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Fourth Session - Thirty-Sixth Legislature

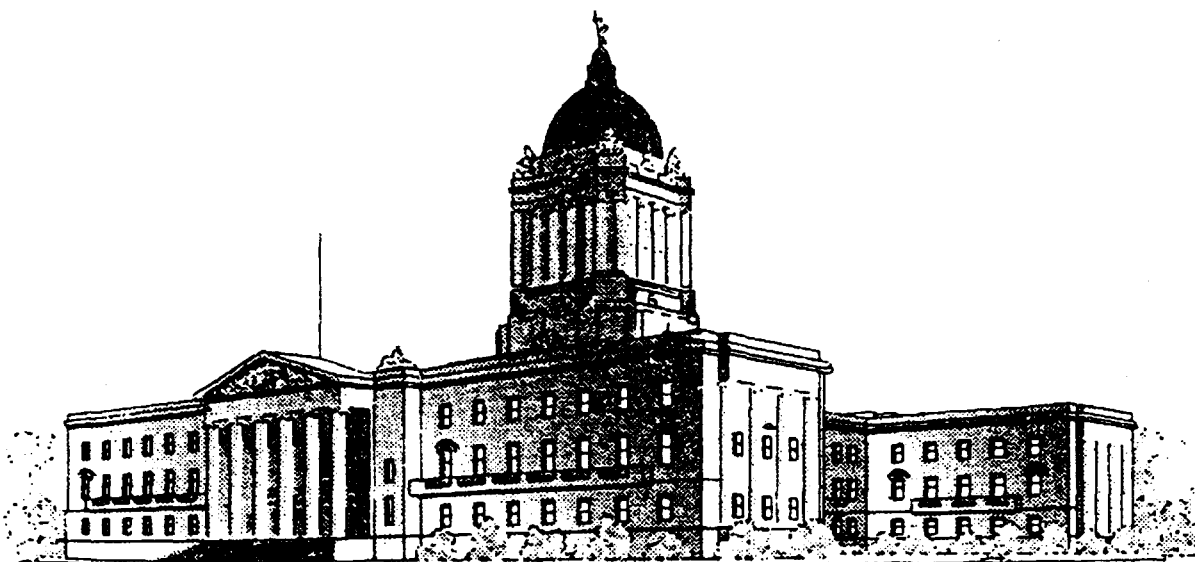
of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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Speaker*



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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Sixth Legislature

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ASHTON, Steve	Thompson	N.D.P.
BARRETT, Becky	Wellington	N.D.P.
CERILLI, Marianne	Radisson	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave	Kildonan	N.D.P.
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DACQUAY, Louise, Hon.	Seine River	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard, Hon.	Roblin-Russell	P.C.
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EVANS, Leonard S.	Brandon East	N.D.P.
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LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
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Vacant	Charleswood	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, March 16, 1998

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Winnipeg Hospitals Food Services—Privatization

Mr. Gregory Dewar (Selkirk): Madam Speaker, I beg to present the petition of Lorraine McBain, Linda Griffin and Lisa Anderson praying that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the Minister of Health (Mr. Praznik) to put an end to the centralization and privatization of Winnipeg hospitals food services.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): Madam Speaker, I beg to present the petition of Violet Milinkovic, Anne Horner, Dana Naskar and others praying that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the Minister of Health to put an end to the centralization and privatization of Winnipeg hospitals food services.

Mr. Conrad Santos (Broadway): Madam Speaker, I beg to present the petition of Thomas R. Horn, Serle F. Fowler, Greg Robinson and others praying that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba may be pleased to request the Minister of Health to consider immediately cancelling the hospital food proposal and concentrate on delivering quality health care instead of using health dollars to provide contracts for private firms.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to table the Report of the Manitoba Legislative Task Force on Canadian Unity. I have not provided sufficient numbers for all members of the Legislature, because it is my understanding that all members of the Legislature have already been provided with copies of said report.

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, 36 visitors of the 66th Air Cadets Squadron from Thunder Bay, Ontario, under the direction of Mr. Scott Cameron.

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

* (1335)

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Education System Advisory Committee Report

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, my question is to the First Minister (Mr. Filmon). A school trustee in rural Manitoba just recently stated that she felt that they were in the Titanic and that the Education minister was in another boat sailing by with the radio turned off. That really illustrates what we are hearing across Manitoba from a number of trustees both in and outside of Winnipeg.

The government received in November of 1997 an advisory committee report. An advisory committee made up of trustees, parents, teachers and administrators from the department has received that report.

I would like to ask the Premier: was he apprised of what was in that report, and why did his government not follow the advice of their own advisory committee in dealing with the future of public education and the opportunities for our young people in this province?

Hon. Linda McIntosh (Minister of Education and Training): Madam Speaker, on an annual basis, the minister's advisory committee will provide us commentary on each year's funding aspects to the division, so we very much appreciate the advice they give us. The advice is, in some cases, acted upon and in other cases not, depending upon our own circumstances. Last year, as you recall, we introduced greater flexibility to school divisions in dealing with 20

percent of their categoricals, and this year, as you know, we were able to indicate at least what the floor would be for funding for the province again to assist in multiyear planning.

This year's problems that the member referred to in the quote from the trustee from Brandon were due to assessment, reassessment and declining enrollment, and I have met with that particular board to discuss their situation. They now recognize that they will be getting \$256,000 which they had not realized they could incorporate this year, which is going to be a great help to them, and we are looking at reassessment phase-ins for following years, again through the advice of the advisory council.

Funding—Property Taxes

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, it looks like the minister's radio is turned off when it deals with her own advisory committee or report. It looks like that trustee was right on in their assessment of this minister. The advisory committee report, and this is two years running, condemns the shift on taxation to property tax base and says for this year, for the '98 school year, that we should not have increases in property taxes to pay for education, that those increases should come from the general revenues of the Province of Manitoba. Now this committee is made up of assistant deputy ministers in the minister's department, parents, trustees, superintendents, and when we look at the Beautiful Plains School Division getting an 11 percent tax increase on property taxes, we look at the Kelsey School Division, we look at Transcona, we look at Winnipeg School Division No. 1, obviously this government is not listening.

I would like to ask the Premier: why do you continue to shift the burden onto the property taxpayers, and why do you continue not to listen to your own advisory committee's recommendations?

Hon. Linda McIntosh (Minister of Education and Training): Madam Speaker, I believe in Friday's Question Period the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) gave a very reasoned response to that very question that the member has just posed to this side of the House.

I have to indicate that many of the school divisions that this year are feeling the impact of reassessment fared extremely well under previous years with the same formula. Trustees have indicated they do not wish to see the formula changed. For example, in Portage la Prairie where it talks about an increase in the rate, what they are talking about in terms of dollars is about \$26 a household. Those divisions that have this year experienced a high impact of reassessment, as I indicated, many fared very, very well under that same formula in earlier years. Brandon, for example, having had an increase of 11.5 percent during the succeeding few years, and that was during an era when funding increases from the province overall were not there, so they are working from a very secure base.

Funding—Technological Needs

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): The minister's radio is not turned on. They are not working from a secure base.

Madam Speaker, taxpayers paying property taxes for school taxes have had hundreds of dollar increases in their taxation under this minister and this Premier over the last number of years, and that is why the recommendation is to make that shift to general revenues this year rather than the property taxes implemented by this government through their cutbacks in funding over the last five years. The report further recommends, as a No. 2 priority, that some \$15 million is needed for new technology for our kids, for our future, for Manitoba children and for our schools. How can the minister square this recommendation based on student need of \$15 million with the \$1.8-million announcement that she made, which is approximately \$10 per student, to meet the future technological needs? Why are we depriving our kids a decent future by denying them the technology that is recommended by their own advisory committee?

* (1340)

Hon. Linda McIntosh (Minister of Education and Training): The \$1.8 million over and above the formula that we provided for technology this year is an indication that we see it as a priority and that we wish to continue helping.

Madam Speaker, that goes along with the science technology grants that are being provided to schools, up to \$40,000 per school annually. We have been giving them to some 25 schools per year, very valuable assistance in the classroom for technology, along with the guidance we have been providing through MERLIN and through other enterprises to assist school divisions in co-ordinating and interacting with each other.

You know, recently, Madam Speaker, the member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk) was pleased with what we are doing in technology in her division. Those kinds of things, while more can always be done and we would like to do more and more and more, I think, given the work that we have been doing, our indication and commitment to technology in schools is clear.

Education System Funding—Rural Manitoba

Ms. Jean Friesen (Wolseley): Madam Speaker, this year over half the school divisions in Manitoba received less than the stable funding that they were promised by this government. One rural school division, writing of its dismay and anger at these significant reductions, said to the minister, in your public announcement you gave no indication of what lay in store for many rural divisions.

On February 11, delegates from over 70 rural municipalities, school boards and parent councils met in an unprecedented meeting to send that same message to the Minister of Education. I want to ask the minister: what has she done with that message? Has she turned that radio on yet?

Hon. Linda McIntosh (Minister of Education and Training): Madam Speaker, there is no getting away from the fact that this year we have added \$17.6 million on top of the \$115 million we had already added since we took office to public school education in Manitoba. That is \$131 million added to public schools since we took office, just in their basic funding formula.

While it is true that some divisions that were feeling the impact of reassessment, of declining enrollment and other factors that affect the formula would experience a decrease, all of those divisions were told very clearly and understood very clearly last year that when we said

this year there would be as much money in the pot this year as there was last year, that that was what they understood. We made it very clear in writing and verbally that variations would occur, of course, to divisions depending upon whether or not their enrollment had gone up and down.

In the case of Brandon, for example, enrollment went down by \$200,000. If their enrollment goes up come September, they will get that money. It will flow automatically. They knew that, and the member should know that they can apply their known factors into the formula for estimating purposes.

Ms. Friesen: I would like to ask the Premier (Mr. Filmon) to confirm that he is aware of the very serious accusations that are coming from rural Manitoba, and again I quote: quite frankly, the quality of education has deteriorated to the point where the primary responsibility of boards to provide a satisfactory level of service to the students charged to their care is being compromised by the provincial government's failure to provide adequate financial support.

Those are serious accusations. Is the Premier aware of them?

Mrs. McIntosh: As I said before, we have put \$131 million more into education this year than was being put into public education when we took office. The special levy that school boards put in place, if the member wants to go back just for comparison purposes, since she seems to be doing some comparisons here, she might be interested to see that the special levy rate increase during the mid-'80s, the late '80s when the NDP were in office were a much higher percentage rate than they are under this government.

So if school divisions are able, Madam Speaker, to—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable Minister of Education and Training, to quickly complete her response.

* (1345)

Mrs. McIntosh: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. School divisions are able—when they are doing their projections they are able and they do take figures that they know to be true for themselves, for example, the market value of their homes, the projected student enrollment, et cetera, and they can plug those into the formula for a reasonable estimate as to what they could be expecting. Divisions did that this year so they were not surprised.

Ms. Friesen: Could the minister, the educational leader in this province, tell us what steps she has taken to meet the very real fears of those parents and trustees in rural Manitoba who are telling her that the quality of education has deteriorated, they cannot meet the needs of their students?

Mrs. McIntosh: Madam Speaker, not accepting the preamble as accurate, because I visit many, many schools and I visit with many, many boards, and the message that she is portraying today is not the universal message that I am receiving. Indeed, many boards have written to say thank you; many boards have dropped by to say thank you. As well, in visiting schools, I am both impressed and delighted with the very, very high standard that I see in many of our public schools. I see wonderful progress in technology taking place, high levels of literacy. I see a tremendous amount of extremely good work being done in the classrooms. I see small classes. I see plenty of educational assistants and technological assistants in the classes. We can always improve and we can always do more, and we wish to do that, but to leave an impression there is a poor quality of education here is incorrect.

Brandon General Hospital Physician Resources—Pediatrics

Mr. Leonard Evans (Brandon East): Because of excessive workloads, sometimes as much as 120 hours a week, the remaining two pediatricians in Brandon have now withdrawn their on-call services, and the hospital, the Brandon General Hospital could be forced to send children by air or ambulance to Winnipeg for treatment. The people of Brandon and western Manitoba are increasingly alarmed at this situation. The minister and his staff have known for many, many months that there was a serious problem, and the minister has not come up with a solution.

My question to the minister: will the minister acknowledge that a crisis does exist and tell us exactly what he is going to do to address this crisis today?

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, we have attempted to keep the member for Brandon East informed on a number of these issues and the details which have not made it into the public debate. I think he is more informed of the intricacies of this situation than his question would imply. I can tell him that, from the recent report I had this morning from the Brandon hospital authority, the health authority, I understand they have identified I believe three new physicians that they are currently talking to about recruiting to Brandon.

Mr. Leonard Evans: Will the minister acknowledge that Winnipeg indeed has an oversupply of pediatricians and that the solution can be found in an adequate incentive system, coupled with proper supports, to attract pediatricians out of Winnipeg, and the solution is not to go offshore to bring foreign doctors in; the solution is at the minister's doorstep if he would only take this matter seriously?

Mr. Praznik: Certainly we take it seriously. I want to thank the member for Brandon East for his support for those types of changes, because under the current agreement we have with the Manitoba Medical Association, reallocation within the fee schedule is within their purview under that agreement. We are beginning, we would like to begin, we have offered to begin the process of negotiating the new agreement, and the kinds of mechanisms that the member is requesting certainly should be considered in this agreement to get the right allocation of physicians. I take it from the member's comments today that we can count on the support of the New Democratic Party in that initiative.

Mr. Leonard Evans: Madam Speaker, will the minister assure this Legislature, the people of Brandon and western Manitoba, that he really will, along with his staff, give this crisis their full attention, make it a priority, and come up with the solution now that will provide for an adequate level of pediatric services in the city of Brandon? As the Brandon Sun has said: Will the minister put the care back into the health care system?

* (1350)

Mr. Praznik: Madam Speaker, absolutely, because one of the observations I make today as we get into these battles, and I suspect since the agreement with the Manitoba Medical Association is expiring at the end of this month, and since we have already been told by Mr. Laplume that they will be looking for areas in which to cause difficulty within the system, I certainly want to ensure care is there in the health care system rather than negotiating tactics or politics in the broader sense. But what the member is suggesting today is a very radical departure from the tradition in Canada and in this province in how we remunerate physicians and how we build into that the ability to direct them.

Our staff at Manitoba Health has been working with the Brandon Authority. We have offered to convert fee-for-service dollars into contracts to be able to get into that position of contract, salaried physicians. Currently, if we are going to do this, of course we should first attempt to do it through negotiating a new agreement with the Manitoba Medical Association. I would expect from the member's comments today that the New Democratic Party will be supportive of our initiatives rather than be continually critical of absolutely every move we make, even when they contradict themselves. When push comes to shove, they will be there.

Grant Park High School Student Protest—Investigation

Ms. Diane McGifford (Osborne): Madam Speaker, last year the Winnipeg Free Press called the Minister of Education a schoolyard bully. This year the minister has evolved to being both an object of ridicule and a bully. The first I think is clear in a Free Press cartoon which I am pleased to table and the second in the minister's unprofessional remarks about students at Grant Park school which culminated in an unprecedented demand that a particular student be punished so as to serve as an example.

Madam Speaker: The question, please?

Ms. McGifford: I want to ask the Minister of Education, and leaving aside the human rights issues, I want to ask the minister if she—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Would the honourable member for Osborne please pose her question now.

Ms. McGifford: Yes, Madam Speaker. I want to ask the minister if she is now satisfied that the student has been disciplined, or does she intend to continue her personal vendetta?

Hon. Linda McIntosh (Minister of Education and Training): In response to questions I had received at my office about security in the schools, I made a request of the Winnipeg School Division, a request for information about whether or not a locked door had been broken open to allow unauthorized personnel to the school, and that if that were true, would the discipline that would be put in place help other students understand that such things should not occur. I have since heard—

An Honourable Member: So where was this RFK analogy; eyes bulging out—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable Minister of Education and Training, to complete her response.

Mrs. McIntosh: The member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton), from his chair, refers to a subsequent story in the Free Press which alluded to how I felt for those few moments on stage, and that may have made interesting headlines, but it had nothing to do with my correspondence to the Winnipeg School Division which was a request for information about a locked door having been broken open, and any disciplinary action which may have flowed from that, if it were true, could the board please make sure that it would help other students understand that we have rules about safety in our schools that we passed last June.

So, Madam Speaker, that is my only communication with the Winnipeg School Division on the issue, so I do not know what the member is referring to in terms of personal vendetta; I have none.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Osborne, with a supplementary question.

Ms. McGifford: Why, Madam Speaker, when the minister clearly knows that legislation states that discipline is the jurisdiction of the principal and, in this case, the principal had taken the necessary measures, did the minister then write to the chair of the Winnipeg School Board demanding a report on disciplinary measures with regard to the student Chris Millar? What has happened—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The question has been put.

* (1355)

Mrs. McIntosh: Madam Speaker, there was no demand in my letter; it was a request for information. I would be delighted to provide the member a copy of my letter which simply said: after the event in question, three platform guests were provided with information by the school that a locked door had been violated and unauthorized people allowed admittance to the school. Because of the newspaper coverage on that event, I received a request from the public questioning our commitment to safety in schools. I therefore wrote to the school board, which is the legal channel with whom I communicate, asking for the information: was there or was there not in fact a locked door violated and, if so, what would be the disciplinary measures?.

It was a request for information; it was not a demand for punishment.

Ms. McGifford: Madam Speaker, the minister is wrong, wrong, wrong about that letter.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I would remind the honourable member for Osborne, this is not a time for debate. Would she please pose her final supplementary question.

Ms. McGifford: Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the Premier (Mr. Filmon) why he allows this minister to bully and intimidate Manitobans, to run a department based on bad temper—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Point of Order

Hon. James McCrae (Government House Leader): Words like the ones uttered by the honourable member for Osborne in her last question—

Madam Speaker: On a point of order?

Mr. McCrae: Yes, on a point of order, Madam Speaker. We have all been reminded repeatedly to use language which is appropriate for a parliamentary setting, and the honourable member's last question contains words which I suggest if they are not on the list of unparliamentary expressions, ought to be, and we can put them there by making a precedent here today.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Thompson, on the same point of order.

Mr. Steve Ashton (Opposition House Leader): On the same point of order, Madam Speaker. It was this minister who likened a peaceful student protest to the RFK assassination, making references to their eyes bulging out, their veins popping, and now the government House leader is concerned about language made by our member of the Legislature in questioning that. I think not only are the comments appropriate, I think it is absolutely unacceptable to have a Minister of Education in this province who would try and persecute student protesters for exercising their democratic rights.

Madam Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable government House leader, on October 5, 1995, the quotation "bullying his way around" was ruled unparliamentary. Caution was again given on April 29, 1996, on the word "bullies." I would request that the honourable member for Osborne please withdraw the direct reference to the minister bullying and pick and choose her words more carefully on a further occasion.

* * *

Ms. McGifford: Madam Speaker, I was quoting the Free Press. I withdraw the word "bully" and substitute—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Ms. McGifford: I withdraw the word “bully.”

Madam Speaker: I thank the honourable member for Osborne. Would you quickly rephrase your question.

Ms. McGifford: Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the Premier why he allows this minister to run a department based on bad temper rather than sound management, accountability and respect for legislation.

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Madam Speaker, I totally reject the assertions that are contained in that question by the member for Osborne. I know this minister to be a very caring individual who has personally attended at more than a hundred and fifty different schools in the province since she was appointed the Minister of Education, who goes out to visit with all of the students, who cares deeply about their future and who has demonstrated that time and time again, which is why we get the kinds of personal attacks we have just had from the member for Osborne.

* (1400)

Education System Funding—Per Student Statistics

Mr. Neil Gaudry (St. Boniface): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Education. Given that education is of great importance for our younger generation in order to obtain the necessary knowledge to advance in our society, can the minister tell this House how much this government currently spends on each student for education, and how does this compare with other provinces?

Hon. Linda McIntosh (Minister of Education and Training): Madam Speaker, the Province of Manitoba provides grants to school divisions. It works out to about \$4,000 per student. I can get the exact figure for him that is provided to school divisions. That is not necessarily what is spent, because school divisions themselves can, through their authority to collect their own levy, change the amount expended by what they collect or choose to spend. But that is the basis for what the province provides on a per capita basis through the student funding formula.

Funding—Provincial Comparisons

Mr. Neil Gaudry (St. Boniface): Madam Speaker, to the same minister: how does the Education budget compare with the province's GDP, and how does the Education spending to GDP ratio compare with other provinces?

Hon. Linda McIntosh (Minister of Education and Training): Madam Speaker, I will have to take that question under notice and provide the information to the member. I can tell him, however, though, in meeting with other ministers of Education across the country, Manitoba spends per capita slightly more than the average in Canada of the other provinces across the nation, but the exact figures I will have to provide for him. They do fluctuate on an annual basis.

Class Size—Provincial Comparisons

Mr. Neil Gaudry (St. Boniface): To the same minister: can the minister tell this House what the average class size at the primary, junior high and senior high levels are in this province, and how does it compare with other provinces?

Hon. Linda McIntosh (Minister of Education and Training): We have the third-best ratio in terms of class size compared to other provinces across the nation. In terms of two categories, pupil-teacher ratio and educator-pupil ratio, we say that we have 18.9 to one, being what would be registered classroom teachers, 19 to one. In terms of educators in the school which would include those teachers who do not teach in classrooms, librarians, guidance counsellors, we have 15, 14.9 or 15 to one, very good ratios in terms of class size. Nineteen would be equivalent to the average class size, but that does not mean, nor should be mistaken to mean that every class will have 19. Some will have 30, some will have 10, depending upon what classes you have, where you are, et cetera. But the average is 19 to one.

Minister of Education Student Complaint

Ms. MaryAnn Mihychuk (St. James): Madam Speaker, time and time again the Minister of Education's behaviour has been unacceptable. At a

meeting of post-secondary representatives last September, the minister showed contempt, disrespect and abusive behaviour to a student representative who was there to discuss the very important issues related to post-secondary education.

My question is to the Premier: what action has the Premier taken to respond to the letter of December 11, 1997, from Elizabeth Carlyle, the president of the University of Winnipeg Students Association, which cites the Minister of Education's behaviour as personally injurious, completely unnecessary and inappropriate? In fact, the Honourable Mrs. McIntosh's behaviour became so unbearable—and I am quoting from the letter—that at one point the Honourable David Newman felt it necessary to intervene and ask her to get back to post-secondary education issues relevant to the meeting.

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Madam Speaker, I will provide a written response to the member—or at least to the individual who wrote that letter. That individual, of course, is also the same individual who led a student protest that occupied my constituency office—I might say occupying private property and taking it over, locking the door and doing all sorts of foolish things that normally would be the subject of police action. I think that kind of hooliganism, though, is not the kind of thing that we should be supporting in this Legislature. I note that the member for St. James supports that kind of activity though.

Point of Order

Mr. Steve Ashton (Opposition House Leader): On a point of order, Madam Speaker, the question—I want to cite Beauséne Citation 417: “Answers to questions should be as brief as possible, deal with the matter raised and should not provoke debate.” The question was about the behaviour of this minister to the president of the University of Winnipeg Students Association. I think it speaks volumes that the Premier chose to also attack the president of the UWSA and make comments that if they were made outside of this House, reference to hooliganism, would most definitely be subject to action for slander.

I would suggest, Madam Speaker, you ask the Premier to not only obey the rules but not make that

kind of attack against the student representative, continuing the kind of personal attacks and vendetta we see against anybody that disagrees with this government.

Hon. James McCrae (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, on the same point of order, the honourable member who raised the point knows the rules very well, knows that he has not a leg to stand on with respect to any citation in Beauséne in relationship to the comments of the First Minister of this House this afternoon and has no point of order.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. On the point of order raised by the honourable member for Thompson, the honourable member does not have a point of order. Language specific to members is ruled parliamentary or unparliamentary. I believe someone outside this Chamber was identified in the First Minister's comments.

* * *

Madam Speaker: The honourable First Minister, to complete his response.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I believe practice in this House, if a member's time has not expired and is interrupted—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I believe practice in this House is, if the member's, who was responding to the question, time has not expired and is interrupted on a point of order, that member can or may indeed complete their response.

Mr. Filmon: Madam Speaker, in concluding my response, the member for St. James (Ms. Mihychuk) joins a long list of New Democrats in this House who support disruptive and illegal activities from time to time—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Point of Order

Mr. Ashton: On a point of order, Madam Speaker, the comments made by the First Minister were highly unparliamentary and out of order, and I would cite the precedent in which the government House leader in another reincarnation a number of years ago was actually expelled from the House for similar sorts of accusations.

The questions asked by the member for St. James were about a meeting between the president of the University of Winnipeg Students Association and the Minister of Education—nothing illegal, a meeting. In this province, Madam Speaker, expressing one's opinion and meeting with members of the government are legal. We are not into a Pinochet-style dictatorship. We have rights, we have democracy in this province and that First Minister should withdraw that rather despicable comment that he made.

Madam Speaker: The honourable First Minister, on the same point of order.

Mr. Filmon: Madam Speaker, I withdraw the comment.

Madam Speaker: I thank the honourable First Minister.

* * *

Ms. Mihychuk: Madam Speaker, my second question is to the Premier. How can the Premier justify the double standard of his Minister of Education (Mrs. McIntosh), who demonstrates where she herself shows great intolerance to her perceived disrespect of certain students, and yet this minister is totally disrespectful to the people that she meets with and, in this case, the president of the University of Winnipeg Students Association—total disrespect?

Mr. Filmon: Madam Speaker, I totally reject the assertions contained in the question of the member for St. James.

* (1410)

Suspension Request

Ms. MaryAnn Mihychuk (St. James): Madam Speaker, my final question to the Premier: will the

Premier suspend the Minister of Education for her unacceptable behaviour—and if anyone is a hooligan, it is in the second row right behind him—and stop the embarrassment to Manitobans and put in somebody who can lead and be a leader in education?

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The reference made by the member for St. James was specific to a member in this House, and I would ask that the member retract the word specifically attributable to the Minister of Education and Training. We have already gone through this once today.

Ms. Mihychuk: Madam Speaker, I remove the specific reference to the Minister of Education being a hooligan. I probably meant her behaviour was hooliganism.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. When a member is requested to withdraw unparliamentary language, the withdrawal is supposed to be unqualified. Would the honourable member for St. James please just withdraw the words used?

Ms. Mihychuk: Madam Speaker, I withdraw my comment.

Madam Speaker: I thank the honourable member for St. James.

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Madam Speaker, I do not believe that the false allegations made by the member for St. James are worthy of a response.

Education System Funding—Property Taxes

Ms. Marianne Cerilli (Radisson): Madam Speaker, on Friday the Minister of Education said that all divisions support the way school divisions are funded, and she said, I quote: that they want to see it stay in place.

This is utterly false and incorrect, and I want to table a copy of a report to the Minister of Education from the Transcona School Division that clearly states that they have concerns with the means by which education

funds are distributed amongst school divisions and that they see the system as fundamentally flawed.

I want to ask the Minister of Education if she will now admit that her statements were wrong and that the huge increases in property tax across the province by school divisions is because of the underfunding of this government for education.

Hon. Linda McIntosh (Minister of Education and Training): Madam Speaker, as I indicated in an earlier answer, and I think it bears repeating, \$131 million more has gone into education since we took office. The school divisions that had originally been quoted in the paper, in the Brandon Sun, as desiring a change to the formula have contacted me specifically to say, please do not misinterpret us. We do not wish the formula changed. We like the formula. Our problem is we got hit this year with the impact of reassessment.

They have asked that in future years can we take a look at phasing in anything over or above a certain variable. We can certainly take a look at that, Madam Speaker, but they made it very clear—they came to see me in person to make it clearer—that they did not wish to see that formula changed. It was those divisions that I was specifically referring to, those divisions that had originally been quoted as saying they wanted a change, emphasized to me they did not want to change. The majority of divisions in Manitoba are in that category.

Ms. Cerilli: I thank the minister for at least backtracking on that answer.

With Transcona-Springfield School Division having to raise now 36 percent of its budget from local taxes, I want to ask the minister to tell us when she is going to start listening to school divisions and her own Advisory Committee on Education Finance and implement the recommendations to review the way school divisions are funded, and that this year specifically no increase in revenue should come from property taxes.

Mrs. McIntosh: Madam Speaker, the funding formula that is currently in place is one that was devised with the assistance of people in the field. Superintendents, educators, teachers, people from the field helped develop the current funding formula.

Madam Speaker, the feedback we have received is that while there may be some exceptions, the vast majority of school divisions say they want no change to this formula. The formula is reviewed annually. We receive advice from the Finance Advisory Committee which is sometimes accepted, sometimes modified and sometimes rejected. We are looking at what to do in the future. There is a massive change in assessment on property values, as the member has suggested. That is part of our normal course of review. We are paying specific attention to that aspect, given that this year it was the subject of complaint by some divisions.

Education System Funding—Rural Manitoba

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): Madam Speaker, I would like to raise an issue on behalf of the people of the Roblin-Russell constituency who are very concerned about the direction this government is taking with education funding.

In a letter from the R.M. of Rosburn and the town of Rosburn to the Minister of Education, it is clear that the municipal leaders are concerned that as a result of reduced funding there is going to be a huge tax increase in rural Manitoba. How can this government continue to say that they have not increased taxes when in fact there is going to be a tremendous increase in property taxes in rural Manitoba because of cutbacks to education funding by this government?

Hon. Linda McIntosh (Minister of Education and Training): I think the member is somewhat flawed when she refers to rural Manitoba, because the changes in reassessment that caused negative impacts for some divisions are not all of rural Manitoba divisions. Many rural Manitoba divisions fared extremely well this year because the impact of assessment came to them earlier. Similarly, many of the metro divisions have a very good experience this year because the impact of assessment hit them four years ago.

Madam Speaker, I come back to the increase in special levies. By and large, particularly in urban Manitoba, they are far less than they were when the New Democrats were in power. I have met with the Pelly Trail board, and I have talked to them. I have met with several boards, be seeing more of them again

during the MAST convention coming up later this month. Anything that they wish to share with me that they have not already shared with me I am quite willing to examine, but problems of low and declining enrollment cannot be changed. If you have fewer students, you will get less money, and reassessment—we are taking a look at.

Ms. Wowchuk: Will the Minister of Education admit that the quality of education in rural Manitoba has declined and people are very worried about it because of a cut in funding to education by this government?

Mrs. McIntosh: Madam Speaker, we are very pleased with the quality of education we see in Manitoba. The member herself is running around the North trying to take credit for our initiatives on technology in the northern schools, a very distinct improvement in quality that has nothing to do with her and everything to do with us. I need to put on the record that the member approached me once last year about technology, and that should be recorded because I notice now she is trying to take credit. So all I can say is if things are not going well, they want us to take the blame; for things that are going well, they (a) either do not want to acknowledge it or (b) take the credit themselves. The fact is the quality of education in Manitoba is extremely good. That is borne out by national examinations. It is borne out by commentary from other ministers of Education across the nation.

Madam Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

Speaker's Rulings

Madam Speaker: I have two rulings for the House. Order, please.

During Question Period on June 23, I took under advisement a point of order raised by the opposition House leader respecting words spoken by the First Minister in response to a question asked by the honourable member for St. Johns (Mr. Mackintosh). The opposition House leader asked that the words be withdrawn and stated that they contravened Beauchesne Citation 484 as well as being unparliamentary. The words in question were “I know that the member opposite does not have issues of substance, so he chooses to look for substance of slime when he comes to Question Period.”

The opposition House leader did have a point of order. Citation 484 states that a member will not be permitted to impute unworthy motives to the actions of another member. I would ask the First Minister to withdraw the words he spoke.

* (1420)

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): I would be pleased to withdraw those words, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I thank the honourable First Minister.

On June 25, the Deputy Speaker took under advisement a point of order raised by the opposition House leader respecting words the Premier allegedly spoke from his seat during a speech by the honourable member for The Maples (Mr. Kowalski) during a matter of privilege. The words spoken, according to the opposition House leader, were “phoney tactical crap,” and he asked that the words be withdrawn. When taking the matter under advisement, the Deputy Speaker indicated that if the words in question had been picked up in Hansard, a ruling would come back to the House.

The words which appear in the Hansard record are “phoney tactical.”

Speakers in Manitoba and other Canadian jurisdictions have ruled that words not spoken on the record cannot be the subject of intervention. These rulings are based on Beauchesne Citation 486(4) which states that remarks which do not appear in the public record and are therefore private conversations not heard by the Chair do not invite the intervention of the Speaker, although members have apologized for hurtful remarks uttered in such circumstances.

Therefore, I cannot ask that the words be withdrawn, but I would ask the Premier (Mr. Filmon) to be prudent in the choice of his language.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Labatt Brier

Mr. Edward Helwer (Gimli): Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the

organizers of the 1998 Labatt Brier for staging a most successful and enjoyable event at the Winnipeg Arena. This was the first time Winnipeg had hosted the event since 1970, so the games were eagerly anticipated.

Competition and hospitality are two of the key ingredients to host the Brier, and both were in ample supply in Winnipeg. Visitors from across the country were treated to traditional Manitoba hospitality at its finest as they took part in the 69th men's Canadian curling championship.

Hundreds of volunteers enthusiastically greeted the fans and the players and ensured that they received high-quality services during their time in Manitoba. Whether they were taking in the games or spending time at our fine local hotels, restaurants and tourist attractions, the Brier participants were warmly received.

The competition was stellar. Even a brief power outage could not dampen the enthusiasm of the curlers, fans and organizers who gathered for the final match between Ontario's Wayne Middaugh and Quebec's Guy Hemmings.

Some 147,000 fans took in the games at the arena, and thousands more watched on television. All can say they witnessed a series of exciting games which exhibited curling's most usual standards of high-quality play and a strong spirit of sportsmanship.

Once again, congratulations to all the curlers, organizers, sponsors and volunteers for a job well done. Their hard work and dedication bodes well for the upcoming world junior hockey champions and also the Pan Am Games. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Philippines Centenary

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Madam Speaker, 100 years ago the Philippines declared their independence. Yesterday I was pleased, along with my wife and many others, to mark this occasion at Casa Bueno banquet hall along with more than 300 other people. It was an extremely enjoyable event and one that will be remembered by the participants for a long time.

In addition to outstanding entertainment, I think the highlight was a trivia quiz on the history and geography of the Philippines. As a result, their Canadian-born guests learned many new facts, and everyone had fun taking part in the trivia challenge. I want to congratulate the organizers of this successful event which was sold out.

There are now more than 40,000 Manitobans of Filipino descent living in Winnipeg. They have made enormous contributions to the culture and business development of this city and province. Over the course of this year, there will be many more events celebrating the centenary of the declaration of independence. I encourage anyone who can attend to participate in such events, and I look forward to attending some of those functions, as do many other members of this Legislature. Thank you.

Ms. Collette Daley

Mrs. Shirley Render (St. Vital): Madam Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the heroic actions by Collette Daley, a teacher at Ecole Varennes. "Hero" is a word that is often used to describe the actions of an individual, but seldom does the word so appropriately fit as it did last week.

During lunch break at Ecole Varennes last week, Ms. Daley noticed a kindergarten student choking on her lunch. Recognizing the seriousness of the situation, Ms. Daley quickly leapt into action and performed the Heimlich maneuver on the student and, by doing so, dislodged the piece of food that was causing the student to choke. Her knowledge of this maneuver and her very quick use of it in all probability saved this young student's life. I am confident that to one young student at Ecole Varennes, Collette Daley is a hero in every sense of the word.

Having worked with Ecole Varennes and its teachers for several years, I know the quality of the teaching staff is among the highest, and this most recent action confirms what I have known all along. So, on behalf of all members of the Manitoba Legislature, I would like to acknowledge Collette Daley's fast thinking and fast action. In a matter of a few seconds, she turned a potential tragedy into an important lesson for all, and that lesson is that we should all have the basic

lifesaving skills necessary so, if we are confronted with similar circumstances, we too can take action. Thank you, Collette Daley.

Philippines Centenary

Mr. Conrad Santos (Broadway): Madam Speaker, my colleague from Burrows has already expressed greetings on the first event celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Philippines. As a member of that community, I wish to add more information about the background of our country of origin.

The Philippines had been under the Spaniards for almost 300 years. When the rule was over, we were placed under the Americans under the conqueror, Admiral Dewey, and we were under the United States for almost 50 years of benevolent political rule. Finally they gave us commonwealth status in the early 1930s, and we enjoyed some degree of local autonomy, which then matured into full independence in 1946—political independence that is, but not economic independence. Therefore we are celebrating this year the beginning of a hundred years of the existence of the country as an independent nation after suffering many of such difficulties in history.

* (1430)

Many of our people in this community have resided mostly in Winnipeg, and due to sheer hard work and thrift, they have seen their children—sons and daughters—achieve their dreams in this province of opportunity. They have become doctors, lawyers, nurses, engineers, and successful in another dozen professions. Although we came here for many different objectives and purposes, economic opportunity was one of them, and we are very grateful to the people of this province. Thank you.

Mr. Basil Agnew

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): In the constituency of Pembina, we are fortunate to have a strong volunteer base that serves a variety of organizations. Their ongoing assistance and the countless hours volunteered ensure local organizations are healthy and well run. In 1996, the Governor General's Caring Canadian Awards were created. It was started to recognize Canadians

whose voluntary contributions provide extraordinary help or care to people in the community. This year's 53 recipients were announced last week, and I am very pleased to note that a constituent of mine from Morden, Basil Agnew, is a recipient of the Governor General's Caring Canadian Award. Out of the 53 recipients, Mr. Agnew is the only Manitoban to be recognized. Mr. Agnew has been devoting his time for over 20 years to helping others in his community and parish. He was very involved in raising funds to build the Morden Friendship Centre and in recruiting volunteers for the 1996 Manitoba Summer Games. The citation noted, and I quote, his warmth and caring are most evident in the countless, low-key, often anonymous acts of kindness he performs for community members in need, from providing transportation for senior citizens to helping friends and neighbours with gardening and home maintenance.

Like a true volunteer, Mr. Agnew was somewhat modest about his community work, but I am more than willing to sing his praises. On behalf of all residents of the Pembina constituency and all members of the Manitoba Legislature, I would like to congratulate Basil Agnew. Your formal recognition through this award only reinforces what your community has known all along: that you are a generous and caring individual whose ongoing efforts to assist others is a blessing to us all. Thank you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET DEBATE (Seventh Day of Debate)

Madam Speaker: To resume adjourned debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) and on the proposed motion of the honourable Leader of the official opposition (Mr. Doer) in amendment thereto, standing in the name of the honourable Minister of Health (Mr. Praznik), who has 40 minutes remaining.

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): I very much appreciate the opportunity to speak at some length this afternoon about the budget and about health care's role within it, which is a very significant role, and to talk about the work, the planning, the implementation of planning that is underway to bring

about I think some overdue and extremely significant changes in the way in which we deliver health care services to the people of our province, indeed in the manner in which health care services are delivered to the people of provinces right across Canada.

Madam Speaker, there is—in fact, beginning my remarks, I would like to say that the changes that the system is undergoing today are just as significant as the decision made in the early sixties to begin to have governments centrally pay for medical and hospital services on behalf of the citizens of Manitoba. The manner in which service is delivered is going through what I would call today a revolution, not an evolution but a revolution in terms of that fundamental change.

The member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) makes some comments about blaming the federal government and he makes some comments about crisis in health care, et cetera. I say to him, I think if he examines what is happening right across the country today, he will see emergency rooms in Montreal, in Toronto, in Edmonton, in Vancouver, Winnipeg, in many centres, have undergone the same kinds of pressures that we have faced in our own province in these last couple of months. He will see those same things being replicated across the country for many of the same reasons.

Many of the initiatives that we have embarked on, Madam Speaker, in the last number of years are very similar in their nature and direction with the kind of fundamental reform that is taking place in every province in this country as we struggle to move our health care system into the next century.

Madam Speaker, what I wanted to address today is very much the plan that we are now into full implementation of. I want to, in doing so, put into some context the world in which Health ministers and governments and health systems and health care workers have had to operate over the last number of years, particularly the last decade.

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in that context we can go back a decade ago when we look at the state of governments right across the country. We were all awash in a sea of red ink, national and provincial governments. The cost

of policies of borrowing money on an annual basis for 20 years had caught up to us. They had caught up to us as provinces and as a country, with the result that we were all facing in our overall budgets the inability to guarantee basic public services into the future because our own cost of carrying debt and ever-escalating cost of carrying debt meant that, in the case of the federal government, they were spending one out of every three dollars on debt servicing, and for provinces, we were beginning to pass the 10 percent or 11 percent of our budget going to debt servicing. Some had reached 16, 17 percent and were escalating beyond the ability of our taxpayers to carry that burden. The result, if we did not collectively, as provincial and federal governments and consequently as municipal and school governments at the local level, meet that challenge was that we would financially, literally collapse much like in New Zealand or other places that found out one day that they just could not borrow any more money and that services, the delivery of public services came to an end or were sharply reduced.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, unlike the government that we replaced, although in their deathbed days they did recognize that they had to do something about it and were starting to look at how they were going to manage but who were largely to a good degree responsible for our problem in Manitoba, we had to take on that challenge and we had to meet it, and we have.

The national government, whatever one's political party, has had to attempt to do that as well. Now, we can debate very legitimately how do they attempt to achieve their savings and to balance their budget. Some of us would argue very strongly that they have not managed to address the manner in which they deliver services to the public where they are responsible. They have managed their deficit by cutting out of transfers to provinces for the delivery of basic services like health care. That is a very legitimate debate, and I would urge Mr. Martin and Mr. Chretien to be re-examining their own delivery mechanisms. By the way, in that challenge I am joined by every provincial—I believe I am joined by every provincial Minister of Health across this country, including New Democrats, including Liberals. I am joined in that battle, in that cry by the federal New Democratic Party and by the former member for St. Johns, who have come to recognize that the national government has

pulled a great deal of money out of the provincial health care system. What we urge them to do is not to get into borrowing again but to re-examine their own spending priorities, the way in which they deliver their services, and if dollars can be saved and directed to the highest priority, which I believe is health, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to do so and do so quickly.

For all provinces, indeed Manitoba, when one pulls some \$200-million plus, \$200 million, \$240 million out of our health care system, when we are spending now \$1.9 billion, that is far more than 10 percent of our expenditure. To pull that out of our system and expect that system to carry on as if they have never lost the money is impossible. It is unrealistic.

We manage by reallocating resources, pulling money out of other departments to make up that money and to add, but in doing so, our ability to meet the growth in demand, to meet the demands of an aging population, of new technology, of new drugs, has been strained, strained to a great degree. It has meant that in practical terms, we have had to run our facilities very much to the maximum. When one does get hit by a momentous event, whether it be a flood in Manitoba or an ice storm in eastern Canada or a flu epidemic, this Sydney strain of flu that we have experienced this winter across the country, it means more people will access the system than expected. It will put more pressure on that system, and it will cause that system to back up. We have never denied that there was a problem, but to understand what is behind it is fundamentally important in that context. It is fundamental to point that out.

When the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Doer) rises in this House and talks about reductions of acute care beds throughout our system—[interjection] The Leader of the Opposition is always quick with a line here or there. His accuracy on the facts leaves a great deal to be desired.

* (1440)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the debate on the right bed mix in our system has been going on for many years. It was going on in the days of Larry Desjardins. The question driven by changes in technology, the development of laser surgery, the increase in day surgery, all of which have reduced the need for acute care beds, has led

every advocate for redefining the Canadian health care system to bring it into the modern age to say that we have had to move bed and care from acute care facilities to other alternatives: long-term care, home care, et cetera. That has been the direction of every analyst of any credibility looking at the Canadian health care system. They have said that is the shift that we need to make in our system. That debate has been going on in Canada for well over a decade. People like Michael Decter, who I understand is a friend of the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Doer), has made a living being an advocate for change in the system and has been involved in these issues. They have been advocates of this kind of shift and this change. The member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale), I have quoted him in this House, I have quoted Mr. Sale, who agreed that that shift has to take place, and Manitoba, like every other province, has been making that shift from acute care beds and services to the long-term care in home care over the last number of years.

Now do we get the number exactly right? There is no science to this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is an art. When you have a diffuse management system of your health-care delivery mechanism it makes it even more of an art. The result, of course, is: do we have exactly the right number of acute care beds in an ever-changing system? From time to time we probably do and other times we may not, and when you compound that by the need for a more long-term care space, it does put additional pressure on our system.

But when the Leader of the Opposition comes up and says we should not have closed any of those beds, what he denies and challenges is the whole change to meet need in our system. He is saying we should go back to the way we delivered it 10, 15, 20 years ago, continue to have those beds in place whether we needed them or not. So I would like the Leader of the Opposition at some point to say is that what he means. Let us turn back the clock on reform and let us have way more acute care beds than we need. If he wants to debate, do we have the right number within that change and that evolution, that is a fair debate, and sometimes we may not have it right, and I accept that, but to say that we should not have embarked on shifting beds and services from acute care into other areas denies reality, denies the needs of the public and is extremely short-sighted. In fact, it is that kind of short-sightedness at the end of

the day that could kill a health care system by making it unaffordable.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are other factors at work in health care today that one has to recognize. One of those areas is technology. The growing, changing technological abilities in medicine have changed the way in which we practise medicine and we treat individuals. [interjection]

I hear the Leader of the Opposition from his seat. There are real issues here to be debated. There are issues on which we may not always agree, but there is a legitimate debate to be had, and what I hear from the Leader of the Opposition from his demeaning and small-minded remarks in this House about members on this side being all the inheritors of wealth, I will tell the member, I inherited \$1,000 from my hardworking grandmother when she died. I did not inherit wealth or money. I did not have half the opportunities that the Leader of the Opposition had in growing up, and yet he comes into this Assembly in his time to speak, and instead of engaging in debate he enters into some kind of attack on members of this House based on some image that his party would create that is inaccurate and wrong. He demeans this Legislature. He demeans good debate, and now he snips from his seat to make smart comments for members instead of dealing or wanting to deal with facts that we are facing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Could I ask honourable members if they want to carry on a conversation to do so in the privacy of the loge. I believe the honourable minister has the floor at this time.

The honourable minister, to continue.

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the change that we are undergoing in our health care system today that is so fundamental, and there are a number of areas—[interjection] The member for Transcona (Mr. Reid) talks about the greenhouse. I do not know what a greenhouse has to do with the debate. I suspect again it is some attack on my mother and father because they are vegetable farmers, and vegetable farmers and small farmers are not supposed to be Conservatives, I imagine—[interjection] And we get into another comment, but that is fine. There is another day and a time for that.

The fundamental change that we are making in this system, and it is fundamental and it is revolutionary, is the manner in which we do two things: the manner in which we govern and administer our health care services and, secondly, the manner in which we budget. Those changes are well underway in our province today. In fact, in the case of governance and the way in which we administer health services, we have substantially completed those reforms.

Our new regional health authorities in rural Manitoba are well underway making improvements and changes and developing better ways to deliver service. On April 1 of this year in the city of Winnipeg, our two new authorities will take their place among the other 11 to do the same in the delivery of service. The second part, as I have mentioned, is budgeting, developing methods of budgeting, and it is going to take several years to work those out, which has direct accountability for the way we spend money, which in the past we have not had.

Let us look at the context of the development of our Canadian medical system for a moment. How did we get where we are today? It is important in understanding this. First of all, if you go back to the early part of this century, health care was primarily a private matter, interspersed with religious and charitable organizations who ran hospitals or facilities or offered charity work. It was a private matter. Government played a very small role only in public health.

After the Second World War the Government of Canada, as it began to pay down war debt and had increasing revenues, recognized that we had a significant shortage of hospitals in Canada at that particular time, and they endeavoured to place a significant amount of money, make it available for the construction of new hospitals. In those days, it was municipalities who took on that challenge and responsibility and built, with 50 percent support from the national Treasury, a whole series of hospitals, mostly across rural Canada.

In fact, if you go into western Manitoba today and various parts of the province, you will still see many of those facilities now time-dated with different function and use but coming from that period of time of great

hospital construction. Saskatchewan had 100-plus hospitals I think built during this particular time, 50-plus of which have now been converted or closed by their government, because structures have changed and many of those facilities were time-dated and not needed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we built those hospitals. We had that expansion. Then in the 1960s, beginning in Saskatchewan with the CCF government of Tommy Douglas and then the later Woodrow Lloyd, they began I think what was really the first revolution in the delivery of health care services, because they brought in the principle, when their budget was balanced—Tommy Douglas was elected in 1944—he did not bring in medicare in Saskatchewan until he had balanced the budget and returned Saskatchewan to a very firm financial footing after the Great Depression. He acted very responsibly.

* (1450)

But he brought about, along with John Diefenbaker as Prime Minister and the creation of Mr. Justice Hall's committee on medicare, they brought in the first revolution in the delivery of medicare and medical services in Canada, because they said that doctors' services and services in hospitals would now be paid for or insured by the provincial treasuries. That was fundamental, because it meant that citizens could access those basic services without having to lose their farm, their home, et cetera, because they were poor. But it changed the nature fundamentally of the delivery of health care services, because they no longer were entirely within the private or charitable sector. They now became a matter of public support and public finance and public responsibility.

There was a very interesting documentary on the 1962 Saskatchewan doctors' strike. A very interesting one. We saw a lot of forces at work in that strike, a lot of forces to deny the necessary changes to give us a quality medical care system for all of our citizens. One of which was the desire of an opposition party to win an election and an alliance with physicians who were opposing medicare, because they saw it as a restriction on their ability. [interjection] It was Ross Thatcher's Liberals, actually. They saw it as imposing restrictions on their freedom, their ability to practise and their

ability to earn a living. All legitimate issues, but the greater public good prevailed, and we got the beginnings of a public medicare system in Canada, the beginnings of it. We got the beginnings of that system. Then we had the Diefenbaker government, the Hall report, Pearson's administration beginning to provide public funding for those secured services.

But remember we had public funding only for hospital and medicare services, doctors' services, but then in the 1970s we started to see that grow. We saw the complete spread of medicare across the country for those services, and the world journeyed on with 50 percent government funding, federal government funding for those services. Then we got to the period of the early '80s when national government said that we do not want to just continue to pay the bill when we do not control the delivery of those services, and they were right. Not even provinces controlled it all. We just funded. We were, in essence, the insurers of the system. We paid others during this whole period to deliver health care. We paid independent hospitals to provide service. We paid independent medical practitioners to provide service. Governments were the insurers. We just paid the bill.

An Honourable Member: Charged premiums too.

Mr. Praznik: As one of my colleagues points out, for many years in this period premiums were charged. Some provinces like Manitoba did not. We ended that in the '70s. Ontario did up until a few years ago, but we, by and large, government-supported the provision of those services as insurer.

We had the remnants of all of that private health care system providing the service, the independent hospitals, the municipal hospitals, charitable hospitals, religious orders. We were just the payers, and it worked. It worked relatively well during that period because technology, the delivery of medical care was all in place and well suited to that structure.

By the 1980s two things were changing and changing rapidly. The technology, information technology and medical technology were now starting to provide a need to consolidate services to get enough volume to meet the costs of that new technology. You also had

information systems beginning to develop in the computer age that allowed you to move information faster and more quickly around the system.

On the other side, the financial side of the coin, you had the rate of increase in health care costs going up so quickly during this period, well above the rate of inflation, that it forced the national government to walk away from 50-cent dollars for basic insured services and go to a block-funding system where they said to government, you could build anything and spend it anyway you want in health, but we will cap it and increase it only at the rate of inflation.

The result, of course, is its cost grew faster and the provinces had to pay an ever-increasing share, but I want to make a comment on one benefit of that block change. When the federal government only provided 50-cent dollars for medicare for insured doctor services and hospitals, what did provinces bill? Where did we spend our money? We spent our money on building hospitals, supporting hospitals and doctor services. We did not build personal care homes during the '70s to the degree we probably needed. We did not build home care. We started. Manitoba was a leader. I will give some credit to Ed Schreyer as a leader in that particular field, but we did not build it anywhere near the need that we needed to meet the need that we could have met or would have to meet, and why? Because every dollar a province spent on a personal care home or on public health or on home care was a 100-cent dollar, and every dollar they spent on a doctor's service or a hospital was a 50-cent dollar. The funding mechanism drives the result and to a very significant degree through a period there, I believe, and I would contend and I would propose that we overbuilt in our hospital system during the '70s and underbuilt in our community care side.

I do not blame anyone. A lot of it had to do with the funding mechanism. By the 1980s, as I said, the federal government changed that significantly and they capped it. We could spend it on anything but we had built significantly as Canadians, overbuilt during that period in our acute care side, particularly given the changes of technology coming on and underbuilt in our community side, so then we began the catchup, and all governments have had to wrestle with that.

We also add to this, by the way, another factor called the Canada Health Act in 1983-84, and that was a

federal government attempt, I believe politically, leading up to the 1984 election, to look like the saviours of medicare. So they proposed we create federal legislation that would restrict what provinces could do, impose some rules, all the while knowing that their share of health care costs were declining. When Monique Begin was Minister of Health nationally at the time, I believe that was a deliberate attempt to create medicare as an issue to get the Conservatives opposing it in Parliament, so that the Liberals could hold on to power in the 1984 general election. Well, it did not work, because the Conservatives accepted the Canada Health Act and Parliament passed it, I believe just about unanimously, and we all marched together to protect medicare in Canada.

The result was we had one more layer of control imposed on the system. So where does it bring us by the 1990s? What it brings us to is a system where we still have the delivery of health care in our institutions done by independent organizations. In Manitoba as of last January, we had over 180 different health care boards running and delivering our health care system. In my own community of Beausejour we had a hospital board, we had a personal care home board for East-Gate Lodge, we had an ambulance board plus we had the services that Manitoba Health delivered. We had four points of administration in a community and district of 3,000 to 4,000 people.

Well, given the fact that the cost and the development of technology and the delivery of medical services means that you have to have larger groupings of people to justify and get full use of that new technology, given the fact that you have to get into that information technology, allows you to administer health care in multisite, it only made logical sense to Health ministers right across Canada, to governments right across Canada that we move into a regionalized system of health-care delivery. Yes, we can debate whether we have elected boards or appointed boards and those are legitimate issues of debate, but I think it is very clear that the change is needed, was needed and will continue to be needed to deliver better care.

In my own constituency the three administrators of the hospitals that I had in my riding, I remember, called me into a meeting, I believe it was somewhere in the early 1990s, 1990-1991, and they wanted to let me

know that for the first time in the history of the Pine Falls, Pinawa, and Beausejour hospitals that they were actually meeting to compare their occupancy usage. Imagine, three neighbouring hospitals before had never shared any significant amount of information because they were busy competing with one another. These three very wise administrators, and they admitted to me they were all nearing the end of their career and so there was not a battle for who would be the administrator. They agreed that we had to work together to get regionalization and they urged us to get on with it and make it happen.

* (1500)

We started working together as a region even before the regional health authorities were created, and the result was we got a dialysis program in Pine Falls for the region; we share a chemotherapy program with Selkirk for the region. We have a physiotherapy program in Pinawa for the region. We have community mental health services in Beausejour for the region because we have the benefit of those large enough numbers. Today my constituents have a greater array of services than they had 10 years ago, and we were one of the first out there. We were doing it even before my predecessor, the member for Brandon West (Mr. McCrae), brought in the legislation; we were making that happen in an unofficial way in our region. So we needed to get the ability to do that. With that regionalization comes the change in budgeting where we know things will be spent and all of the other changes we need to meet the needs of the future.

Now we come to Winnipeg, because in Winnipeg being very, very large, it was the collective wisdom that it was better to divide the hospital side from the community care side at least in the beginning, because it is such a large elephant you cannot consume it in one sitting but to split it off into two authorities for a period of time before we would bring it back together, get each a chance to reform. On April 1, the two authorities will begin their legal life of operation, but there are a number of very key issues in making the Winnipeg Hospital Authority work. Some of them are controversial and some of them are being opposed. I think we have to accept that the benefit of being able to make decisions for a system, instead of nine hospitals, leads to far better decision making than not. It leads to

far better budget allocations than not, and it leads to a much more humane and efficient system of human resources than leaving everyone independently.

Now what is interesting is virtually every one of the existing boards have accepted those principles except on the labour side, except on employing authority. Yes, there is a bit of a controversy today between some on the board of directors of St. Boniface and this government and some in the Faith Association, but what are we attempting to do? We are attempting to get a common employing authority so our labour relations will follow that. We will have city-wide collective agreements, and we will be able to move staff when it is appropriate and have them keep their salary, their benefits, their seniority within a Winnipeg hospital system.

We have announced a very significant change in purpose for the Misericordia Hospital, one that will take it into a very bright and promising future for their next 100 years. But in the course of making that move, there are going to be many acute care nurses and acute care staff who will not want to work in a long-term care facility. Will we need them? Absolutely. We will need them in our other acute care facilities. How will we get them there? Will we get them there by laying them off at the Misericordia Hospital and having them reapply for jobs at Concordia or Seven Oaks of HSC? Is that what people want? Is that fair to those employees?

But I will tell you, I know where the New Democrats will be. They will say we should not do it. They will say we are being nasty. They will say we are interfering with independent volunteer boards. I have heard that already. But what is the purpose? The purpose is to allow employees in that hospital system to move their place of employment and still maintain their jobs, their salaries, their income, their benefits and their seniority. I will tell you they may not believe this is coming from a Conservative government. But I tell you this, this government cares about those health care workers, and we will make sure that this happens because it is the right thing to do, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

My question is: will the New Democrats stand with us or will they stand against this change? Will they be there? Will they be there if this does not happen and

nurses are laid off at the Misericordia to have to be rehired somewhere else? Will any of those members have the courage of the comments they make in this House to go in front of them and say we prefer it this way, we agree that you should be laid off and not moved? I doubt it, because they will be long gone to hide behind some other issue as they always do.

Now I know my time is drawing short in this debate, and I could speak for another hour. I want to share a couple of other stories that I have seen about the need for change. There is a hospital in southern Manitoba, southeastern Manitoba, an 18-bed hospital, an 18- or 20-bed personal care home. They have, as they are regionalizing and moving into the regional health authority, a \$1-million operating surplus, and that is not money—[interjection] Well, I want the member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) to listen. That is not money that was fundraised, that is not donations, and that is not municipal levy. That is money that Manitoba Health on behalf of the taxpayers of Manitoba provided to that hospital to deliver service, and they have accumulated a \$1-million operating surplus.

Now, they came to see me because it had to be moved into the RHA, and they agreed to do it. When the meeting was over, I said to the chair of that board, tell me, how do you get a million-dollar surplus at a small facility? You know what the chair of the board said to me? He said, Mr. Minister, I have been on that board for 22 years, and we learned something a long time ago. If Manitoba Health funds us for a nurse and we do not hire one, they still send the money.

They still send the money, so what happens? That is not a way to operate. Where is the accountability? Last year, in the Winnipeg hospital system, the wonderful status quo structure I get the sense the New Democrats defend when it is convenient to defend—[interjection] Right, where is the accountability? That is what we are building into this, financial accountability.

A year ago, in the Winnipeg hospital system, they lost collectively a net loss of \$2.5 million of the people's money subsidizing their cafeterias. [interjection] Well, the member says here we go. Is the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) saying that \$2.5 million of public money is better spent subsidizing a cafeteria or

going into hip and knee replacement? Where does he want the money, in hips and knees or cafeterias? The New Democrats say cafeterias; the Tories say in hips and knees, and that is where it is going to go, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is where it is going to go.

I hear these comments again. The New Democrats have to decide, is the health care system there to deliver health care or—

An Honourable Member: Or frozen food.

Mr. Praznik: Well, the members say frozen food. I have been waiting for this one, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because if you listen to them, it sounds like in January the peas and carrots come in from California and every pea is shelled in our hospitals today. There is no frozen food in our hospitals today. Why, everything comes in fresh from California, and it is all shelled out there. The hospital staff are shelling the peas so they are nice and fresh. [interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton)—oh, there we get it. That is where we get it right now. The member for Thompson's criticism is that one of our colleagues here wanted to explain it to his constituents. My goodness, is it not terrible that some citizens of Manitoba might actually want to have the facts on which to make their decision, instead of the absolute baloney and malarkey they have been getting from UFCW. The only baloney served in Manitoba hospitals is from UFCW. That is the only baloney; it is from UFCW.

That is what we get. That is the great dilemma, because, ultimately, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if health care is to survive, it has to have the management and administrative structures that allow us to be able to move resources around, to be able to accommodate new and ever-increasing degrees of technology. It has to have the ability to have accountability in budgeting, where we are not just giving money to groups of private administrators in hospitals and saying go, thee, and govern, and when they run out of money or waste it, they say please send more, without accountability.

That has to end and it will end with this government, because if it does not, if we are not successful in this, the current structure of health care will condemn it to

the kind of fall and end, because it will not be affordable to the citizens of Manitoba. This change is just as fundamental now at the closing years of this century, as we face the new century, as Tommy Douglas's and Woodrow Lloyd's decision to insure medical services publicly in 1962.

I can tell you, if the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) had watched the documentary, he would find many parallels to the somewhat thoughtless attack against that first revolution in 1962, many comparisons to the position his party takes in this House every day. Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

* (1510)

Mr. Steve Ashton (Thompson): I just want to say to the Minister of Health that as a New Democrat, as someone who saw what Tommy Douglas did for Saskatchewan, who attended conventions with Tommy Douglas, who knows what Tommy Douglas stood for, the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Praznik) is no Tommy Douglas, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that is clear by his words.

For a Tory who is part of a government that has been in government now for 10 years, 10 long years, and when I look at those faces, 10 very tiring years, for that Minister of Health (Mr. Praznik), who is now presiding over a full-blown health care crisis, to turn to Tommy Douglas and somehow suggest that we in the New Democratic Party do not share the same vision I think is a sign of true desperation.

I would remind the member, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that Grant Devine tried that in his last election in Saskatchewan and look where he is today. He is out of government. Most of his caucus is in jail. He tried to wrap himself in the CCF tradition, but, you know, CCFers and New Democrats know, to quote the Premier (Mr. Filmon), that a Tory is a Tory is a Tory, and we see that every day in this Manitoba Legislature.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to suggest to members of this House that we have reached the watershed in the time that this government has been in power. We have reached the watershed because, you know, we are hitting close to the 10-year mark—in fact, we have been at the 10-year mark since what some of us call the Jim

Walding day. What I find interesting is there is clear evidence from this Minister of Finance's (Mr. Stefanson) budget that pretty well all the foundations of this government's policies in the past 10 years were wrong. Think about it for a moment. Health care—we will deal with this in detail here—education, infrastructure, even in terms of economic development, we are seeing this government beating a hasty retreat from the kind of positions that it has taken year after year in this Legislature.

I find it rather interesting. Let us take health care for a moment. The Minister of Finance on health care talking about this \$100 million extra for health care—and, of course, we did kind of find out that it was more like \$3 million extra in this year, but even given the difference between the years, what is interesting is even all the rhetoric that we have heard from the Conservatives across the way has now shifted. You know, after year after year of us pointing to the fact that health care in this province was being subject to cutbacks, the kinds of decisions that were being made to freeze capital construction, the numbers of jobs that were being eliminated, direct patient care eliminated by the laying off of nurses, now we have this government desperately trying to put money into the system, desperately trying to put resources into the system, desperately trying to deal with the health care crisis.

But you know what is pathetic, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is I think we all know in this House why they are doing this. They have not converted on the road to Regina here. They can quote Tommy Douglas, but they are no newfound born-again believers in health care.

What they have done is they have run an opinion poll. The opinion poll says no one believe the Tories on health care. They believe there is a crisis in the system. They do not trust them, and now they are desperately, as that election clock ticks down, down, down, down, they are trying to change their image on health care. They tried with the former Minister of Health; you know, the fuzzy sweaters.

An Honourable Member: And the former former one.

Mr. Ashton: Well, the former former Minister of Health was not exactly into fuzzy sweaters, as we know, and now the current minister tries the most

desperate thing I have seen yet, and that is to wrap himself in Tommy Douglas's name. I mean, no one will believe that.

Let us deal with education for a moment. I am not going to deal with the question of this minister's rather bizarre attacks on a peaceful student protester, Chris Millar. I must say I talked to a lot of people in my constituency who were offended by that, who thought that the minister's comments about likening that to the Kennedy assassination, the Robert Kennedy assassination, Chris Millar and the student protesters were not Sirhan Sirhan. This is not 1968. They protested peacefully.

This a democratic society. Even the Prime Minister, who has had a bit of a difficulty with protests in the past, had the sense to say to the RCMP, no, that is not a problem. This is a democratic country. I must say I was even more disturbed by the comments made by this minister and to the Premier about the president of the University of Winnipeg Students Association.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have some affinity with the president of the University of Winnipeg Students Association, because I was the president of the University of Manitoba Students' Union. I attended a number of protests, and I met with the then Premier, and I will tell you one thing, with my experience, seeing the kind of vicious right-wing ideology that members opposite espouse, when I saw it day to day in education, the kinds of cuts, I made a commitment at that time that I was not going to just protest against this government, I was going to run against them. In fact, I was fortunate enough to be elected to this House for the first time in 1981.

But, you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is what democracy is about. When I heard the Premier today accusing a student association president of hooliganism—this is not Pinochet's Chile, this is Manitoba. I expect better from this Minister of Education (Mrs. McIntosh) and from this Premier (Mr. Filmon). We have a quote from Pinochet provided to us, by the way, and I think, in a way, unfortunately we see some members in the House subscribing to this. Basically the quote from Pinochet is, Pinochet had said that he had nothing against ideas, just the spreading of ideas. Think about it. [interjection] Well, the member

for Lakeside (Mr. Enns) and I have a bit of a thing ongoing about Pinochet and Allende going back many years, but I do not want to digress.

I want to say, though, that this government has recognized the complete failure of its policies in public education. Just think back a few years here, think of this Minister of Education (Mrs. McIntosh), then the previous, previous Minister of Education. You know, it is interesting, with health care and education, there are a lot of previous ministers. Maybe it is an indication of the difficulty they have had in these key areas of public service, but even this Minister of Education at times has said, well, money does not really matter. When it comes to public education, that does not determine quality.

I still remember some discussion on this a few years ago, and I thought the appropriate point that was made at the time by the then member for River Heights, if money did not matter in terms of quality of education, private schools would not be charging \$9,000 a year tuition, they would not be seeking additional funds. Come on, everybody in this Legislature and everybody in this province knows that money is not the only determinant of quality, but if you cut, if you cut, and you cut teachers and you cut programs, you cut the quality of education.

How do we see that this has now been admitted by the government? You know, they came out in advance of the budget, and what did the Minister of Education announce? A further cut? They cut 1991, '92, '93, '94, '95, '96. I think '97 we had a freeze. The minister went out of her way to say: oh, we are putting more money into education, supposedly, 2.1 percent. Once again, they have recognized that people feel that our education system has declined in quality and they are trying desperately going into the next election to deal with it. This is not necessarily a conversion that reflects any change in philosophy. It reflects political expediency and perhaps was one of the findings, along with health care, contained in that opinion poll that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson), Mr. Open Government, would not release to the people of Manitoba.

I must say I was disappointed, because I expected from this Minister of Finance that the least he would do, if he is to really put any sense into being the

guardian of the public's finances, was release that information. I mean, we all know what is in it. You know what is in it. We see you desperately trying in your shotgun approach heading into the next election to try and put a human face on this government. But I say to the Minister of Finance, it is really unfortunate that you would not admit to it, at least release the public documents, and I think it meant in this House that your policies on public education have been a failure.

* (1520)

I want to put on the record what they have meant to my community. You know, it is interesting, because the Minister of Education seems to have a lot of time for Chris Millar, the peaceful protester, and the president of the University of Winnipeg Students' Association. You know what my school board is going to get at MAST in the way of time to talk to the Minister of Education—30 minutes. Thirty minutes, that is how much time she is going to give them. Now think about this for a moment. She has not been to Thompson. I do not mean that as a shot. I think it would be appropriate being the third largest city, but then again, the Premier (Mr. Filmon) has not been in Thompson since just before the last election. We have come to expect that. I actually give credit to some of the members opposite who have been.

But, you know, my school district has faced—get this—between 1992 and 1995 a 10 percent drop in funding, not inflation-adjusted numbers, a real drop in funding; it does not reflect dropped enrollment, far greater than any drop in enrollment. We have had only a minor—

An Honourable Member: Reassessment.

Mr. Ashton: Well, reassessment. Here is the situation we are in, to the member opposite. This year the province got 2.1 percent. You know what we got? Mr. Deputy Speaker, 0.4 percent. My school district is faced with a million-dollar shortfall. They are looking at \$300,000 of that coming from property tax, probably in the 10 percent range. To the members opposite, do you know what the property tax increase has been on the school board side? Until this year, it has been 25 percent over the last five years, and it is going to go up another 10 percent minimum this year.

An Honourable Member: What happened to the reassessment?

Mr. Ashton: Well, the member opposite talks about reassessment. Here is the fallacy of what this government is doing to my community. Has anybody heard what has happened at Inco? Inco has laid off 150 contractors. It has laid off 45 staff employees. It is going to lay off either directly or through attrition another 100 people. My community is hurting right now. My community is being hard hit by those cuts. But, just as we are hard hit by those cuts, we are expected to dig down deeper to do what—to try and save things like our teacher-librarians, to try and preserve what quality of education we can after the last several years where we have seen cuts in French language education, where we have seen cuts in Cree education, where we have seen particular cuts that affect special needs students, where we have seen cut after cut after cut. This is the tale of the two provinces.

You know, it is ironic. Friday, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) brings down his budget. Tuesday, the school board in Thompson brought down its budget. What a contrast. If you were to listen to the Minister of Finance, you would have thought that the streets were paved with gold. I will tell you, there may not be a lot of inflation economically right now, but there is sure a lot of inflation when it comes to the kind of terms and the kind of rhetoric being used by members opposite. But, you know, compare that rhetoric to the reality.

I find it interesting, by the way—I mean, we could get into some of the specifics of the First Minister's (Mr. Filmon) new philosophy of public finance and economic development—I found it rather interesting, for example, when he talked about balanced budgets creating jobs. What is interesting then, and I say this to the Minister of Finance, I mean, a nice phrase. Now you might want to also argue that jobs create balanced budgets. In fact, the minister might want to look at where the greatest impact on public finance has been the last several years at the federal level and the provincial level. It has been in terms of revenue growth. The minister knows that. Does this mean to say that in 1992-93 when the government he was part of ran the highest deficit in Manitoba history that they were not interested in jobs in those days, that they had

no commitment to employment? The Minister of Finance should move away from these glib statements and recognize that the key element that needs to be maintained is jobs—yes, well-paying jobs, most definitely, and jobs for the many people in our society who are still being left behind.

I want to address that because what is interesting is we are also seeing how they are admitting their failure in a number of these areas, too. Look at the rhetoric in this finance document about aboriginal people. You know, for 10 years this government's policy towards aboriginal people has been one either of benign neglect or of direct cuts. Let us talk about the benign neglect for a moment and direct cuts.

Look at what they have done in terms of aboriginal justice. The ceremony that we saw marked recently, the 10th anniversary of the J.J. Harper shooting that led to the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry. You know, I find it amazing that our member for Rupertsland (Mr. Robinson) had to say in interviews: this government has not even lived up to the first recommendation of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry and the most substantive elements.

Madam Speaker in the Chair

We see a government that—and I go back to the '92-93 cuts. You know, who was the No. 1 target in those cuts? It was the aboriginal people, with New Careers, with Access programs being cut, various aboriginal organizations cut, the Friendship Centres cut. After close to 10 years in which aboriginal people have been faced with continued problems in terms of the justice system, the need for the aboriginal justice system, continued lack of advantages in terms of economic development, we have seen this government cut.

It is nice for them now to become newfound friends of aboriginal people, but part of the problem has been the arrogance of a government that refuses to work in partnership with First Nations, with the Metis people of this province. We have seen it time and time again. We have seen this government unwilling to look at the real needs that are out there.

Well, it is similar, I think, when you look at a young people. It is interesting, Madam Speaker. I would

suggest if you want to ask the people of Manitoba what they feel about the current political circumstances and economic circumstances, ask them a very simple question. Do they think that they, if they are young people themselves, or their kids or their grandchildren have better opportunities now, adequate opportunities for a job, a decent future in this province? For all the talk we get from members opposite, they fail to reflect on the fact that—well, record numbers of Manitobans are employed right now. Unfortunately, a lot of them are in Alberta. We are starting to see that out-migration take place again. We are starting to see increasingly that situation.

I want to use a couple of statistics here to demonstrate that, and the member for Brandon East (Mr. Leonard Evans) points to the real story on employment growth, which shows us close to the bottom, January, February of 1998 over 1997. But, Madam Speaker, let us go one step further. I ask some very simple questions here. Let us do a sort of a real barometer here of how Manitobans are faring under close to 10 years of government. What is the average industrial wage in Winnipeg? Twenty-four cities. It is interesting. I was aware of this, but I read this in the sports page in the Free Press. It is funny it does not appear in the business section. There are 24 cities that are analyzed. Okay, where do you think Winnipeg ends up? Top 10? 15th? 20th? 21st out of 24 cities. You know, the average industrial wage in Newfoundland is traditionally higher than it is in Winnipeg. Now there is higher unemployment, yes, but—

An Honourable Member: Not when you count aboriginal people.

Mr. Ashton: Exactly, as the member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) points out, if you count in the number of aboriginal people who are not measured as being unemployed, it makes a huge difference, but, of course, we have a Premier that said in the last election that aboriginal people were not really Manitobans, certainly when it came to poverty statistics. I have heard many comments from aboriginal people who will never forget what that Premier said.

Let us take another barometer here, and I say this to the Minister of Finance. I particularly point to people in the city of Winnipeg because I come from outside of

the city. I suppose, since being an MLA and being back and forth to university over the years, I have actually been back and forth to the city, like most residents of rural and northern Manitoba, pretty well on a regular basis since 1972, and I consider it sort of a home away from home. I still live in Thompson, and my family, but I also understand one thing. Without a strong city of Winnipeg this province is going to be in very difficult circumstances. I apply that by the way to rural Manitoba, particularly the agriculture sector, the same thing in northern Manitoba with our dependency on resources.

* (1530)

But let us ask a simple question to the average resident of the city of Winnipeg. Ask them to compare what their house was worth ten years ago and what it is worth today after 10 years of Tory rule. I look at the member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale), the member for Transcona (Mr. Reid), the member for Point Douglas (Mr. Hickes).

Well, let us start. It is interesting comparisons, by the way, in terms of communities represented on our side. I know what houses are worth in Point Douglas right now. There are houses that are selling for \$10,000, for \$20,000–\$10,000 and \$20,000 less than assessed value.

Let us take Crescentwood, south centre Winnipeg. Have house prices been booming in Crescentwood? Not in Crescentwood. How about Transcona? Frozen. You know what is interesting? Let us move to the other side of the picture. People may say, well, you know, the NDP represent some of the more modest areas of the city. Let us ask the average home owner in Lindenwoods. I look to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson), if he can answer this question, what is the average house in Lindenwoods worth compared to what it was worth? The minister knows it is worth less. In many cases, people have a house that is worth less than what they paid for. I can cite all sorts of areas in Fort Garry. You do not have to ask a real estate agent for this. You can ask the average citizen on the street.

I want you to compare your rhetoric in all this sort of, you know, happy days are here again and all these statements that you made about how great you thought things were. I say to the Minister of Finance, the reality

is—[interjection] Well, the minister, I think, is trying to come back with something that says it is good to have low housing prices. I will tell you, you know, not depressed housing prices. Everyone knows that the biggest investment most people make is in their house, the biggest lifetime investment. I ask people opposite to reflect on that, because I just want to run through this for a second.

Let us go back to health care. You know the Minister of Finance came in and lectured us on health care reform, his style. Just ask people out there, just ask people if they think their health care system is better today than it was 10 years ago, when the Tories came into power. Just ask them that question. Do not take my word for it.

Same thing with education. Ask them, is there a public education system—not private, by the way. I acknowledge that private system is much better off after 10 years of Tory rule. But ask them, is the public education system better off today than it was 10 years ago? You know the answer is going to be no. I think if you ask serious questions about the economic circumstances of most Manitobans, they might say, well, finally, maybe there is some employment creation. But the reality is that their houses are worth less, their income is down in real terms, and their prospects of the future are of great concern to them, particularly when it comes to young people.

Now, I have given that snapshot and I, by the way, would suggest that members opposite use that as their barometer. Do not take my word, just ask people. It is a barometer for where the government stands after 10 years. Let us look at some of the underlying reasons behind this approach. I found it interesting, by the way, that I would call this budget essentially a shotgun approach. The Minister of Finance has got a poll showing they do not have any credibility on health care, so let us make it look like we are doing something on health care. Education, let us make it look like we are doing something there. Infrastructure was another area that struck me, the \$5 million for city streets which—

An Honourable Member: That will not do Transcona.

Mr. Ashton: That will not even do Transcona, as the member points out. Some additional funding for

highways, I do not know how much of that we will get in northern Manitoba, I must say.

An Honourable Member: They are building a private road in the Whiteshell, though.

Mr. Ashton: They are building a road in the Whiteshell, I am advised, Madam Speaker. I think what the government has to recognize—and once again this is part of the shotgun approach. After 10 years of particular neglect of our infrastructure in this province, they are now finding that they cannot ignore it any longer. Roads, sewer systems, water systems—we all know they are in a crumbling state. I find it amazing that in the budget document, they are going to create a park to Duff Roblin who, I think, was a fine Manitoban. It is interesting, Duff Roblin will be remembered most notably, for what? For building Manitoba's infrastructure, Duff's Ditch being the most obvious example.

If you go into what happened—and the member for Lakeside (Mr. Enns) was here—I think with Walter Weir; there was a bit of turning back the time clock. Ed Schreyer, I will tell you people in northern Manitoba remember Ed Schreyer for—and much of rural Manitoba—what he did for infrastructure. He built the air strips, the roads. He built the community halls.

I want to run through the same thing in 1980s. I tell you if you go to a lot of areas in Manitoba and ask about the NDP government in those days, they will remember infrastructure once again, such as Limestone, one of our largest. That is part of our infrastructure; it is making us a hundred million dollars a year.

Now the minister, in the dying days of this government and its mandate, has decided to be a born-again believer in infrastructure, direct public expenditure. Let us be a little bit careful here because this government has a habit of recycling announcements on infrastructure. Look what they did with health care.

I think the member for Brandon West (Mr. McCrae) actually believed that when he got approval for that capital project the capital program was going to go ahead. I do not blame the member for Brandon West when he told the member for The Pas (Mr. Lathlin) that

do not worry, we have the capital project approved for you. What happened?

After the election, surprise, surprise, everything gets put on hold. [interjection] Some of them went ahead says the member for—but I want to stress I am not blaming the member for Brandon West. They must have sat down after. I can almost picture the Tory cabinet table after the last election. Now after they had finished laughing about the Jets, boy, did we ever fool them on the Jets. They must have been rolling in the aisles. Filmon out there saying—pardon me—the Premier out there saying, I was not in the loop. That would have been in about the first 15 minutes of the cabinet meeting. The second 15 minutes would probably have been spent discussing MTS. Oh, yes, we are not going to sell off MTS here. What I think they probably did in the next part of the meeting, they said we are in government now, we do not have to deliver on health care. Let us cut back on the capital expenditures. Boy, did we ever fool them.

How many times do they think they can get away with this? This is the government that promised a health action plan in 1988. They promised it by 1990, they did not deliver it. They then brought out the blue document on health care reform in '92-93. Big cuts in health care. I remember the impact that we are going to see in my hospitals; '93 by-election, whoop, they lose seats. They bring in the member for Brandon West (Mr. McCrae) in a sweater and all that is on hold—yet he came to Thompson, I give him credit by the way—everything was on hold.

You know what happened, the election came. Guess what they did? They went ahead with all the cuts they had announced in '92-93. I do not know how many times they think they can get away with this. Okay, 1988 was somewhat unique circumstances, different issues; 1990, there was probably some discussion back and forth; even in 1995, because do not forget this government got 42 percent of the vote and the vote was split between two opposition parties.

I say to the members opposite, it is not going to be that way in the next election. It is going to be a two-way fight, and you know what, you cannot fool the people anymore. You have run out of ability to fool

people on health care, on education, on infrastructure. They just do not believe you anymore.

I also want to note for the record that I think they have to examine the weakness of their overall economic strategy as well. The days in which a low wage strategy, and let us not kid ourselves, that has been the strategy going back to when Clayton Manness was the Minister of Finance. I noticed, by the way, it is very interesting that he was here watching the budget and it was sort of kind of the current Finance minister against the previous Finance minister.

I must say I was quite interested by the dynamics because I actually know that the former Minister of Finance would not have agreed with the approach taken in the budget by this minister, because he believed, and he told me this on many occasions, of ratcheting down the size of government, and he is rigid about it. He did not believe in this pre-election spend a little bit more money stuff.

What I find interesting again is that Minister of Finance did something that this Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) often does not do and actually really talked about the strategy openly. I mean let us look at it, our minimum wage. Remember I told you about the average industrial wage. One of the reasons is we used to have I believe the second highest, if not the highest minimum wage in the country.

An Honourable Member: The election is coming.

* (1540)

Mr. Ashton: Well, now, as the member for Transcona (Mr. Reid) has pointed out, the election is coming. Maybe they are just going to raise the minimum wage again, but we are eighth out of 10; eight out of 10. The minimum wage is an important part of the economic portfolio we are dealing with.

I would ask members opposite, if you want to look at the kind of economic strategy that other jurisdictions are following, increasingly they are understanding that you cannot compete strictly by cutting back on the price of labour. I say to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson), the current minimum wage here, I mean, you can go to Mexico and you will get one-tenth the

minimum wage. The way we compete as a country is through the strength of our infrastructure and the strength of our education system, and, yes, the strength of our health care system. That is how we compete, and where we are successful it is largely because we have been able to maintain that niche in the world economy.

I say to members opposite, I do not know how much longer we have to go through this deliberate choking off of wages for Manitobans, a time at 10 years where their purchasing power has declined. I say to members opposite, by deliberately keeping down the wages—I will tell you, talk to young people, many of whom are the ones working at or near minimum wage. We had at the Youth Parliament—believe you me, when Gary Doer, the Leader of the Opposition, talked about the need to raise minimum wages, you could see the response that came from those people. [interjection] Well, the member for Transcona (Mr. Reid) references some wages that have not gone down.

I say to members opposite, history—I mean, even Henry Ford understood in the first part of the century that if workers working on an assembly line to build cars do not make enough money to buy those cars, you do not sell cars. This government, I get such a kick out of them talking about change and looking ahead to the future. You know, they are a government of the '90s. They are a government of the 1890s. Virtually everything that they argue, all their true ideology when it is not masked coming up to election time, is to have us go back to the good old days, you know, the good old days.

I say to the members opposite, their strategies are being rejected increasingly throughout the world. I was looking at the European Union. I think out of 15 governments, now I think about 13, maybe 14 soon with Germany, are social democratic governments. Right-wing governments are being rejected in every major economy in this world.

You know what part of it is? Let us look at what happened. Why would people be rejecting their kind of ideological approach? I want to mention MTS for moment. This is a summation for you. This government—and I am not going to spend much time on how they tried to fool the people of Manitoba in the

election. You know, it was interesting, there was a poll out recently saying a lot of people think that politicians are liars. Well, after what happened with MTS, Madam Speaker, who can doubt that there is some cynicism when a government said, oh, we have no plans to sell off MTS.

But you know what is interesting, this is a tale of two Manitobas. You know, immediately after the sale we saw the sale of Mercedes-Benz and Jaguars increase dramatically in this province. Who? The brokers spending their newfound gains trading in their Jaguars for more expensive Jaguars.

Well, what have we seen since—and this is how total this government was in its lack of being up front with the people. We have seen 450 job losses, and I want to put on the record, by the way, Bill Baines, one of the heads of MTS has been saying, oh, it has nothing to do with privatization. You know, I remember when Tom Stefanson said on the public record, we are not going to cut back jobs; we are going to expand jobs. I have that on record in the Thompson Citizen. I have that on record when he was in the House here. Boy, did they have a good one with that, I am sure, too. Did they think anybody was going to believe that? Even the Portage Daily Graphic—and I refer the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Fauschou) to that—said call a spade a spade. Look at what is happening to communities like Portage now with the closure of the office and the layoff that is taking place there. You did not tell the truth.

The same thing with the First Minister and the Minister responsible for MTS: Well, we are moving from public to private ownership, but it is going to be a Manitoba company. Whoa. The stockbrokers are saying that 80 percent of the shares are now owned outside of the province. Are you proud of that? Were you either not telling the truth about that or did you deliberately act in a completely incompetent way?

I mean, I have said on the record that—and I will tell you, when we are in government, I will predict that there may very well be a compete investigation into what I consider to be one of the biggest rip-offs and scandals in Manitoba history. You ask the people out there about whom the Tories represent. There is the best example. The only winners were the brokers. The

only winners were Bay Street and institutional investors. The losers were everybody in the province of Manitoba who has to pay more for their phone bill, or the people like the people in Portage who are now being laid off, many long-term MTS employees. I have talked to them, by the way. They phone me. I will tell you one thing: they are disgusted by a government that will not even be up front with them and say the truth, that they knew before the sale of MTS that was going to happen.

Have you noticed as well that they say, Madam Speaker, their other strategy now is Manitoba Hydro, oh, no, we will never sell off Manitoba Hydro? I would say if you asked most Manitobans what they remember about the Film on government's first 10 years, I think the Jets would be one of them and the other one would be MTS. Now they are going to say, we are going to protect your Manitoba Hydro or MPIC. It just does not wash anymore.

What I want to suggest to the government is, they finally admit on the record something that is very obvious. This government after 10 years has become arrogant; it has become aloof; and it has become out of touch. Just think about it for a second. The Minister of Health (Mr. Praznik) gets up in the House and says we were not having a problem with health care until there was an influx of patients. Madam Speaker, I cannot believe it. How terrible, there would be an influx of patients. The Premier (Mr. Filmon) says, do not worry, probably by next year things will be okay. I pointed out that is conveniently just after the next election, so, hopefully, it means he is anticipating what we are anticipating too: the election of an NDP government that we will get in and fix up our health care system.

We have a Minister of Education (Mrs. McIntosh) who says, well, cuts do not really hurt the quality of education. That is when she has time to look at such questions, when she is not trying to punish student protesters.

We see the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) stand in this House and say that happy days are here again, that we have never had it so good when we have the 21st out of 24th for the industrial wage in this province, when the purchasing power of Manitoba workers today is lower than it was 10 years ago, and when houses in

the city of Winnipeg barely sell for the price you paid for them 10 years ago, if that—in many cases, sell for less. The reality is take off those, as one of my colleagues said, blue-coloured glasses for a moment—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Ashton: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I want to finish off on this note. I have had one advantage of being a member of this Legislature, fortunate enough to be elected by the people of Thompson in 1981, 1986, 1988, 1990, and 1995. You know what? It is recognizing when people are out of touch. I have been in Thicket Portage and talked to my constituents. I have talked to the woman who came down to Winnipeg and had her surgery cancelled after being in Winnipeg for four days and sent back home. I have been in Pikwitonei and talked to Fred Cordell, who is still waiting for cataract surgery. I have been in Thompson and talked to Mrs. Judy Benner, whose daughter had to be medivacked to Winnipeg, an eight-hour trip, to get an appendicitis operation. I have been into Split Lake and Nelson House and talked to people who have seen the continuing conditions of our roads, the damage that has caused, the accidents and the injuries that have been caused.

I have spoken to people all throughout my constituency, and, you know what, Madam Speaker? They are saying one clear thing: the first question they ask me, when is the next election?

* (1550)

I say to this government, now we are in the budget debate here; now, you put forward the best card that most governments can put forward—the budget. I will tell you what, let us not put the people of Manitoba through this any longer. Let them be the judge. I say, we in the New Democratic Party challenge the government to call an election on its policies, its health care policies, its education policies. I say tomorrow when we have the budget vote, we have a chance. I tell you, we are ready. The people of Manitoba are ready to elect an NDP government that will fix their health care system, fix their education system and stop the damage, 10 years of Tory damage.

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Madam Speaker, it is certainly a pleasure to rise in the House to put a few comments on record regarding the budget, but not only regarding the budget, I think we need to, when you assess why we are in the province where we are today, I think you have to assess what has happened historically in this province.

I think when we look at some of the criticism that has been extended to us from opposition members in the House regarding health care and education and all those kinds of things, I think one must look at why we are where we are and why things have happened the way they are happening. I think it has always been clear in my constituency and with people at least in southern Manitoba—and I know that having done the value-added task force and the tour of the province that we did, that people in this province think alike whether they are in opposition-held ridings or in government-held ridings, they think alike, and that is they clearly understand the economics of how their own households must be run. They understand clearly how to run a business, because if they do not, it simply collapses and dies.

I think that is something that we need to consider from time to time in this House when we make all sorts of considerations or accusations about the system. I think one must also realize that no business can ever truly stop, because if it stops, it will go into a descending mode and it will die. If you keep on improving and changing a business or an industry, it creates growth and it creates a dynamic all unto itself and the energy that is created by making that change drives an expansionary-thought process. I do not think it matters too much whether that theory is driven by a household, whether it is driven by a business, the agricultural sector, manufacturing sector or the service sector, I think the principles can be applied in all different areas.

That is what has driven this budget and that is what has driven our government to put in place a plan that is now nearing a decade. I think we are now seeing the fruits of that plan that was put into place by members of our government. I find it interesting that when you look at the changes that are being made in the health care system, and change is never easy, that we hear criticism from the opposition, and yet those changes have been driven by increased services, increased

facilities, better facilities in many communities in rural Manitoba and a much expanded workforce, although a changed workforce, in the health care system. And so we provide a better service to many of the people, and the changes in process now established in our health care system are simply different than they were many years ago.

I think one must realize and accept that if we had not changed anything, the system would have imploded because there would not have been enough money to keep on doing what you are doing. People no longer want to be institutionalized, whether you are a senior citizen or you are a young person with appendicitis. If you can walk into a health care institution, have an operation and go back home—and recuperate at home is what everybody wants to do. I talk to many senior citizens, I visit many senior citizens, I visit many of the seniors residences. When you talk to those in seniors residences, they have nothing but praise for this government and the changes that have been made to allow them to have services in their home. It is called home care. Look in your budget. Look at the budget that was presented in this House 10 years ago by the previous government. Look at how much they spent on home care and tell me whether our services in that sector have increased.

Look at the budget line on health care in its totality from 10 years ago when I came to government to what it is today. It has increased by almost a billion dollars. It has. [interjection] The honourable member says \$500 million. Well, it is obvious that his education and my education have not been similar, because my mathematics show me a different story. So we have increased better than \$800 million our budget on the health care side and, similarly, we have increased our bottom line in the education portion of our budget. Yet all we hear from the opposition member is criticism.

Well, I ask you, Madam Speaker, what do we hear from Saskatchewan? What do we hear from their colleagues in Saskatchewan? I was somewhat astounded when I listened to the honourable members opposite when the previous Saskatchewan government started building the Rafferty-Alameda project. They were so critical of the environmental process and of the actual building of the facility to create power and energy for southern Saskatchewan, and yet today we

hear nothing but praise for the system, and the current NDP government in Saskatchewan is telling the people of the benefits, the huge benefits that are now being accrued from the Rafferty-Alameda project.

And why? Why is it? It is interesting, I believe, that the Saskatchewan people have finally elected a better conservative government than they have ever had before, although they call themselves NDP. I think they are farther right in their thinking than we are in this province, and I would suggest to honourable members opposite that their thinking, their mentality is history. There is nobody in Manitoba that is going to support the NDP philosophy that these people across the way are expounding today. That is simple.

I think it is important to note when they ask and they make accusations about how we got to the bottom line and how we balanced our books and the budget we are running. I think one need only look at headlines in the various papers in the province over the past week or so, and they indicate clearly why our economy is booming. Because people are finally gaining confidence that the old regime, the socialist control regime is over and they are gaining the confidence that leads them to want to invest in this province. That is what it is all about.

We were told when we did the value-added forums across the province: you know what we need? They said: we need lower taxes. Our Minister of Finance lowered the taxes. They said: we need a better, secure future. We are paying down the debt, which will lead to a more secure financial future for our young people.

People are not immune to that kind of demonstration of will by a government, and it was the previous, you know, a decade ago you saw a clear—every story in the newspapers was, there was declining population in rural Manitoba. Everywhere in rural Manitoba there was declining population and there was nothing but doom and gloom, and it was under the old socialist regime in this province that those stories appeared.

What do we read today? What do the headlines say? Manitoba is a rural boom. Manitoba's rural population was in steady decline; dying towns, stories abounded. Families felt they were being exported. The young people were leaving the rural areas and jobs to go to the city. That has turned around completely.

* (1600)

The town of Winkler, over the last 20 years, the last two decades, has grown from 2,800 to 7,200 people. Why? Because these people have confidence not only in themselves but in a government that has listened to them and has turned this economy around and has balanced the books.

The rural boom is leading others from outside to come look at Manitoba. I do not think we need to say too much more about the pork industry, the new industry being built in Brandon, and the expansion of the pork processing industry in Winnipeg. I do not think we need to say too much about that, do we? More than double the production that we had 10 years ago, five years ago.

The interesting thing is that we are building production buildings in rural Manitoba which is leading towards long-term stability and jobs. My neighbours have just finished building a very large hog operation. They are going to be employing 12 people. My neighbour's kids are not going to leave. After they finish their high school, one of them went to Vancouver, and one of them went to Toronto to see whether they could find jobs. They have come back home and are going to work right at home. One of them who was trained in veterinarian services is going to be hired by that hog operation. Is that grow? Is that positive grow? Absolutely. It could not have happened without the expansion in the industry that we have seen.

We have five or six major industries that are touring Manitoba or looking around Manitoba. As we speak, they are looking for a home. Why do you think they are looking to Manitoba for a home? Because we have created an economic climate that is conducive to building in Manitoba. Why do you think our job force has increased over the last five, 10 years in this province? Because people are coming home to work. They are wanting to work in Manitoba because there are jobs in Manitoba, not as the previous administration assumed.

I always think, Madam Speaker, that it is interesting—the Ontario experience, I think, is an interesting experience. When the Ontario people elected a socialist government, the socialist government

said we will demonstrate to you how you can borrow yourself out of oblivion. What happened? They clearly demonstrated how you can borrow yourself out of oblivion and into a black hole that you cannot get out of. That is what happened.

When I look at my own home town of Altona, and I look at the tremendous expansion that has occurred there and is occurring there as we speak, one has to wonder if that would have occurred—I do not think you have to wonder. It would not have occurred if there would have been a socialist government in this province, but those business people in my home town are gaining the kind of confidence to build into a new era.

Madam Speaker, when you look at the kind of commercial development that is going on right now, there are going to be constructing what is called the Golden West Plaza which is a five-storey business complex. In the town of Altona ten years ago that would have been unheard of, and yet today it is happening.

Secondly, they are building a brand new co-op grocery store in town—yes, a co-op. Altona has always been known as the centre and home for co-operatives, and it was probably led by a person by the name of J.J. Siemens who started the oil-crushing industry in this country by building a very small, little oil-crushing plant which crushed oil out of sunflower seeds. Yet, out of that industry has grown a demonstration of how to not only change a town's history but, in fact, change western Canadian history. Canola has—[interjection]

I find this very interesting, Madam Speaker, that the members opposite, the member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) truly does not understand economic development. The first thing he does when we start talking about all the growth that is taking place in rural Manitoba, he points a finger at a project that has not opened its doors yet. It has not finished building yet and has not opened its doors. He points fingers and he said what about the white elephant? That is typical of the NDP kind of thinking. These guys know nothing but doom and gloom, nothing but doom and gloom.

Here we have a town that is continuing to build. The Friesens Corporation are expanding their industry and

are going to add at least 50 to 100 jobs within the next year, and what do they say? You know, their new building is not finished yet. Are you going to call that a white elephant too? I would hope not, Madam Speaker, but it appears that the opposition, the member for Crescentwood, knows nothing but to point fingers and point at the negatives and talk about the negatives in this province. Just simply addressing and talking about the negatives is never going to build confidence in our young people. That is what you need to do, and that is what we have done over the last 10 years, is we have tried to build confidence in our people, especially our young people, encourage them to stay home, go to work in your own communities and build a future for yourselves and their families. That is what needs to happen.

You know, there was a young couple—as a matter of fact, two young couples—who put their heads together a year and a half ago in the town of Altona and said what can we do to get involved in this business community? Do you know what they built? They built a store. It is called the Bargain Centre. It has been so tremendously successful that others are looking at the same kind of a concept. Two young couples, local couples, people that the previous administration would have told, you cannot have a job here; no, no, we are going to put you on welfare or we are going to export you. That is what they would have said. Get an education; we will export you and away you go. But these people are now gaining confidence in a province that is, in fact, proud to call themselves Manitobans.

The town of Altona is also planning a number of major housing projects, and these housing projects, again, are a demonstration of the growth that is happening there. These people are not moving away. They are moving back. They are coming back to Manitoba, and they are looking for homes, and we are building homes for these people; we are building businesses for these people.

You know, we have spent a lot of time, Madam Speaker, as I said initially, talking about health care. I remember when I was first elected 10 years ago in this House. I drove out to Vita, and I was asked to tour the hospital in Vita. The hospital in Vita had the plasterboard fall off the roofs, and the water pipes were leaking into the basement. It was an absolute shame to

visit a facility such as this. The people in Vita had been told by the then government, the then just previous government, that they would never build a hospital in Vita.

* (1610)

Well, our Minister of Health took one look at that facility. He said we have to rebuild this facility, and we did. They have a brand-new hospital in Vita; they have a personal care home in Vita; and we provide a home care service, Madam Speaker, to the citizens of southeast Manitoba that is second to none. We have more people employed in the health care system—I would suggest double the number of people employed in the health care system in the Vita area and the southeast area—than they ever had under the NDP administration. Yet the NDP will talk only about gloom and doom in the health care system.

The town of Altona was the same way. I mean, the hospital was falling off its foundation, and the NDP administration would simply not—they simply refused to take a look at even replacing that facility. We did. We are, as the NDP say, the bad Conservatives that do not care about health care. How come we build all the facilities? How come we built the new hospital in Altona?

Were you ever in St. Pierre, Manitoba? Did you walk through that hospital? The plaster was falling off the ceiling in the hospital when I first walked through it. Did the NDP do anything about those kinds of facilities? No. Do you know what they said? You can drive to Winnipeg. That is where you can get your service. We recognized, our government recognized, the value of our rural communities and building industries in those rural communities and providing the service: first of all, providing an economic base that you can afford to; building a service centre in those communities that can service the rural area; providing education—and how many new schools have we built?—in those communities; providing health care; and building confidence. That is what it is all about. It is not the rhetoric that I hear here day in and day out, but what should be done, or what should not be done. Madam Speaker, let us be known by our actions, not by our words. That is how I would like to be known and

remembered when I leave this Chamber, by our actions and not by our words.

I think, Madam Speaker, we have a tremendous future. We should be espousing the benefits of our province to everybody that is willing to listen. We should be saying to our young people: you should be proud of your heritage; you should take pride in what you have done; you should take pride in your history. We should say to our young people: we want you to stay; we want you to be here; and we want you to prosper. One way of doing that is by demonstrating that we truly mean what we say, and not offloading our services on them that they would have to repay.

That was the saddest part about the previous administration. They kept on borrowing and borrowing and borrowing on the backs of our children and our grandchildren, and one of the saddest things that I have ever seen is the huge amount of debt that we have offloaded on our kids and their children.

One of the most complimentary things that I can say about our Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) is that he had the fortitude to this year double the debt repayment schedule, to double it, because if you double payments at the start of a repayment schedule, if you double the payments, at the end of the day you will triple the benefits, more than triple the benefits. It will quadruple the benefits and the services that we will be able to provide to our grandchildren is going to be expanded by that amount. I mean, if we could do away today with the capital debt that we have to carry and the service debt that we have to carry that the NDP have loaded on us, we could today provide \$500 million more services without changing anything else.

I know the honourable member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) loves to natter about this thing, because he does not like to hear what we are saying. He does not like to hear this because he realizes full well the honesty and the truth of what we are saying. He knows how badly they have mistreated the future generations of this province and what they have done to them. I would too want to sit there and natter and not listen to what I am saying. I would too want to reflect negatively on my past if I was in their shoes.

On a note that is not quite as positive, my friend, Mr. Ed Helwer, the member for Gimli and I were invited to

a meeting in Crookston, Minnesota, last week Saturday. We were invited to a meeting in Crookston, Minnesota, by my friend, Mr. Jim Tunheim, the representative for the northeast part of Minnesota. This meeting was called to listen to people in that part of the United States and the difficulties they were having on their farms and the tremendous challenges they are going to be facing and are facing today. It was a sad day, because there were about 400 farmers came to the Crookston meeting and they told of how difficult it was to farm in Crookston, Minnesota, and the surrounding area. They told about the crisis they were facing because of the three crop failures that they had had and virtually no support from their government.

I thought about our situation in Manitoba. If we would have had three crop failures in a row and we have no more government supports worth speaking of—and we did have five or six years ago significant government supports, the Crow benefit, \$750 million taken right out of Manitoba and Alberta and Saskatchewan farmers, \$750 million stripped of income. That income now has to be derived off the farms and paid to railways in lieu of the \$750 million federal commitment that was made to agriculture via transportation supports, that is gone. The GRIP program and special grains programs and many other programs that were devised to keep people in western Canada on the farms during tough times, those programs are all gone.

Madam Speaker, we heard a similar kind of story from Minnesota farmers. What worries me is that we in this country assume that disasters will not truly negatively affect agriculture. We should never allow ourselves to think that, because if you have two or three crop failures in a row, there is nothing that an individual manager can do to keep themselves viable during that period of time. The costs of operating today are much too high, so the risk is much too great.

The worry I have is during trade negotiations a few years ago, when we talked about free trade and we talked about the international free trade arrangements that were made, it was assumed that we had all agreed to lower those tariffs and truly put agriculture and agricultural products on an even basis throughout the world. That has not happened, Madam Speaker.

European farmers today, as we speak, get \$200 an acre of government supports. Their export enhancement programs are still there and are used quite readily. The estimate currently is that the Europeans are using export enhancement up to \$35 and \$40 a tonne to export into our market. That means simply that they are artificially dropping the price of my commodity by a dollar a bushel, the price of my wheat by a buck a bushel, and if they are then underpinning their agricultural community by \$200 an acre, that puts me out of the marketplace by about \$240 an acre. That puts me out of the competitive realm.

* (1620)

Our farmers in western Canada simply cannot be expected to face that kind of competition. That is why I think it is important that we start sitting down with our American friends; that is why I think it is so extremely important that we start talking to our political allies in the United States; and that is why I think it is extremely important that our wheat growers and our bean growers and our sugar beet growers start talking to each other, instead of at each other, and that maybe we can get together and find an amiable solution. Then if our countries, as a North American unit, need to go to the international trade discussions over the next year or two, that we can make a case for ourselves that will in fact require producers in all parts of the world to compete on an even basis.

We have to do this, Madam Speaker, or else we are going to lose our agricultural community. If we allow, through trade negotiations, other countries to keep on underpinning their agriculture artificially through government supports and we back away from all this, we are not going to see a viable long-term agricultural community and a sustainable one. So I think we need to take a great deal of care in the next round of trade negotiations and discussions to ensure that our position is understood.

I found an article that was written by the former Secretary of Agriculture of the United States, Bob Bergland, a very interesting one. He talks about the commodities that are in Canada under supply and management. He did not refer to the Canadians; he referred simply to the economic situation as being addressed under the current farm bill and the right-to-

farm legislation in the United States. He said what is going to happen, Madam Speaker, is that the dairy industry in the United States will be driven out of the south central areas of the United States and into the northern states because it will be simply done by virtue of economics. I agree with that.

What I suspect will happen in Canada is that under the next trade round the federal government will be forced to relax dramatically the controls and the tariffs that they have gained for our dairy and our poultry industries. So I think we need to strongly consider, in the very near future, as to how we are going to deal with the realities of the marketplace and the reality of the international community and how they interact with each other and how we discuss and what terms we negotiate under our next trade agreement. Because it will impact very dramatically, Madam Speaker, on our ability in rural Manitoba to survive.

We have seen a very dramatic growth industry, and I have always said that if we had established Canada under a different term and terminology that we initially did, we would have seen an entirely different western Canada. I truly believe that. I think the demonstration of doing away with the Crow benefit and putting us in a competitive marketplace is being seen today, and we in Manitoba are going to be the biggest benefactor on the livestock-side sector. However, we are not going to be able to survive over the long term if we are going to allow outside forces, legislative processes and those kind of things to protect artificially these industries in other provinces.

I think, therefore, we need to really look at again internally freeing up the systems as well to allow Manitobans, the Manitoba grain producers, access to a feed-grain market that will be driven here if we truly allow the competitive forces to take place.

I think it is simply unethical and reprehensible if we allow the current agreements to remain in place and allow the population basis to be the determining factors in formulating quotas. I think that system simply has to be changed dramatically, and we have to set the quotas based on economics and competitiveness. If Manitoba can produce products cheaper for the consumer than any other jurisdiction in the country can, then Manitoba must be the place where it is produced. That is where

the quotas must be directed then if there are going to be quotas. I think that must be said clearly and loudly.

We need to, Madam Speaker, in my view, sit down and in earnest start discussing freeing up the trade barriers that we have set from province to province. We have talked so long about the trade barriers between us and the United States. Well, I think it is about time we started addressing the trade barriers between us and Saskatchewan, between us and Alberta, and between us and Quebec and Ontario and the Maritimes, because those trade barriers are in many ways much larger than the barriers we face with our friends across the south side of the border. We need to, in my view, start really addressing the impact of taking \$750 million away from grain farmers in western Canada and not doing anything, not returning anything into that sector.

I am asking federal members of Parliament in this province to start taking leadership because we have seen none so far. We have lost our sugar beet industry, and the member that represented that area of the province where most of the beets were grown did nothing. He never lifted a finger, never said a word about the industry. We needed a change in policy in Ottawa and nothing was done, so we lost a \$100-million industry. Who is to blame?

We have a similar situation whereby our transportation system, our road network, is being very dramatically impacted by the huge numbers of large trucks that are transporting grain where railways transported it before. We are seeing the damage that is being done. We are seeing the large numbers of dollars taken out of the system, \$750 million, and taken back to Ottawa and spent in eastern Canada by the federal government, and yet we as a province, the taxpayers in this province and in other provinces in western Canada, are asked to foot the bill. We are only asking and should ask Ottawa to return some of the money into a road network, an infrastructure program that will provide proper roads to replace the responsibility that was previously placed on the railways.

We need a real effort being made by all our politicians in a united way in western Canada to direct the efforts and say that all the gasoline taxes and fuel taxes taken out of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta

need to be put back into Saskatchewan, Alberta and Manitoba to rebuild an infrastructure that we can utilize and use. If we will not, Madam Speaker, we will be the net benefactors of that kind of hurt that we are seeing today.

So I think we are only asking that they return part of what they took away. We are only asking that they take part of what they collect and give it back to us and allow us to build No. 1 roads, to allow us to build water pipelines, to allow us to build infrastructure to allow industry to build and flourish in this province. We are demonstrating that you can do these things on a balanced budget. We are asking Ottawa to recognize that and put their money where their mouth is.

Madam Speaker, I think it is time that we start addressing this issue on a national basis, on an international basis, and certainly, above all, on an interprovincial basis. Thank you.

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to be able to put some words on record regarding the 1998 budget, and to do so from the point of view of being both a Manitoban and a northerner.

I have listened with particular interest as government member after government member has tried to put the most positive spin possible on this budget, and I know why they need to do that. The budget needs that positive spin, and if I were in their shoes, I would probably have to do that as well. My honourable colleague from Brandon East, however, has referred to the budget as intriguing and confusing. In fact, he doubts that upon close scrutiny the budget is even actually balanced. As well, my honourable colleague from Crescentwood has stated that this budget is constructed out of such quicksand that one finds oneself sinking in numbers that bear no resemblance to reality. Now I know that the members opposite like to target the member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale), so I presume he must be hitting a raw nerve, and I encourage him to continue.

* (1630)

The budget is a complex document, Madam Speaker, and if there is fudging or camouflaging or shading going on, then one can hardly blame the average

Manitoban for being perplexed about the true nature of this budget. The press, I could add, has cooled considerably towards the budget after having given it a good scrutiny. In other words, the Tory euphoria of budget Friday has given way, or gave way early the following week, to much more sober second thought.

In fact, early that week Frances Russell writes in her column that the deficit debt preoccupation of the neo-Conservatives has led to attempts at brainwashing the public and, in effect, attempts to make cheerleaders out of the very victims—those were her approximate words—the very victims that will suffer most. She quotes one of Canada's top mainstream economists, Michael McCracken, as saying that the debt-free crusade violates accepted accounting principles, is bad economics, and threatens future generations. McCracken refers to balanced budget and debt repayment laws as simple-minded, self-serving and short-term money grubbing. McCracken further states that we elect governments to make judgments at the time based on situations at the time. McCracken believes that in the short term zero-debt goals lead to poor economic performance, loss of human capital, degradation of social and physical capital, and will enviably result in conflicting long-term damage on Manitoba.

Because of Manitoba's positive asset balance, there was no need to sell MTS to pay down the debt; or, to express it in northern imagery, Madam Speaker, if a commercial fisherman or fisherwoman was struggling with a modest debt, it would be silly, in my opinion, to sell the boat and the nets to pay down the debt.

I mentioned these various views on the budget, Madam Speaker, only to point out that there is no unanimity on this budget, either in this Chamber or out there on the streets. What the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) presented to us on Friday, March 6, as a golden coach has actually turned into a pumpkin. One could argue that there are positive aspects even to a pumpkin, but it is not a golden coach, it is not a panacea. Fiscally responsible governments should balance the books whenever possible and certainly during prosperous times, and governments have done just that in the past. In Saskatchewan Tommy Douglas and Allan Blakeney balanced the books, and Roy

Romanow reached zero deficit long before we did in Manitoba.

This government is fond of dragging a red herring in front of the NDP in an attempt to globally characterize all NDP parties as tax-and-spend parties, and that is not true. This government has contributed \$2 billion approximately to our provincial debt. This government, under this Premier (Mr. Filmon), created the largest annual deficit in the history of this province. In 1992-1993, that deficit was well over \$700 million if proper and, I could say, honest accounting procedures are used. Please do not lecture us on fiscal responsibility. If you want to lecture people, then lecture Grant Devine who left the Saskatchewan economy in total shambles, or lecture Trudeau or Mulroney who left us with a federal debt of \$600 billion. In an ideal world, Madam Speaker, there would be no need for finger pointing. In a less adversarial world, in a place less confrontational than this Chamber, people of good will could perhaps work on our common problems in an atmosphere of mutual trust. But there would have to be trust, and this government would have to give us the straight goods.

And it boils down to this, Madam Speaker. We on this side of the House do not believe that we are getting the straight goods. The government tells us the economy is performing at a dizzying speed, and yet its revenue projections do not support this. Why are we drawing on the rainy day fund if we are living in such buoyant economic times, as the member from Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) has pointed out? It seems to me an obvious question to be asking. Why is there an out-migration of Manitobans? Why are so many Manitobans leaving the province? Why are so many Manitobans unemployed or underemployed? Why are so many young people telling us, once they come out of post-secondary educational institutions, that they are saddled with crushing debts and that it is almost impossible to find a decently paying job? That does not sound to me like a buoyant economy.

Madam Speaker, allow me once again to quote from Frances Russell's column in today's Free Press. It should be required reading for the bench across the way. "Fiscal shell game exposed. In his budget, Finance Minister Eric Stefanson proudly announced 'over' \$100 million more for health next year." Then she goes on a little later on. "Then, on Tuesday, a

cabinet document came out showing the \$100 million had dwindled to just \$1.47 million.” Further on she states, “we will in fact see less spending on patient care this year than we did last year” and “Actual spending on health care in Manitoba has only grown by \$79.5 million in the last six years.” And, I think, most telling of all is the following: “Using real 1988 dollars, health funding has dropped \$184 per Manitoban since 1992-93 . . . and education funding has nosedived \$472 per pupil” in the same time.

Madam Speaker, this government would have much more credibility if it started levelling with the people of Manitoba, if it stopped bending the statistics, stopped exaggerating, started to fulfill its promises. When you say you are going to build a personal care home in Flin Flon, then build it. When you say that you are going to save the Jets, save them. When you say you are not going to sell MTS, then keep your word, honour your word. When you say that you are putting \$100 million more into health care, make sure it is new money. As my colleague from Crescentwood has pointed out, ministers of the Crown should not say 12,800 new jobs were created last year, or 15,000 new jobs or 17,000 new jobs, when the statistics clearly indicate only 1,800 new jobs were created. The minister knows full well that the labour force shrank by 7,000 workers last year, and although our unemployment rate was 6.5 percent in January-February, it is still higher than in either Alberta or Saskatchewan.

Yes, the prairie economy is rallying, but we are not yet in paradise. In fact, Madam Speaker, when you ask the average Manitoban if he or she is better off now than last year or the year before, you usually get a negative answer. In northern Manitoba, you almost always get a negative answer. Well, that is because especially in northern Manitoba, people have either come through extremely difficult times or are facing difficult times, and I just reference Flin Flon which was on tenterhooks for months, the people not knowing whether they had a viable mining industry past the year 2004. Now, hopefully, the mining industry will indeed survive and thrive until well past the year 2012, but there was a serious problem there for a time.

In Flin Flon itself, for example, 10 years ago there was no food bank, but year after year lately, the Lord's Bounty food bank, with its dedicated volunteer, serves

more and more hungry people. In fact, I happened to talk to one of the food bank directors this morning on the airplane, and she said they take in at least two or three new families every week. This was not the case 10 years ago. Ten years ago there were no food banks. There were no food banks under Howard Pawley's administration or Ed Schreyer's. People tell me—and I have no reason to doubt them—that they had more disposable income then. There was a greater feeling of security then, a feeling that things would get better, a feeling of optimism. Now that feeling has largely evaporated in northern Manitoba.

Yes, when Ed Schreyer was in power, there was a larger vision. Not just hydro projects, which also had a negative side because of environmental impacts and dislocation, but northern roads were built, northern and remote airports were constructed. Northern Manitoba became more firmly linked to the south. Northerners felt that at least they would be listened to in Winnipeg and treated with some degree of respect, treated as regular citizens. They do not have that feeling today. They do not feel that they have a real share in the development of this province, and that is unfortunate. Those hopes that they had then have been dashed.

Since the days of Schreyer and Pawley, things have changed. The infrastructure, the roads and airports in northern Manitoba have not been maintained properly, improved or modernized. Hospital upgrades, water and sewage projects, personal care homes, they are all on hold. Funding for Access program, New Careers, BUNTEP—either slashed or eliminated; freshwater fish freight subsidies—eliminated; Flin Flon Crisis Centre funding—eliminated. Yes, the government talks about being serious about women's issues and domestic violence in northern Manitoba. Northerners no longer feel that things will change for the better soon, and unfortunately there is much reason for that pessimism.

The Northern Manitoba Economic Development Commission was appointed by the Minister of Northern Affairs and was mandated with examining the economic potential of northern Manitoba, and between 1991 and 1993 via the public consultation process, a huge six-volume report which cost approximately one million dollars was issued. That report is still gathering dust. After so much effort and energy, and after consulting hundreds and hundreds of northerners—men,

women, entrepreneurs, workers, professionals—why are virtually none of the recommendations that flow from that huge report ever implemented? The same holds true for the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry. They have become doorstops. Let me remind the government that a commission, a study, a report is supposed to lead to action.

* (1640)

One of the volumes of the Northern Manitoba Economic Development Commission report is entitled Northern Manitoba Sustainable Economic Development: A Plan for Action. On page 95, under the commission plan for action, personal and community development, activities and under overall objectives and activities, priority actions for the first year—and I presume that the first year here refers to 1993-94—the list goes as follows, and for me, it is almost like *déjà vu* because we keep repeating these things: No. 1, paving the road to Cross Lake and Norway House—this is from the government's own report that they commissioned, that they spent a million dollars on; paving the road between Thompson and Leaf Rapids; upgrading the road to Lynn Lake; assessing the feasibility of a road from Lynn Lake to Pukatawagan to close the northern loop, which would certainly help the tourist industry and would certainly help Pukatawagan; exploring the idea of a mid-Canada corridor road system; assessing the basic needs for economic infrastructure and costs, particularly sewer and water services, and it is particularly relevant for Flin Flon and Channing right now; considering opportunities for roads in association with major resource development.

That was the list, Madam Speaker, and not much has been acted on that comes out of that list. Well, I do not have to tell northerners how little of that dream then has become real. Basically, we are still waiting, but we are not waiting quietly or passively. Concerned citizens from Lynn Lake, Leaf Rapids, Thompson, South Indian Lake, Norway House, Cross Lake, Nelson House, Moose Lake and other places are continuing to organize and lobby for things such as better roads, better housing and so on, but especially better roads.

The Minister of Highways (Mr. Findlay) talks now about dedicating 11 percent of the highway budget to

northern roads, and I am very happy with that. If that were true—although not still nearly enough—it would be a step in the right direction. For a number of years this government has believed that the North, with 4 percent of the province's population, deserved only 4 percent or slightly better of the total road budget, and that is not fair. That was and is totally unacceptable, but if indeed the minister is serious about dedicating 11 percent of the expenditures relating to capital to northern Manitoba, that would be roughly 11 percent of \$105 million or \$108 million, and we look forward to him spending or allowing this expenditure of \$12 million this coming year on northern upgrades and construction, but I will believe it when I see it.

The Leader of our party has correctly identified that northern Manitoba needs a long-term infrastructure strategy for its economic future. That was also identified clearly five years ago in the Northern Manitoba Economic Development committee report. To make northern Manitoba highways safe, a lot more money is needed for both maintenance and construction, and that comes as no news to the minister or to this government. A decade of neglect needs to be rectified soon.

Secondly, as our Leader has pointed out, the priority after safe northern roads should be a transitional strategy for rural roads, roads that because of the aftermath of rail line abandonment, changes to the Crow, changes to pooling, have wreaked havoc with the rural road network. In fact, the member for Emerson (Mr. Penner) has just finished chronicling some of those problems with rural roads.

Lastly, we should worry about road convenience and comfort. Secure the northern road life lines first, then fix the battered rural roads, and then worry about paving the obscure roads in Tory ministers' ridings.

Unlike the federal government which has basically walked away from its transportation responsibility, this government should be more responsible, should stop flirting with privatization schemes and stop attempting to push formerly provincially maintained roads onto municipalities. Yes, everybody realizes there are limited funds, and we realize that the federal government is remiss in not dedicating a large portion of the gasoline tax to provincial roads. Again, the

member for Emerson (Mr. Penner) pointed that out quite clearly. We all agree on that, but we have to be aware of the fact that the feds are paying 30 cents to their revenue dollar to service the debt, whereas we pay only nine cents of the revenue dollar. I think we have to keep that in perspective.

What we need—and there is no mention of it in the budget—is a provincial transportation strategy; certainly a northern transportation strategy. We are facing more rail line abandonment in the province, and, in fact, not so long ago, we almost lost the Bay Line and the Sherridon line. Certainly the tragedy of Little Grand Rapids pointed out once again that our 22 northern and remote airports need major upgrading. Only the skill of our pilots has kept the tragedies to a minimum. In many cases, we are trying to land 21st Century state-of-the-art airplanes on World War II runways. It has to change. Economic growth and diversification in northern Manitoba is not possible unless the transportation lines, the transportation links, are safe and secure.

It should come as no surprise, Madam Speaker, to members of this Chamber that tourists very often refuse to fly into remote communities because they feel that the airstrips are too short, too rough or too unsafe. Many tourists refuse to drive northern roads because the condition of these roads usually results in lost mufflers, broken windshields, chipped paint and so on. Above all, these roads to Gillam, to Leaf Rapids, to Lynn Lake, to Cross Lake, to Norway House, to Sherridon, to Moose Lake are unsafe.

Take the Sherridon road as one example. The collisions there between pulp trucks and passenger vehicles are frequent. The road is narrow; the road is winding. Let me give you some examples. Edward Head, a well-known Metis leader, was seriously injured on the Sherridon road. His daughter-in-law lost an unborn child in the same accident. The former mayor of Sherridon, Cyril Perry, was injured in a collision on this road. A friend of ours, a well-known resident of Cranberry Portage, Mr. Art Riemer, was killed on the Sherridon road just before Christmas; again, a collision with a pulp truck. Mr. Riemer's widow is a colleague of my wife. I taught the Riemer children, Jeff and Jennifer.

These horrible road conditions create tragedies, and in a small community even one tragedy is devastating enough. This budget does not address this need in a meaningful way. This budget puts an extra \$75 million into paying off the debt, which in better times would be a good idea but at this time is a questionable move because of the crying need for more money for roads, for schools, for hospitals. As well, there is an enormous social debt that has to be addressed, not just a money debt, and many of my colleagues have spoken on that.

Madam Speaker, roads or lack of them in the North remain a particularly sensitive problem for us, and we are not happy with the fact that the \$90 million that was promised for road upgrades in northern Manitoba in connection with the Repap expansion never did materialize. I think the members opposite would realize that Repap has now been sold to Tolko, but Repap used to be Manfor which used to be Churchill Forestry which used to be engendered under rather mysterious circumstances. I will only refer to a Mr. Alexander Kasser and Swiss bank accounts.

Even the Manitoba Chamber of Commerce noted recently that the province should be spending at least \$20 million more fixing our crumbling highways. In an article from the Portage la Prairie Daily Graphic for March 12, 1998, Dan Le Moal writes: a recent Department of Highways study shows that provincial roadways are rapidly aging. The average pavement age in the provincial highway system has gone from 10.8 years in 1978 to 19.1 years in 1995. About 59 percent of asphalt-paved highways in the province have exceeded their 15-year designed life.

This budget does not do a lot for Cranberry Portage whose downtown core desperately needs rejuvenation. Tourism and recreation in northern Manitoba is not advanced by such measures as last year's fishing licence fee hikes or huge park fee increases. It is not helpful when lodges and outfitters are charged with annual licence fees, fee increases of over 1,300 percent in some cases.

* (1650)

Take the example of Mrs. Constable who has operated Constable's Lakeside Lodge in Cranberry

Portage since 1950. This feisty woman, this feisty lady, is well into her '90s—I think she is 93 or 94—and she is incensed that this government would increase the annual lodge licence fee for the three small cabins she rents out in the summer from the usual \$15 to \$200. This elderly lady rightly asked why she should pay such an exorbitant increase without a phase-in period, without a warning, without ever having taken a penny of government support. She wanted me to point that out to members opposite. She has never taken a penny of government support. This government may argue that it is merely bringing these licence fees in line with other provincial jurisdictions, but Mrs. Constable believes, and I also believe with her, that it is another disguised tax grab. You spend \$55 million extra on gambling palaces and then you rip nickels and dimes from a woman in her '90s who is trying to be independent and is trying to make a living. That, I think, is shameful.

This budget does not do much either for the mining communities of northern Manitoba. Lynn Lake's gold mine is slated to last only several more years. Ruttan Mines at Leaf Rapids is slated for closure in 2003 and that puts tremendous stress on the community of Leaf Rapids. No orebodies of significant size have yet been located near both these mining towns. Snow Lake has recovered extremely well in the past few years, but Photo Lake is close to exhausted and low gold prices, I am sure, are giving the New Britannia TVX Gold operations the jitters. If HBM&S wins approval from its parent company, Minorco, based in Luxembourg for its ambitious \$1-billion 2012-plus initiative, then both Snow Lake and Flin Flon should be able to prosper for two decades, but at this point that is still a big if. That will also give governments the breathing space and the time to take diversification seriously.

In the Flin Flon region, we have had a wake-up call. Let us heed it. We have 15 to 20 years, hopefully, to get diversification in high gear. Economic development corporations, such as Greenstone Community Futures in Flin Flon and Northwest Manitoba Community Futures in Lynn Lake, are working hard to develop new businesses and industries. But the province needs to get much more involved. Fish farming, wild rice production, marble production, ecotourism needs support. Forestry and minerals are the big industries, but smaller ones must be encouraged to grow.

The Grass River Tourism Corridor initiative needs major provincial support. There are no bold new initiatives to help northern Manitoba in this budget. Even with a billion-dollar mining industry facing hard times, the Department of Energy and Mines has dramatically cut staff over the last few years, fewer geologists, fewer mining engineers. Exploration is down and much of it is concentrated away from the nickel belt where the existing towns are located. Forestry is a growing industry in the North, but there are concerns from workers that Tolko is using out-of-province, nonunionized contractors while Manitoba workers and machines sit idle.

The government grants woodcutting licences without necessarily ensuring that TLE obligations do not overlap with cutting licences. It is true that the people at Tolko are working hard to overcome these difficulties, especially Mr. Henderson. You know he is very sensitive to the problems in northern Manitoba, but he needs more support from this government.

Nor is there an awareness on the government's part that mining and forestry development needs to take into account the aspirations and needs of First Nations people. The unemployment rate on reserves and many small northern communities is extremely high and is ignored by this government. As other honourable members have pointed out, the government, when it puts together its unemployment statistics, does not even count aboriginal people who are unemployed. The unemployment rates on some reserves are approaching 90 percent.

So as the member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) has so clearly pointed out, the actual rate of unemployment at this time, 6.5 percent, is probably in reality closer to 12 percent in this province. It is a shame that there is so little in this budget for northern Manitoba. That \$90 million promised by this government for northern roads in connection with the Repap expansion would have gone a long way to helping our underfunded northern road system.

Just picture it, Madam Speaker, you are a person living in Lynn Lake and in order to do your banking, you have to drive 105 kilometres to Leaf Rapids and 105 kilometres back over one of the province's most

bumpy and potholed roads. That could take you up to three and a half hours in the winter.

In fact, *The Globe and Mail* today published an article in the national news section, and I will read just a portion of it. The headline reads: Town shaken by bank's withdrawal. People in Lynn Lake, Manitoba, face a three and a half hour round-trip drive to nearest branch with CIBC gone. The Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce closed its doors here at the end of January. Attempts at long-distance banking have gone haywire. We have had everything from computers and phone lines going down to mixup in deposits, said Sherron Loewen, operator of the Lynn Lake Esso station and president of the Chamber of Commerce. Seniors have taken to hoarding cash in their homes. Business owners are making risky deposit runs over a lumpy 105 kilometre road to the next town. The laundromat is scrambling for coins. Social assistance cheques have gone uncashed because businesses do not have enough money on hand. The RCMP worry about security with so much more cash around.

Further, the writer David Roberts states: Townspeople are saying highly profitable big banks such as the CIBC—it earned \$1.55 billion in after-tax profit last year—have abrogated their social responsibility by abandoning them. I always thought your banker was your best friend, your best ally in your corner, Mrs. Loewen said. I do not know that I would be happy with any banking institution at the present time. At the end of the article, John McCallum, professor of finance at the University of Manitoba's Faculty of Management said it is obvious that technology is changing the banking system at a breathtaking pace, but the theory of advancing technology was to ensure remote communities were more, not less, viable. The reality is the opposite, and this may be one illustration of it.

So those are some of the concerns that this government has to take into account in northern Manitoba. If I sound like a gloom-and-doom prophet, Madam Speaker, as members opposite accuse us of, there is a glimmer of hope in this budget for the small community of Granville Lake. The Minister of Northern Affairs (Mr. Newman) has confirmed that this small community will finally get its long-awaited water and sewage. It may not be much, it may be a token, it

may be a symbol, but it is a start and we are grateful for it. I do take the minister at his word because I know he is a person of integrity, and I look forward to seeing that these plans become a reality very soon.

But there is nothing in this budget for Pukatawagan. We desperately need to link this community of almost 2,000 people to Manitoba's road network. It has to become a priority. There is only a stretch of approximately 30 kilometres that needs to be bridged so that Pukatawagan can join the Tolko, the former Repap road network. In other words, we could easily link up Pukatawagan to the road system of this province. Once we do that, we do not have to have the 300-plus medivacs out of Pukatawagan every year. That alone, that cost alone, would probably build a large chunk of that road.

As well, Madam Speaker, there is little in this budget to help the citizens of Lac Brochet and Tadoule Lake. I wonder if this government is even aware how difficult it is to survive or to live in these communities. As always, there is great difficulty pushing through the winter roads that allow much needed fuel and foodstuff into these communities, and especially this year. This is a particularly difficult year, and the winter roads are not operational for many of these communities, and particularly this year, we may have trouble getting fuel and housing material and foodstuffs into those communities. It is a crisis, as housing is a crisis, as health is a crisis in the northern communities, as policing is, as justice issues are.

We could talk about each of these topics, Madam Speaker, in great detail, but we are not going to do that now. However, many of these issues are not properly addressed either by the federal government or by the provincial government, and sometimes there is a ping-pong game being played by the feds and by the province, and aboriginal people get caught in-between. I think this has to end. These people are citizens of Manitoba, as well as citizens of Canada.

In conclusion, I regret that I could not be more positive about this budget. I sincerely regret that, but there is very little in it for northern Manitoba, and I do represent northern Manitoba. I think, as well, not only for northern Manitoba is there very little in this budget; for the average Manitoban there is not an awful lot in

this budget. It does, in some token way, push certain hot buttons. There are minor tax relief things that come out of the budget, but the global bold vision is lacking. I sincerely regret that. I wish it would have been otherwise. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

* (1700)

Hon. Bonnie Mitchelson (Minister of Family Services): I am sincerely proud and honoured to rise today and speak to the 11th budget that our government has introduced in this Legislature, the 11th consecutive budget, Madam Speaker.

I am very pleased and proud to say that I have been here since that first budget was introduced, and we had much more difficulty after an election in 1988 that saw us take over the reins of government in the province after a defeated budget, a budget that was defeated, a New Democratic budget, that sort of left us with a situation that was not quite as desirable as it would be today taking over as government in this province. We have had some very difficult years and some tough budgets, Madam Speaker, as a result of trying to get our financial house in order, and I know that Manitobans, because they have re-elected us, have truly supported our desire to get our financial house in order and have supported very much the balanced budget approach that we have taken as government.

We are seeing not only a balanced budget, Madam Speaker, in the sense that we are not spending more than what we take in on a year-by-year basis, but I think we have taken a very balanced approach to the direction this year's budget brings. That direction does not only give some tax breaks for Manitobans, but, in fact, it provides some additional resources in some priority areas that Manitobans told us they wanted to see more resources go into.

So as we pay down the debt and pay down the debt in an accelerated fashion, we have more money as a result of less interest on that debt that we can put into services, and it does give us the ability also to look at the priority areas of health, of education and services to families, that Manitobans did tell us through the budget consultations that they wanted to see additional resources spent if they were available.

I am very pleased, Madam Speaker, to see that kind of balanced approach to tax breaks and improved or additional spending in areas that do need that additional support, and my Department of Family Services happens to be one of the areas that we can be very proud of seeing additional supports provided.

Madam Speaker, we all know that children are our future, and certainly there has been a major focus or a major emphasis on additional supports to children in families that need our support, sometimes through no fault of their own, sometimes through situations that have seen families develop a considerable dependency on government and on government resources. We have certainly been able to try to ensure that we are moving in the right direction by providing supports in the areas that children need that support most. We know for a fact, through any type of research or information that we have, that a child who gets off to a healthy start to life, who is well nurtured and well parented and not neglected or abused, does, in fact, have a better ability to enter the school system more prepared to learn; and, certainly, if they are more prepared to learn throughout their years in the school system, they will be more prepared to enter the workforce when that time comes. So we have focused a lot of our energies and our efforts as a result of consultation with Manitobans that have told us that support in early intervention programs and support in trying to get children off to a healthy start to life is critical. We have done just that with the over \$20 million of money that will be spent on children and supports for children's programming.

Madam Speaker, we were able to accomplish some of that early intervention through the National Child Benefit that is something—and I think I just want to put on the record some of the background around the development of the National Child Benefit. In fact, it was our premiers, premiers of all political stripes, right across the country, that back in late 1995, as a result of unilateral decisions by the federal government to take money out of transfers to provinces for health, for education, and for services to families, decisions that were made without any thought of what the consequences might be in individual provinces, which were just not acceptable to any province, regardless of political stripe, right across the country. So our premiers got together and tasked us as provinces, with

the lack of federal leadership, to show some leadership on how we could work together.

As a result of that process, provinces and territories agreed unanimously that looking at a National Child Benefit that would, in fact, reduce the depth of child poverty and ensure that people that were working were better off than people on welfare would go a long way to address some of the issues that exist, and our premiers endorsed that approach. They presented that approach to the federal government and for whatever reason, whether it was the lead-up to our federal election campaign or whatever, the Prime Minister did agree and tasked one of his ministers to work with provinces to develop the National Child Benefit. Madam Speaker, I know that the federal government has termed the National Child Benefit as a down payment on supports to low-income families and children, but I have many, many times said that it is not really a down payment, it is a partial repayment of what they took away when they reduced transfers to provinces. Nonetheless, it has been a co-operative, working approach, and I think it addresses some of the issues that all of us right across the country wanted to see addressed. That was co-operation between levels of governments, having a consultative process, having us identify what the real issues were and putting dollars into programs that address those real needs and real issues.

As a result of the National Child Benefit and the federal government putting \$850 million into a program that would provide support to low-income working families, additional dollars for children, provinces have all agreed to reinvest dollar for dollar the dollars that we can save on welfare to programming for early intervention and programs for trying to ensure that people have the ability to be trained to develop some attachment to the workforce and see additional resources in their pockets to help support their family needs and their children. So, Madam Speaker, I think we have a process that is positive. The federal government has committed to putting more money over the next couple of budgets into the National Child Benefit, and provinces then will have the ability and the opportunity to reinvest those dollars into early intervention programs, into trying to ensure that people are trained and moving into the workforce and off the dependent cycle of welfare.

Madam Speaker, I am really pleased that in Manitoba this year, as a result of the National Child Benefit, we have been able to announce several new initiatives. There will be more detail around these initiatives in the next few months, but we have put \$2 million into early intervention programs emphasizing positive parenting, healthy child development and preventing adolescent pregnancy; another over \$2 million for early childhood nutrition initiatives, which I will be able to expand on in the near future; \$2.6 million for early literacy programs and initiatives to help ensure that children are ready to learn and are successful when they enter the school system. We have put another \$2 million to help income assistance families and low-income families to enter the workforce, including initiatives which provide employment placements and training opportunities, and \$4.8 million into child care supports, which enable lower income parents to enter and to remain in the workforce, hoping that some of the new dollars will be spent to look at more flexible and accessible child care for those that are working nontraditional hours in our workforce.

* (1710)

The amount of money that the federal government is putting into the National Child Benefit—I indicated that was \$850 million—approximately \$10 million comes to Manitoba based on our share of that funding, but we considered the early intervention program so important that we were able to put in over \$15 million into reinvestment. When we say we are getting \$10 million from the federal government, our commitment is much more significant because we have a total of \$15 million that would qualify under the National Child Benefit as reinvestment, if we had more money to do so, so the incremental support from the provincial government indicates our commitment to children and families in our province.

I indicated, Madam Speaker, that we were putting \$4.8 million into child care. We also have a lot of changes in our child care system that we have been working on with the child care community as a result of our fact-finding mission that was conducted by my colleague Marcel Laurendeau, the member for St. Norbert, throughout last year. I believe that the changes that will be announced in the child care programs will go a long way to address the issues that

were raised during that fact-finding mission and our work with the community through the regulatory review that has just been completed. There will be many changes that will, in fact, have a positive impact on families that need child care support as a result of moving into the workforce and off welfare and people that are finding jobs because we do have considerably more jobs available for people right throughout the province as a result of initiatives that our government has undertaken.

Other areas within my department, areas that I have responsibility, are Children's Special Services, where we know that there are families that have children with disabilities that need additional support so that they can maintain and provide care for their children in their own homes, but we know that many need access to respite care, access to child development programs, supplies and counselling. I am pleased to say that we have found a significant amount of new resources to ensure that another 300 families with children with disabilities can be served through this budget.

We all know that protecting children and the well-being of children is of prime importance, so through this year's budget we have put significantly more resources into our Child and Family Services system, and we have also dialogued in a very significant way with communities and developed community partnerships to try to ensure that wherever possible we can keep families together, providing that additional support and counselling that they might need to make that happen. So, Madam Speaker, I am pleased again with our ability to work with community partnerships and develop community- and neighbourhood-based solutions to some of the issues that affect families. Certainly the end result is going to be that more families will be healthy and happy as a result of the interventions that we have put into the Child and Family Services system.

We also, through the Children and Youth Secretariat, have had major success in developing a lot of the new initiatives that will provide early intervention and ensure that that critical component of getting children off to a healthy start to life will happen. We all know that children should have first call on the resources that we have available to us and that the services need to be

co-ordinated in a community-based and child-centred fashion.

The Children and Youth Secretariat has been very busy working with the seven departments that are part of that secretariat. Any of the new projects that will be announced will certainly have an evaluative process attached to them, and we will be measuring outcomes to try to determine whether we are moving in the right direction with our early intervention projects. So, as well as developing and working within departments and with departments and the community to develop the new programs, we will be ensuring that we measure the progress of those projects and those programs to ensure that they are working.

We all know that services to adults with mental disabilities is an area where most Manitobans feel we need to be placing support and priority and emphasis. I want to indicate to you the one area within my department that year after year has received additional resources and again this year will receive additional resources in support to adults with mental disabilities, and I am pleased to say that we have another over \$7 million available for Supported Living programs and for day services for people with mental disabilities. That is a 10.7 percent increase over last year.

We know there is an ever-emerging need as we see people living longer with mental disabilities and people being born with disabilities and, because of our health care system and the technology that we have available, more children are living today than would have in the past, and more children are surviving to adulthood than ever have in the past, and they are living longer at the other end. We have many, many seniors now that have need of supports through our programs for those with mental disabilities, so I am very pleased that we have the additional resources and the ability to work with the community to ensure that the programs are meeting the priority needs of those individuals.

Madam Speaker, we have been working very closely with the St. Amant Centre over the last year, and they have developed a five-year strategic plan. We know that as we do not admit as many people with disabilities into institutions, there is a need for more community-based service, and St. Amant has risen to the challenge of trying to develop the kinds of programs that are best

able to meet the needs of the people that they serve. They have, through their five-year strategic plan, looked at a new school model that will provide year-round schooling.

One of the problems in the past has been with the school system, and the delivery of the school program at St. Amant Centre has been that in the two months in the summer when school programming stops, the children that are served through St. Amant regress and go backward rather than continuing to be stimulated and move forward. We have developed a new model that will provide year-round schooling in St. Amant Centre and also some enhanced ability for St. Amant Centre to develop day programs and community residences for those that move into the adult program, so I am very pleased. I am pleased and proud that St. Amant Centre has been able to be forward thinking, to look into what their needs are going to be in the future, and that we have been able to work with them to accomplish a much more comprehensive and better program for the people that they serve.

Madam Speaker, at the federal-provincial level, also, we have been working on a vision for services for people with disabilities, and that vision paper, I think, is fairly close to being finalized and shared with the community. We are in the process, also, of working on employment supports for people with disabilities to try to ensure that they are as active as they can possibly be and participate as much as they possibly can in the workforce. Those with disabilities have told us that they want to be a part of our workforce. They want to be full contributing members of our society, and we want to ensure, through any new agreement with the federal government, that we have a focus on what they want to see, and that is employability wherever possible.

* (1720)

Madam Speaker, I am going to speak a little about how we have progressed as a result of fairly significant changes in our welfare program and welfare reform. I have said many times in this House, and many of my colleagues have said, that the best form of social security is a job. We have had very positive results as a result of placing an employability-first focus on all of our welfare programming, and I am really pleased that

my colleague the Minister of Education and Training (Mrs. McIntosh) and I have been able to work so closely together and our departments have worked so closely together to try to ensure that the appropriate training models are available to help people transition from welfare into the workforce. We have had significant positive success not only through programs and training programs that are available in the Department of Education and Training but some of the partners that we have developed outside of government like Taking Charge! which is a program that is focused primarily on single parents and helping them move into the workforce and off of welfare.

Madam Speaker, another partnership that we have is with the Mennonite Central Committee and Trainex which is looking at finding and retaining people in employment, and it has been extremely successful. There is more money in the budget this year to expand that program. It is a program that does pay them after the fact, once people have been successful in obtaining employment and staying in the workforce for at least six months. So there are many things that are working and working to a point where we are seeing for the first time since the beginning of the '90s significant reductions in our welfare caseloads.

We have seen our caseloads decrease by 1,800, or 13 percent, over the last year as a result of our welfare reform initiatives, and that is not insignificant, because for every family or every single parent that moves off the welfare caseload and into meaningful employment, you are impacting or affecting many, many more lives. Obviously, all of the single parents have children, so you are impacting at least two people for every job that is created, and when you have two-parent families with children, you are impacting more than two people. So not only are we seeing 1,800 individuals who are now employed and in the workforce, but you are seeing many other lives impacted in a very positive way as a result of that move.

We are also seeing, Madam Speaker, within our welfare caseloads that more people are reporting some income from employment, so they are only being somewhat subsidized by welfare because they are in part-time jobs and moving into a system of independence as a result of that. So we have seen successes and we have achieved success in many areas

within my department, and I am really pleased to see that Manitobans are the benefactors of some of the initiatives that we have introduced through welfare reform.

Another important initiative that will be underway this year is the one-tier welfare project, where we will be taking over the City of Winnipeg's welfare caseload. Madam Speaker, that is moving along quite nicely, and I think that as we can reduce the overlap and the duplication, we will be able to serve more people in a much more co-ordinated fashion, and we will see extremely positive results.

I know that some members of the opposition are speaking from their seats. I guess I would ask them to stay tuned for some of the initiatives that are going to be announced in the very near future. Madam Speaker, \$20 million for children in our province is not insignificant, and I—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Madam Speaker, I hear some catcalls, or whatever, from across the way. I know that it is very difficult and very frustrating to be in opposition for as many years as the official opposition has been in opposition, and so from time to time we see them take a more personal approach to their attacks than a policy approach because they have very little to criticize. Manitobans have told us what they wanted to see in this budget. We responded to Manitobans. I understand how frustrating it must be when the opposition has difficulty finding ways to criticize our government, our government policy, our budget and the direction that we are taking, and therefore, I think we are seeing a very nasty side of some people. I have to forgive them because I know that they are frustrated. I know that I was in opposition, too, and I understand how frustrating it is, but I would like to see from time to time—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Madam Speaker, from time to time, I would like to see some members of the opposition give us some credit for some of the things that we are doing right. When it comes to the opposition criticizing the National Child Benefit and the direction that we are

going, I only have to remind them that New Democratic governments in British Columbia and in Saskatchewan are approaching the National Child Benefit in the same way we are in Manitoba. I have to say that it is great to sit in opposition and be critical, but—[interjection]

Madam Speaker, the member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) says he does not really care, but reality is when you are in opposition you can try to have it all ways, but when you are in government you have to take responsibility for making decisions. I have to say that Saskatchewan and British Columbia, although they have New Democratic governments, are making decisions for the right reasons for the people that they serve. I am sure that their oppositions are probably being critical of the direction they are taking, but in the instance of the National Child Benefit, provincial governments of all political stripes have determined that we are doing the right things for the right reasons. The member for Crescentwood may talk about what he thinks he might do when he is in government, but the reality of governing and being in opposition are completely different because you do not have to be held accountable or responsible for the comments that you make. You can be as irresponsible as you want to be in opposition and it does not matter, because you do not ever have to be accountable for the statements that you make.

So on that note I want to say that there certainly is something that I think all members of this House should be able to support in the budget, and I would like to see for once some members of the opposition stand in their place and support not only a financially balanced budget but a budget that is balanced to meet the needs of Manitobans that have indicated to us their desire to have us move in the direction we have. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

* (1730)

Mr. George Hickes (Point Douglas): I would like to start off my address to the budget by stating that, yes, there are some good things in the budget, but also there are, on the flip side, some things that are very hard to support. Throughout my speech, I will point out the areas where I agree with and I commend the government for but also the areas I do not and why I do not. I will be making an address to the budget as a

whole, and one area I will be addressing quite often will be the aboriginal area. The reason I will be addressing that is because we have a new Minister of Northern and Native Affairs (Mr. Newman) that I have seen around quite a few places, and the comments I get from quite a few of my aboriginal friends and community leaders is that he is trying very hard. I welcome that.

I just want to remind all members when some initiatives that come forward, do not forget in the past what the negative impacts had on aboriginal people. The freight subsidy for fishing, over a million dollars cut to friendship centres, and we tried many times to encourage the government to build a personal care in the Island Lake area which is really isolated, and I and some of my colleagues were there and we saw some of the care families were trying to administer to their elderly family members and it was very difficult. The cuts to MKO, Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and the friendship centres that offer all kinds of services. They offer language programs. They offer day activity, wilderness camp, parties for children at Christmastime, and they did a lot of training and education workshops. They held elder support groups and held suppers for the elders and they had various afternoon programs. They gave the elders something to do. They had hospital visits. It goes on and on and on.

So when we say that the cuts to the aboriginal peoples and aboriginal agencies, yes, it is fine what you are doing but it is not enough. What we are saying is you have already taken so much out, when you put back the equivalent of what you have taken out, then we can start saying, yes, you are doing an excellent job. But like I said before when I started, that we have a new minister of northern and native affairs and I like to give him the benefit of the doubt because he is trying. I have seen with my own eyes, and I have seen him at various functions but until some of the very badly needed programs are put in place, I cannot say congratulations. I commend him for trying, but I cannot say congratulations for a job well done because it is not finished yet.

He knows that there are a lot of good proposals and ideas that are out there. In fact, I would just like to talk about some of the initiatives that have been undertaken by residents and various levels of government that have

worked very well. For instance, just go back a few years and look at one of the major aboriginal communities of my constituency of Point Douglas, the Lord Selkirk housing development. The Minister of Housing (Mr. Reimer) knows all about it. The Minister of Justice (Mr. Toews) knows all about it and the Minister of Family Services (Mrs. Mitchelson) knows all about it. You go there today, it is like night and day. It has completely turned around. Sure, the majority of the thanks go to the residents, but you also have to give thanks to the various levels of government. Your government, the federal government, the civic government, they all had a hand in it.

If you look at, for example, the residents association that is in place now, it is a very, very strong group, and they work together well. They work with the community well, and they work with all various agencies. I try to attend once a month, I have attended most of them, it is called the Lord Selkirk agencies meetings that are held at Kikina [phonetic] and I try to attend as many as I can. There are representatives there from Mount Carmel Clinic, from everywhere, the city, from all over, and we meet. We discuss the issues and that is co-ordinated by the CIDA worker Cecilia Baker and we meet and we discuss.

I have seen where Native Alliance has taken the initiative and has brought in programs. You walk into the gym there at Lord Selkirk now, it is always going. Native Alliance, through the funding of various governments, they did not do it on their own. I know that. They did it and if you look at the family resource centre, that is a hive of activity. A lot of parents go there to get some advice and even just to get away for a few minutes of peaceful time.

Well, there is nothing wrong with those kinds of programs. A community police station opened up there. You have an excellent patrolman that walks around and is the kids' friend. At one time, even when I was a kid growing up, we used to be scared of the police officers because the only time we ever had contact with a police officer was if we or a family member did something wrong. Otherwise, we never ever said even hello to a police officer. We were terrified, but you go there and you see the police officer walking around with kids running up, hi, Constable Dan. It is nice to see.

I cannot go on to another topic without mentioning the involvement of David Livingstone School, the principal, the teachers and the parent council and their involvement with the Lord Selkirk residents association and the parents and the children. So it is very positive, and, yes, positive things can happen if people would work together, co-operate, and look at how can we benefit.

Another area I want to touch on which I was extremely impressed with, I was talking to a constituent of Point Douglas, and his name is Don McKay [phonetic], and he mentioned to me that he wanted to start up a cadet corps. He was a long-time—I want to read this story into the record because I think it is very important because these are some of the alternatives that individuals have to offer to neighbours and offer the people of Manitoba. If this individual is successful in getting this army cadet corps off the ground, it will be a great, tremendous alternative to gangs, and it will be a positive, positive improvement. I wanted to read this out and make sure that I have his last name spelled properly in Hansard because I think it is important for him, too, because I am sure he needs the support and encouragement of all members of the House here and the community at large to help get this initiative off the ground and to be successful, not for us in here, but for the children and the community that he will try to give an alternative to, to the gang activities that we see out there.

Don McKay's [phonetic] long-time goal for the creation of an aboriginal cadet corps is now close to realization. The retired Canadian army military policeman and vice-president of the Royal Canadian Legion's Sam Steele Memorial Branch will be recruiting cadets in the near future. He says I have a vision of seeing an army cadet corps within the Winnipeg core area and eventually having a cadet military band. McKay [phonetic] is a long-time resident of Winnipeg's core area, and he is dismayed at the lack of positive activities for the area's young people, many of whom end up being recruited by gangs. His solution is to form the first cadet corps that is part of a neighbourhood rather than a military armoury. The positive benefits of having aboriginal youth join the cadets are many, according to McKay [phonetic].

Joining the cadets will make them a better person, give them something to work towards, be a part of a group, learn self-confidence, and be a better citizen. Cadets will have somewhere to go and something to do where they will learn comradeship and military training that may lead to a military career.

There are many more activities for cadets to do than merely marching up and down on the parade grounds. They include leadership training, target shooting, canoeing, camping, mountain climbing, preferably in a place that has mountains, and many sporting activities, to name a few. Exchanges with other cadet corps ensure that there would be trips across Canada and maybe even overseas.

If you need a hook with our youth, that could be one of the best hooks, just to give them that little extra initiative and encouragement and hope. Like today, for example, when the Speaker introduced all the young air force cadets, when they all stood up, did they not look so nice and proud to be part of the cadet corps? That is what this gentleman is talking about.

* (1740)

The cadet corps will be based out of the Freight House community centre which is located in the heart of Winnipeg's core. McKay [phonetic] says that it is an excellent choice from which to base the Sergeant Tommy Prince Royal Canadian Corps, in honour of—I am sure everyone in this House knows about Tommy Prince, and I am sure each and every one of us are very proud of Tommy Prince's accomplishments and how he stood to defend our great country—named after a Brokenhead Ojibway nation World War II hero who was awarded the Victoria Cross. Because of the wide range of sports facilities that Freight House offers, we would like to have the cadets participate there. It goes on. So these are the kinds of positive things that individuals are undertaking on their own.

Another thing I would like to bring about, and I am sure a lot of members have already heard of this. I am sure that the Minister of Northern and Native Affairs (Mr. Newman) has heard of it, and I know that some things have already been undertaken. I applaud those. It is called the Winnipeg Urban Plan, and it is put out by the Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg. It says, the

time for positive and constructive change is now. The Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg is in a strategic position to plan and co-ordinate these key initiatives, not only for the benefit of aboriginal peoples, but for all of Winnipeggers. The need for strong responsible partnerships is now. Together aboriginal and non-aboriginal people can make a difference for the benefit of Winnipeg. How true.

The Winnipeg Aboriginal Council has developed the concept of Neganan [phonetic], and I am sure the minister has heard of this. It says, with the medicine wheel as the nucleus of this cultural concept, Neganan [phonetic], our place, will embrace all cultural components of the Winnipeg aboriginal community. It says, the medicine wheel encompasses aboriginal roots in history, beliefs, world view, the connection and the commitment to Mother Earth. The understanding of being connected to all that is living in the universe and the philosophical framework for the journey of life, Neganan [phonetic], our place, will be more than just a complex, but a living testimony to the unique contributions made by Winnipeg's aboriginal community.

It goes on and on and on, but I will just read the last paragraph of this part. It says, Neganan [phonetic], our place, through the establishment of the medicine wheel and the village will become a gathering place to celebrate, welcome and share in the knowledge of Winnipeg's first peoples.

The other concept they have is a centre for aboriginal human resource development. I think that is a good idea because Higgins Avenue—and with the dream and the commitment from the aboriginal people of not only Winnipeg, but all of Manitoba, it could be the thriving public that is needed very, very desperately.

It says, meeting the training and employment needs of Winnipeg's aboriginal population has always been, and will continue to be, a challenge. The dawn of the new economy and information age has come, bringing in sweeping change. What does this mean for jobs and training and employment requirements for Winnipeg's aboriginal people? This means that now more than ever aboriginal people will have to be equipped with the required essential skills that the new economy will demand. Who better than a centre for aboriginal human

resource development to deliver these essential services required by the Winnipeg employers?

I would say that would be a good tool to deliver, but it has to be in conjunction with all levels of government; it has to be in co-ordination. I know that they will look forward to meeting with this government, with the federal government, with the civic government to ensure that there is a partnership undertaken by all partners. It says it will provide individuals with the ability to choose occupations or careers thereby capitalizing on personal motivation; develop the capacity of training and employment services to deal with people regardless of their level of entry into the service framework; and to support their development through various stages. So I would encourage that the government meet, and if they have not, to meet with the Aboriginal Council and look at some of those ideas.

The other one that they have in here, it looks like it will be the aboriginal business development centre. The Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg co-operates with Winds of Change because they have developed a very ambitious plan to encourage aboriginal economic development; more specifically, aboriginal business development within the city of Winnipeg under the banner of first aboriginal business.

I was just reading in the paper, and I am really glad to see where it says, the federal government announced investing about 900,000 in the entrepreneurial dreams of Winnipeg's aboriginal people. I hope your government has a share in this because they are citizens of Manitoba and they will benefit greatly. Also, I hope the City of Winnipeg has a partnership in it because a lot of the individuals through the training and the start-up and the support systems that are put in place will give a lot of aboriginal people a hand up to get into businesses and, hopefully, will encourage their success in their chosen business endeavours.

The Aboriginal Legal Services of Winnipeg, I know that they just had an announcement. The Minister of Justice (Mr. Toews) is very aware of this and to me it is a very positive step because it gives an alternative to incarceration. What that does is it gives an individual the opportunity to appear with their elders or the victims or whatever and then appropriate community or restitution will take place then, instead of always just

incarcerating individuals and putting them in jail. I know that this will be the answer for some individuals but also incarceration has to be there for other hardened criminals or people that really damage or do a lot of serious harm to our population. So we have to have the incarceration but we also have to have the alternative to incarceration, because a lot of times an individual that has gone through the programs that will be developed, it will help. Hopefully, sometimes a person would stop at that stage instead of reoccurring offences or learn new skills or what have you.

It says here that to develop and implement an aboriginal community council diversion program with participation of the Winnipeg aboriginal community to provide a more culturally appropriate approach for Winnipeg aboriginal people in trouble with the law, to involve elders in all aspects of programming for input on spiritual and cultural matters, to provide more effective justice services for aboriginal people in Winnipeg and to reduce the rate of incarceration among aboriginal people in Winnipeg.

I think this is an excellent step in the right direction, and I see in the paper here where the Minister of Justice (Mr. Toews) said he hopes the project lowers the number of repeat offenders sensitive to the needs of the aboriginal community. So I hope he will support this, and I hope that he will look at implementing the AJI report. I think it is so crucial because if you read the article where they talk to Chief Justice Alvin Hamilton, and they did not speak to Judge Murray Sinclair but they were the ones that were instrumental in putting together the AJI report, it has a lot of good recommendations. I think we have to take the dust off that AJI and look at it seriously and see what we could do to bring it forward.

I want to mention those kinds of activities that are available to individuals and the aboriginal language development, computer lab centre is another one that the Aboriginal Council would like to undertake and also the Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre of Winnipeg which this government has put in place and it is out of the Aboriginal Centre. I know that it will provide a lot of services that are needed for the area. You also have the Mount Carmel Clinic that will offer services too. Hopefully, with those two it will help a

lot of individuals within that area that would need those services.

Another program I would just like to touch on is called the Newcomers Employment and Education Development Services. It is for immigrants and refugees. I will read backwards to front, because I want to mention something here that the single parents program is funded through the Taking Charge! program and the Taking Charge! program has been a very successful program. It has helped a lot of individuals and a lot of single parents and mothers and even through the upgrading program. The single parents program is employment preparation, career planning, two full-time classes, life skills and legal education and training allowance. Okay? It also provides training for community-based language training program, multicultural women's group program, services provided for immigrant women. Those are the kinds of programs that we see.

* (1750)

Now, on the other side, I see a lot of negative coming out of this budget. You know, if you look at some of the tax breaks that—[interjection] Well, I want to be fair in my speech. I read the budget, I read some of the comments, and I looked at some of the taxes and some of the fudging of the budget that was in place. We had \$5 million that was earmarked for Winnipeg street repairs, and the \$5 million for highway construction is offset exactly by \$10 million that is being taken out of the Canada-Manitoba Infrastructure program, so road construction will not noticeably increase.

Now when you start fooling around with those kind of budgets and stuff like that—and it says \$1 million is earmarked for infrastructure money in northern Manitoba. It is only Cormorant and Dawson Bay, what about the rest of the North? How much is being put into the roads in northern Manitoba? My colleague for Flin Flon was just speaking earlier, and he was telling you some of the horror stories of the roads that lead to Sherridon. I am not sure if he mentioned to you, but go for a drive to the road that takes you to Leaf Rapids and Lynn Lake and go for a ride on the road to Cross Lake and Norway House, and when I was listening to my Leader speak—and I agree with him 100 percent when he said the highways budget should be based on safety

first. That is so essential and so crucial that what is more important than to repave a stretch of highway that is already paved or to fix a road to save a person's life? The member for Flin Flon was giving you some facts on how many people were hurt that he knew personally, that were injured or killed on the road to Sherridon. Well, you look at how many people were hurt and injured on their way to Cross Lake or Norway House also and to Leaf Rapids and Lynn Lake. But it should be based on safety, and it should be based on not where people vote but where the services are needed the most.

When the Finance minister was making his budget speech, he mentioned about the federal cutbacks. He said we had to make these tough choices because of federal cutbacks, but the Finance minister forgot to tell Manitobans that the federal cutbacks have stopped. The equalization payments will rise by \$40 million in the coming year and, on top of that, you will be getting assistance for the flood of the century.

The other thing that I thought was kind of deceiving to the citizens of Manitoba was when they are talking about extra resources to reduce waiting lists that have been promised. Well, those have been promised over and over and over again. In fact, in 1995, just before the election, the resources were made available. Then what happened after the election? They just somehow disappeared and the money disappeared and construction—there was no construction because at that time there were promises to proceed with personal care home construction, and expansion in some of the home care placements for some of our elderly were announced, Lions Manor, Oakbank, Hartney, The Pas, and I think there was an announcement of a Betel personal care home. I think that was announced in 1995. What really surprised me is if you make the announcement and if you control the funding, if you are the person that controls the funding, then you know if the money is there or if the money is not there. So how could the Minister of Finance participate in putting the shovel in the ground and celebrating the building of the personal care home called Betel, and then shortly after saying, whoops, we really do not have any money for this, we are not going to build it?

When the member for Wellington (Ms. Barrett) raised that question, I thought to myself, holy smokes, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) must be feeling a

little silly inside, because I know he was a little bit red. He ought to be red because if anyone knows the budget, it has to be the Minister of Finance, so how can you say, yes, we have money for a personal care home, before an election, and then after the election say, whoop, I am sorry, but we really do not have that kind of money? So I do not know. I sure did not agree with those announcements, but I hope in all sincerity that the government will go ahead and build the personal care homes that they have promised because they are badly needed. I think that Manitobans deserve them and our hospital care will benefit from those personal care homes. They should take some of the pressure off our acute care beds. I will get into that a little bit later because there are a couple of little areas that I want to cover pertaining to safety of all citizens of Manitoba.

You know, we hear in the budget that so much money has been allocated to Justice, but if you look at the budget, a lot of it is for facilities. I have talked to many people about what is happening with the gang activity. I read you an article from the paper that I think will really help a lot—I hope it will help—to curb the recruitment of youth gangs and gang activity in Manitoba. But I hope that the Minister of Justice (Mr. Toews) would seriously look at the Gang Action Plan that is put together by our Justice critic. It has merit, serious consideration; it has a lot of good ideas in it. That is one of, I guess, the problems of being opposition, because when you are sitting in opposition you always hear the government sort of try to belittle us and say, oh, that is the party of doom and gloom, party of old-think. If you look back at some of the ideas that were brought forward by the opposition members, here is a good example right here, the Gang Action Plan. There are a lot of good ideas in here. Feel free to use them. As long as it benefits the citizens of Manitoba, who cares? I do not. If it saves one youth from getting on the wrong side of the law, or if it saves one youth's life, I am all for that. Feel free.

If you look at some of the alternative budget proposals that my Leader proposed the other day, there are a lot of good ideas in there. I do not know why the government would not want to tap into some of those. One of the things that really stuck out in my mind in this budget was, as my Leader was stating, if you really want to be fair to Manitobans, eliminate the PST on baby bottles and baby foods, and look at how you are spreading out that 2 percent reduction in taxes. Would

it not be more fair to Manitobans if you would have eliminated the PST on baby needs and baby supplies, and even for meals under \$6? Most of our children go for hamburgers and fries now. Why should they be—and yet the unfair taxation, when you look at, as stated by the Finance minister as having a fair and competitive tax system is a key to creating jobs, and yet you see cutting personal income tax right across the board, reducing the payroll tax rate and so saving the employers \$9 million, increasing the corporate capital tax, removing provincial sales tax from custom-developed computer software. Well, I wonder how many people that I know in Point Douglas will really benefit from removing the provincial sales tax—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Hickes: —from the custom-developed computer software. They would have benefited more from removing the tax from baby food, baby supplies. I will continue tomorrow.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Point Douglas (Mr. Hickes) will have 11 minutes remaining.

The hour being 6 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow (Tuesday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, March 16, 1998

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