you go back into the '80s, you will see we were just as high then as we are now. So what we are doing is sort of recuperating from a drop that occurred a few years back, in the late '80s, early '90s.

Also, Madam Speaker, this government should not become too complacent when it talks about unemployment rates being so low and what a great, great thing we are doing in Manitoba. I want to alert members, I want to ask members to again look at the statistics, and they will see that unemployment rates tend to be low throughout the prairie provinces. This is the way it has been ever since these surveys have begun.

The three prairie provinces are usually among the three lowest. Like, 99 percent of the time over these years, over these months, it is the three prairie

provinces that had the lowest rate of unemployment. In 1996, we averaged 7.5 percent unemployment but, if you look to the west of us, Saskatchewan was 6.6 percent, lower than us, and so was Alberta at 7 percent.

So what is happening? You have this traditional lower level of unemployment, still not good enough, still too many people out of work, but better than the national average. Then when you talk about, well, look how great it is for the young people here, we have a lower rate than Canada, which is true, but we do not have a lower rate than the rest of the Prairies. Our rate in 1996 for the young people under 24 was 12.8 percent unemployment; Saskatchewan was 12.2 percent; and Alberta was also 12.2 percent. So we are more or less in lockstep with the prairie region in terms of the level of unemployment among the youth.

So I say we need a dose of reality before we get carried away with our own rhetoric as to how great things are in terms of unemployment in Manitoba.

Similarly, when you look at job increases, you will see that more or less there is a pattern that you will see in the prairie provinces that Manitoba shares in. As I said, if you look at the breakdown by industry, you will see that where the jobs are coming from are the poorer jobs, the part-time jobs.

* (1610)

There is one particular statistic that I think we should all be concerned about, and that is the whole matter of housing. What is happening to our housing industry? For the life of me, with lower interest rates, why is it that housing starts are so pitifully low in this province?

In 1995, we had 1,215 housing starts in urban centres in Manitoba. In 1996, it went up to 1,243. So, oh, my goodness, there has been an increase of 30 housing starts or thereabouts in a year, in 1996 over '95, but if you go back to the historical statistics, Madam Speaker, lo and behold in those '80s that the members opposite always criticize, the early '80s when we were in government, what was the level of housing starts in Manitoba in 1983? Nowhere near 1,200 that they are this last year. In 1983, there were 5,985 housing starts; in 1984, it was 5,308; in 1985, we had 6,557 housing starts; in 1986 we had 7,699; in 1987, we had 8,174

and so on. In '88, the first year that this government was in office, it was 5,455, and it has been coming down ever since. Every single year it has been coming down, down, down. There were 18 in '92; 1993, 17; 1994, 16; 1995, 12-something; 1996, virtually tied with 1995, a few more. So I ask, what has happened? Why are we not getting more housing built in Manitoba, especially when you have interest rates that are much lower?

Well, one could go on and talk about the Manitoba economy, and, as I am willing to admit, we have been doing better the last while than we have for some time, but so has the country as a whole. Having said that, though, we still have an unacceptably high level of unemployment, and particularly in eastern Canada, it is really pathetic. I would be the first to observe also that the figures tend to understate the amount of unemployment because there is indeed a lot more underemployment, a lot of unemployment that the numbers do not reflect.

But why have we had this relative improvement in the Canadian economy? It is because in the last couple of years there has been a change in the policy of the Bank of Canada. So we have to thank the change in the national monetary policy for bringing down the rate of interest, and by bringing down the rate of interest we do wonders for the economy and wonders for economic growth. It makes it possible for consumers to buy more big-item appliances, big-ticket items, and cars and the like. It certainly makes it more easy to obtain a mortgage, to be able to pay a mortgage, and certainly for business. It is easier for business to invest in new plant and equipment.

Coupled with that low rate of interest, Madam Speaker, is the relatively cheap Canadian dollar. I had an opportunity to speak to a couple of manufacturers, who are engaged in exporting, a week or two ago, and they were very concerned that the Canadian dollar might rise in value vis-a-vis the American because if it did it would be extremely difficult for them to maintain the level of exports to the United States. So our exporters, our manufacturers and others who export to the United States are riding high, so to speak, because of a cheap dollar which means that our merchandise, that our products are relatively at a low price in the

United States and therefore the demand for them has increased.

In turn, this increase in exports should mean more jobs for Manitobans and for Canadians generally, but in Manitoba in addition to that—and that may explain what has happened, as well—we have had an infusion of farm income, good crops, good farm income. That never hurts. So you have that occurring. In addition, there has been this subsidy payment, I believe, to make up for the loss of the abolition of the Crow rate. So those factors are fundamental to what is happening to the Manitoba economy. It is not these really minor adjustments to taxes. The tax regime has been changed very minimally in this province in the past eight or nine years under this government, so I would suggest, with all due respect, Madam Speaker, there is nothing in this budget or in the budget of the last several years that has been of any vital significance to what happens to our economy.

Another point I would like to make is with regard to tax changes. It has been pointed out by the speaker before me and indeed others on the government side that this government has a proud record of not increasing major taxes, but the reality is there have been tax increases, various tax increases, and some of these have been very significant. Back, again, in 1993 this government broadened the sales tax to even include school supplies, children's items and so on. They broadened the sales tax, and at the same time that year they eliminated \$75 of the property tax credit. I believe, all in all, that was equivalent to around \$115-odd million, \$120 million, \$115 million, and even the Department of Finance in an internal memo, which somehow got out, said that that meant this was equivalent to a 5.7 percent increase in personal income taxes, \$400 per year per family of four. So let it not be said that this government has not raised taxes because indeed it has.

On the other side too, of course, there have been all kinds of miscellaneous fee increases right across the board in just about every department of government there may be, from Natural Resources in parks, to Land Titles, to you name it. Nursing home rates have gone up substantially under this government. Talk to anyone who has a relative in a nursing home and find out what has happened to them. What is the extent that they

have been hurt by rising nursing home rates? I think I made a point here last year about the increase in nursing home rates to the ridiculous point that those people in nursing homes who have nothing but the basic old age pension from the federal government were having to pay so much money now, their rate increase had gone up to such an extent that they were only left with about a dollar or two per day for personal effects.

We expect people who reside in nursing homes to pay for their own toothpaste, to pay for their own miscellaneous cosmetic supplies or even hearing aids, I understand. There are all kinds of charges, clothing and so on that they have to pay for, and they were left with only a dollar or two a day, and this was just incredibly pathetic, so much so that those people, who were having to pay more because this government raised nursing home rates, were able to qualify for provincial welfare assistance. Now, how do you like that? And indeed this did happen in my own constituency. I contacted everybody who lived in a nursing home in my riding, and indeed some of the families did apply and did obtain social assistance for nursing home residents because the government in its wisdom, or in its folly, raised the rates excessively and hurt those people in particular.

In fact, as I said, all the families were hurt. I know many people who talked to me in my constituency have said they do not know how they are going to manage. One partner is in a nursing home, the other is still trying to maintain his or her home and they are finding it to be a very, very heavy burden to pay these additional monies for nursing homes. I might remind members opposite, nursing homes were not always under the medicare system. They were brought in by the Schreyer NDP government in 1973, the same year we brought in a universal Pharmacare program with a \$50 deductible and the government paid 80 percent of everything thereafter for everyone, regardless of your age or your circumstance, a universal drug assistance program which was a necessary supplement to a medicare system, to make the medicare system even more effective.

Well, we have had all these miscellaneous fees. There are higher municipal taxes because there is less assistance for municipalities to fund the education

system, and indeed there have been Pharmacare cuts. One elderly couple told me yesterday in my constituency that they are now paying \$100 more a month for drugs that they must take. This one lady is in her early 80s and her husband is the same age, they are in their early 80s; and they said, Len, we have to pay \$100 more now on average for our drugs and we are having a very, very difficult time of it. Well, that is the same thing as a tax increase. I would say that is like a \$1,200 tax increase for this couple who are in their early 80s.

There are a lot of examples I could give to show how—what we have done is transfer the burdens from the government, from the Treasury, onto individuals and onto municipalities, onto the school boards, the municipalities, individuals. We are paying for it. There is no magic. You say you have cut expending; there is still the expenditure out there. There is still the cost of health care. There is still the cost of education. There is still the cost for social services. These things are being paid for now more and more by individuals and municipalities, and in many ways, I would argue, this is a retrograde step. It is simply less equitable than the system that we had established before this government took office.

* (1620)

I want to talk for a couple of minutes about monetary policy, and some people who have heard me on this are sick and tired of this topic, very sick and tired of this particular topic. But I want to make an observation. In fact, I think there are more and more people in this country who are coming around to the point of view that the Bank of Canada should play an effective role in financing the Government of Canada expenditures, and these people will say, the economists will say, in fact, the Bank of Canada has caused the major debt problems that government is facing today because of the high interest rate policy which began in 1988. In fact, it has been estimated that we have had the highest real interest rates of any of the G-7 countries since 1988. This is real interest rates. That is the difference between the nominal rate and the rate of inflation.

So what are you really paying for in interest—and we have had the highest of any of the G-7 since 1988.

What this high interest-rate regime has done is choked the Canadian economy. What we have done is see our central bank really induce a recession to try to stop what was supposed to be a danger of inflation. Well, there never was much danger of inflation, but the bank carried on as though it was just around the corner. Instead of helping the Canadian economy, they did just the reverse; they created a lot of unemployment. The unemployment rose, and the burden of debt that governments were holding, of course, was made greater because the interest rate payments were edging upwards.

So I would say categorically that the zero inflation policy of the Bank of Canada caused the recession that we had in the 1990s. We all suffered for it, all governments, individuals, business. Everyone has suffered for it. There has been one estimate that, if the Bank of Canada used a target of inflation of 3 percent, instead of 4 percent that they were concerned about, the economy would have been \$25 billion larger in 1992, and the deficit would have been \$15 billion smaller.

Well, I do not want to get into too many figures and calculations, but the point is there was a price that was paid by all of us—by the economy, by governments, by individuals and by business for this high interest rate policy. But it was very convenient because this goes back to the days of John Crow and the Mulroney government. It was very convenient to use deficits, because when you see deficits grow and the burden of deficits grow it is very convenient to use these deficits to attack social programs and say, well, we have got to get at social programs because this is where we spend a great deal of money and this is the only way that we are going to bring down the debt burden and the deficit.

Well, Madam Speaker, there is another solution, and that is the solution of a monetary policy that recognizes that the Bank of Canada can play a very critical role in financing the public debt. I would remind all members that Canada fought a very critical war in 1939-1945 using in large measure the Bank of Canada to finance that war. Indeed, the post-war prosperity was, in a large measure, financed by the Bank of Canada. It was the Bank of Canada that was caused to cut back its degree of financing of federal government debt that created an increased burden of deficits.

What I am suggesting, and I am making this as a positive—I wish there were more members present on the Treasury bench. I cannot name anyone by rule here, but if there were certain key members of the Treasury bench present, I would like to make this as a positive suggestion to them that they go after the Minister of Finance in Ottawa, Mr. Paul Martin, and try to impress upon him that there is a need to use the Bank of Canada to finance a greater percentage of the public debt.

In doing so, as I said, there would be a great relief on the Government of Canada, who in turn I hope would therefore not see its way to continuing cuts in transfers to the provinces, in fact to reinstate those monies that were cut. What I am suggesting is that we go back a few years and have the Bank of Canada hold a higher percentage of the debt.

Back in 1976, the Bank of Canada held 20.8 percent of the federal debt, and today it is only 5 percent of the debt, which is a difference of roughly 16 percent. So if you took 16 percent of the total federal debt of \$600 billion, you are looking at about \$96-billion worth of debt that the Bank of Canada could have been holding for our government. That is virtually cost free all these years because there is no interest paid to the Bank of Canada, because the Bank of Canada is owned by the people of Canada, and this is virtually interest-free money.

In other words, instead of making the commercial banks rich, we could have saved \$96-billion worth of interest. In other words, we could have been saving roughly 7 percent—that is the average rate of interest—of \$96 billion or roughly \$7 billion each and every year. If you are one of seven million taxpayers in Canada, then we could calculate that you and I, we are all paying an extra \$1,000 per year in taxes for this change in monetary policy. It is a policy that is favouring the wealthy banks, certainly, and not the people of this country, not the businesses of this country, not the provincial governments, not the individuals of this country, not the federal government.

So I say it is time for the federal government to order the Bank of Canada to take on a greater percentage of the debt.

Now, this is not some sort of a radical idea from on high. All I am suggesting and what a lot of economists are saying is, well, instead of holding 5 percent of the debt, which is what is being held today, let us go back to where we were in 1975, go back to roughly 20 to 22 percent, in around there, and as I indicated earlier with those numbers, we could have reduced this interest burden substantially. This reduction in interest burden I would hope then would translate for the federal government in ways that it would see its way to stop cutting transfers to the provinces so that, in fact, as I said, to reverse its situation and increase the transfers back to the provinces.

Someone might say, well, this cannot be done. To those who say it cannot be done or those who say that it is inflationary, I say nonsense, because it is simply a matter of, instead of the private banks creating the money, which it does now, it would be the Bank of Canada.

If the Chretien government needed, let us say, \$50 million for an infrastructure program, say, with the provinces and everything else, they wanted \$50 million and it has to borrow that, what it does is go to the commercial banks, the Toronto Dominion or the Bank of Montreal or whatever, sell them the \$50-million worth of government loans, give them the paper, \$50-million loans, and those banks in turn write to the credit of the Government of Canada \$50 million.

Bingo, the money is created. The money has been created by the private banks. There is no two ways about it. The private banks create the money, based, in this instance, on the bond notes, the IOUs of the Government of Canada. So the banks are getting rich, Madam Speaker. They are getting filthy rich, I would suggest, and the taxpayers are having to shoulder an unnecessary interest rate burden.

It is rather interesting that Mr. Paul Hellyer, who, at one time was in a Liberal cabinet federally—I believe he was with the Trudeau government, and I think he may have even been with the St. Laurent government, I am not sure—but he then later ran for the leadership of the Conservative party, was not successful, and now he has been in business for some years and is acting as a consultant. He is now heading up a new party, the Canada Action Party, and this is their main plank: to

use the Bank of Canada to shoulder more of the debt and, indeed, to use the bank to help stimulate the economy, because he is saying we have an intolerably high level of unemployment and that by using the bank the Government of Canada could stimulate the economy, create more jobs and not impose a burden by way of debt on the Canadian people.

* (1630)

Madam Speaker, I see my time is running out, so I want to say in conclusion that it is regrettable that, while the Minister of Finance can brag about getting his financial house in order, surpluses and all the like, I suggest that in the process what we are seeing is our social deficit increasing. There is no question that services to people in Manitoba have deteriorated over the last few years, whether it be education, whether it be health care, whether—and you can see that I mentioned nursing home rates having gone up, I mentioned Pharmacare cuts. There have been education cuts, hospital cuts. So there has been a human cost here. People on social assistance are treated more poorly than they were some years ago, and I think that is regrettable.

So I say, Madam Speaker, the citizens of Manitoba will recognize what they have done in this budget, will recognize their policies and judge their policies in accordance with how they affect their livelihood, how they affect their families and make a decision. But I say that it is curious, it is interesting, that more and more people are asking, when is the next election? They all want to know what the date of the next election is, and I say there is a message there. I hope members opposite are listening.

Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage la Prairie): Madam Speaker, it is indeed an honour to rise and speak to this year's budget and to welcome all members back to the House and to wish all of them the very best in the coming session. I may or may not see the end of this session because of my decision to leave the provincial realm of politics, but I certainly do leave my best wishes if I have to depart prior to the end of this current session.

I have with me, and I know you enjoy seeing these, a couple of pictures. These are, as Hansard must be told, pictures of my daughters.

An Honourable Member: Beautiful.

Mr. Pallister: They are beautiful, and I am very proud of them. I know I am not alone in having pride with my children. I know that this House is—all members who have been blessed with children share the same feelings, but I think that this budget is historic for children. It is historic in the sense, of course, that this is the first attack that we have made on this province's debt, and that is a significant step, truly a significant step. It is also the first time in a generation that we have had a surplus for three consecutive years, and those are historic accomplishments for a government; but, more importantly, in reference to the children of our society, those are significant contributions to the best interests of those children.

Last week my mother-in-law visited us, and, as opposed to some of the sort of standard jokes about mothers-in-law, I love my mother-in-law. She is a wonderful woman. She came to see us and observed that the girls were really making progress. She said they are really advancing in their skills and so on. Esther, my wife, said, really, I do not notice that. My mother-in-law said, well, why, Esther, why do you not notice that? She said, well, I am here with them every day.

That is kind of true, too. Sometimes when you are too close to things, you do not see the actual small changes or the small steps that happen over a period of time. I think it is appropriate to use that analogy because I think that the children's improvement reflects an improvement that is happening in terms of our budget, in terms of the reflections and the improvement that has happened in our society and the way that government has managed money over a decade, close to a decade, of leadership by this government. I think that the significance, as I said earlier, to children is very real and very major.

The fact is we inherited a legacy from the previous government not unlike other provinces and other provincial administrations in the 1980s that was one of tax and spend, and that is not to be overly critical of the members opposite because, of course, others will be. Suffice to say that what we inherited was a debt which had gone from around a billion dollars to over \$5 billion in about six years, and the historical fact of that

is undeniable and the reality is also. The debt service cost quadrupled during that same time period to about \$600 million per year, money that had to go to debt service that could no longer go to children.

So, of course, that, too, being a historical fact brings to mind a saying that reveals kind of a truth about the way we live and the way we make decisions. That saying is, only a fool trips over what is behind him. The reality is that only fools do. The reason they trip over what is behind them is because they do not know what is there, and the reality of the attitude I have heard displayed by some of the comments from the member for Concordia (Mr. Doer) is that he does not know what is there either, because he denies it. He denies the reality of what has gone before him and what he shares some accountability and some responsibility for, and that fact is obvious in some of his observations and statements.

The fact is if a fool trips over what is behind him, it is because he does not know what is there, and that is probably ironic, given the fact that the member is so often looking backward.

Mr. Doer: You are running for the party that brought in the GST, and you are lecturing us?

Mr. Pallister: Well, the member for Concordia need not be too defensive. I will devote most of my time to focusing on another party besides his own, but the fact is that for a man who spends as much time looking backwards and whose words so often reveal a backward-mentality, it is ironic that he is not aware of his own historical contribution to this province. He makes the comment that surpluses are immoral. I think that most Manitobans feel that deficits are somewhat more immoral than surpluses are.

But the reality is, too, that the New Democratic Party did introduce a number of creative approaches to government, and I want to give them credit for this. The most creative approach they introduced was taxation, over 20 new taxes or increases in existing tax in just a few short years. The reality of that—

An Honourable Member: Who brought in the payroll tax?

Mr. Pallister: Well, the payroll tax—members mention the payroll tax which is one that, of course, is particularly irksome to small business people and should be. It is a tax on jobs. But let me share with you a quote from a member of that NDP team in that time period who said this in 1982: A sales tax was considered. Clearly, it would provide substantial additional revenues; however, its impacts tend to be somewhat regressive and unfair to most Manitobans. An increase would hit hardest at those living on low and fixed incomes such as pensioners.

That was the then Minister of Finance Vic Schroeder. Well, his words I think are accurate, and I think most of us would share a belief that those words are true, but what then was done did not reflect that. I think most people would rather see a sermon than hear one any day, and so the actions of the government in the years subsequent to this statement were that they raised the sales tax from 5 percent to 6 percent just a year later and hurt low-income people, and took money from those on low and fixed incomes, and hurt pensioners, and took resources out of their pockets, and did so despite their belief that this would hurt them. They did it knowingly, not out of ignorance, but knowing.

Further on in their mandate in 1987, they actually increased the sales tax yet again and increased the base upon which the sales tax is applied, so here we have it again. I think most people would rather see a sermon than hear one any day, and they certainly did not see one when the NDP was in power.

The reality is, though, Madam Speaker, that we should grieve, but not grieve too long because there is no point in focusing totally on the past. I think we have to deal with the present and with the future, and the reality is that our economy has turned around in spite of the legacy that was left to us by the previous administration. The Conference Board of Canada expects our economy to grow by 2.8 percent this year, and the national average forecast is 1.6 percent. That is true economic growth and a real turnaround.

In terms of jobs, nearly 24,000 were created between January '96 and January '97, a real and significant improvement in Manitoba's economy. Manitoba's economy today employs over 540,000 people. That is more people than have ever been employed in

Manitoba in the history of this province. This is a real statement of the reality of what this government has done in terms of its management of this province's economy, and Manitoba has the highest job creation growth rate in Canada. Now these are all compelling statements of fact that support my contention that this province has done things well in terms of its management.

* (1640)

In terms of manufacturing, there has been a tremendous boom in the manufacturing sector, 9,000 new jobs since '92, thousands more created by a number of different opportunities that are coming forward, and I will allude to those in a moment; manufacturing shipments up 8 percent. That is three times the national average.

All of these indicators are very real statements of the possibilities that are emerging in Manitoba. Capital investment in Manitoba rose, in '95, 12.5 percent. That is the highest increase of any province. Nationally, investment spending declined 1.7 percent, which belies the Liberals mandate that they campaigned on, of course, of jobs, jobs, jobs. Where investment spending declines, so too will jobs follow. Private investment rose 19 percent in Manitoba in 1996, and we are the only province to record rising private investment in each of the past five years.

Well, we are all fond of quoting from periodicals when it suits us, so I will do the same. What does the Winnipeg Free Press say about us? Since coming to power in '88, the Filmon government has been nothing if not determined to put Manitoba's fiscal house in order. The Tories are proud of their fiscal record and so they should be. They have made tough, unpopular decisions during their time in office, decisions that are starting to pay off in terms of fiscal stability and economic growth.

Well, since 1988, we have continuously debated with members opposite on the merits of the decisions that we have made, and the reality is that the tenor of the advice that we have received from members opposite has been consistent if nothing else, and it has consistently been their position to advocate we spend more money. Had we taken their advice, Manitoba would not be experiencing the economic growth that it is now experiencing. Had we taken their advice, we

would not have reduced deficits, we would not have balanced the budget, we would not be paying down debt in this province. We chose not to take their advice. That was the right approach then, and it probably remains the right approach.

The reality is, Madam Speaker, that we must reflect as a government the qualities that people admire in others, and one of the qualities certainly that I admire in others is foresight. We all try to look ahead, and we all admire those who try and who do look ahead and who live their lives reflective of the reality of what it is they want to see happen in the future. We all rub our hand on the grimy pane to try to see what is out there beyond.

It is a challenge that each of us faces, and it is a challenge that governments must face up to. That means looking beyond today's current issues and looking to the future and trying to ascertain what those issues will be in the future. Some have the ability to look ahead and others do not.

I would like to share with you some quotes, Madam Speaker, from some people who do not have much foresight. Here is one, and I quote now: "Drill for oil, you mean drill into the ground to try to find oil—you are crazy." This is what drillers, whom Edwin L. Drake tried to enlist to his project to drill for oil in 1859, told him just before, of course, major developments in the jurisdiction he was in.

Here is another one. "Stocks have reached what looks like a permanently high plateau." That was Irving Fischer, who was a well-known professor of economics at Yale University in 1929—if you can reflect on the ability of Mr. Fischer to look into the future.

Here is another one, a member for Thompson. He said, this bill will not work. That was in reference to The Balanced Budget, Debt Repayment and Taxpayer Protection Act which is working, of course, and because of its enactment has achieved balanced budgets in this province as a consequence, another example of a lack of ability to look ahead.

Let us try this one. "Who the hell wants to hear actors talk?" That was H.M. Warner, Warner Bros., 1927—a little lack of foresight there, I would say.

Oh, here is a good one. I quote now: "I think that this piece of legislation is much like the Free Trade Agreement. It has the same agenda, and it is equally as dangerous for our province as the free trade agreements have been for Canada and Manitoba." That was the member for Radisson (Ms. Cerilli) on balanced budget legislation, September of 1995.

Another lack of foresight: "We do not like their sound and guitar music is on the way out." That was Decca Recording Company rejecting the Beatles in 1962, another example of a lack of foresight.

Here we have a good one. "I am sorry to have to rise on a bill that is destined to make Manitoba the laughing stock of the financial management world." It is the member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale), September 1995, balanced budget legislation.

These are all examples, Madam Speaker, of people who just simply have not the ability to look ahead or at least have not tried to look ahead very far into the future. What we have done, Madam Speaker, is we have tried to look ahead, and we have governed with foresight as a conscious and unceasing focus of this government. As a result of that, we are the lowest cost government in Canada. Service First initiative is a good example of looking within, of a government that is willing to look within itself to try to reinvent the way it delivers services, and there is never an end to this type of looking within. We have to continue to pursue better ways of spending within our government's operations. That is not something that we will reach a result on that will be anything but a temporary signpost along the way to continuous improvement in business operations within this government.

We recognize through this government's initiatives in the small business sector that the small business sector is, in fact, the engine of growth in our economy, not a cow to be milked as members opposite would view it, but rather the sturdy oxen pulling the cart beside it. REDI initiatives through the Rural Economic Development department, Business Start program, Rural Entrepreneur Assistance, Grow Bonds, Manitoba Marketing Network and many, many others, all designed to ally ourselves and our government with the small business sector in this province who is responsible for employing the people of this province.

The reality is that jobs are nothing more than capital put at risk. Capital at risk is the best definition I have ever heard of a job and how do you put capital at risk in an uncertain environment, an environment where the government looks to raise taxes every six months? You do not. You need to have a stable tax environment, and that is what we have in this province today.

So we have in this province no major tax increases now for 10 years. That is the longest standing tax freeze in our country, and we have, in fact, lowered taxes in this budget in an effort to create an environment where small business can create more jobs for our young people and for all of us. All of us will benefit by that type of approach. I am pleased to see corporate capital tax exemptions increase from \$2 million to \$3 million. I am pleased to see the payroll tax exemption level increase to \$1 million. Over 90 percent of our employers are free of that tax and should be free of it because, by taking money from small businesses and taking it out of payroll, we reduce their ability to employ those people who need jobs and want jobs in our economy.

When I speak of foresight, I will speak with some pride of the City Council in my home town of Portage la Prairie who, through their foresight and their ability to manage more effectively and more decisively in challenging and difficult times, has had a continuous tax freeze for six years. Following the lead that this provincial government has set, they are striving at their level of government to establish some certainty and confidence in their jurisdiction so that small businesses can, in fact, locate there.

I am pleased to tell you that in my community of Portage la Prairie small businesses are starting up and expanding, and this is to the benefit of all of us. As all of the members of this Legislature know, Portage la Prairie has gone through a dramatic loss of employment positions as a result of the closure of the Canadian Forces Base there and the Campbell Soup operation, a traumatic experience that equates to roughly the loss of 40,000 jobs within the city of Winnipeg, on that scale, significant, significant loss. [interjection] We will have a discussion later. I will complete my remarks now.

The reality is that this is the type of foresight and the type of prudent management that must continue. If we

want to continue to restore confidence for the small business sector which will lead to capital being put at risk, we must exemplify our willingness to create stability as a government in terms of the tax rates and of the climate for small businesses, and we are seeing the results of that.

* (1650)

In Elie, Isobord Enterprises, it is a \$142-million plan. I know the member for Lakeside (Mr. Enns) takes some pleasure in seeing that plant, which will produce composite board from straw. There will be 300 jobs created during the construction phase, 100 permanent jobs, another 100 contract jobs for the massive straw collection operation each fall.

Can-Oat Milling in Portage la Prairie, a tremendous success story, Can-Oat Milling currently employing over 75 people and expanding. With the completion of its next construction phase, in partnership with SaskPool, Can-Oat Milling will be the second largest processor of oats in the world. Its base is here in Manitoba. I think all of us in this House, in this Chamber, take great pride in that fact.

McCain Foods is completing a \$75-million expansion in Portage that will double the size of its potato processing plant there, over 120 full-time jobs created, not to mention the tremendous value-added benefits that will provide for the suppliers of potatoes to the McCain operation throughout the central plains and the south-central part of the province. Midwest Foods' \$18.6-million expansion of its Carberry facility, Archer Daniels Midland Agri-Industries, construction of an oilseed terminal in Carberry—many, many other examples of course exist, and these are all revealing of the competitive advantage that we have in this province, that we have created in part as a result of the initiatives of this government. We deserve to be proud of that.

Just as we, perhaps because we are too close, perhaps because we are here every day, we do not see these incremental improvements and we do not give credit to these small-business people for putting capital at risk and creating the jobs in our economy that we should, and we do not give credit to ourselves here for the

decisions that have been made, but those are wise decisions that reflect in a better economy for our province.

It was interesting to hear some of the comments from the member for Concordia (Mr. Doer) and the member for Brandon East (Mr. Leonard Evans) because, in reference to the budget, they were making comments along the lines that we should not take credit for increased revenues due to better trade opportunities.

That seemed to be the gist of the comments they were making, and that seems rather ironic, given the fact that this government was a strong advocate for free trade, did promote free trade. It seems that it would be only fair to take credit where credit is due, and so if we advocated for free trade and it benefits us and produces jobs and increases revenues, then it is a good thing to take credit for.

On the part of the member for Concordia (Mr. Doer), however, he, I believe, opposed free trade, and his party, the party of which he is a member, was dead against it, and all of these jobs that I have alluded to, without exception, are as a result of free trade and NAFTA and the agreements that have been signed with other jurisdictions. So it is pretty ironic that the member for Concordia would attack this government for fighting for something which is creating jobs and try to take credit for something which he opposed, but it is not out of keeping or inconsistent, as far as I am concerned, in viewing the member's comments.

Now our foresight has had, in effect, a strong impact on health care. As in previous years, this foresight will mean that Manitoba will spend a greater share of its program spending on health care than any other province in Canada. Over 34 cents on the dollar will be spent in '96-97 on health care. That is the highest percentage among the provinces, and health care remains a fundamental priority in our province. This year's budget is \$1.8 billion. That is up \$14 million from last year, and that is over 37 percent higher than was budgeted in '87-88. This budget is committed to a number of health care initiatives. Of course, one that I know gives some satisfaction to myself and other members is the Boundary Trails Regional Health Care Centre, a major project and one that will benefit the people of south-central Manitoba tremendously.

Now, this is in spite of federal offloading that has been described, and accurately so, as draconian, backward, shortsighted and thoughtless. By this government's efforts to maintain the level of health care spending that it is in this jurisdiction, we are effectively being asked not only to balance our own budget, but along with the other provinces, we are being asked to balance the budget of this country. The reality is that this federal government needs to follow Manitoba's lead in a number of areas. I would like to put forward the idea that we make Manitoba's way Canada's way.

Now, first of all, I would like to talk about regulatory review. In this province, we committed to undertake a review of the regulations throughout our province—10,000-plus pages—and did so, and streamlined fully a third of those, eliminating many, avoiding duplication, eliminating duplication because we knew that the Canadian Federation of Independent Business said that, when they surveyed their members, their members told them that after the level of taxation, the level of regulation was the second highest level of concern that their members had. We knew that by reviewing our regulations and by reducing the burden of red tape on our small business people we could create an environment where small businesses could create more jobs.

Now what did the federal Liberals do? They made an announcement that they would do that too, that they would follow Manitoba's lead and would review the regulations of the federal government. They would come up with a streamlined approach, and they would create efficiencies which would see greater job creation that is so badly needed in this country. Then what happened? Sunday, March 9, a little write-up in the Canadian Press wire service says here: Ottawa. Bill to cut red tape dies. The government has quietly abandoned the bill it promised would cut red tape and ease the regulatory burden on business.

It goes on to say: The bill would have allowed businesses to get exemptions from regulations by negotiating alternative arrangements with cabinet ministers. Lots of noise, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. The federal Liberal government made an announcement and then dropped the ball.

While we are preserving health care, the federal Liberal government has slashed the Canada Health and

Social Transfers by 41 percent. In spite of the fact that we have a couple of opposition parties that have told us nothing about this, many people are becoming aware of it, and the reality is that we need to make Manitoba's way Canada's way.

We have looked to other areas to reduce our expenditure, not to health care, not to education, to other areas, more difficult and more challenging areas, than it would be to download to the provinces that responsibility. The federal Liberal government in the last two budgets alone has chopped over \$6 billion out of the Canada Health and Social Transfer and more to come, more to come. If we leave the Liberals in power federally, that is exactly what we will get, more chopping of health care, post-secondary education and social services in this country.

You know what hurts? Madam Speaker, you know what hurts most? They cut over 40 percent for the Canada Health and Social Transfer. Do you know how much they have cut for internal reform, internal spending? Do you know how much their budget has come down? One percent. So while vulnerable people and health care patients across this country, expectant mothers and the disabled are all frowning and crying and living in fear, and the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) tells us about it everyday in the House and he is right, those people are frightened, and while they are frightened, fat-cat bureaucrats around the Liberal government walk around with a smile on their face knowing they are safe as all get-out in Ottawa because they are looking in the wrong areas to cut. They have not got the courage to stand up to their own bureaucrats in Ottawa and say we are going to do things better here. No, they are going to chop us on health care.

Where are the priorities? Where is the compassion? You have got to say no to health care so you can say yes to bureaucrats if you are a Liberal. I do not think that is the right way. There has got to be a better way than smiling bureaucrats in your office every day. Maybe they need some frowning bureaucrats in their office, so they can have some smiling people out here in rural Manitoba that know they are not going to get chopped on health care every year under a Liberal government.

What about in Justice? I think Manitoba's way is starting to work. We have the most developed youth

justice committees in Canada. We have got 700 volunteers in over 70 communities working together with the justice system so that victims and offenders are brought together to decide what form of justice fits the crime. Initiatives such as healing circles, which the aboriginal members of this House have told me they agree strongly with, Urban Sports Camp Programs, drinking and driving laws in Manitoba are the toughest in Canada, strict stalking and sexual harassment laws, Victims' Assistance—I want to compliment the people who are involved, many volunteers involved in the Victims' Assistance programs in this province—worthwhile programs dealing compassionately with people who are living in fear, seniors in rural communities who feel particularly vulnerable. We have put more money into counselling for victims.

What has the federal government done in Justice? Let us address that, shall we? What has the federal government done in the area of Justice? Well, I know one thing for sure. Lloyd Axworthy voted for the faint hope clause. He thought the faint hope clause made good sense. Well, it makes good sense to Clifford Olson, but Clifford Olson should not be on the face of this earth. Clifford Olson should not be here with us on this planet today. Clifford Olson is an animal, and the Clifford Olson horror show should not be perpetrated on people in this country, and victims should not be made victims time and time and time again by an animal like Clifford Olson. When Lloyd Axworthy votes for the faint hope clause, I hope he stands up in his riding and tells us all who he was representing when he voted for it. I would be interested to know.

We have people who have built this nation, people with courage who built this nation, living in fear in their own homes, living in fear of violent acts perpetrated on them. We have people living in farmhouses who have had to have their locks retooled to get keys for them because they have never locked the doors of their houses. They have never locked them before.

People in rural communities have said I am going to leave my house unlocked, because if somebody gets stuck in a snowbank, I do not want him to freeze to death. They should come right into the house and use the phone. That is how rural Manitobans feel, and now they are retooling their locks. Why are they doing that? Because they live in fear.

So we all know that. We have a nation of people living in fear from violent offences, which are up. The member opposite for St. Johns (Mr. Mackintosh) quotes these statistics, and he is correct, as well.

People are living in fear, and so what do the Liberals come up with in Ottawa? What is the best initiative that the Liberals—[interjection] The big Liberals. For the member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), I am not talking about the little Liberals here in Manitoba. I am referring to the big Liberals.

* (1700)

Point of Order

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Speaker, I am somewhat baited with a number of the comments that the member for Portage la Prairie levels across the floor, but, on the point of order, in Beaudry and in our rules it is very clear that the minister has to be somewhat relevant.

We are talking about the provincial government and what responsibilities the provincial government has, Madam Speaker, and the very same questions and concerns that he raises could, in fact, be levelled at the provincial government.

So he might want to talk about what the provincial government is actually doing to resolve some of these problems of the insecurities in rural Manitoba as opposed to trying to campaign for the next federal election, quite possibly.

Mr. Doer: On the same point of order, although I did not agree with most of his speech, I believe he was in order, because the federal Liberals in Ottawa and the provincial Conservatives in Manitoba, of which we have moved an amendment of nonconfidence, are both to us the same group of corporate individuals, and, therefore, I think he was relevant even though they share the same race-to-the-bottom ideology. So I would say the minister is in order.

Madam Speaker: I would remind the honourable member for Portage la Prairie to ensure that he keeps his comments relative to the budget.

Point of Order

Mr. Doer: On a new point of order, the motion before the House is the nonconfidence motion, and we would advise the member, if he really wants to get support in the next federal election, join us to throw out this government.

Madam Speaker: The honourable Leader of the official opposition is accurate. You should be speaking to the amendment that is being proposed by the honourable Leader of the official opposition.

* * *

Mr. Pallister: Madam Speaker, I am very saddened to note that the ever campaigning member for Inkster does not think that justice is relevant in this country and relevant in the discussion of a budget in the provincial Parliament. I am also very pleased, however, to note that the Leader of a party that is totally irrelevant thinks that I am in my comments. I appreciate that very much.

Now, let us ask ourselves, what have the Liberals come up with in Ottawa in terms of dealing aggressively with the circumstances and concerns of people who live in fear. What they have come up with is this. They are for criminalizing those who choose to discipline their children. They are for that, and they are also for criminalizing farmers who must register their .22s. Now, those are the steps that the federal government has chosen to take against criminals in our society. To go against disciplined parents, to go against farmers is going to make us a safer society. I think not, but that has been their thrust.

Let us compare jobs and the economy, federally and provincially, shall we, just for interest. The Manitoba government has lowered taxes. The federal Liberals have raised taxes 40 times. They have raised taxes a total of \$2.6 billion. We have the second lowest unemployment rate in Canada here in our province. There are 400,000 unemployed Canadians. We have a 6.7 percent unemployment rate in Manitoba and dropping. We have a 9.7 percent unemployment rate in Canada and rising.

Ask yourselves, who is doing a better job here? Is it the government of Manitoba under this Progressive

Conservative collection of talented members and dedicated members, or is it the federal Liberal government?

I want to talk for a moment because one of the first things that someone told me upon making the decision to enter the political arena, they said: Perception, Brian; you will find in politics that perception is more important than reality.

Is that not a sad commentary? You know, the perception is that the federal Liberals have managed well. I am all for giving credit where credit is due. I am all for doing that, and I try to do that every time I speak. But I will tell you something. When a government reduces the deficit and takes claim for reducing a deficit and wants credit for it, that is fine. But let us look at the reasons the deficit has been reduced, shall we? Perhaps additional revenues from the GST which the federal Liberals said they would slash. Perhaps additional revenues as a result of free trade which the Liberals fought tooth and nail against. Let us give credit where credit is due. No credit is due on those two counts, and those are two of the major contributing factors to the reduced deficit.

How about downloading onto the provinces? Yes, all credit to the federal Liberals for downloading on the provinces the responsibility for balancing the federal budget. They have done that. They should be taking accountability for that and responsibility for accepting the fact that they have done that, and that is the wrong way to balance a budget. There is a better way.

Now the perception is they are a government for all, but the reality is something different. They are an urbanist government, as is the Liberal Party provincially, a party only within the Perimeter Highway, a party that advocated for retroactive crop insurance right here in this very Chamber. The member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) is howling with laughter at this point because he knows the ludicrous nature of a suggestion like that.

But here is what Liberal members of Parliament say about their own party campaign strategy. Liberal M.P.s warn campaign strategy too urban centred. I quote now: There are quite a lot of things I cannot use, said Liberal MP Murray Calder, Wellington-Grey-Dufferin-

Simcoe, Ontario. If they send us packages that are not relative to the rural ridings, they usually end up in the round file.

Let us see who else has got something to say about the Liberals' strategies. Oh, here is somebody. I quote again: Agriculture is not a big concern for this government, said James Tunney.

Well, the odds are pretty good he is not a Tory, so he might be a Bloc or a Reform member. No, he is a Liberal. Agriculture is not a big concern for this government, he said. He said, I want to give a little more recognition. But his party does not want to give it any recognition.

Now, here is the ever-popular member, the resigned, elected again Sheila Copps. She says, and this is a great suggestion: There should be rural and urban campaign packages for Liberal candidates focusing on distinctly different issues and playing up or down others. Computers make it easier to move things around, she said. Well, there is a Liberal for you. The perception is, it is a party for all. The reality is, it is a party for urban residents.

This is not a grassroots party, the federal Liberals, yet they claim to be. The reality is they are dictatorial, and the reality is that they have proven that by the conduct of their Prime Minister in his top-down approach, his dictatorial approach for the candidate selection process where he has insulted not only Liberals but all Canadians who have a basic understanding of democratic rights and the need for participation, and open participation, in the democratic process.

To suggest that he knows better than all the constituents in this country who have the desire and the need and the right to express their voice and have their vote on who represents them—to even suggest that is the ultimate in arrogance. For the Prime Minister of this country to suggest that he is the great benevolent dictator of this country—is well within his right, but he will be made accountable for that decision on his part.

* (1710)

Let us see, what else do we have here? The member for Concordia (Mr. Doer) talked about going door to door. I suggest, given the nature of the popularity of

his party based on recent polls, going from second to third, I understand, that he continue to go door to door and seek out at every opportunity people to meet and introduce himself to.

The reality is that we have constituents who have interest and views, constituents who are concerned, and I have gone and always been proactive in pursuing the opinions of my constituents. So this weekend I went around the community to many different venues and asked people what they thought of the budget, and they told me. They said you have not raised taxes; in fact, you have lowered them. Good for you. They said you are setting the tone for more jobs by leaving more money in our pockets. They said you are cutting in the right areas. I met with the mayor and reeve and they both complimented our government on working co-operatively with rural municipalities. I met with the member from the Manitoba Government Employees' Union. He said I have more job security now than I have ever had because there is no security in an operation that is losing money year after year.

Unlike federal governments under Liberal leadership, which is an oxymoron I think, we will not abandon Manitobans. We will not abandon the interests of working people. We will not abandon the people who count on the services of government. The reality is that we have a government that is conscious always of its obligations to its people. A sacred trust exists, and it is a real thing in our minds and in our hearts on this side of the House, a sacred trust to those whose pictures I showed you earlier, a sacred trust to our young, to our elderly, to our vulnerable, to all of us who will at some point in our lives certainly, if not today, depend on the services of government.

I want to close by making just a final reference to the conduct of the federal government in terms of the way it has treated disaster victims in this province. I want to say to the member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), who should be ashamed as he mouths off in his seat, that he has not raised a word in support of disaster victims in this province who have been downgraded on by bureaucrats in Ottawa, and not one Manitoba elected member of Parliament has spoken up in support of these people.

Municipalities do not deserve to be treated with disrespect when they are the most accountable level and

most pre-emptive level of government. They save us millions of dollars, and we have a flood coming this spring. They deserve to be treated with respect. They deserve to have decisions made at that local level respected by all of us. The federal Liberal government has decided that it will continue to download to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars—

Point of Order

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member for The Maples, on a point of order.

Mr. Gary Kowalski (The Maples): On a point of order, I had to leave my seat for a while, so I did not hear the entire speech.

I am wondering are campaign brochures being given out with this speech? Is there any relevance to the provincial budget, or is the member not only giving up his cabinet salary but going to give up his MLA salary because he is using public money to debate and campaign for the federal election?

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member for The Maples does not have a point of order. It is clearly—[interjection] On the same point of order?

Mr. Pallister: On the same point of order, Madam Speaker, I am commenting on the reality of the Liberal government's conduct in this country, and if that is not relevant to the member for The Maples, I am surprised and disappointed, but the fact of the matter is the Liberal government in Ottawa has downloaded onto the provinces and onto municipalities, and if the member finds that necessarily a campaign plank, I am sorry, but the fact is I am speaking about a fact that concerns all municipal leaders as evidenced by a unanimous resolution passed by the Union of Manitoba Municipalities and the Manitoba Association of Urban Municipalities.

If the member says it is an election issue, I do not dispute that, but the fact is it is agreed by all municipalities in this province that this is a relevant point that needs to be made more effectively by all of us, including the member for The Maples.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member for The Maples does not have a point of order. It is clearly a dispute over the facts.

* * *

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Portage la Prairie has about 30 seconds remaining.

Mr. Pallister: I want to conclude by saying, Madam Speaker, that I wish you the very best in your continued challenges in this House as you deal with emotional people who are sometimes rational. I want to encourage each of the members and say that I hold what they do in great respect, even though sometimes their conduct does not reflect the honour with which they have been bestowed by their electors. In particular, I make reference to some of the members opposite in their conduct during the MTS privatization debate of this past session.

I want to thank my constituents for the honour of serving them. It is indeed an honour. I want to thank my family for their ever present support and encouragement in a task that is truly, I believe, a worthwhile task. Thank you.

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): Madam Speaker, I intend during the course of this debate to refer extensively to the budget expenditure documents, particularly as they relate to Health, and to basically take a walk through the budget to examine why this government, despite the fact that they talk about their commitment to health care, are doing an abysmal job with respect to health care in this province and are managing health care in a state and in a fashion that is probably the worst managed health care system in the country in the province of Manitoba, which is why we have had three Health ministers over the last little period of time and which is why we are going to have three deputy Health ministers in the last period of time and which is why this government is continually in hot water.

You know, we are not going to rest on this side of the House until members opposite do something about what is happening in personal care homes in Manitoba. An inquest into Holiday Haven and the one death at

Holiday Haven is not enough. There is a bigger story here that needs to be told. They can accuse us of playing politics, but I can assure you this has got nothing to do with politics and has everything to do with protecting the rights of people who have no one to speak for them, protecting the rights of those who have no one to advocate for them, protecting the rights of individuals whose voices have not been heard for the past five, seven and eight years.

We will not rest on this side of this House until members opposite do the right thing with respect to personal care homes and allow those people to have a voice and deal with the past and ensure that Holiday Haven can never happen again in Manitoba. This is fair warning to members opposite from this side of the House that the issue will not go away. It will not go away any more than the issue concerning the inquest of the baby deaths at Health Sciences Centre did not go away. It will not go away until we have some answers, until we have an assurance that this kind of circumstance can never happen again in the province of Manitoba, Madam Speaker.

It is curious, Madam Speaker, to hear members opposite talk about no tax increases. Our Leader has very aptly pointed out the fact that we have seen tax increase after tax increase foisted upon the citizens of Manitoba, off loaded onto the citizens of Manitoba. Is it not ironic that the member for Portage talks about offloading when, in fact, this provincial government has offloaded onto taxpayers like no other provincial government in the history of this province.

There is an interesting development with respect to this Health budget as it relates to offloading. There was a time in this province when we paid for the capital cost of developing a facility 100 percent. The money came out of general tax revenues on the basis of fairness and on the basis of universality and on the basis that some regions in some areas of the province could not afford some services or some areas could.

What have we seen in this budget? We have seen a 20 percent tax effectively put onto the citizens of Manitoba, so if they want their capital projects to go ahead, they have to raise 20 percent of the cost. Members opposite say no. [interjection] A local contribution. You know, it is funny how they always

have a word for it, Madam Speaker, everything but the reality, that it is a tax.

* (1720)

If you take the capital program that was promised and then withdrawn, and it has sort of been partially promised again, the \$600 million, you are talking about taking out of the economy and out of the pockets of Manitobans \$150 million for them to proceed in their capital projects, Madam Speaker, and, you know, it would be one thing if they had the opportunity to do so, but those institutions and those bodies are already busy trying to raise capital for basic necessities that have been underfunded and not paid for by the provincial government for years. There was a time when fundraising took place in these communities and in these organizations for the extras, for the extra colour television, for the extra furniture in the lounge. Now they are fundraising in these institutions for the necessities, for the machinery, for the equipment, and on top of it now you are telling these communities and these organizations that they have to come up with the capital itself.

Madam Speaker, it makes for a curious juxtaposition. Will those public institutions own the 20 percent of their contribution, like private nursing homes who own 100 percent of the asset that the province pays for? It is interesting. Perhaps what is good for the goose should be good for the gander. Will those public institutions be able to have a say in that 20 percent of the capital they are putting up? I think not.

Madam Speaker, it is ironic that private nursing homes that have been growing at an expanded rate under this provincial jurisdiction should be allowed the 100 percent ownership and 100 percent control of their asset and public institutions do otherwise. What is the policy reason behind this decision? I wish we could hear, I wish there would be an explanation as to the policy reason.

The Minister of Health (Mr. Praznik) said on television the other day something to the effect that it would help to prioritize the projects. It would help people to really know what their projects would be at some other kind of—the reality is that it is a tax. It is a

cut. It has been instituted in this budget. What you are telling the people of Manitoba is you have to come up with another \$100 million, another \$150 million in order to have your capital projects go ahead, and you have no rational explanation for it and no defence of it.

Madam Speaker, this is without a discussion or even a discussion of the way that the province has manipulated the capital projects and the way the province has manipulated the numbers and the way the government promised projects and found them necessary, even though they had the financial numbers in front of them, and then subsequently after a provincial election found it necessary to freeze them.

Madam Speaker, I have told many communities that I think the capital projects are going to go ahead. They are going to go ahead because this government has such a bad record on health care that they have to do something, they have to be seen to be doing something in communities with respect to health care, so I think most of the capital projects will actually go ahead if those organizations can come up with the 20 percent. They are going to have to do it soon because they are going to have to start doing something, so the public can actually look at this government and its health care and see what they are doing because their record on health care is abysmal.

Let us open up the budget book and let us take a look. Let us go through the budget with respect to health care and see where the province is taking us, this well-managed—and I say that in italics—this well-managed health care system.

Madam Speaker, we take a look at Executive Support. We see Executive Support basically on par with last year, even though we know that we are having a new deputy minister by the end of the month and that the old deputy minister is going to be taken under the wing of the Premier as a special advisor, which is curious because the previous deputy minister has been doing consulting work, so the old club continues, the old managers, the old administrators still hang around—this despite the fact that this government has spent more money on consulting studies than any other regime in the history of this province. They have spent more millions of dollars on consulting companies than any other—[interjection]

The minister says what have you got against consulting? Because there is no accountability, because rather than talking to the people of Manitoba you have talked to the consultants and you have delegated power to make decisions, not to the public, not to your deputy ministers, which is why, perhaps, so many have left, but rather to the consultants.

Madam Speaker, the consultants for the past couple of years, KPMG in particular, have been running together with Jules Benson, the Department of Health. I do not fault the ex-minister. He barely had a say in what was going on in Health. It was out of the Premier's Office, through Jules Benson, and it was out of KPMG, and members opposite know that fact, so frankly it is hard to understand why you even need a deputy minister, because the deputy minister authority is residing at Treasury Board with Jules Benson or alternatively at KPMG or your other consulting firms.

Madam Speaker, let us continue looking on down through this budget, and let us look at the Home Care line. Now you know we see in the Home Care line that the government has finally put in an increase to home care that to a certain extent begins to reflect the demand and the need for home care in the community.

You know, for years we have been critical of the government because if you look at the data that is coming in from home care, while the budget has expanded for home care the number of people in home care up until last year was declining or was equal, so while the government went ahead and closed a thousand beds and while the government went ahead and laid off 1,800 health care providers, the budget and the number of people receiving home care was stagnant.

So we see this year an increase to home care, but what is the increase to home care at the expense of? Well, first off, we see a decline in salaried employees at home care in the vicinity of 120 individuals but we see more money, and where is that money going to go? [interjection] The Deputy Premier (Mr. Downey) knows where that money is going. It is going to their friends. It is going to the private companies that are going to be receiving the contracts to privatize home care. Built into that will have to be a profit level to

allow those companies to make their profits, clip their coupons and continue contributing to whomever they continue contributing to, and I think it is fairly obvious whom they contribute to.

We are seeing an increase in home care funding, but only this government could design the kind of home care delivery system that this government has designed. If you want to look for a quintessential example of a poorly managed government, it is with respect to how the home care process is working. We are going to have the city of Winnipeg divided up into two quadrants, originally four, two quadrants, and the new people who require home care are going to be receiving the new private service and, presumably, the old people will continue on the government service but there has to be a certain ratio that is maintained and there is a crossover between long-term care and short-term care and you know it is the most cumbersome, awkward structure. It could only be designed by a government that is so committed to privatization that it is willing to compromise the care—yes, I said compromise the care of people receiving the care to put in place their convoluted home care system.

So let us go on. Let us look, and I wish the Minister of Health (Mr. Praznik) were here because—well, I should not say that. I apologize, Madam Speaker. I wish the Minister of Health was listening more attentively and had the opportunity. Where in this budget do we see the child care initiative that has been so promised and so lacking? The government rushed out to release the Postl report before the election to say all of the things they are going to do about Healthy Child, and, you know, they have done virtually nothing after being in office for two years and after releasing the report.

* (1730)

My Leader talked about how you could make a difference. Madam Speaker, as the Postl report indicated, if you could, for example, deal with low birthweight babies, and if you could assist the low birthweight moms, you could save not only the lives and well-being of many children, but you would save the province \$200,000 in the first two years of that child's life.

We attended an opening, me and the Minister of Health, several weeks ago for a program Mom and Me, and you know, Madam Speaker, it took—and I will give the federal government and the city credit for putting that program in place, but it took the community, it took the nutritionists, it took money from the federal government, initiative of the city and some limited initiative from the provincial government to get that process going. It is a wonderful program, and it is a first step. But where was the province in taking a leadership role? They were not there; they have not been there, and they continue to be absent.

Let us go on. Let us look through Laboratory & Imaging Services. We are now awaiting the awarding of a contract with respect to laboratory services. Report after report after report to this government has indicated that money can be saved with respect to the private labs. In fact, there is a report that said the private labs are creaming the profit from the public system. What does the government do? The government takes the public system and basically privatizes it and tells them they have to be private, even though they have reports to the contrary. I see members shaking their heads. One only needs to look to the proposal that was put forward by the Winnipeg hospitals who said the only way we can get some say in what is happening in labs is to go with a private consortium consultant as our partner because that is all the province will listen to. So they are proceeding exactly opposite to the recommendations.

Again, we see another example of a blind management approach to ideology that they are following. Instead of approaching it from where can we save money in the private sector, they are saying we are going to ratchet down the public sector and have them downsize, have them proceed to work in a consortium with private operators. That is the way they are proceeding.

Madam Speaker, let us move down to the Health Services Insurance Fund, the largest portion of the provincial budget. Let us take a look at hospitals. Again, we see hospitals taking another cut. Hospitals have taken over a hundred million dollars in cuts since 1992-93 when the level was at \$950 million. We are now down to \$817 million. In fact, the cut is far beyond a hundred million dollars. When the

government said they were going to close acute care beds, they promised there would be services in the community. Where are those services? Where are those programs? Is there any wonder that we find out that ambulance services of the City of Winnipeg spends 90 percent of its time diverting patients from hospital to hospital? I might add, the government had a plan to close some of those hospitals.

The problem is beds, and the problem is flexibility. The Bed Registry that we have heard so much about—Don Orchard promised it in 1991; Jim McCrae promised it in 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, and the new minister is promising it in 1997—is only one small part. It is not a panacea. What you need is some flexibility, need some beds. If members opposite do not understand, let me explain it to them.

There is nowhere to put patients on occasion. There used to be an opportunity to move a patient from the ICU into a medical bed, or you could move a patient even into a surgical bed. You had some flexibility. Now, Madam Speaker, there is no flexibility left in the system. So I go to Health Sciences and I go check out what is happening in the operating room. What is happening in the operating room? Surgery is delayed that day. Why is surgery delayed that day? Because the ICU beds are full. They cannot do surgery. So the patients who are recovering have to recover inside the operating room until ICU beds open up so they can move a patient out. That was just one day. That was only one—[interjection] The member says, what happened when you were government?

You know what, Madam Speaker? There have always been problems but, when you cut a thousand beds out of the system and you fire 1,800 people, you lose the flexibility. I dare say that never in the history of Manitoba have ambulances spent 90 percent of their time shuttling patients from hospital to hospital looking for a bed than you have done under this poorly managed health care system, the worst managed health care system in the country.

You know, Madam Speaker, I am going down line by line in the budget so, if the members would pay some attention, they would perhaps—and that is the problem. You know, there is a defensive reaction from members opposite, cluck, cluck, cluck, just defensive reaction.

Let us defend our government record even though it is abysmal, let us defend the status quo, let us not criticize the Premier (Mr. Filmon), because you know what happens when you criticize the Premier on that side. The only people who get away with criticizing the Premier are on this side of the House, because anyone else criticizes the Premier in that caucus or anywhere else—

An Honourable Member: There is no need to.

Mr. Chomiak: Oh, the Deputy Premier (Mr. Downey), true to form, says there is no need to criticize the Premier, and therein lies the problem. There is no need to criticize the Premier when we raise Holiday Haven, and the Premier says, you are fearmongering. There is no need to criticize the Premier because the members opposite do not listen. Because they are so defensive, they refuse to listen, and when we bring legitimate issues to this Chamber, they refuse to listen, and they get themselves into the kind of trouble that they get themselves in. [interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I am experiencing difficulty hearing the honourable member for Kildonan.

Mr. Chomiak: My point has been well made. Dare I criticize Gary Filmon? And the voices chortle up from the rafters. Dare anyone criticize the Premier? You know, members opposite know that that is, in fact, true. They know that you cannot criticize the Premier, and that is part of the problem. You have a management mentality over there. The Premier is no longer a governor. He operates the government like he is a CEO, and you do not question the CEO, because what the CEO says goes. You minister, you are right. You are finished, you go, and that is it, and they slink off into the night.

The problem with that, the problem with not challenging the Premier is that when we raise issues and everyone runs to the defence of the Premier, no one says, hey, is it possible that perhaps what they are raising is legitimate? Is it possible that these issues are a problem, and Holiday Haven is the best example.

The Premier went on air and said we were fearmongering. The Premier went on air and said we were, and the member now says we were fearmongering.

You know, if we wanted to fearmonger, I could have released publicly the information that I had confidentially forwarded to the Minister of Health, hoping that the Minister of Health would have done something to improve the situation before a man had to be dragged out of his bed and killed.

Mr. Mervin Tweed (Turtle Mountain): You are responsible for withholding that information.

Mr. Chomiak: The member for Turtle Mountain says that we are responsible. You know, Madam Speaker, I will never again, as long as I am in this Chamber, do what I did on Holiday Haven.

I will call press conferences. I will make everything public. I will never negotiate with this government to try to solve a problem of that nature ever again as long as I am a member in this House. Because we tried to do—[interjection] No, the information was forwarded to the Minister of Health on the understanding that the matter would be solved, and the minister did not do anything. Oh, yes, he gave me a reply, three letters later, three letters later one management report recommending the management change later. One death later, he replaced management, and that issue is not over yet.

So, Madam Speaker, the problem with the psychology over there is, members opposite—and if members opposite think that I am angry, yes, I am. The problem with the psychology on that side of the House is that we do not criticize the Premier (Mr. Filmon). We do not criticize our government. You have closed your minds, and you have closed your hearts to what people are saying in Manitoba.

* (1740)

Let us look to the Personal Care Homes line in the budget, down from \$244 million last year to \$238 million this year. Personal care homes are funded less this year in Manitoba than they were in 1992-93, despite the fact that there are more beds, an area where the government has been criticized report after report after report, where the government has been told that staffing has to increase, that guidelines have to increase, and the government has reduced the budget to personal care homes.

Now, what else has happened in personal care homes? The rate paid by individuals has more than doubled. But that is not a tax increase; that is another contribution. What is the doubling of the increase? Is it not a tax increase when you are paying twice as much as you paid three years ago to be in a nursing home?

An Honourable Member: It is a contribution.

Mr. Chomiak: The minister says it is a contribution. You know, it is tax increases from the members opposite—

An Honourable Member: Do you know what? It is a contribution to the private personal care home owners and then transferred back over into the Tory coffers.

Mr. Chomiak: You know, that is an interesting point. That is an interesting point. When we talk about contributions, we should talk about contributions that make their way into the Tory coffers. Perhaps that is the reference to contributions.

So Manitobans are directly paying more for their personal care homes, to stay in their personal care homes, and the government is contributing less. You have a crisis in personal care homes, and any fair-minded observer will tell you that. I have met with executive directors, and I have met with workers, and I have met with patients. They will all tell you that the staffing levels are inadequate, that the systems are inadequate in personal care homes.

You have been warned about that. You had an inquest in '92-'93 that warned you. You had a study that was taken as a result of an exposé by one of the media in '93-'94, and still you fail to act, and failure to act has caused—[interjection] Oh, the Minister of Education (Mrs. McIntosh) is chortling about working for free. The Minister of Education who does not understand, the Minister of Education is asking for someone to look after her, Madam Speaker. Well, all I can say is that collectively at one time in this province we used to provide universally for health care, and that has been seriously eroded under this government.

Let us move down to the Pharmacare line. Well, Pharmacare, if one is to look at the Pharmacare line, it appears that there is a big increase to Pharmacare this

year. In fact, we have only taken Pharmacare not even to where it was last year before the government dismantled the program. So another example of poor—and why I say this government is the most poorly managed health care system in the country is you only have to look at Pharmacare.

What happened last year in Pharmacare? The government destroyed, took apart the Pharmacare program without any advance notice, without any discussion with the public. They destroyed the program. And what happened? Not only did the government succeed in eliminating two-thirds of Manitobans—and I know the Minister of Education likes that. I know the Minister of Education does not believe in universality; I know the Minister of Education believes in just the concept of—but they eliminated two-thirds of the people on Pharmacare and at the same time they ended up costing the government more last year than the year before, and why is that?

Well, they so poorly managed the program that they did not even take a look at the—[interjection] Madam Speaker, I urge you to call the Minister of Education—she will have her opportunity to debate in this debate. She only makes my point that this government fails to listen, and this government only chortles on, an inability to look in the mirror, an inability to even listen to any criticism, is the reason why this government has destroyed, effectively, our universal health care system and which is why students, who came here to the Legislature and watched the minister answering questions the other day, kept saying to me who is that woman answering questions. I said that was the Minister of Education (Mrs. McIntosh), and they were astonished that that was the Minister of Education.

Madam Speaker, when we go to Pharmacare and we see what they have done to Pharmacare, we get an idea of how poorly—[interjection] Oh, the member says that this is a personal attack and I withdraw that. I withdraw those comments about the member, the Minister of Education. I thank the minister for pointing that out.

Madam Speaker, if we look on to the capital and if we look at the Addictions Foundation in Manitoba, we see the budget that is frozen from last year, this year,

and you scratch your head and you wonder about a government that has increased gambling like no other time in the history in the province, and why the programs that have been put in place by this government have not commensurately put in place effective prevention programs. Again, it speaks volumes about the inability of this government to manage what they are doing in health care.

Madam Speaker, let us look at the Ambulance line. We have a situation where the ambulance service in the city of Winnipeg is devoting 90 percent of their time moving patients from hospital to hospital because of the fact that the government has so poorly managed the emergencies.

Now let us look at the emergency system. As I indicated earlier, the government has promised a central bed registry now. Six reports, three ministers, and again we see it promised again and somehow and in spite of the fact that that scene is a panacea. Yet this very government wanted to eliminate an additional two emergency rooms in the city of Winnipeg without putting in any alternatives.

Madam Speaker, if there is ever an example of poorly managed health care, it is in the emergency sector in the city of Winnipeg. It is an absolute disaster. If we brought to this House the stories and the phone calls that come in, I think we could spend most of Question Period on those alone.

An Honourable Member: Why do you not?

Mr. Chomiak: The member says why do we not. We generally have not brought those kinds of issues to the floor of the Legislature on a systematic basis just because of the nature of the way that we do our business in this Chamber, but if the minister would like us to do that we could certainly take care of all Question Period with it because that could easily take care of all Question Period if we brought those issues to the floor of this House.

Madam Speaker, palliative care, there was a brief reference. I saw it in the throne speech, to palliative care, but I do not see any reference in this budget. I attended a debate with the new Minister of Health (Mr. Praznik) and he admitted publicly—and I give him credit

for it—that in the area of palliative care the government had not done enough, and I agree.

In fact, Madam Speaker, the government has recommendations from a report of four years ago, a very well extensively done report that could see an extensive palliative care system put in place in the province of Manitoba, if only the government had the initiative or if only the government had the desire to do so. I asked the members opposite, if you are truly interested in dealing with the reform aspects of health care, then surely you would take that report and immediately implement it and prevent individuals, some of whom are suffering, just suffering miserably.

* (1750)

I reflect back on the comments earlier to the deputy minister where there was recently an individual who, rather than our bring to the floor of the Leg, we simply raised it with the minister. In fact, the minister responded and provided the palliative care to the individual, but it did take the individual having to contact us directly and our having to contact the minister's office for that person to get adequate palliative care. That should not have to happen. You should not have to go to your MLA to get adequate and proper health care. It ought to be provided.

Let me touch on the capital program. Rather, you know what, I just realized my limits are fast approaching here, and I wanted to touch on the question of regional health authorities. I think the government was dishonest last fall when they passed Bill 49 dealing with the regional health authorities, indicating publicly that the regional health authorities, the regional boards, the pre-existing regional boards would have the opportunity of coming on or not coming on into the regional health authorities, and then as soon as the bill was passed, coming down with a hammer saying, if you do not come on board, you are stuck with your debt. Madam Speaker, that was dishonest. It sets the tone for the way the government is going to be centrally running health.

As I said on many occasions in this House, the model that members opposite have chosen with respect to regional health is the New Zealand model. Members ought to take another look at the experience in New

Zealand, the place that they sent civil servants down to study. Members ought to reflect on what is coming back from the New Zealand model, because what is coming back is increased costs, resignation of boards and increased waiting lists. The model that has been chosen with the establishment of the regional health authorities and the district councils and the contracting out of services and the competition is exactly the New Zealand model.

I remind members opposite of what Evelyn Shapiro from the government Centre for Health Policy and Evaluation that is supposed to be monitoring the government health care reform, what Evelyn Shapiro warned members opposite. She said the experience on regionalization is not coming back as positive as members like to hope. Manitoba is in a unique position. We do not have to go as fast as other jurisdictions. We can learn the lessons from other jurisdictions, and if there is still a need to proceed, then learn the lessons from the other jurisdictions before you proceed. That is not happening. That is why we said, put regionalization on hold for 12 months.

I urge members opposite who do not seem to be able to listen to any kind of criticism, if you do not want to listen to members, if you do not want to listen to our criticism, then read about the experiences themselves from New Zealand, look at what the Centre for Health Policy and Evaluation has to say. Look at those examples and heed those warnings before we go down the path of the New Zealand model. We are already seeing difficulties in our health care system. We are already seeing a problem.

Madam Speaker, I want to touch very briefly in the final seconds upon the whole issue of capitalization. I think the government has been dishonest with respect to capitalization. I think that a project that was a necessity and a go-ahead prior to the last provincial election is no different today. The only difference today is, the government is not facing the voters and that you are forcing the people of Manitoba to have to raise funds. I think we ought to have a debate. We ought to have a discussion before you go down that road with Manitobans with respect to the advisability of the need for raising 20 percent of the capital. I think it is patently unfair. I think the government ought to be able to put forward its policy reasons as to why they are

doing so. There ought to be discussion about that prior to going down that road.

There are too many unanswered questions, but, as usual, the government has proceeded without listening. I urge them to heed the call of what I am sure you are going to hear from jurisdictions around the province, that this is unfair, that they had no opportunity and that a project that was somehow advisable prior to the election is not somehow advisable now opens a lot of questions about the validity of the government's honesty in dealing with the capital projects.

I close by saying that the government has, in my opinion, the worse managed health care system in the country. I urge them to start listening, Madam Speaker, and stop defending the Premier (Mr. Filmon) and the chairman of Treasury Board with respect to what they plan to do. Thank you.

Hon. Bonnie Mitchelson (Minister of Family Services): Madam Speaker, I stand in my place in this House today to lend unequivocal support to the budget that our Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) brought in on Friday.

At the outset, because I did not have an opportunity to speak on the throne speech, I would like to say to you, Madam Speaker, that I have every confidence in your ability to lead this House and this Legislature in your role as Speaker and want you to know that I believe you have done an excellent job through some very difficult times and through times that sometimes I am ashamed to admit that I had to be a part of as an elected member of this House. So, to you, you can hold your head up high and be proud of the job that you have done and that I know you will continue to do to serve all members of this Legislature.

I would also like to welcome back the pages and know that probably the time that you have spent in this House serving all members of the Legislature will be very memorable and something that you can talk about for years to come, sometimes with a smile on your face and you may remember some times that were not quite so pleasant. To you, welcome back and thank you for the job that you have done in serving us very well and I know the job you will continue to do through the rest of your term as our support.

To the table officers and to our new table officer, welcome. You will, I am sure, find the job that you have challenging but very rewarding in many respects.

With that, Madam Speaker, I would like to put some comments on the record about what I believe is a historic budget for the province of Manitoba, one that I stand in my place and I am very proud of as a result of nine long hard years of work on behalf of the people of Manitoba by our government.

I take some pride in being a part of a budget that finally begins to pay down the debt in the province of Manitoba, a debt that we have been burdened under, much money with deficits and payments on those deficits, interest payments on the deficits that have not been able to go to serve the needs of Manitobans, whether it be through the services that we value so

much in health and in education and in services to families and children that I have the responsibility for as the Minister of Family Services. I am very pleased and proud that we have been able to maintain those supports and those services to families and children and to education and health; we have probably the greatest percentage of our budget in Manitoba going to those services than any other government across the country has.

I think it is very positive for the people of Manitoba to recognize and to realize that—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The hour being 6 p.m., I am leaving the Chair with the understanding that we will reconvene at 8 p.m. this evening, and at that time the honourable Minister of Family Services (Mrs. Mitchelson) will have 36 minutes remaining.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, March 17, 1997

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