

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLAN, Nancy, Hon.	St. Vital	N.D.P.
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ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	N.D.P.
BLADY, Sharon	Kirkfield Park	N.D.P.
BOROTSIK, Rick	Brandon West	P.C.
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CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
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DERKACH, Leonard	Russell	P.C.
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FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	P.C.
GRAYDON, Cliff	Emerson	P.C.
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HOWARD, Jennifer	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
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<i>Vacant</i>	Elmwood	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, October 2, 2008

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

Hard Surfacing Unpaved Portion— Provincial Road 340

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition.

All Manitobans deserve access to well-maintained rural highways as this is critical to both motorist safety and to commerce.

Provincial Highway 340 is a well-utilized road.

Heavy vehicles from potato and livestock operations, agricultural-related businesses, Hutterite colonies and the Maple Leaf plant in Brandon use this road.

Vehicles from Canadian Forces Base Shilo also travel this busy road.

Commuter traffic from Wawanesa, Stockton, Nesbitt and surrounding farms to Shilo and Brandon is common on this road.

Provincial Highway 340 is an alternate route for many motorists travelling to Brandon coming off Provincial Highway 2 east and to Winnipeg via the Trans-Canada Highway 1. An upgrade to this road would ease the traffic congestion on Provincial Highway 10.

Access to the Criddle-Vane Homestead Provincial Park would be greatly enhanced if this road were improved.

The hard surfacing of the unpaved portion of PR 340 south of Canadian Forces Base Shilo towards Wawanesa would address the last few neglected kilometres of this road and increase the safety of motorists who travel on it.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) to consider hard surfacing of the unpaved portion of Provincial Road

340 south of Canadian Forces Base Shilo towards Wawanesa.

This petition signed by Randy Haverchuk, Clayton Smith, Bernice Maksymic and many, many others.

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

Increased School Facilities— Garden Valley School Division

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition.

The student enrolment in Garden Valley School Division has risen steadily for the last 10 years.

Since 2005, the enrolment has risen by more than 700 students, from 3,361 students to 4,079 students, a 21 percent increase.

Since September 2007, the enrolment has increased by 325 students, an increase of 8.7 percent.

Currently, 1,050 students, or 26 percent, are in 42 portable classrooms without adequate access to bathrooms.

There are 1,210 students in a high school built for 750 students; 375 students are located in 15 portables without adequate access to bathrooms.

Projected enrolment increases based on immigration through the Provincial Nominee Program reveals the school division enrolment will double in the next 12 years.

Student safety, school security, reasonable access to bathrooms and diminished student learning are concerns that need immediate attention.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth (Mr. Bjornson) to consider providing the necessary facilities to Garden Valley School Division.

To urge the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth to consider providing the Garden Valley

School Division an immediate date as to when to expect the necessary school facilities.

This is signed by Pete Thiessen, Phyllis Thiessen, Jake Unrau and many, many others.

Hard Surfacing Unpaved Portion— Provincial Road 340

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition.

All Manitobans deserve access to well-maintained rural highways as this is critical to both motorist safety and to commerce.

Provincial Road 340 is a well-utilized road.

Heavy vehicles from potato and livestock operations, agricultural-related businesses, Hutterite colonies and the Maple Leaf plant in Brandon use this road.

Vehicles from Canadian Forces Base Shilo also travel this busy road.

Commuter traffic from Wawanesa, Stockton, Nesbitt and surrounding farms to Shilo and Brandon is common on this road.

Provincial Road 340 is an alternate route for many motorists travelling to Brandon coming off PTH 2 east and to Winnipeg via the Trans-Canada Highway. An upgrade to this road would ease the traffic congestion on PTH 10.

Access to the Criddle-Vane Homestead Provincial Park would be greatly enhanced if this road were improved.

The hard surfacing of the unpaved portion of PR 340 south of Canadian Forces Base Shilo towards Wawanesa would address the last few neglected kilometres of this road and increase the safety of motorists who travel on it.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) to consider hard surfacing of the unpaved portion of PR 340 south of Canadian Forces Base Shilo towards Wawanesa.

This petition is signed by Jackie Wilton, Dave Lenathen, R. J. Wilton and many other Manitobans.

Education Funding

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

Historically, the Province of Manitoba has received funding for education by the assessment of property that generates taxes. This unfair tax is only applied to selected property owners in certain areas and confines.

Property-based school tax is becoming an ever-increasing burden without acknowledging the owner's income or owner's ability to pay.

The provincial sales tax was instituted for the purpose of funding education. However, monies generated by this tax are being placed in general revenues.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth (Mr. Bjornson) consider removing education funding by school tax or education levies from all property in Manitoba.

To request that the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth consider finding a more equitable method of funding education such as general revenue following the constitutional funding of education by the Province of Manitoba.

This petition, Mr. Speaker, is signed by Caroline McFerran, Donna Wojciechowski, Donna Rogan and many other fine Manitobans.

Physician Recruitment—Southwestern Manitoba

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition:

The Town of Virden has the last hospital in Manitoba on the busy Trans-Canada Highway travelling west.

For the safety of recreational travellers, long-haul truck drivers, oil and agricultural industry workers and its citizens, Virden, a town of nearly 4,000, requires emergency services at its hospital.

On June 30, 2008, the emergency room at the Virden Hospital was closed due to this government's failure to recruit and retain doctors for southwest

Manitoba and its failure to plan for the departure of doctors whose contracts were expiring.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) to consider creating a health-care environment in which doctors want to work and build their careers in Manitoba.

To request the Minister of Health to consider making it a priority to recruit doctors to southwestern Manitoba so emergency rooms do not have to be closed when they are needed most.

This petition is signed by: Bryan MacDonald, Brandon Forbes, Jim Moffatt, Patricia Wright and many, many others.

Crocus Investment Fund—Public Inquiry

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

The background to the petition is as follows:

The 2007 provincial election did not clear the NDP government of any negligence with regard to the Crocus Fund fiasco.

The government needs to uncover the whole truth as to what ultimately led to over 33,000 Crocus shareholders to lose tens of millions of dollars.

The provincial auditor's report, the Manitoba Securities Commission's investigation, the RCMP investigation and the involvement of revenue Canada and our courts, collectively, will not answer the questions that must be answered in regard to the Crocus Fund fiasco.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Premier (Mr. Doer) and his NDP government to co-operate in uncovering the truth in why the government did not act on what it knew and to consider calling a public inquiry on the Crocus Fund fiasco.

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by Simone Mailhot, Max Qually, Gayle Andrews and many, many other fine Manitobans.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines): Mr. Speaker, I'm

pleased to present the 2007-2008 Annual Report for Green Manitoba.

In addition, I'm pleased to present the 2007-2008 Annual Report for MERLIN, the Manitoba Education, Research and Learning Information Networks.

Also, I'm very pleased to present the 2007-2008 Annual Report for the Industrial Technology Centre. Thank you.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): I'd like to table the following: the '07 Annual Reports for the Residential Tenancies Branch and the Residential Tenancies Commission, as well as the '07-08 Annual Reports for the Automobile Injury Compensation Appeal Commission, Vital Statistics, Companies Office and the Manitoba Securities Commission.

* (13:40)

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the Speaker's Gallery where we have with us today Honourable Rory McEwen who is the Minister of Agriculture, Food, Fisheries and the Minister for Forestry from Australia.

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

Also in the public gallery we have from Options 4 Success Incorporation 54 visitors under the direction of Mr. Brad Tyler-West. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for Point Douglas (Mr. Hicke).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Pandemic Planning Status Report

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): About five and a half years ago, there was a severe outbreak of SARS in the province of Ontario. There were 375 cases of people who had SARS, 44 deaths in that outbreak, and over the course of that pandemic there were some 8,098 cases in 31 countries worldwide.

In the aftermath of the SARS outbreak, in 2003, there was a flurry of activity in jurisdictions across the country, including here in Manitoba. There were concerns expressed over four years ago in the

emergency room task force report which has come up in the context of the ER tragedy of a couple of weeks ago, but another comment in that report was that many departments also have concerns about the ability to provide adequate infection control measures in light of concerns raised by SARS and pandemic influenza.

Three years ago, Mr. Speaker, in the Speech from the Throne in October of 2005, the government said, and I quote: "Planning for a pandemic has received the highest priority . . ." Shortly thereafter, on November 23 of 2005, the then-Minister of Health put out a news release discussing pandemic guidelines where he said: Preparing for emergencies is a high priority for the Manitoba government—Sale.

Then, Mr. Speaker, there was, with much fanfare, in December of 2005, a bill introduced in this House—this is 34 months ago—it was a new public health act, and the minister said in his news release that this would replace legislation enacted in 1965. It would build on the framework established after 9/11, and Minister Sale said at the time: With this comprehensive and up-to-date legislation, public health officials will be better able to identify health threats and respond quickly in the case of a health emergency.

I want to just ask the Premier: Given that it was the top priority of his government, has he asked for and received any briefings on the status of pandemic planning, and can he confirm to the House that all work in connection with preparing for pandemics in Manitoba has been completed?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I would point out that the Emergency Measures people and all the municipal leaders had various meetings on pandemic planning, including with the regional health authorities, following the announcement that was made.

Further, Mr. Speaker, the Health Sciences Centre, which the member opposite referenced, had no adequate isolation rooms when the capital was deferred seven times in the 1990s. Since the new capital has been introduced, in the operating rooms and the acute-care section of the Health Sciences Centre and the reformed and redeveloped area of the Children's Hospital, the critical care unit does have isolation rooms. It was part of the announcement that was made at the time. It was also part of the announcement that was revealed to the public when that facility was opened. The new Seven Oaks emergency ward and the changes there include

capacity in a similar way. I believe that the new section of the Concordia Hospital emergency ward includes similar isolation rooms. It's also being connected to the old emergency ward in terms of its capacity.

So many of the recommendations that have been made in terms of capacity have been implemented, with major capital investments I might say. In terms of other areas under The Public Health Act, we're still dealing with one outstanding issue dealing with anti-sniffing strategies that we think is a very important public health issue that we have to resolve with the people on the front lines.

I would also point out, and perhaps I can in the next question, some of the other areas we're working on in terms of the front-line community health-care activist, Mr. Speaker.

The Public Health Act Proclamation

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, he's indicating through his answer and his non-response to the question that he's not satisfied that all of the work that had been called for back in 2005 has been complete.

He has made reference to some capital projects. I just want to ask him: Given that the bill, the public health legislation, which the then-minister Tim Sale said would help identify health threats and respond quickly in the case of a health emergency, this bill which was introduced 34 months ago in December of 2005 and passed on June 13, 2006, 27 months ago, I wonder if he can indicate to the House why it is that he hasn't gotten around to proclaiming it yet.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): In my previous answer I stated that the act hadn't been proclaimed because we're still working with the issue of anti-sniffing prevention, so this is not a revelation. That is not to say that there are not a number of actions that have been taking place following the SARS incident, which I might say, Mr. Speaker, there have been other incidents of similar—not similar, but there are other incidents of concern.

The first recommendation we had, and we have implemented it, was to have every health-care professional that is dealing on the front lines of medicine be alerted to the issues of containment of any infectious disease. The other area that we were recommended that we follow is the whole area of first responders in municipalities. The Emergency

Measures Organization has had those meetings some two years ago.

We also had inadequate capital containment facilities. If the old Health Sciences Centre had been reformed under the members opposite, we would have had the isolation rooms. Regrettably that did not happen. It would only open a short time ago. As we speak, Mr. Speaker, there are workers completing isolation rooms at Concordia Hospital as part of the major capital investment in that hospital. So we are implementing a number of the recommendations dealing post-SARS in terms of infectious disease.

We're also dealing with issues of public health, including sniffing prevention strategies, also as part of the proclamation of that bill. But when you build isolation rooms in the critical care unit of the Health Sciences Centre, when you have capacity at the emergency wards, when you improve isolation capacity at the Children's Hospital, the new emergency ward, when you have, as we speak, rooms being completed at Concordia Hospital, rooms that have been completed at Seven Oaks Hospital, capacity built in western Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, every—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, there's considerable work on implementing strategies from our public health agencies and our regional health management dealing with the capital facilities that are necessary to implement the protocols that have been put in place with health-care responders all across Manitoba.

I want to say that I want to thank all the staff, the first responders, the chief medical officers and volunteers in many of the municipalities who have volunteered their time to attend meetings with the Emergency Measures Manitoba. I want to thank all those volunteers and professional staff that have been putting a considerable amount of time to have a more effective response to very serious health-care challenges, Mr. Speaker.

* (13:50)

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, the law was passed 27 months ago, and rather than giving 27-minute-long-non-answers to the questions, the fact is the act contains a number of important powers that would allow the government to deal with emergencies, and

they haven't yet, 27 months after its passage, gotten around to proclaiming it.

He said in the Throne Speech in October of 2005: "Planning for a pandemic has received the highest priority"

It's not one of our highest priorities. I know he's like the federal Liberal leader. He knows it's hard setting priorities, but it says very clearly in the Throne Speech: "Planning for a pandemic has received the highest priority", over three years ago.

The act has been in place for 27 months. It hasn't been proclaimed. The news release which sounded just terrific at the time said that the act would require—the news release says, and I quote: would require the appointment of a chief provincial public health officer to oversee the provincial public health system. That's the first bullet on the news release.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that they got great coverage coming off of that news release. I want to ask the Premier if he can indicate whether they have hired anybody to fill that position separate from the chief medical officer of health, and I also want to ask him if he's aware of the most recent accreditation report with respect to the Department of Health and the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority which says, and I quote: that the WRHA has not completed its regional disaster plan and that there's a potential adverse effect. The report says, and I quote: There may be an inability to respond to a pandemic situation given the current situation.

This is the most recent report. The report goes on to say, and I quote: Manitoba Health has not yet finalized the provincial plan.

I want to ask the Premier to update us on the announcement made almost three years ago on the provincial public health officer and indicate why it is that the outside, independent accreditor in the most recent report is saying that they're not yet ready, when he said three years ago it was his top priority.

I want to ask the Premier: Is protecting the health of Manitobans against an outbreak that could lead to many deaths, is it his top priority or was it just the usual Throne Speech spin?

Mr. Doer: I believe the national report on accreditation dealing with health agencies across Canada has a comparable assessment of all provinces in this regard.

I would point out, Mr. Speaker, that the law—and I know the member is a lawyer and deals only in laws, but laws do not preclude action. We are working on one component of the law with the Human Rights Commission dealing with some parts of a disagreement on the balance between the individual rights of citizens, which is very important in the law, and the collective rights of the community to be protected in a pandemic situation. We're trying to resolve that issue with the Human Rights Commission, as I understand it, and that's the issue of the proclamation of the law.

Mr. Speaker, I would recall—and the member should recall—that Dr. Kettner presented the Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Guidelines report for local governments at the AMM. He is our chief medical officer in Manitoba, as I indicated in the answer to my first question. I've indicated in my answer to my first question the capital work that we've done in terms of surveillance. We've implemented a surveillance system for outbreaks detection and reporting. We've expanded our illness monitoring at schools and stronger lab monitoring across Manitoba. We've strengthened our vaccine and antiviral strategies. We've strengthened the public health measures, such as quarantining. We have stockpiled 600,000 doses of antiviral drugs to deal with a potential pandemic, whether it's food safety and the listeriosis situation in Canada or whether it's what happened out of the SARS incident in Ontario and British Columbia. We have excellent public health leadership here in Manitoba. We have excellent people in our disease lab here in Manitoba. We have put in place a number of measures.

Mr. Speaker, is anybody going to say that any government anywhere in the world has absolute infallible measures in place? No. But we've made a lot of progress, and we hope to close the gap on the proclamation of the law that also provides more protection for the public good and hopefully can deal with the concerns of individual rights of citizens.

Pandemic Planning Winnipeg Regional Health Authority

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, the crisis in our ERs right now does not bode well if a pandemic is going to hit Manitoba. If our ERs are struggling right now to care for patients, it's going to be a thousand times worse if and when a pandemic hits Manitoba.

Ontario certainly experienced it five and a half years ago with SARS. So when the WRHA was

undergoing accreditation in November, they were told to complete their pandemic planning; otherwise they might not be able to respond to a pandemic.

Considering that the Premier (Mr. Doer) is not up to speed on this issue, can the Minister of Health tell us today if the WRHA has now completed its pandemic planning?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I'm happy to inform the House, of course, that preparing for pandemics and preparing for infection control is a very important part of what the WRHA and, indeed, all regions in the province are doing.

We know, of course, Mr. Speaker, that with capital infrastructure and new construction of emergency rooms, we've seen a creation of negative pressure rooms, decontamination rooms, as well as isolation rooms for these very issues. Training is ongoing for staff.

We know, of course, that we need to continue working not only here in Manitoba but across the nation, because, of course, a pandemic situation will not occur in one isolated city, in one isolated place in Manitoba. It needs to be a national effort and that's what we're working to do.

Status Report

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): The Minister of Health needs to take this more seriously. According to the accreditation report, the WRHA does not have a pandemic plan finalized but neither does Manitoba Health, and they should be providing the leadership in this.

Mr. Speaker, if or when a pandemic hits Manitoba, according to their own Web site, 410,000 Manitobans will get sick and between 4,000 and 6,000 Manitobans will die. So we need to be ready for this.

I'd like to ask the Minister of Health to tell us when she will have her own provincial pandemic plan completed. Is it done now or does she have a time line in which it will be completed?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I can let the member opposite know, of course, that other jurisdictions in the nation have turned to Manitoba for its leadership on pandemic planning, in particular Ontario, as she cites.

We know that we have an unprecedented, in its scope, plan, including enhanced surveillance systems

for outbreak detection and reporting, expanded illness monitoring in schools and stronger lab monitoring. We know that we've strengthened vaccine and antiviral strategies to target priority groups. We know that we strengthened public health measures such as quarantining.

I would think the member opposite would know that pandemic planning never stops because these illnesses are very dynamic, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Driedger: Outside accreditors, the Canadian Council on Health Services accreditation, in their external report, the accreditation survey report, indicated that the WRHA had not completed their pandemic planning and that there was not a completed provincial plan. They are the ones that are saying Manitoba will not be ready unless these plans are completed.

I'd like to ask the Minister of Health: Where has her leadership on this been, because we are talking about a significant issue if a pandemic hits Manitoba?

Ms. Oswald: The member might be interested to know that the Deputy Minister of Health for Manitoba today is in Washington, having been invited there to do a presentation on pandemic planning to the Pan Am Health Organization. We were invited because of our leadership.

On the subject of leadership, Mr. Speaker, I might also mention that, days before the federal election was called, the provincial-territorial ministers of Health gathered with the federal minister to discuss pandemic planning, to come to an agreement on how we would work together, in unison. The member might be interested to note that the federal minister refused to put money on the table to help with pandemic planning, curious indeed.

*(14:00)

Shamattawa Aboriginal Youth Suicides Prevention Strategy

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, on May 14 of this year, I asked the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs what he was doing to address the devastating rate of Aboriginal youth suicides in Manitoba. The minister responded that he was leading a delegation of two to three ministers to Shamattawa to discuss the issue of epidemic youth suicides.

The people of Manitoba, in particular the children of Manitoba, deserve clear answers from

this government. My question is for the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs. Can the minister tell the House today when he went to Shamattawa, which ministers accompanied him and what the outcomes of those meetings were?

Hon. Oscar Lathlin (Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs): I thank the member for the question because it gives me an opportunity to give a progress report as to what happened since I made a commitment in this House in June to go to Shamattawa with some of my colleagues.

The Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross) accompanied me to Shamattawa, some staff people, and we spent a whole day in Shamattawa, meeting with the chief and council, talking about some of the issues that they were facing in their community. As a result of that meeting in Shamattawa, we were able to come up with some short-term planning and long-term planning.

In the short term, we were able to bring some people, young people, from Shamattawa. For example, seven young people were brought—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, on September 25, a 14-year-old girl committed suicide. This was her third attempt at taking her life. Her home community was Shamattawa.

This week, a nine-year-old boy from Manto Sipi Cree Nation God's River took his life. Also within this time frame, a youth from York Landing had attempted to end his life.

Mr. Speaker, this issue is serious and it's intensifying. The reality is these children are falling through the cracks. Children are losing their lives. The ones left behind, the families and their communities are trying to maintain strength and to remain focussed, but they are also losing hope.

Mr. Speaker, on May 14, the minister promised a comprehensive suicide prevention strategy. What is the status of this much-needed strategy?

Mr. Lathlin: The young people that were brought into Winnipeg spent some time in Winnipeg training in a sports leadership program, and after the training they were able to go back to Shamattawa to provide leadership in their community.

As well, we spent a week-long summer camp that was provided in the community of Shamattawa

in August. Some 88 children participated in the camp. Then we have the Swim to Survive program that was delivered in Shamattawa in July. Approximately 60 kids participated in that program.

Then we have some planning for the long term. We've already committed \$200,000 towards the construction of a youth centre. We're now trying to get the federal government to come on board and cost share the program with us. So that's what we've done so far.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, the comprehensive suicide strategy that this minister promised in May is not before us, and I would encourage the minister to share that when he does have that strategy prepared.

Mr. Speaker, there's a dramatic increase in suicide in recent years with a significant increase among children under 14 years of age. This government has been promising to address this issue for years, and nothing has changed except more children are dying at a younger age.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs: As an advocate for Aboriginal families, why are you remaining silent on this very serious issue? Where is the strategy that they promised to put into place immediately? Bring the strategy into play.

Mr. Lathlin: We're not silent about the issue in Shamattawa. We're taking action. In fact, on the 25th and 26th of September, some of our staff from Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, Culture, Tourism, Heritage and Sport and Sport Manitoba visited Shamattawa again. While they were there, they were able to engage the community leaders in a planning process, and some projects will come about as a result of that planning meeting.

In fact, in two weeks I'll be going back to Shamattawa to meet with the community leaders again.

Taman Inquiry Report Release to Family

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday of this week, the Minister of Justice received the public inquiry report into the death of Crystal Taman.

This morning I spoke with Robert Taman, who has yet to see the report into the tragic circumstances surrounding the death of his wife. Understandably, he is frustrated and he is angry that he has not yet

been shown the report despite the fact the minister has had it for two days.

If the minister is not going to release this report publicly prior to the weekend, could he please assure the family of Crystal Taman that he will at least speak with them and share with them the report.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I've spoken with the family.

Mr. Goertzen: And when I spoke with Mr. Taman this morning, I'm aware that the minister has spoken with the family. While that is appreciated, what they are looking for is the ability to see the report that the minister has had for two days.

I'm not asking the minister to share the report with me. I'm not asking him even to make it public, even though I think he should do that sooner than later. What I am asking him to do is to share it with the family of Crystal Taman. They've waited too long for answers and they shouldn't have to wait any longer.

Mr. Chomiak: One of the things that I want to be most careful about, Mr. Speaker, is two issues. One is the entire principle of how the justice system deals with the issue, and the other is that we treat all of the victims and family members with respect and with candidness.

I have spoken with both the Sveinson family and Mr. Taman, Mr. Speaker, and I will try, as hard as I humanly can, to not let this become a political football.

U.S. Economic Situation Impact on Local Economy

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, I have to admit that the more I read about and the more I listen to economic forecasts, the more concerned I get, but it seems the Minister of Finance doesn't share my concerns. Yesterday in a local newspaper, in his typical what-me-worry kind of attitude, he went on to say that the U.S. recession and global economic downturn will have a minimal effect on the Manitoba economy.

Rather than simply live in a dream world, I wonder if the Finance Minister can actually tell us what he plans on doing when revenues decrease, when equalization payments are reduced and when borrowing costs increase. Does he have a fiscal plan to follow, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): First of all, Mr. Speaker, the member is doing what he so often does. He's misquoting myself and he's clearly not understanding what's written in the articles. We said, yesterday, and we've continued to say that nobody is immune from some of the problems that are going on in the United States. There's a global impact going on around that.

That being said, Manitoba is in a relatively good position to respond to those challenges for a variety of reasons. First of all, the productivity of labour in Manitoba has increased through a variety of initiatives by private companies, some of those done in partnership with government programs, such as the Advanced Manufacturing Initiative.

Secondly, the overhead costs, which are partly incurred through taxation, have been reduced in Manitoba with corporate income taxes going down from 17 percent to 13 percent and further going down to 12 percent. Small-business tax rates are now the lowest in the country, and I'll give further information on my next question.

Mr. Borotsik: Mr. Speaker, the spin and the bravado and the rhetoric doesn't really cut it. I simply asked a simple question. We recognize that manufacturers and industry in Manitoba are doing their part. There's no question. We have some very good entrepreneurs in spite of the fact that this government throws roadblocks in their way all the time. They are doing their best to keep the economy in Manitoba going.

What I'm saying is there are storm clouds. There are going to be reductions in revenues. There are going to be equalization payments reductions, Mr. Speaker. As much as the minister wants to suggest that nothing is going to happen, it is happening now. It's happening right now.

What plan does the minister have, when those costs go up and those revenues come down, to make sure that Manitobans are going to be able to survive this economic downturn?

*(14:10)

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, this is a good question. This is why we have just in the Public Accounts reported that we have a Fiscal Stabilization Fund that is \$818 million, double what it was, more than double what it was, when we came into office. This is why we have made sure that we have a number of arrangements in place in terms of future program planning to manage those programs to ensure they get the best value for Manitoba. We have very

sufficient supplies of liquidity put in place to manage any program needs going forward.

We've had a credit-rating upgrade which has identified the strengths of the Manitoba economy and the government of Manitoba, including a very diverse economy where the manufacturing sector is outpacing the Canadian average, including a GDP growth rate which is higher than the Canadian average, including job creation which is higher than the Canadian average. All of these things have been aided in part by some of the measures we have put in place—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Country-of-Origin Labelling Tabling of Government Plans

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, over the past year, we have asked a number of questions in regard to the country-of-origin labelling. U.S. pork producers, such as Smithfield and Hormel, say they will stop taking Canadian slaughter hogs because of the new country-of-origin labelling legislation.

Manitoba Pork Marketing Co-op has warned that if either of Manitoba's two federally inspected processors were to shut down for any reason, there would be serious problems handling those pigs here in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Agriculture table for the House her plans in regard to country-of-origin labelling?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, the issue of country-of-origin labelling is one that we have put a lot of work into. We have had legal advice. We've had counsel working with the U.S. government. The rule that should be coming into place has three options for labelling. We're hoping those labels will go through, and we can continue to market—when that law goes through, we can continue to have trade between the two countries.

It is very important for our producers. It's very important for U.S. producers, and it is very important for the U.S. processing industry that there is a system developed that will allow for the continuation of movement of live animals into the U.S.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, obviously the minister doesn't have a plan. We need more than just hope. We need some action by this government. The minister has listened to us. I have to give her credit for the cash flowed in regard to TB testing.

Obviously, Mr. Speaker, she hasn't got her federal counterparts onside yet, but it's clear this government—the Alberta government has developed a comprehensive meat plan and livestock strategy, focusses on expanding export commodities, increasing market access through foreign investment. We see other provinces working hard to ensure livestock producers have a competitive advantage. They're trying to shut the livestock industry down here in Manitoba with Bill 17.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Agriculture today outline her strategy to ensure our tools are in place for our producers here in Manitoba, to look after our producers today?

Ms. Wowchuk: You know, Mr. Speaker, agriculture is broader than the meat industry. There is also the Canadian Wheat Board that is a very important piece of legislation that is in place for our farmers to market their wheat and barley. We cannot get a position from the members opposite on that despite the fact that producers have asked them to.

Mr. Speaker, with regard to meat processing, I would remind the member that it is this government that has worked with Hytek to expand the facility in Neepawa. It is this government that has worked with Maple Leaf to expand the slaughter capacity in Brandon. We have to look for solutions at home should that border close, and one of them is to have increased slaughter capacity. I would encourage the member to get on board with the industry rather than to constantly criticize.

Federal Liberal Green Plan Government Support

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I see the Premier's following our Liberal lead in supporting efforts to end smoking in cars with kids and to consider making booster seats mandatory.

Like his original opposition to these progressive measures, the Premier has opposed the green shift. A single working parent living in Manitoba with two children and earning \$20,000 a year will receive more than \$2,000 each year in additional income under the green shift.

When there's great urgency to reduce greenhouse gases, when there's a great need to reduce poverty and help struggling parents in Manitoba, when will the Premier come on board and support the green shift?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Well, Mr. Speaker, there's a green shift that allows people to save money through energy efficiency, and there's another green shift that requires people to pay more money, as we see proposed by the member opposite.

We're against the piling on that is being proposed by a party which I won't talk about in this House, because, obviously, we don't want to be part of the federal election, but I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that if you were to go to Churchill and look at what the fossil fuel costs have meant to the increased transportation costs of food to northern Manitoba, when you look at a senior citizen in Manitoba that may not be paying tax because of lower income, but because they have the gas prices that have gone up across North America that would be taxed, and natural gas being taxed, we don't think it's appropriate to pile on to low-income families. But that's why there's a democracy. We'll find out how well this idea works and how well it doesn't work.

I noticed that you are working in your own community and I'm working in mine, and that's why democracy's a great thing, as it was in 2007. The people are never wrong, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gerrard: I note that the Premier was out campaigning recently with Jack Layton, and maybe after the election he'll be looking for Jack Layton's job, who knows?

Mr. Speaker, with two recent shocking deaths of children in care in Shamattawa, this is a situation which has badly needed attention, absolutely.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The initial question was on the green shift, and now the honourable member is going in another direction. Supplementary questions should seek further information on the initial question.

So I hope the honourable member will tie the two together here. I'll give him the opportunity.

Mr. Gerrard: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. The green shift is a very effective way to help poor families in Shamattawa and a lot of other communities, and the fact of the matter is instead of helping people, the minister is operating and the Premier is operating a system which tends to take far too many people into care instead of helping people keep them in their own families.

It makes a big difference if you're in Shamattawa as a single parent and you've got two kids and you're getting 2,000 extra dollars a year. Why are you against that?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, at some point we'd like to work with the federal government. In fact, we've been proposing for a number of years to remove diesel fuel from some of our communities and go to either—we had the east-side transmission line which we were involved in between '86 and '88 that has removed diesel fuel, but there are communities in northern Manitoba that have diesel fuel in them, regrettably.

I'd like to ask the member: Does he support putting a tax on diesel fuel in those remote communities?

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, one of the interesting things about the green shift is it provides dollars to help communities adjust to the new world where we've got to be greener and we're using things like alternate fuels and green wind power, et cetera. The fact of the matter is that the Premier's working in the past, and Liberals are trying to address the problems of the present and looking forward.

The Premier, in fact, is standing up for people in Alberta who are going to have to pay extra taxes because they're using coal and natural gas to generate electricity. Why is the Premier campaigning for people in Alberta instead of supporting Manitobans? When will the Premier start standing up and supporting Manitobans and helping people in Manitoba communities?

* (14:20)

Mr. Doer: Well, Mr. Speaker, why should people in northern Manitoba, in remote communities, pay a higher tax for their heating fuel so somebody in Toronto that might be making \$100,000 a year can get a tax reduction maybe down the road with the so-called green shift. I think people in northern Manitoba should be very, very careful about that kind of piling on.

I suggest to the member opposite he hasn't done his homework on what it will mean. The shift will mean that people in remote and distant places pay more tax and people in urban centres that might be able to have a subway system, which I think would be great, pay less tax. I think that's not the kind of shift we want to see in western Manitoba and in northern Manitoba, Mr. Speaker.

Interlake Flooding Victims Government Information Brochure

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Farmers in the Interlake have experienced one of the most difficult

seasons in decades. The Tory approach to this has been to conduct a disinformation campaign based totally on partisan politics, the result being confusion in the Interlake as to what programs are available.

This behaviour is unconscionable, Mr. Speaker. This has only further exacerbated the problem.

Can the Minister of Agriculture give us the status—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Nevakshonoff: I have to say I'm very disappointed, Mr. Speaker, that, when I'm trying to put an important question about this situation, I'm heckled by members opposite. It's disgraceful. It's disgraceful, and they find it amusing, in addition.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Agriculture give us an update about the status of the harvest in this area and try and create some clarity here to combat the confusion that has been created by members opposite?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): I thank my friend from the Interlake for raising this issue because it is, indeed, a very important issue and a challenge that our producers in the Interlake are facing. We're all hopeful that with the weather that we've got right now producers can take off some of that crop and put up more hay, Mr. Speaker.

But, Mr. Speaker, there has, indeed, been some misinformation put out, and that's why we have put out a brochure. It's been delivered to every farmer's mailbox, outlining all of the programs that are available. There is a series of meetings that have set up in all of the communities where farmers can come and help fill out their applications.

Mr. Speaker, the federal government has also sent producers a form outlining all that they can collect under their AgriStability/Invest, and I want to say as well that we have worked with the federal government to raise the amount that they can get an advance to 75 percent—

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Mahatma Gandhi Day

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): With great pride, I rise today in recognition of October 2 being proclaimed Mahatma Ghandi Day in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, in keeping with an international marking of Gandhi's birthday, the Premier (Mr. Doer) announced last month that today Manitoba would follow in paying tribute to this extraordinary spiritual and humanitarian leader of the last millennium.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born this day in 1869 in a small village in Gujarat. Mahatma, the title bestowed upon him by India's legend poet and Nobel Laureate Rabindra Nath Tagore, means Great Soul.

Mr. Speaker, this half-naked faqir, as the British Prime Minister Churchill called him, changed the world by preaching the values of truth, peace and simplicity as weapons to conquer wars. His philosophy of non-violence has spread throughout the world, encompassing the rejection of violence against oneself, against others, against other groups, against other societies and against nature.

In other words, Mahatma said: Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man.

As a civil rights leader, Gandhi also saw entrenched poverty as the worst form of violence. The United Nations has proclaimed October 2 as the International Day of Non-Violence as a means of bringing awareness to the chronic hunger and dehumanizing poverty that still prevails in many parts of the world, including Canada. As such, it is a very important way to remain cognizant to the challenges of achieving a just and equitable society.

To celebrate Mahatma Gandhi Day in Manitoba, there will be a ceremony at The Forks Market, involving a garlanding of the Mahatma statue and traditional singing.

I'm pleased to recognize some of the founding members of the Mahatma Gandhi Centre of Canada today, who are in the gallery.

Mr. Speaker, Mahatma Gandhi Day is a very important day in Manitoba. Not only does it connect us in the real way of his teachings, it reminds us all that we are children of the same God, are brothers and sisters and that we continue our peaceful movement by working together to build a better world. Thank you very much.

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): I would like to thank the Member for

Radisson for the powerful words spoken today in tribute to a powerful figure on the world stage.

I want to acknowledge Dr. Dakshinamurti and his wife, Mrs. Dakshinamurti, and others who are here as members of the Mahatma Gandhi Society. The Dakshinamurtis, as many will know, are making great contributions to our province in the field of health care, but do so also in very many other ways. I want to thank them for being here today.

Today, as has been indicated, is the 139th anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's birth. We mark this occasion with the inaugural of Mahatma Gandhi Day. I was pleased to be part of the celebrations led by the Premier (Mr. Doer), the Member for Radisson and others on the grand staircase the other day. We reflect on the contributions of a great social activist, a revolutionary political figure and a benevolent leader for the independence of India.

The world over, today is set aside as the International Day of Non-Violence, a day when the lessons gleaned from Gandhi's words and actions can compel us to build a gentler globe, structured on principles of compassion and tolerance. Today in India, Prime Minister Singh paid tribute to the father of his nation, saying that Gandhi's message of peace and non-violence was especially relevant in our world today, a world marred by hatred and conflict, in his words.

We are too often faced with sad realities: family torn apart by combat and conflict, refugees forced far from their homes by insurgency and instability. We are shown the ravages of war and asked to be satisfied citizens of such a world.

At home in Manitoba, we confront our own challenges. We know that, all too often today, many confront the ongoing vestiges of racism and other acts of intolerance.

Mr. Speaker, we know that, if we listen for the words of Gandhi, we can hear that and, as he said: An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind.

We can use today to forge his ideals of non-violence and social justice toward the formation of a world more in line with his principles. For Gandhi, it was action, not words, that had meaning. We can use that mantra in channelling our energies and efforts toward building the best possible world. Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, in view of the significance—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Gerrard: –of the tribute to Mahatma Gandhi, I ask leave to say a few words.

Mr. Speaker: Well, we normally have five members' statements and we're on members' statements, but the honourable member is asking if he could say a few words to this special occasion. Is the honourable Member—

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Mr. Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, the role of Mahatma Gandhi in India and, indeed, around the world—his message of non-violence, of peace, the importance of what people can do for themselves in their own communities and in their own country is an extraordinary one and a very, very powerful one.

That message echoes today and certainly reverberates here and elsewhere around the world as we deal with difficult issues and try to do our very best to deal with these in a way that is non-violent, that uses discussion and debate and finds solutions and compromises and effective solutions. Thank you.

* (14:30)

Mr. Speaker: That was by special leave of the House, so we still have three members' statements, two for the government side and one for the official opposition.

David Archibald Woodhouse

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me to rise in the Chamber today to pay tribute to David Archibald Woodhouse, who passed away on September 19 of this year. Archie, as he was known to one and all, was a proud citizen of Pinaymootang First Nation, known to many of us as Fairford, and he has given to us all over the 60 years he walked this earth, the classic example of a life well lived.

First and foremost, he was a devoted family man who worked hard to provide for his family. His many varied endeavours included work in construction for Manitoba Hydro and Dominion Bridge. He performed his civic duty by serving as a band councillor for two terms. For a time, he lived a life on the land in a traditional style by working as a commercial fisherman, a trapper, hunter and as a beef cattle rancher.

His true calling as a business entrepreneur was evident throughout his life in that over time he operated a convenience store, pool hall, garage, the

Fairford riverside tourism campground and the Powderhorn Creek Restaurant and Gas Bar. In addition, he was an inventor, as many commercial fishers will attest to, having patented and produced the powered under-ice crawler, which made the setting of nets in the harsh winter environment so much easier. It is noteworthy that one of his famous jiggers is now on display at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, DC.

In his spare time, Mr. Speaker, Archie truly loved to participate in sports, whether as a player or coach. As a member of the Fairford Maroons, he will long be remembered for his home run hits.

Archie was also a devout Christian, who loved to play the guitar and sing gospel songs. In his later years, this was a great joy to him and it was not surprising he was engaged on this path on the last day of his life, when he exchanged an earthly flight to a gospel revival in Berens River to ride the wings of angels instead to his just reward in heaven.

We are all better off for having known him. May he rest in peace.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Brandon First Promotional Day

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, I just simply want to say that Brandon rocks, Brandon succeeds. When Brandon volunteers put their energy into promoting Brandon they succeed. The MLAs who attended the Brandon First promotional day at the Legislature recently were treated to a display of genuine community spirit. Volunteers dressed in Wheat King and Bobcat jerseys, displayed their Brandon pride and love for their hometown. These are the same people who just recently secured the Western Canadian Music Awards for Brandon and Manitoba. Brandon First put together a strong bid to secure the rights to host the event, so strong that they were quickly the only city left in contention.

This week, the Western Canadian Music Alliance announced that the three-day celebration of arts and culture would be coming back to Manitoba in 2009, which last played host to the WCMAs in Winnipeg in 2006. The star-studded event will roll out the red carpet across the streets of Brandon next fall as all the big names in music from across the Canadian west will pay a visit to the Wheat City.

A visit to Brandon during the WCMAs will showcase the talent of Manitoba performers with special emphasis on the host city's great musical

proWess evident through its many world-class acts and quality university centre for music education, and, of course, awards will be handed out to the best and brightest of the bunch with both industry and artist awards up for grabs. Adding to the excitement is the momentum that this brings to the Brandon music scene providing an opportunity for artists to bring their act to the Wheat City for the first time and, hopefully, make plans to return many times after.

Thanks go out to Lois MacDonald, Erin Brown, Tom Crook, Heidi Howarth, Greg Gatlew [*phonetic*] and many others at Brandon First for their hard work in showing the world that Brandon really does rock.

Police and Peace Officers' Memorial Service

Ms. Marilyn Brick (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, on September 28, I had the privilege of attending the annual Manitoba Police and Peace Officers' memorial service at the Legislative grounds. The service is held to honour those brave men and women who have lost their lives serving Manitoba citizens. It follows the 2006 proclamation announced by the honourable Minister of Justice that each year, the last Sunday in September be remembered as Police and Peace Officers' Memorial Day. The service was attended by hundreds, including many RCMP and police officers.

The honour roll includes fallen officers dating back from the 19th century to the present. Among the many honoured were members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the former Northwest Mounted Police. Federal corrections officers from Stony Mountain Penitentiary, a provincial corrections officer from Vaughan Detention Centre, members of the Manitoba Provincial Police, a town constable from Benito, Manitoba, Manitoba conservation officers, a member of the Winnipeg Park Police and members of the Winnipeg Police Service.

Manitoba's service is in keeping with the Government of Canada's decision in 1998 to hold a national memorial day for police and peace officers. The memorial gives us the opportunity to express our gratitude to the fallen who are put in harm's way in fulfilment of their duty. It's also an important reminder to Manitobans of the men and women who work to serve and protect in our province.

This is also a time to remember our brothers and sisters in the military service. As we approach Remembrance Day next month, it is important that

we as Manitobans pay our respect to those who gave their lives in service of our nation and those who currently work in defending our interests and values abroad.

I would like to recognize Jawwad Saeed from the constituency of St. Norbert who has recently returned from Afghanistan. Mr. Saeed completed his tour of duty at the beginning of August. I would like to congratulate him on his successful mission.

Mr. Speaker, police and peace officers around Manitoba, Canada and the world put the interests of others before their own every hour of every day. I would call on this House to remember the sacrifices those who have fallen have made and the sacrifices police and peace officers continue to make today.

As today is the International Day for Non-Violence, I would ask all members of the House to join me in hoping that we can resolve conflicts in the future through the use of consensus and mediation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

GRIEVANCES

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Pembina, on a grievance?

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Yes, on a grievance.

It is regrettable that one has to resort to these kinds of, I guess, opportunities but the time to put a grievance on record regarding the situation that's taking place within one's own community.

Today I want to talk about three areas. Of course, the basis for all of these is infrastructure needs that we have within the constituency of Pembina.

Again, at the outset, I want to indicate that where the government continues to pride themselves in the fact that their nominee program has been successful, we in the Pembina constituency have been the recipients of many, many people moving in—and we welcome them. But I do believe that the government does have a responsibility to meet the needs of these people as they come into our communities from other areas, from outside of the country.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to talk today about three areas. This will be of no surprise to anyone here. The first one will be on the schools, the situation as we have it out there; the health care

within our community, and the other one, of course, is the infrastructure of highways.

I will indicate to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I do want to start with the schools, and, again, this should be no surprise to anyone here, especially the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) and the Premier (Mr. Doer). They have been warned for the last nine years that there is growth within the region, growth within the area. I do want to indicate—I'm only going to go back to 2005—the growth that we have seen out there is exhibited in the numbers of students that we have, but it was previous to that as well that it started.

But, in 2005, the growth rate of the students in Garden Valley School Division was 5.5 percent. At that time we had 33 portables and 825 students within those portables. Garden Valley Collegiate—I've been asking questions of the minister repeatedly and having the petitions brought forward as well; the information is there. In 2005, we had an enrolment at Garden Valley Collegiate of 940 students. We had eight portables at that time and a 5.4 percent increase. In 2006, we had a growth in the student population of 5.2 percent, and in the GVC it was 6.3 percent. In '07 it was 5.8 percent. At the collegiate it was 8.4 percent. This year, incidentally—and I know that my petition does have these stats on it as well—but we have seen an increase in student enrolment of 8.7 percent and, at the high school, we have an 11.7 percent increase.

* (14:40)

At the high school, today, there are 15 portables. As I've indicated time and time again, these students do not have the access that they need to even go to the bathrooms. So what we're finding is a number of students will either just simply not go to the bathroom and will wait till noon hour when they have a little bit of a break or, in fact, they're not coming to school.

I've asked the Minister of Education and the Premier as to whether they feel this is the kind of education that they want to promote and that we all want to promote within the province of Manitoba. I would submit to you that the answer is no. We should not be promoting this. We should be doing something about it.

Now I know that in my discussions with the minister, he has said at times, we weren't really prepared for this growth. Well, I have just given you the stats here. If you go back five, six, seven years,

this is not just something that has happened. We have seen the graph. We have seen the numbers. We have seen the percentage increases. These are out there. We know that this is taking place. We have been giving information regarding 2012, and, I believe, the stats for 2012—the prediction there are 4,961 students, an increase of 5.8 percent. This is substantiated by the number of students that we have there and also, if you look back, the number of babies that are born each year at Boundary Trails, and just on that, Madam Deputy Speaker, I'll indicate to you that this year they're expecting to have 1,000 babies born at Boundary Trails Health Centre.

Let's just assume that only half of those will be coming to the Garden Valley School Division within four or five years; that's 500, and that is a dramatic growth and somehow we need to plan ahead and we need to be able to accommodate the needs of these students.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I know that I have said this time and time again, but the information is out there. We know the stats. We have the numbers. So we need to move aggressively in order to do something to accommodate those needs and the growth that we are experiencing there.

Again, we are also projecting that there's going to be an increase of immigration during that time. The number that I have given you now regarding the births at Boundary Trails is specific to the people living within the area. This does not look at the growth that we're going to be experiencing and seeing in the years to come from the immigration that we have. So, again, while we applaud and while we welcome immigration, we need to be out there to look after the infrastructure needs.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

The other area that I wanted to look at, just briefly, Mr. Speaker, is the whole area of health care. I know that I've been reading petitions on those as well. Tabor Home was built 57 years ago and Tabor Home was built as a light-level seniors housing complex. Today it is a personal care home and the majority of the people there are bedridden. There is no sprinkler system. The doorways are too narrow to move residents in case of a fire or any other emergency that we have.

So I have been asking the minister time and time again whether, in fact, there is accommodation being made to replace the Tabor Home in Morden. Just to substantiate the need that we have in order to

accommodate the elderly people within our community right today, and again this is the wrong use of a facility, of a hospital, but right today, Boundary Trails Health Centre has 26 beds occupied by people who should be in a personal care home. If you look at an 80 bed hospital, you'd take that percentage, this is the wrong use of a hospital. You talk to any of the people working in that facility today and they would indicate that there are other people who need to be able to use those facilities for other things, other than for personal care reasons. But they have no place to go.

Certainly, as a province, we need to be able to accommodate the elderly within our community. I think it's only right, it's only fair. I say to my mother, who is 93 years old, and she's in a personal care home right now, we're all aging at the same rate, some just had a head start. It's true. Some started earlier than others and this is pretty straightforward.

So some day you and I are going to be needing a place that we can go to, a personal care home, and we need to be able to have facilities that will accommodate our needs. So, again, I implore the government of the day to look at the infrastructure that we have out there.

The last point I wanted to make was the infrastructure regarding highways. I would be remiss if I wouldn't indicate to you, Mr. Speaker, that, with the growth that we're experiencing in southern Manitoba, the four-laning of Highway 32 is imperative. It is a must. We have to do that. There's just so much traffic out there and again it's because of growth. This is something that has taken place. The government continues to applaud the growth, and I will concur with that, but we need to put the resources out there so that these communities can continue to grow.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I just want to indicate that we have some really, really big needs within the Pembina constituency. They are regarding schools, they are regarding health care, and they are regarding our highways. There are other needs but these are the ones that we need in order to be able to accommodate the people who are coming into our communities.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Lakeside, on a grievance?

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Lakeside, on a grievance.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, this is a day that I want to put some things on the record in regard to the mismanagement of this government. I know the Member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) tried to get up a little bit ago and ask a question in regard to flooding. We know the mismanagement on this file and the way it's been handled, in particular in the Interlake and Westlake areas. I was up there just last Friday looking at a meeting with a number of producers. Once again, there's another meeting being called which I've been invited to up in that particular area, and I can tell you that there's significant hurt out there. You can't have a wait-and-see attitude. We need action from this government. They need action not only from the government, they need their MLA to be onside and not be playing politics with the issue at hand.

We have a serious situation in not only, like I say, the Interlake area, but the Westlake area, and those people are hurting. They are selling off their herds. In fact, unfortunately, one of our well-known producers, actually for the Member for Interlake, Glen Nichol, the *Co-op* ag reporter, is selling off his herd. Unfortunately, we've seen more and more of this as a result of mismanagement, of misleadership on this particular issue, and we need a program that's going to be out there. I know the Member for Interlake talks about it's going to be countervail. Well, it's not going to be countervail, Mr. Speaker, because we know that the 1,400 producers that are going to be impacted by this is not going to be a countervail challenge. We know that—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Eichler: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know the Member for Interlake's passionate about this issue as well, but he can get on the record just the same as I can. He can get up from his seat and certainly, get up and speak his mind. He has that opportunity. Whether we talk about countervail challenges, this is not going to be countervail challenge. It's 1,400 producers is what we're talking about. It's a situation where they need some type of leadership from this government. If it was going to be countervail challenge, the freight assistance program would be challenged. You can't have one and not the other. It just makes good sense.

When we look at these programs, it can be very clear about where we want to go. It can be on a per-head basis, but also a top-up on those grain producers. When are we going to be able to try and help them also with their issues? A lot of combines have been brought in, the track combines in order to get some of the crop off so then they can determine what level of insurance they're going to be at, what they're going to need in order to be able to use for top-up on those particular acres that they can and cannot get off.

It's a significant issue; it's an issue which we are very passionate about. You know what? I'm going to stand here, fight for rural Manitoba, I'm going to stand here and fight for our farmers, and I'm going to continue to do so, whether or not the government likes it or not. That's my job. I'm going to take it very, very seriously, Mr. Speaker.

Also, when we talk about mixed signals, with Bill 17 just recently being passed in this House, we knew it was going to pass. There are 36 on that side, 19 on this side, but now we're getting mixed signals from the government. The Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) is finally speaking up and saying, oh, there may be something we can do for these producers. We'll look at anaerobic digesters. We'll maybe look at some other methods, but I'll tell you what. What you've already done is killed the industry. They have lost all hope, all hope in this government for any initiatives to be brought forward in a timely manner which would be based on science, and, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, those research dollars that we were wanting to get and put forward and have based on good science have now been thrown out the window.

* (14:50)

Yesterday, the minister announced \$150,000 to the research station in Glenlea in regard to greenhouse gases put off by cattle. Well, I can tell you we need to do that research, but what we also need to do is listen to those researchers, listen to those scientists, so that we do have the best data, the best information which we can have at our disposal.

Quite frankly, when we look at the science on any particular issue, be it the hog moratorium or cattle, the crops, the run-off, the ALUS program. There are a significant number of issues that are very, very important that we have to deal with.

So we on this side of the House are going to continue to lobby for those projects. We're going to

continue to lobby for our farmers. We're going to continue to fight for them to make sure they have a sustainable income over the next year and for the generations to come, because we do know they're the best stewards of the land. They're the ones that make the best leadership decisions, and they want to be there not only for their children but their great-grandchildren as well.

Also, with regard to drainage, when we look at drainage, at the meeting in Eriksdale and the meeting in Eddystone, it was very clear about significant changes to the drainage program. We talked about DFO on one of our projects. Well, we checked on that. There's not been one application. Not one application has been sent in to DFO for approval by this government since January of this past year. Why is that, Mr. Speaker?

We have significant issues in regard to drainage across this province. I know the conservation districts is an issue that's been brought forward by this government, and I commend them. But what you also have to do with this issue is attach significant dollars in order to make sure that these conservation districts will, in fact, be able to do the work they need to do in order to provide that adequate drainage, and with a plan it puts in place that is going to be there that's going to be sustainable, because you can't just start draining in one area and not have a backup plan so it's going to be able to go on down and into the lakes and the rivers of which we want to keep clean in a way that's also going to be able to be sustainable, because I know in my particular area, we have two lakes, the Shoal Lakes, and it's becoming our Devils Lake. Quite frankly, we know that something has to be done there.

In fact, I commend the minister and her staff for meeting with the R.M. of St. Laurent. Now, I understand they're part of this package that's been brought forward with looking at Shoal Lake. We need leadership from our government. We need leadership from us, as members of this Assembly, in order to ensure that, in fact, we do have those programs in place.

Also, I want to talk in regard to the health care, in particular, not only in the city of Winnipeg, but also in rural Manitoba. Mr. Speaker, I know this year, unfortunately, I had the experience of using our health-care system, and I can tell you in order to get in to have surgery was quite the ordeal.

First of all, we were only seeing cancer patients and emergency service people because of the

shortage of doctors, because of the shortage of bed spaces, because of the shortage of nurses. We in rural Manitoba and here in the city of Winnipeg, it's a significant issue. We have to make sure that we not only keep the doctors that we train—in fact, I find it disturbing because one of my constituents came to Winnipeg, got her doctor degree. There were some 70 students that graduated. Mr. Speaker, she was one of those that never got picked to stay in Manitoba. She's moved to B.C., since she met Mr. Right out there. Unfortunately, she won't be back. Her dream was to practise. Her dream was to practise right here in rural Manitoba, make her home here, stay here. She was educated here, subsidized by Canadian dollars, which is significant because we need to keep those people at home. We need to get more nurses in place. We also need to take some of the stress off.

I know the doctors in my home town. Mr. Speaker, we're down to two and about a half—there's one that works part-time—which we have room for five. Unfortunately, we haven't been able to fill those positions, and usually what it is is a stepping stone into Manitoba, then either on to Saskatchewan, Alberta or British Columbia.

What we also see is the nurse overload. In fact, when I was in the health-care system this past summer, I know that a number of the nurses had to work double shifts in order to try and stay up with the need because of the shortage that was out there. We need to address those issues in a way that's going to be very meaningful.

I see my light's flashing already. It's amazing how fast 10 minutes go, Mr. Speaker, whenever you're talking about a grievance, something so important that we want to get on the record here.

But, anyway, in regard to the CentrePort, it's an issue that our side of this House, our leader has been taking very seriously. We need to move quickly on this file. We got the bill passed yesterday, and I know it's going to have significant impact on us here, not only in the city, but in rural Manitoba. So we want to ensure that the government and those people that are in that organization have the tools they need in order to make those decisions, in order to lobby the federal government and our counterparts throughout and ensure that we do get CentrePort here within the province of Manitoba.

So, with that, I thank you for this time for my grievance, Mr. Speaker.

House Business

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, just prior to orders of the day, can I just make a House announcement, and that is regarding the Public Accounts meeting previously announced for October 8. I would like to announce that the meeting will begin at 7 p.m. and end at 9 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: For Public Accounts for October 8, it will be at 7 p.m. and conclude at 9 p.m., for information of the House.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if you could call in order please the following bills: for concurrence and third reading, private bills, Bill 300; followed by concurrence and third reading of Bill 32; followed by debate on concurrence and third reading for Bill 35; followed by concurrence and third reading on Bill 38.

Mr. Speaker: For the information of the House, we will deal this afternoon with concurrence and third reading of private Bill 300, and then we'll move on to concurrence and third reading of Bill 32. Then we'll resume debate on concurrence and third reading of Bill 35. Then we'll deal with concurrence and third reading of Bill 38.

ORDERS OF THE DAY (Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

CONCURRENCE AND THIRD READINGS- PRIVATE BILLS

Bill 300—The Royal Lake of the Woods Yacht Club Incorporation Amendment Act

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by Member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Cullen), that Bill 300, The Royal Lake of the Woods Yacht Club Incorporation Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi constituant en corporation «The Royal Lake of the Woods Yacht Club », reported from the Standing Committee on Private Bills, be concurred in and be now read for a third time and passed.

Motion presented.

Mr. Speaker: Are there any speakers?

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Just to indicate that we support this legislation.

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

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Is the House ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House is concurrence and third reading of Bill 300, The Royal Lake of the Woods Yacht Club Incorporation Amendment Act.

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

CONCURRENCE AND THIRD READINGS

Bill 32—The Personal Health Information Amendment Act

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): I move, seconded by the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald), that Bill 32, The Personal Health Information Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur les renseignements médicaux personnels, as amended, reported from the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development and subsequently amended, be concurred in and be now read for a third time and passed.

Motion presented.

* (15:00)

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I want to just put a few comments on the record, of course, about the importance of the amendments to The Personal Health Information Act. We know that there has been co-operation among all House members—most House members, I suppose I should say—and we're grateful for that.

We also know that there has been extraordinary consultation and community input to the improving of this bill, and it will help ensure that patients have more access, that their families have more access, that people who need greater access to spiritual care and, really, improved health care in general as a result of the work that's been done on this bill.

We know individuals such as Mimi Raglan, Blake Taylor, Leslie Worthington, Charles Cruden, Alice Little and, indeed, a legion of others have brought their important voices to bear in improving patient safety in Manitoba. The government of Manitoba is grateful for that, and we look forward to the unanimous support of these amendments and of this act.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the Minister of Health and the members of the House for proceeding with this legislation and the Minister of Health, in particular, for bringing in an amendment which was, in fact, one that we had first proposed as a bill a number of years ago, to allow 24 access to medical records and including family members in this process.

This is an important step forward. As I've said, it's been one that we've been calling for for quite some time. When we brought a bill forward several times, the government resisted it, but I am very pleased that the government now has seen fit to follow in our lead and to support this measure.

It's very important that we move to a situation where we have more open ability to share information about health care and that patients and family members can be much more a part of the decision-making process and be more knowledgeable. It is only fitting in what some people call the information or knowledge age, that knowledge be provided quickly and promptly. I would say that this is an important step forward, and I'm very pleased that it's happening.

I would say that, at the vigil which was last night for members, individuals who came forward to talk about concerns over patient safety, there was pleasure that this bill was going to be passed and that the point was made that, with the move toward more and more electronic medical records, it may even be possible at some point to move to a shorter period than 24 hours. But 24 hours is, I think, a pretty good result for today and certainly means that we have made a very significant step forward.

So we, the Liberal Party, certainly are strong supporters of this bill and the measures that are within this bill. It will help to improve access, the ability to address needs which have been talked about in terms of support. Financial support for institutions are also, I think, a good measure. It's taken quite a while to get that through, but now that will be significant.

All in all, Mr. Speaker, we have good support for this bill, and we're glad that we achieved the amendment to give us a 24-hour access. Thank you.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I, too, rise on behalf of our caucus in support of this legislation.

I would note that, when the original legislation came into place in 1997, it was supposed to have been looked at within five years of that. There was to

have been a comprehensive review of the operation of the act that involved public representations and, within one year after the review was undertaken, it was also supposed to submit a report on the review to the Assembly.

Now we are quite late in seeing all of this come to fruition, but, certainly, now that it is before us, we are certainly supportive of it and the changes that have been made. What is, I suppose, somewhat disturbing is the time it's taken this government to actually move on this and the amount of angst it has created amongst a lot in the public. People that were out there fighting so very, very hard for their family members and feeling that they needed to be or wanted to be involved in being able to help their family members by, you know, having access to information and then using information to, in fact, be able to support their family member. It is a bit upsetting that these family members had to jump through such hoops in order to be able to achieve what they needed to achieve for their loved ones.

But, certainly, with this government, we have seen time and time again where not very many things are done in a very timely fashion. But, certainly, with this, we're glad to see it here before us today with third reading. I would note, and I had heard in doing some research on this, I think it's in France where patients are actually the owners of the charts, of their own charts. That, in fact, is, you know, quite an intriguing concept where in Canada and Manitoba that certainly is not the case and there is such reluctance to share information with families.

So, Mr. Speaker, I hope that this legislation will, indeed, do what it is intended to do. I suppose time is going to tell us whether or not that is the case. I do wish—I know there's been some reference to having an adjudicator, a privacy adjudicator. I don't think this Province has gone near far enough. In fact, we're the only province not to have done it and put in a privacy commissioner even though this government has said again that they were going to do it and then never did it because that, in fact, is probably what would have more teeth than what the government has put in place.

But I think it's again their intent to make it look like they're giving, you know, authority for people to access information. I'm not sure it's going to be as good as we really think. But saying all of that, I suppose we will have to just wait and see. I just want to say that this legislation really has to pay tribute to some people who have, I think, stuck with this

through the years and spoken up loudly on behalf of their family members and that is Mimi Raglan, Blake Taylor, Leslie Worthington and Chuck Cruden on behalf of seniors in Manitoba. I think they deserve full credit for never giving up, for their persistence in this because I don't think we would be here today without the effort that they have put into this. I think all Manitobans really and truly owe them a great debt of gratitude for doing this.

So, with those few words, Mr. Speaker, we're certainly prepared to see this bill passed.

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

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House is concurrence and third reading of Bill 32, The Personal Health Information Amendment Act.

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

DEBATE ON CONCURRENCE AND THIRD READINGS

Bill 35—The Statutes Correction and Minor Amendments Act, 2008

Mr. Speaker: Okay, we will now move to resume debate on concurrence and third reading of Bill 35, The Statutes Correction and Minor Amendments Act, 2008, standing in the name of the honourable Member for Lac du Bonnet.

What is the will of the—the honourable Member for Lac du Bonnet.

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to put a few brief remarks on the record with respect to Bill 35 on behalf of my constituents and of course on behalf of our caucus.

When I looked at Bill 35 when it was introduced—and it was a little bit of a daunting bill—I think 52 pages long—making changes to 100 different statutes of the province of Manitoba. So the reality is, that it took some time to go through the bill itself because not only do you have to review what is happening within the bill itself, Bill 35, and go through each of the 52 pages to determine its effects on the province, but you also have to look through all of the bills that it, in fact, corrects and makes amendments to.

* (15:10)

So it was somewhat of a time-consuming process. I think it was necessary because we've seen

in the past, particularly even in this session in terms of Bill 31, where we've seen that while the title of the bill was admirable in terms of privacy and typical legislation making changes that, hopefully, would benefit the province, we found, on its face, it sounded good, but the end result is when you dig right into the provisions of the bill itself, on Bill 31 in particular, we found that it was lacking in terms of helping protect the privacy and provide public information to Manitobans.

So I think it was important for me, then, to go through Bill 35 to determine its effects. I know when I went to a briefing, Mr. Speaker, on Bill 35, I was told by staff there that, in fact, it did deal with typographical errors, numbering and drafting errors. But, after having gone through the bill, I can say that, in fact, it does do that, and so I'm satisfied with the provisions of this legislation.

It's important, I think, for a critic to take time to look at any bill, whether it's short or whether it's long, such as this bill with 53 pages long, and changing or making minor amendments to, in fact, 100 pieces of legislation in the province. I think, it's important, because I recall, Mr. Speaker, about three years ago, when I was the Finance critic at that time, I know the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) introduced the BITSA bill, the bill that, right after the budget, is introduced so that it carries out the effects of the budget itself and makes changes. That, too, was a long bill. I recall it was probably some 100 pages at the time, because there were many changes that were proposed in that budget itself in terms of taxation and so on, and in terms of increasing taxes through the back door at that time, in terms of fines, in terms of licences, and so on. So those types of things had to be in the BITSA bill at the time.

It was a very long bill, and I recall going through it and taking several days, in fact, through that BITSA bill, because I was concerned that it would reflect what was done in the budget. What we found at that time, Mr. Speaker, when I compared the budget itself to the BITSA bill three years ago, while it mirrored the budget in almost all respects, I found one small provision in there which indicated that the BITSA bill was, in fact, doubling the tariff that was applicable to estates at the time from the budget to the BITSA bill. I don't know, it could have been oversight. That's what the Minister of Finance told me the next day, and I'll accept his word. We're all honourable members here. I'll accept his word that,

in fact, it was an oversight, that it was a misprint or a typographical error.

But they're the kinds of things that we have to look for in very complex and very long legislation. We have to make sure we compare, in this case, the BITSA bill, between the budget itself and the BITSA bill itself as well, to make sure that they're consistent. Had it been passed, Mr. Speaker, we actually would have seen a doubling of tariffs for estates in the Court of Queen's Bench. While we caught it, and I accept the Minister of Finance's explanation that it was a typographical error, and he did make an amendment at the time I recall. So that amendment was made and, obviously, those kinds of things have to be looked at.

So, when I saw Bill 35 being 52 pages long and ending 100 different pieces of legislation, even though I had gone to a bill briefing with staff and so on, I took the time to look at the 100 different pieces of legislation to compare what exactly this bill was doing. By and large, it was reflecting, Mr. Speaker, some new and different terms that are being used today versus when those pieces of legislation were initially passed. As a result of that investigation and as a result of that research and work that I did, we're prepared to let the bill pass.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): I just want to say a few words on the record prior to passing of Bill 35. As the Member for Lac du Bonnet has pointed out, it is a bill that attempts to make a multitude of minor changes to a wide variety of pieces of legislation. In fact, if you go to the first couple of pages, it kind of gives you a sense of just how many amendments are actually being made, and to which acts.

I guess the only concern is that, when you see legislation of this nature, sometimes you get legislation that is, in fact, brought forward and, quite often, it's things that are hidden in the details, and the impact that it can have is actually fairly significant.

I thought it was interesting in my just quick glance at the bill, because I really didn't have the opportunity to have a briefing on the bill—this is, in fact, my first chance to really go through it, believing it to be very minor in the sense of not really impacting the legislation or the law that's currently there.

I always find it somewhat of an interesting read. Sometimes you see legislation that makes it a little bit more politically correct. For example, it takes out the husband and wife and replaces now with things

like spouses or common-law and things of that nature, or you see modifications, whether it might be a misprint or it's just a spelling mistake.

We take the government at its word in terms of its intention to literally have to go through the legislation as it's proposed to us and do the crossover and the cross-check. It would be a fairly extensive job for any one or two individual researchers to be able to pull, take a look and literally go through each clause by clause, because it is a very thick document and it's affecting so many pieces of legislation.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I do believe that when governments tend to bring forward legislation of this nature—and it doesn't happen that often—there might be some value in terms of having a statement where the minister is formally—that goes beyond even a second reading—where the minister stands up and says, it's just housekeeping. One could define what is housekeeping to one might not be housekeeping to another.

I think that there should be some sort of a formal declaration that maybe—whether Legislative Counsel or the Auditor's office could come up with—a formal statement that the minister is obligated to provide to the House so that there is no attempt on government, intentional intent, to try to make a change or to sneak something through that would, in fact, have a significant impact.

I think that, as much as possible, it's better to have legislation separated so that there is a good solid opportunity for debate, and critics are afforded the opportunity to be able to address legislative changes in a more appropriate way. With those few words, I'm prepared to see the bill pass. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House is concurrence and third reading of Bill 35, The Statutes Correction and Minor Amendments Act, 2008.

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

House Business

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): On House business, Mr. Speaker, I previously had called for the sitting of the PAC Committee to go from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. I've been

advised by the Co-chair that they would like the flexibility to possibly sit until 10 p.m. if necessary.

So I'm amending my previous statement to indicate that the committee will sit till 9 p.m. unless the Chair and Co-chair decide otherwise. In which case, it should end by 10 p.m. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: For the information of the House, the Public Accounts meeting for October 8, the scheduled meeting is from 7 to 9 but, if the committee agrees, they'll continue the business till 10. That's for the information of the House.

* (15:20)

CONCURRENCE AND THIRD READINGS

Bill 38—The Balanced Budget, Fiscal Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act

Mr. Speaker: We will now move on to Bill 38, The Balanced Budget, Fiscal Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), that Bill 38, The Balanced Budget, Fiscal Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act; Loi sur l'équilibre budgétaire, la gestion financière et l'obligation de rendre compte aux contribuables, as amended and reported from the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs, be concurred in and be now read for a third time and passed.

Motion presented.

Mr. Speaker: Do we have any speakers?

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Well, Mr. Speaker, it's quite something to have to get up in the House to speak to a bill that came 13 years after the most responsible bill in monetary policy in Manitoba's history was passed by the previous Progressive Conservative government on November 3 of 1995, a bill called The Balanced Budget, Debt Repayment and Taxpayer Accountability Act. Thirteen may not be an unlucky number for some, but it will be for Manitobans if the Bill 38 passes today or sometime this session or anytime in the future in Manitoba.

The bill was brought in by the Member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger) on April 30, 2008, and this will be, indeed, a dark day for Manitoba. I would suggest that it perhaps might be the beginning of a dark period of time in Manitoba, and that's not just reflecting on today's downturn in the markets and

what's happened here in North America and across the world with the refinancing of much of U.S. debt in the housing market in the United States that's taken place and, of course, our markets are down tremendously. This week's been very volatile—down 800 on Monday, up 400 on Tuesday, down some 40 or 50 yesterday and, of course, down some 600 just before question period started today. As the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) was pointing out in his comments and questions of the Minister of Finance in question period today, the government has in their replies obviously no consideration of a backup plan for what will happen to Manitoba's debt that is the highest that it's ever been in this province.

They are bringing forth what they call The Balanced Budget, Fiscal Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act, Bill 38, and, if I could say so, this is the biggest oxymoron probably in Manitoba's history, to bring a bill in that's called the fiscal management and taxpayer accountability act. The fiscal management part is what they've changed from a debt repayment part of the bill. This bill is not going to provide fiscal management for Manitobans in the future by the government, Mr. Speaker. Other than what it does is it allows the government to balance the books once every four years unless, of course, they have a weather or an impact from another level of government.

I've spoken to this bill on second reading, and many of my colleagues have spoken to this bill on second reading. Mr. Speaker, we're extremely concerned about where the Manitoba government is taking Manitobans and leading Manitobans. It's brought on because of the out-of-control spending of this government and the out-of-control management that this government has brought to the table in regard to fiscal issues and fiscal responsibility. I know that many of their backbenchers haven't had any input into these bills. I know, in fact, that the only ones that really had anything to do with this bill were the Premier (Mr. Doer) and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) themselves as they brought this bill forward, snuck it into the House and made it available to try under the auspices of perhaps protecting themselves in power down the road at the expense of every man, woman and child in the province of Manitoba and future generations that will have to bear the repayment of the mistakes that this government is making as we speak, and future ones that will come about in the few years that they have left in their term before Manitobans throw them out

and bring in a strong Progressive Conservative government in this province.

Mr. Speaker, the government today is faced with many decisions, and this bill certainly has been brought in with foresight of a downturn happening in our economy. I don't think they even thought that it would be of the nature that it has been in the last few weeks here, but the foresight in this is to allow them to skate and get off the hook, if you will. Instead of having to balance the operating budget of the government of Manitoba every year, they will only have to do it once every four.

Our side of the House is certainly in favour of moving to the GAAP, the generally accepted accounting practices process, Mr. Speaker, but the bill should have, as the Member for Brandon West spoke the other day about it as our Finance critic, should be more aptly named the summary budget, instead of the name that they've given it because, of course, that's what it is.

Mr. Speaker, the previous Filmon government brought in the bill that they did on November 3, 1995, The Balanced Budget, Debt Repayment and Taxpayer Accountability Act, because it forced the government to balance the books every year on an annual basis, or else ministers of the Crown were going to have to forfeit a portion of their salaries. This was the most respected, financial-budgeting-process bill of anywhere in North America at the time.

What we're seeing is the complete devolution of that today by a government that hasn't even been able to keep up with the intent of that bill at that time, Mr. Speaker. The intent was to have a 30-year plan to eliminate the debt in Manitoba.

Of course, we all know that, two or three years ago, Alberta eliminated their debt. We know today, as we speak, that the new premier in Saskatchewan has paid down a third of the provincial debt in Saskatchewan with a \$2.2-billion payment this fall as well. That leaves Saskatchewan with about a \$4.6-billion debt that, I understand from speaking to Premier Wall, will be paid off if things continue the way they are, in about two years.

Of course, that may be impacted by the changes financially across North America today as well, but the intent is there, Mr. Speaker, just like the intent was 13 years ago. We would be almost halfway to eliminating the debt in Manitoba if the government

had kept the intent of the bill that was brought in in 1995.

Ms. Erin Selby, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

Now the bill—the government can say that they have continued to make the payments and, under the repayment of debt, they have paid down the debt as they were expected to do and met the tolerances within the bill, Madam Acting Speaker. But, of course, on the other side, they have completely thrown out the window any intent of keeping a balanced budget, because they have added almost a doubling of the operating debt of the Province of Manitoba since they've taken power in 1999. The debt has gone from somewhere in the neighbourhood of just over \$6 billion to 11.8—just under 12 today.

That is not what Manitobans expected when the government in 1999 said: We will continue to have balanced budgets; we will continue to control the debt; and we will fix health care in six months with \$15 million. Madam Acting Speaker, we know that debt in health care, that the cost today—the money going towards health care has gone from \$2.1 billion to \$4.1 billion; it's doubled.

We know as well that the health-care system is absolutely brutal today in Manitoba with what we've seen in the last while, not only in the emergency rooms in Manitoba here, but certainly I am very aware of it as the impact of 18 rural emergency rooms are closed across Manitoba and not just for summer closures, Madam Acting Speaker. These are long-term closures in some cases.

Indications are that the community that I live in—Virden—will not receive doctors till at least February and no guarantees then, and Melita may be the same in regard to that, Madam Acting Speaker, although I understand that there may be some moves to look at the backup persons for the lab tech positions and some of those.

* (15:30)

Madam Acting Speaker, the government really wanted to have it both ways by moving to a four-year rolling budget. They wanted to be able to say that they could balance the budget and yet retain their traditional practice of overspending. So that's what they've done, and that's why they brought this bill forward. This bill has been brought forward to try to lessen the impact of the impacts that the bill talks about. Those impacts were weather. Of course, I'll get to those in a moment; the second one in a moment. The first one, of course, is the refusal of the

amendment that was brought forward by the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) the other day to deal with an impact of weather in Manitoba. Of course, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) didn't even pick up on that and there's a reason for that. They don't want to be tied to the fact that just a weather problem might be in Manitoba because that does impact.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Of course, the weather situation that quite impacted the government and forced them into bringing a bill in in the early 2000s, was the fact that there wasn't enough rain or water that year to keep the level of Lake Winnipeg high enough for the government to continue to steal funds, if you will, or let's say, just take funds at least away from Manitoba Hydro, in the profits. They passed a bill that allowed them to take three-quarters of the profits of Manitoba Hydro out of Manitoba Hydro for government spending three years in a row, for the next three years. They were able to take \$150 million out of the \$200-and-some-million surplus that came about in that first year of that bill. Fortunately for Manitoba taxpayers, there was less water going over the dam in the second year and of course, the exports fell somewhat of hydro, unfortunately. The government was tied to only being able take \$53 million out of the some \$75-million profits of Manitoba Hydro that year.

Of course, we all know that 2005 was a dry year. There was virtually no—I lived on the Souris River at the time, and there was no water coming down the Souris River. There was virtually no water coming down the Assiniboine River. The Red River was low. All the tributaries leading into Manitoba forced Lake Winnipeg to be down. There were no profits in Manitoba Hydro that year. Of course, the government then was forced to take zero profits or zero monies out of Manitoba Hydro at that time. That meant that Manitoba Hydro was going to have to finance \$203 million, which ended up costing, in the long-term payback, over \$500 million for Manitobans to have to pay back in their future rates in hydro.

The government cannot possibly, in any way, shape or form, consider that kind of action a fiscally strong and prudent means of running the government of Manitoba and I'll get to that in a minute.

The situation with the second concern, of course, was the fact that there could be an impact from

another level of government. The first one was an impact from weather and, of course, I've outlined what can happen and did happen. The fact that they wanted this to be a weather impact anywhere in North America is because, of course, if there was an impact in other jurisdictions, like Ontario, you could end up in a circumstance where it may impact the Ontario economy or an impact in the Alberta economy. Of course, those two provinces are the two key providers of transfer payment funds across Canada. Manitoba lives and dies by the amount of money that they get, this government, on transfer payments and equalization payments out of Ottawa. About 40 percent of the budget comes from the federal government in this province and that's a shame. It certainly makes Manitoba a have-not province and will continue to be for many years under this government because they have no fiscal responsibility in being able to provide a plan of paying down the debt and long term. As we've seen in the markets today, those who are extremely heavily leveraged in the market are in dire straits today and we don't want Manitoba to be in that position and be that dependent on other jurisdictions in the future.

I believe that's why the government wouldn't pass the amendment to have the weather problem only in Manitoba. It's because they are so heavily dependent on transfer payments, that if a weather item impacted other jurisdictions that forced the reduction of the ability of those provinces to gather funds and lowered the impact of transfer payments, Manitoba would suffer. So they wanted to have the escape clauses that would allow them to not be responsible and simply go ahead with their spending largesse and habit that they have, and continue to put Manitoba further in debt, as I've pointed out, the levels of debt already in the province. You know, as I indicated, we will be the only prairie province with perhaps a debt left in a few years and there's no need for that, or there hasn't been, Madam Deputy Speaker, if we had stayed on the 30-year pattern that was set up by the previous Filmon government by bringing in the bill that they did in 1995.

You know, I just wanted to say, as well, that the second one as an impact from another level of government, well, the other level of government is tied into what I was just saying, the transfer payments, and it could only mean the federal government, Madam Deputy Speaker, because not very many other levels of government are going to impact the provincial government to the level that

they wouldn't be able to survive and continue to operate. The federal transfer payments is what I'm referring to and, of course, the impact from another level of government would be something if the government had actually tied a level of that. They wouldn't go for the percentages of spending, but the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) had put into the amendment the other day—they defeated those as well. It would have been something even if the government had been honest and said that, well, if there's \$1 less in transfer payments, we don't have to balance the books. They could have said, well, you know, unless there's a variance of 5 percent, or maybe \$100-million drop, or something to that effect. I mean, the Premier (Mr. Doer) has even indicated in this House that in the mid-'90s there was a \$245-million drop in transfer payments to Manitoba in one year. He said that on a repeated number of times now in the House. That \$245 million was a fiscal straitjacket for the operations of this province in the mid-'90s, and a responsible government managed to get through that by still keeping up the spending on health care which we were spending the most in health care per capita anywhere in Canada right through the recession that took place in the mid-'90s.

This government, now, with the largesse that they've had, huge transfer payments, huge increases in transfer payments—that even the Premier acknowledges—still can't balance the books in a responsible manner without doubling the debt of the province over the last nine years. It's almost as bad as what Premier Pawley did from '84 to '88 when the debt of the province tripled, or quadrupled almost, from 1.4 billion to 5.2 in the years from '84 to '88. Some of the members are still here. Certainly, the Premier was in those days, Madam Deputy Speaker.

So it's with great trepidation that I speak on this bill because it is such a bad bill. It's one of the worst bills, I believe, in Manitoba's history, and it will be proven to be that down the road. Of course, it's tied in with what I think are three of the worst bills in Manitoba's history. As I've said before, Bill 37, the vote tax bill, and also Bill 17, a moratorium on business in a certain portion of Manitoba. Even the Business Council's reply to the Premier on that is certainly something, I hope, that the government takes into heed because the Business Council has chastised them greatly for making the moves they have, based on no science, as the community of Winnipeg and other jurisdictions have also chastised them for that as well, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is not at a time when the government is out of money. This is at a time when they have increased their revenues by increasing taxes to Manitobans in many, many areas. Let me just name a few of those. One of them, of course, we were talking about Manitoba Hydro a few minutes ago and its fiscal responsibility, that the government basically stole over \$500 million out of it, forced onto the taxpayers of the province for their own spending habit. Of course, we were right in the middle of the Crocus crisis that they hadn't revealed at that time, and so we don't know whether they used those funds to cover up some of the actions that took place in the Crocus Fund, or whatever. But we certainly know that they put a huge scare into the venture funds in this province and something that we now—present conditions—we'll have a tremendous problem getting the confidence of individuals back to put—or may have. I hope I'm wrong. But I believe that these kinds of actions do not spell well for the future at a time when we are the only province in western Canada with a payroll tax.

*(15:40)

We're the only province that, you know, our neighbours—the government talks about the fact that the federal government was irresponsible in reducing the GST down to 5 percent at a time when the Province increased the PST on plumbing, electrical, electricians and building of homes. You know, we always paid the PST on the materials, Madam Deputy Speaker, but the first thing the government did when they came into power was put the 7 percent tax and extend it onto all of the labour required to build those homes as well. So that's a huge concern. They just kind of sloughed that off, but it actually doubled the taxes that they collected in Manitoba on the industrial side or on the housing construction side of the industry, yet they were chastising the federal government for lowering tax.

Our Saskatchewan neighbours have reduced the PST to 5 percent. My point is we need to be competitive with other jurisdictions. This bill allows the government to not be competitive in those areas and allow them to continue to cover up being fiscally prudent and fiscally responsible. It allows them to continue to dump more tax dollars onto future generations of Manitobans, to be paid down the road.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I only put this all on the table because, if those in the future don't believe any of what I've said here today, I just want to go back to some of the comments by some of the

members of the government of the day in 1995, when the Premier himself said in regard to The Balanced Budget, Debt Repayment and Taxpayer Accountability Act that was passed on November 3, 1995, in Manitoba, when it became law, the Premier himself said, and I quote: "You have a silly balanced budget legislation that doesn't deal with people working."

Madam Deputy Speaker, I don't know what he meant by that, but the quotes—"you have a silly balanced budget legislation"—that's what this Premier thinks of balanced budgets.

They've certainly tied his hand, he believes, too much; so he's going to open that up completely. It's just like he was against free trade. That's one of the major impetuses in Canadian history that has allowed us to pay down the debt of the country as much as it has today as well and certainly has allowed us to eliminate the deficit of the country as well.

The present Deputy Premier (Ms. Wowchuk)—this is even more shocking—the present Deputy Premier, the Member for Swan River, said that, and I quote: "No government needs balanced budget legislation."

Can't get much more clearer than that. I don't know what planet she's on, but anybody that thinks that government can go on forever and ever and ever, without being responsible and doesn't need to have some kind of checks and balances in place in regard to balancing its books, is—well, you must have great socialist-leaning tendencies, if not even more harsh words for the kind of spending that you could have out there.

That is a completely irresponsible quote from the Minister of Agriculture today, the comments that she made in 1995 in this House about balanced budget legislation, and it shows why the government is in the straits that they are today.

Of course, there were others. The member that was here until last year was Tim Sale and his quote was: "Balancing a budget every year cannot be defended on any economic grounds."

Now that's just priceless, Madam Deputy Speaker. That's got to go down in history, that Tim Sale actually believed that. There are other quotes that I'm not going to take the time to go into today, but that shows you the background as to why the government has gutted the most fiscally responsible, balanced budget law in Canadian history, in North America, recognized across North America, to bring

in this one that they have put before the people of Manitoba today.

It would be one thing if the government wanted to just bring in a bill that would allow them to not balance the books ever again, or under the auspices of once every four years with escape clauses, never having to do it. That would be one thing, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I just want to say that I referred to Premier Pawley a little while ago and the government of the mid-'80s and the actions that they took.

How did they get that debt? How did they quadruple that debt from \$1.4 billion to \$5.2 billion in those days? They did it by being able to say, run a deficit, but, at the end of the year, we'll recapitalize the whole debt. We'll go out and borrow against it, and we will capitalize that deficit into a debt and add it to previous years' debts.

They actually came out in public having done that and said, annually, they balanced the books. Well, this bill—and that's how the debt increased from \$1.4 billion to \$5.2 billion in four years. This bill allows this government to go back in history and do exactly the same thing that Premier Pawley did.

Our Crown corporations in Manitoba, including Manitoba Hydro and others, basically have a \$700-million to \$800-million surplus in Manitoba on an annual basis, on the average. This bill allows the government to go in and borrow against that \$700 million. It allows to recapitalize, if you will, all of the deficits that they might want to—all of the spending sprees that they might want to go on, by balancing off that \$700 million or \$800 million, any surpluses that our Crown corporations might have in Manitoba, and borrow money against that, not call it a deficit, put it into the debt of Manitoba and say we balanced the books.

They're not taking the money out of the Crown; they are borrowing against the Crown's profits. Madam Deputy Speaker, that is a very tricky way of trying to explain to Manitobans, who will have to pay this debt down in the future, that you're balancing the books. That is almost lecherous, if I could be—if I could find a more harsh word, I would, but I can't use some of them in this House. I just have to say that this bill allows the government to do that. I want Manitobans reading this in the future or anyone listening today to understand exactly the impact that this bill could have on future generations of Manitobans, and the openness that allows this government, the open-ended spending blank cheque

that allows this government to have open-ended credit card that this bill provides for the government of Manitoba.

Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, I just want to say as well that there were a couple of taxes there that I missed in my earlier comments too about the largesse that the government is doing while they're on this spending spree. You have got to find some way to pay for it. So they've upped the taxes, as I said, on the labour to build items in Manitoba, but that wasn't good enough. When they got into the second term of government, they immediately put 7 percent on all lawyer, accountant and architect fees for construction and anything that anyone has to go to a lawyer, an accountant or an architect for in the province of Manitoba.

That's just appalling that you can increase taxes, increase the PST; I mean they might as well have left it where it was and put the PST up to 11 or 12 percent. Madam Deputy Speaker, what kind of an exasperated Manitoban wouldn't have been standing out on the front steps of this building if our PST had gone to 12 or 13 percent? That's the effect that this government has had on those particular industries by expanding it, almost a doubling of the taxes in those areas.

Madam Deputy Speaker, fortunately, we've had an economy that has been good, that has been strong across North America until the recent weakening that we've seen. But, certainly, in the first seven or eight years of this government, the growth across many areas of the world was paramount, some of it driven by increases in commodity prices, but other jurisdictions are attracting a lot more people to them than Manitoba. Why? Because people were—you know, they're not blind. They do pay taxes and they don't mind paying taxes. They like—and, in fact, I've had many people tell me they don't mind paying taxes as long as they're getting something for it and they feel that they're getting quality for what they are paying for. Well, Manitoba hasn't been supplying that to them in the past, whether it's been roads or health care, even our education opportunities; we've seen great shortfalls there as well.

Certainly, it's just been fiscally imprudent the actions of this government over the past nine years. So how do you cover that up? Well, you have to bring in a bill like Bill 38 and force people to give you more of their hard-earned taxes and hard-earned dollars down the road. Best way to do that though is

to force it on the future generations, some of them that may not even be born yet.

But I just have to say that, when you bring this kind of a bill in, it does not provide confidence for future generations to establish themselves in Manitoba. Anybody can look at the levels of debt that we have per capita in this province compared to our neighbours and other jurisdictions and they will understand quite quickly that Manitoba is in a very detrimental position. Now I understand, having been born and raised here in Manitoba, that some of us just love the province enough that we'll stay here, Madam Deputy Speaker. I'm sure that she will as well. But there are others who have choices in where they move to in this highly volatile country, economy and world that we have today. We have immigrants that are coming to Canada. We need immigrants to come to Canada because we are short of tradespeople all across the nation.

* (15:50)

Now it's one thing to say well, we'll go and we'll get some people from a foreign land and bring them into Canada, into Manitoba to work, but you know when they get here they have choices in what provinces and states they can go to as well. Will they come to Manitoba? Will they be there in the future?

Madam Deputy Speaker, I just want to close by saying that I believe that the only accountable means of being—you know, if there's anything to do with this act—the last few words are taxpayer accountability act. If there's only one accountable action that I ask the government to do with this bill it is to withdraw the bill, don't pass the bill, rethink the actions that they're putting in place. There are other ways of doing what they are intending to do instead of robbing Crown corporations, dumping huge debt loads on future generations of Manitobans and just completely stripping the responsible actions of reducing debt in the province of Manitoba with this bill.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): It is a pleasure for me to rise this afternoon and participate in third reading of Bill 38, The Balanced Budget, Fiscal Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act.

Indeed, I did have opportunity earlier this week to speak on the amendments that were proposed to this bill by the honourable Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik), and I was very, very

disappointed to see the government's disinterest in the amendments that were put forward, as they were rooted in the committee presentations. As we went through the process, as our legislation requires to provide for public input, we were blessed by very, very well-thought-out presentations on Bill 38 and provided all members of the committee with insight into the public's viewpoint of Bill 38.

Consequently a number of amendments, 23 in total, were brought to the House by the honourable Member for Brandon West and not one, Madam Deputy Speaker, not one was supported by those on the government side of the House. I know that a number were slightly similar in context and were withdrawn once the major amendment was defeated by government, although each amendment did have merit on its own accord.

Now this government, I believe, is setting the stage for a complete dismantling of the balanced budget legislation here in the province of Manitoba, which was passed by the former administration in 1995. Indeed, this government campaigned at length about their support for balanced budgets, and the public supported that position obviously, not only the previous administration but the current one as well. That is, wanting the government to maintain a positive bottom line, as we all do in our day-to-day lives.

This government, as I said, is setting the stage to dismantle that legislation and provide for, under the guise of a change in accounting practices, which I believe every member of the Assembly does support. We should be consistent with other jurisdictions and we should adopt the principles that provide for transparency in the accounting of government and all related agencies of government. I believe that the move to the generally accepted accounting principles as proposed by the Auditor General is a good one and, indeed, does provide not only we, as members in the Legislative Assembly, but the general public as well a very clear accounting of expenditures, of taxpayer dollars or related revenues that come to government and government-related agencies, and how those revenues are disbursed.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Mr. Speaker, this government, though, in this legislation states that, because the principles of accounting have changed to incorporate all Crown agencies, direct and indirectly related to government, it is a pooled source of revenue and a pooled source of expenditures, but not necessarily is that the case

because we as Manitobans believe, when we pay for our Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation premiums, that the insurance and the registration that we pay for will adequately provide for that service for which we in Manitoba are required to pay for.

I don't believe it is a case where Manitobans believe that they should pay more for their automobile insurance and registration, just to subsidize general government operations. This bill allows for that. The same is true for Manitoba Hydro and, as a consumer of energy as we all are in the province of Manitoba, whether it be electrical energy or natural gas, that entity is one that should operate with a balance sheet that is not generating revenues for general government operations.

We know that this government did take, as they termed, a dividend payment from Manitoba Hydro when things were a little tight for their bottom line a few years ago. Mr. Speaker, they received a significant public backlash from that action, because Manitobans did not want to be paying more for their energy from Manitoba Hydro, just to subsidize general government activities.

So that's a couple of examples. Another could very well be for those that are looking at MLCC or Manitoba Lotteries as other sources of revenue. There is quite a lengthy list of other government-related operations that do generate significant amounts of money, but each entity should function on its own and be responsible for generating the required revenues to cover the expenses of that particular entity.

It's not the responsibility of government-owned agencies to be generating and, as quite adequately put by others in the Chamber here, a backdoor to taxation. This government is very, very, well known for its ability to creatively raise additional revenues. There isn't a licence or a permit or a fine in this province that hasn't been raised exponentially over the course of the tenure of the current government. One just does not want to get a speeding ticket in this province, because it is a shock to receive even a minor infraction as to the cost that one will have to provide this government with.

* (16:00)

So this government, with this legislation, is definitely opening the door for the agencies owned by the government to bring forward the additional tax revenues that this government, essentially, should be raising up-front with Manitobans, so Manitobans

can clearly identify with this government's insatiable need for additional revenues. They do need more money each and every year. In fact, when one looks at the gross domestic product and the increase in economic activity within our province, and to see our government expenditures rising almost at twice the rate—in some years it's almost been three times the rate of increased economic activity—this simply, Mr. Speaker, is not sustainable. Hence, this government has devised another way of providing for that insatiable appetite to spend more and more money. Bill 38 provides all related institutions to provide that to them.

It's curious as to how revenues do come by way of government, because every time, as a small-business owner, I turn around, there's another charge or another requirement that takes time, effort and, perhaps, expenditure on my behalf in order to satisfy. I did fill out a form that was required not so long ago and I invoiced government for the time spent in collecting the data which they asked me to provide. Do you think, Mr. Speaker, that this government replied and paid the invoice which I accompanied with the form? No. It's considered a bad debt in my books because this government, obviously, does not value any small-business owner's time, effort. So it does speak volumes as to the attitude that this government has toward small business.

Now, if any one of the members opposite was in small business and was required to fill out all the forms of a retail business here in the province of Manitoba, he or she would be well aware of this government's increased requirements.

I spoke, just briefly, in regard to the small market that we here in Manitoba possess for specialty videos and CDs. I used the example of extreme sport, whether it be wall climbing or the skateboarding. The individual that came to our business and actually secured, confiscated if you will, numerous tapes that did not have the sticker of the Manitoba government on the tape, and the inspector, actually, was boasting that on this trip he had collected more than 1,500 illicit CDs and videotapes throughout the province in his travels. You wonder, these illicit tapes, what actually are they? I queried as to what these tapes may be. Did you know that there was a training tape, a training tape for John Deere mechanics collected in there, because it did not have the Manitoba-rated video sticker on the side of it? I was just beside myself as to it.

My honourable Member for Carman (Mr. Pedersen) asked me, are you really truthful in that statement? And I am. I am. I believe it was resolved at a later date with this government, and they recognized that perhaps training tapes were exempt from the Manitoba review so they could be stickered.

I think the government actually blamed it on an overzealous inspector within their employ for the collection of that particular tape, but this is the type of attitude this government has towards small business in Manitoba. They don't—as persons that came along to actually ask our retail outlet to be a vendor for their particular production, they were extremely dismayed to learn that their tapes had been confiscated and actually went back and researched it and discovered that Manitoba is the only jurisdiction in all of Canada that has this requirement.

When one talks about regulation and legislation and the demands of government, and I know the honourable Minister for Competitiveness, Training and Trade (Mr. Swan) is listening, this is an example of the over-regulated marketplace that we have here in the province of Manitoba. If the CRTC, the level of government responsible for communications, has an acknowledged rating system for audio-visual productions here in Canada, I would say that they are well qualified to provide for the acknowledgments and ratings of various productions. I think that we should leave it to them, and I don't believe this is additional need here in the province of Manitoba, although this government, at this present time, believes that it is necessary that they have a different twist on things, and think that they have a better idea.

Maybe it's an opportunity to employ more persons perhaps. One is left wondering why we here in the province of Manitoba are the only jurisdiction that has this requirement that now—[interjection] It may be termed creative employment, but I hope the Minister of Competitiveness, if he really truly is dedicated to his ministry and the term which describes his responsibility, I think he should be looking into it and making the changes necessary to withdraw that added requirement and encumbrance to doing business in that sector here in the province of Manitoba.

Now, further to the stealth nature of Bill 38, and the hidden agenda that this government has is that the rolling average, or the four-year average that the government is affording itself to provide for a balanced set of books, I think, is not keeping with what the demands and desires of Manitobans are

either because if you or I, Mr. Speaker, were to approach our financial institution to say to the person responsible for our credit that we will pay you back somewhere in the next four years, we will balance our books somewhere in the next four years. Trust us. I don't believe that either one of us would be receiving any additional credit or loan monies with that type of response because every financial institution wants to know that you, in fact, are balancing your financial endeavours each and every year because if you're not, then it is ultimately going to be disastrous.

* (16:10)

I think the quotation that our honourable leader used the other day came from a very prominent news agency more than a decade ago, when it was predicted by the news reporter that the change in legislation by the Clinton administration could spell disaster to the financial markets of the United States by freeing up of finances to persons that had less-than-stellar credit ratings, and the reference to the government-backed, secondary-loan agencies of Fannie Mae in the news article.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, not more than a month ago, that prediction came to be, and the federal government had to, in fact, in the United States bail out with taxpayers' money that agency which was, in fact, only following the government's own direction.

I believe that Bill 38 is, in fact, taking the government of Manitoba down that road and also saying to the various agencies of government that we're all one big family here and we're all going to be pooling our resources at the end of the year.

Then what does that say to the various direct- or indirectly financed institutions here in the province of Manitoba? Does that, then, say to the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority that they can go with their needed expenditures and basically spend more than is allocated or budgeted to them? Does that, then, say to the Winnipeg School Division that they can spend lavishly? But, again, I should couch my terms because I do believe expenditure on education is not an expenditure, but an investment in the future.

If one was to spend and invest more than one has revenues for, ultimately somewhere else within the accounting model which Bill 38 provides for is going to have to make up the difference. It doesn't have to be government that overspends; it could be any agency named within this that is related to the government, that perhaps recognizes that they were

not receiving adequate budgeted monies and then goes about making certain that they provide the services or products to Manitobans that they are mandated to do, and it requires much more money than is actually budgeted. So it is a bringing together of any and all related government-sponsored and perhaps government-owned institutions.

So we want to state very emphatically that we believe, as Conservatives, that each and every entity should be responsible and provide for a positive bottom line at the end of their accounting year, each and every year. Bill 38 does not speak to that.

Also, what is gone in Bill 38, which I was quite surprised that the ministers opposite would not support, the amendment that spoke to adding penalties back in to the respective ministers if their particular department or related agencies did not come within budget at the end of the year and, in fact, actually deficit finance.

I was quite taken aback that the honourable ministers would not support this amendment because, truly, it speaks to the honourable position to which they occupy. I would believe that each and every member of the Executive Council would have wanted to have that clause returned into Bill 38 so that they had that motivation that would be shared by all of their respective staff and would not want to see their minister having to work all year for basically no stipend. I think that particular amendment should have passed with the support of all Executive Council members. But, on the contrary, Mr. Speaker, that did not take place, and it was rather disappointing that that was the case.

So, anyway, Mr. Speaker, I look to the first quarterly report of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), and I see that within the parameters of expenditures most of the departments are actually having a variance that is positive to the bottom line. It is something, though, that I have to state for the record that I'm rather disappointed about. Looking to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) that the particular line of expenditure there, that significantly less monies are being spent by his department, I'm wondering as to why the minister, who fought tirelessly not only in this Chamber, but around the Executive Council table to make absolutely certain that more monies were dedicated to the infrastructure and transportation network here in the province of Manitoba, because I know him to be an honourable man and takes responsibility very seriously because the

infrastructure of those two areas has been waning over the last number of years for various reasons.

But now that the money has been allocated to that department, the question has to be asked as to why, then, is it not being spent. The actual prediction by government's own figures that by the end of June, the department of highways and infrastructure would have actually spent about \$30 million of an annual budget of about \$250 million in that time period, and yet had spent less than \$20 million.

An Honourable Member: It's the weather.

Mr. Faurshou: The honourable minister suggests it might be weather, but I would like to see the minister adopt a tendering process that would allow for greater flexibility to the contractors, that when weather is prohibitive in one area of the province, they may then undertake other projects elsewhere in the province where perhaps the weather is not so much of a factor.

But, Mr. Speaker, we look at other areas of government expenditure, and, for the most part, capital investment is significantly under budget. That was the focus of the honourable Member for Pembina's (Mr. Dyck) grievance this afternoon, was that the significant need of a growing community that he represents, that being Winkler, needs significant investment in infrastructure. When I look to this government that has budgeted for those types of expenditures and then fails to carry through, I'm left doubtful and highly suspect as to whether or not the government is, indeed, going to live up to all of the press releases and media spin opportunities that they had throughout the year. If only one would be able to make sure that they had spent the money on the projects which they have announced time and time again. My honourable colleague for Brandon West would definitely like to see the bridges completed in Brandon for Highway 10, yet they are not.

I wonder if the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation has taken note of the time comparison between the building of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco as compared to the short span, in relationship, over the Assiniboine River, and taking very similar amounts of time. I'm wondering about whether or not this government is really truly committed to projects like the twinning of the bridges in Brandon, because I know that workmen or workers here in Manitoba are equally as skilled and professional as those in the Americas that undertook

that particular awesome undertaking in the Golden Gate Bridge.

* (16:20)

So, Mr. Speaker, I realize from indication from the Clerk's table that my time is growing short.

I do want to say that I, as a principled individual, believe that Bill 38 does not serve the best interests of Manitobans. I will not be supporting the passage of Bill 38 because this government—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I'd like to thank the Member for La Verendrye (Mr. Lemieux) for that welcoming applause as I begin my comments on Bill 38. I've always appreciated his support as I oppose his government. I know that he, probably himself, would like to oppose many of the things that his government brings forward but, constrained by the parliamentary system and the *[inaudible]* that's on in all the issues that come forward from the NDP caucus, he doesn't feel the ability to do that. I will try, in my own way, to oppose these things for him and perhaps some day he'll join me in coming forward and representing the residents of the southeast part of Manitoba.

Let me begin by commending my friend from Brandon West who has led the charge against this particular bill through committee, in the evenings and during the days and a variety of times, I hear, at a legislative committee. He's been a passionate voice for Brandon West on this issue. I know he hasn't been joined—*[interjection]* The Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) is correct—really for all of Brandon because the Member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell) has been silent. I'm sure that even though there's a division electorally in the city of Brandon, there's no division when it comes to ensuring that families in Brandon, and across Manitoba, live within their means and they expect their government to live within their means. I appreciate the fact that the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) has carried that torch, not only in his own area, his own riding and his own city, but right across Manitoba.

I have a special connection, and I think all the residents of the Steinbach constituency, for which I'm pleased to represent, have a very special connection to balanced budget legislation. We like to say that the impetus and the drive for the legislation in 1995 came from residents of the Steinbach constituency. We know that the hardworking residents of that area are not only entrepreneurial but

that they're good stewards of their money. Stewardship is a principle; it's a biblical principle, but it's a general principle, of course, that's applied within the community, the constituency and the region.

There was great attachment to the balanced budget legislation. Not only because it was the first of its kind in Canada but because they believed through driving that legislation, they were building a better province for themselves, for their children and for their grandchildren. So, not surprisingly, there's been a considerable amount of concern and distress regarding this legislation which guts the 1995 balanced budget legislation brought in by the former Filmon government. I've certainly heard many, many constituents that come to me and express concern about the fact that the NDP is now formally and officially moving away from balanced budget legislation.

There have always been concerns and questions about whether or not they are following the spirit and the intent of the 1995 legislation, because they continue to increase the debt even though we have strong economic times. Now this is a formal recognition from the NDP that they do not believe in living within their means, the government's means, year over year.

I understand and the Member for Inkster will correct me if I'm wrong, but the Liberals are also in opposition to this bill. This will be probably a compliment the Member for Inkster would rather not hear, but you know that the bill is economically unsound when the Liberals are even supporting the Conservative position for us, the party who stands in this House and trumpets the green tax and wants to tax Manitobans and Canadians even further. When even they recognize that this particular piece of legislation is ill-conceived, then you know that it has sunk to such a level and to such a low level that it just can't be supported by Manitobans generally or at all.

It's no coincidence that we're here a little bit more than a year after the last election, debating this bill. Had the government, I think, believed in the principle of the legislation that they were bringing forward, they might have decided to bring it to this Chamber in 2006, a year before the provincial election, and then they could have campaigned on it.

I've heard the Premier (Mr. Doer) in this House, as he sometimes does, speak quite loudly about the fact that something was brought forward during the

campaign and then he says he's following through on it after the election. But I don't remember the Premier going around Manitoba a year before the election saying, I'm going to gut balanced budget legislation if I'm re-elected in the 2007 spring election.

Yet he brings it forward now—brought it forward during the last session earlier this year but, after a relatively short period of time after the provincial election, he brings it forward because he didn't want to debate it during the campaign. He hopes that, before the next campaign, people will forget about it or not recognize what has happened with the finances through this particular piece of legislation.

So it's clever; it's politically advantageous, but it's probably too cute by half, Mr. Speaker. I think Manitobans will recognize it for what it is.

I note in the bill, and there are a number of concerns that we have with the legislation but to begin with, of course, the ability for the government through this legislation to now infuse net income of Crown corporations into the government budget to declare a balanced budget. This is a government, probably more than any provincial government—and that's not easy to say because they've had many NDP governments who have interfered with Crown corporations, but I'm not sure that there has been any New Democratic government that's interfered with Crown corporations more than this one.

We can certainly go through a long list of examples. It starts with the decision or the attempted decision by the New Democrats to try to take profits from Manitoba Public Insurance and to put that into universities and funding. Essentially of course, all Manitobans I know support funding through general revenues of our universities and post-secondary institutions but, to try to take the money from Manitoba Public Insurance where the funds were designated and delegated for an insurance purpose and then to try to take that and put it into the university fund, so that you wouldn't have to have that cost off your general revenues, thereby saving the government that funding that would normally come from general revenues, certainly struck Manitobans as not being right and not being what those funds were intended to be used for.

There was quite a push back at that time and Manitobans rallied to the cause. They were concerned about the fact that the government was going to do this and interfere politically with the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation, to take

funds that should be coming from general revenue but taken from the insurance corporation and put them into the universities, not because Manitobans didn't support funding of universities, but they certainly didn't support taking it from Manitoba Public Insurance and then dumping it into that sort of a support where it should be coming from general revenues. So that was certainly one example of the government manipulating and interfering with Crown corporations.

* (16:30)

We've seen other examples. Certainly, in the history of this government, since being elected in late 1999, they tried a variety of different ways to get the Crown corporations to pay for things that normally were coming out of general revenue. We've seen a significant expansion of law enforcement that are being funded through Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation and a variety of other programs that normally would have been funded out of the general revenues and from the Department of Justice now being funded by Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation.

You could look at some of those programs, and you could argue that there's some good reason for some of them to be funded in that way, but there never really is that public debate because these things aren't generally done through legislation; they're done through government direction. So it never really comes to the floor of the Legislature here. It never really goes to the coffee shops or to the main streets of our communities where you can actually have a debate about how the funding for Manitoba Public Insurance is used.

So that's the concern, obviously, with this legislation. The government wants to dump the income from these Crown corporations into the general revenue streams for reporting purposes of the government and try to indicate that they've balanced their budget.

We know we've seen other examples, more recent examples, and there are many of them. It's actually hard to recall all of them, Mr. Speaker, because there are so many, but the most recent, and the one that's being debated here these days is Manitoba Hydro. We've heard the Premier (Mr. Doer) talk many times about how hydro is to Manitoba what oil is to Alberta. He's been saying that for nine years, that Manitoba hydro is to our province what oil is to Alberta.

Yet Alberta's debt continues to go down with their oil, and our debt continues to go up with our hydro. So it's a nice slogan, and it certainly sounds good when you go on to the election trail or into the communities when the Premier swaggers into the coffee shops and says that particular mantra. But, in reality, it's clearly not working. So either the slogan isn't right or how it's operating under this government, under the NDP, isn't working.

I would suggest it's probably the latter. I do think that there's tremendous opportunity with Manitoba Hydro and it could, in many ways, be to our province what oil is to Alberta, but it's not going to, the way this government operates it and directs it, interferes with it politically.

We know that right now there's quite a bit of debate and discussion regarding a power line that is intended to go from northern Manitoba to southern Manitoba, and then, hopefully, be used as export capacity for electricity to other jurisdictions and where the placement of that hydro line will go. It's not an insignificant decision in terms of monetary value. Independent individuals, people independent of this Legislature, have said that it'll cost at least \$600 million—and that's probably a conservative, a small "c" conservative estimate—to have that power line go down the west side as opposed to the east side of the province of Manitoba.

When we've been in committee and had the discussions with the chair of Manitoba Hydro, he's indicated very clearly that that was not Hydro's preference; Hydro's preference was to try to establish the line down the east side of Lake Winnipeg because it was shorter, it was safer, it was more secure, and, of course, it would be cheaper, both in the short term and in the long term, because you wouldn't be losing the hydro electricity power because of the longer line through leakage, the volt leakage.

Yet the government made a decision—the Premier (Mr. Doer), the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), and others in their Cabinet decided that they were going to politically interfere and direct that the hydro line go down the west side of Lake Winnipeg, despite the fact that generations of Manitobans will be paying for that decision, if it's fulfilled, for years to come.

So it's no surprise that we have concerns and that Manitobans have concerns about the ability of the government to dump income from Crown corporations into the books of the Province and then

to pretend that they've balanced the budget over even a four-year period of time.

Which brings me to my second concern, a significant concern, regarding this particular piece of legislation, and that is that it's going to be removing the mandatory provision that a government balances its budget every year, and instead, is going to allow it to budget it over a four-year period of time. This is something I think that the NDP has been looking, at the very least, to do for some time, because they've had difficulty in trying to find any more new and creative ways to work outside the existing balanced budget legislation.

So, finally, they've given that up, and they realize they can't find any more trap doors or other ways to work around the 1995 piece of legislation, and so they had to gut that and now bring in the new provision that says they only have to balance the budget every four years.

Mr. Speaker, this is something, I think, from a very common sense perspective: When you talk to Manitobans, they express significant concern, because Manitobans realize, and in their own individual lives and when they sit around their kitchen tables or their living rooms to discuss the family budget, they recognize that they need to live within their means, and they need to ensure that their own families are run and their households are run in as fiscally prudent a way as possible. If we expect that and if Manitobans expect that of their own families, it's difficult to justify a government who doesn't want to do that themselves, particularly in the economic times that we've been living in in North America over the last eight years.

Sometimes they say it's better to be lucky than good, and, certainly, the New Democrats have been lucky to be governing in Manitoba where a North American economy was lifting up the fortunes of all of Canada, and it didn't necessarily result in the NDP building a more competitive or a more prosperous province. But what it did is, we fell in terms of our economic performance relative to the rest of Canada. It meant that our equalization payments grew as a result of that. Members of this Chamber will know that there are two ways that the federal government sends money to the provinces under our federal system. One is through transfer payments, something that all provinces receive to pay for a variety of services which the federal government has a responsibility to fund, but which the province generally operates. So whether that's areas of justice

or whether that's health care or a variety of other different areas where there's a federal responsibility for funding but a provincial responsibility for operation, that money flows from the federal government to the province in the way of transfers.

Separate from that is what's called equalization payments. Equalization payments, under our federal system when our country was established, were intended to ensure that there was, generally, equality through the different provinces and that there wouldn't be a significant difference between programs that were offered in one part of the country as opposed to offered in another part of the country simply because there was economic disparity between those two provinces. So those provinces who aren't doing as well economically would receive, from provinces who are doing quite well, equalization payments to try to equalize the difference between the ability to fund programs between different jurisdictions.

So, as Manitoba has done more poorly compared to other provinces over the last nine years, our equalization payments have grown and gone up. Now that probably won't be the case for much longer, as we've seen in Ontario, a province who's generally been net contributors to equalization, is doing less well off, and so we would expect the equalization payments to fall. That is certainly one of the reasons I'm sure the government has decided to bring the legislation in because they simply aren't able to make ends meet as the equalization payments are reduced. Whose fault is that? In this environment, you simply have to look at the fact that the government, the NDP, haven't prepared themselves for this inevitability.

Of course, we know and we can look at the markets, and anybody who analyzes the markets or the economy generally would tell you that there is no such thing, while there might be something called a sustained time of growth, there is never an inevitable and growth in perpetuity. There are always times when the economy does less well than at other times. Certainly, it looks as though, as a result of what's happening in the North American and particularly the United States because of the housing crisis, that we are entering a time where our economy won't be doing as well. But there is an expectation of all of us, and is in particular of those who are in government, that they'll do their best during good economic times to prepare for those times when the economy falters.

When you look at the track record of the NDP government increasing the debt through the 1990s, even though they had record revenues coming into the province; of not reducing the debt, even though they had record revenues coming into the province; of not lowering taxes to make us more competitive or at least stay competitive with other provinces, even though we had record money coming into Manitoba; that is truly the fault of the government and it was a missed opportunity. So now, given that, they feel that they have to bring in legislation that will allow them to run a deficit for three years, and possibly four, to get out of that dilemma that they've placed themselves in.

* (16:40)

I don't think it's a fait accompli, Mr. Speaker; I do, in fact, think that there are ways—even though the government has backed itself into a corner with poor fiscal management, there are certainly ways that it could continue to live under the current balanced budget legislation if it made some sound economical decisions.

Starting with that, I mentioned it earlier on in my address, would be to ensure that the hydro line, which it is proposing to build on the west side of Lake Winnipeg, would go on the east side. That alone would save the government at least \$600 million, conservatively, but possibly as much as a billion, and more than a billion dollars based on what others are projecting outside of this Legislature. We've seen the government willing to build a new building for bureaucrats in Winnipeg. Even while other areas of our health-care system are struggling, they're willing to put in \$30 million into a new office building so that the increasing number of bureaucrats who are in the system can be within that new building. That's certainly a decision that I think that this government needs to review. Those are only two examples.

When you look across a variety of different things that the government is proposing to do that are out of step with the priorities of Manitobans, you could find many examples and millions of dollars, totalling billions, I believe, of savings that could be used so that the balanced budget legislation, which Manitobans have been very proud of since 1995, wouldn't have to be dismantled and wouldn't have to be gutted.

I think, when you compare the record of this government to others across the Prairies and right across Manitoba, you'll find, economically, that

we've missed a significant opportunity in the province of Manitoba. I wouldn't go so far, perhaps, as to call it a lost generation, but I do think that, when historians look back over the years 2000 to 2008, the present and beyond, they'll say this was an opportunity for Manitoba to make a significant step forward, to bring this economy into a line competitively with other provinces, as they were able to have sustained and reasonable growth within the economy as a result of the general North American economy on an upward trend, but that opportunity has simply been missed. It won't be regained easily, Mr. Speaker. It won't be easy for us to simply ride the wave of other parts of North America which are bringing us along and helping us, and that's unfortunate because, ultimately, while it's us as individuals who are currently income earners in the province of Manitoba who will shoulder some of that load, it will go on much longer than that. Our children, our grandchildren, their children will be paying for this debt for many more years.

I know that the 1999 legislation, I believe, I had 30-year debt repayment portion as part of the bill. We would almost be half way through that. Can you imagine, Mr. Speaker, being half way through a debt repayment program for Manitoba, as was set out in the 1999 legislation? I remember, and I often hear the Premier (Mr. Doer) say, well, we can't compare ourselves to Alberta because we don't have oil. Even in the same sentence he might say that we have hydro, which is like oil. He does make the point that we aren't able to compare ourselves to Alberta because of that lack of oil. Certainly, Alberta was able to eliminate its debt much quicker than Manitoba ever could because of the oil that they had, but it doesn't mean that we had to say, well, just because we couldn't eliminate the debt within a five-year time frame like Alberta may have, we shouldn't be chipping away and making improvements each and every year when it comes to the debt.

That's really what the 30-year debt repayment program was intended to achieve, Mr. Speaker. We know that it wouldn't be easy, and that it would be a long-term projection. It would have to go through a number of different governments, obviously, because governments come and they go in Manitoba. But, if there was a dedicated effort by all parties in Manitoba, regardless of who was in opposition and who was in government, to maintain that track for those 30 years, then, at a certain time in our history, and now we would be halfway through that, we

could also stand up, with the likes of Alberta, and say that we had eliminated the debt.

Wouldn't that have been a glorious day for all Manitobans to know that their province was on such strong economical footing that they wouldn't be putting forward debt for future generations? Instead of going forward with that, Mr. Speaker, we've gone backwards, and the debt has increased instead of going down. As we lose many young people from our province, one wonders what impact the fact that we don't have the same sort of opportunities as other provinces because of the high debt load that we carry has on the fact that these young people are leaving the province of Manitoba each and every year.

I also know that it seems that the government probably never was truly committed to balanced budget legislation. I've indicated that, throughout their term in government, they've looked at ways to try to skirt the spirit of the legislation by taking programs that would normally be funded through general revenue and putting them onto Crown corporations to fund instead. I know that in 1995 I think that the then-Member for Concordia, the then-opposition leader, referred to balanced budget legislation as silly. He denigrated it; he didn't think it was important in the province of Manitoba. So he's never truly been committed to the principle of living within their means as a government, to truly ensuring that each and every year the budget would be balanced and that they could go forward.

There are other members of his government who made derogatory comments. I remember—well, I don't remember, but I am reminded that the Minister of Agriculture, the Member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk), said that no government actually needs balanced budget legislation. That was a comment that was made then by the Member for Swan River.

The former Member for Wellington, Becky Barrett, indicated that balanced budget legislation was an unrealistic piece of legislation that this government is going to have an enormously difficult time living with. That was the Member for Wellington who indicated at that point that she didn't support balanced budget legislation. So we know through their words and through their actions, Mr. Speaker, that this is a government who's been trying to move around, to get around this piece of legislation for a long time because they didn't like it.

The reason that they never probably, I'm going to suspect, came out and directly said that they were going to withdraw the legislation is because they

know that Manitobans like it. They know that instinctively Manitobans believe that their government should have to live within its means. They know that Manitobans can recognize that, if the government continues to spend more than it takes in year after year, eventually that's going to have a difficult and a tough time on the books of the government and, ultimately, on Manitobans. That's probably why these members opposite, the NDP government, didn't just directly repeal the legislation because they knew, in fact, that the Manitobans believed in it and were a driving force behind it and wanted to keep it.

It didn't stop the government from doing everything it could to try to find a way around it, and this is certainly the most direct attack on the legislation, by going forward and trying to make a change to the bill that will really gut the legislation. Members and Manitobans won't recognize the legislation as a result of the changes that are coming from Bill 38.

You know, when you look at debt servicing and the costs of debt servicing, of course, there's the cost to individuals Manitobans through the concern that they have regarding the debt, but there's also a very tangible cost. I mean, every dollar that one puts, applies to the debt, results in some amount of savings from servicing that debt. Had we not been applying and growing the debt in the province of Manitoba through the NDP government, you can imagine all the different projects that we could be doing to improve Manitoba right now when the government says that they don't have the resources. I know that within my own community there's a great need for schools. We've heard from the Member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck), who passionately talked about the shortage of space, the schools within his constituency. Really, my constituency is a mirror of that where the high school is bursting at the seams, where the elementary schools are bursting at the seams. The government says, well, we don't have the money to do all of this right now.

* (16:50)

Well, if they'd been paying down the debt over the last nine years, that certainly would have freed up a good amount of money because it wouldn't be servicing bad debt, and they could address some of these issues.

I think of the operating room at the Steinbach Bethesda Hospital. I met with the doctors again last week, who told me that it's not up to code, that it's

not up to standard. We hear the government talk about fruit flies in operating rooms. Well, they should come to Steinbach and see an operating room that isn't up to code any more, and they might not want to be so high and mighty in some of the comments that they make. That could have certainly been used if they'd been paying down the debt.

You've given me the signal, Mr. Speaker, that my time is up in terms of debating this particular piece of legislation, but I certainly hope—and I hear the Member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar) indicate that he may want to have me continue on. Maybe he's changing his mind. I would applaud the Member for Selkirk if he is, but I also hope that all members of the government will take a second look, to step back, realize it's not good for Manitoba, not good for Manitobans, and withdraw Bill 38.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 38, third reading, The Balanced Budget, Fiscal Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act.

It really is unfortunate that the purpose of this bill is to withdraw or take away from Manitoba's balanced budget legislation which was passed in 1995 and arguably, the best fiscally responsible legislation anywhere. I guess, perhaps, the signal that it's sending is what really worries me because, apparently, now this government is worried about running deficits, and under the balanced budget legislation, it can't run deficits or, if it does, there are reduced salaries for Cabinet ministers and measures to prevent the province from increasing debt.

What Bill 38 will essentially do is allow the province to run up more debt, and that's not good at a time right now when we see the financial meltdown that's happening south of the border and the worries that all of us have on our savings and on our funds that we have invested. Bill 38 not only will allow them to run deficits on a yearly basis, what it's doing is it's also going to, on an annual basis, if they are faced with deficits, they'll be able to raid the Crown corporations to boost their performance of the government and balance their summary budget on a yearly basis. It not only allows them to raid the Crown corporations to balance their own books, but Bill 38 also means that they only have to balance their summary budget every four years. I don't know of many households, many companies, many businesses across Manitoba, I don't know of any of them, actually, that only balance their budgets, their

household budgets, their business budget, every four years. Certainly, the ones that do are probably facing a financial meltdown along with the U.S. right now because it's just not fiscally prudent to do that.

I also note that it becomes virtually impossible for a deficit to occur with a four-year summary budget. Even with hundreds of millions of unfunded spending by core government each year, and I want to add that the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) has assured me that under Bill 38, if Bill 38 is passed, even he could balance the budget. That's what he has told me, that this is such a no-brainer, that you can do anything right now by a government and still balance your core budget on a yearly basis.

I know the government accuses us, and particularly our Finance critic, of gloom and doom on a daily basis that we're—but all you have to do is—what we've been asking the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) is to demonstrate what actions he will take if there is a slowing of our economy in Manitoba. He quotes many statistics about GDP, the debt and lots of statistics, but there's no plan. When there's no plan, that's when problems happen because there's no plan for when there is a downturn, should it actually happen. I don't think anyone in the opposition is hoping for a downturn. Goodness, we all live in this province. We all want to see the province do well, but I'm sure the American economy was not asking for a financial meltdown there either. They called it creative financing in the U.S., and that seems to be where this Bill 38 is headed.

I know that the Member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire), the Member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) quoted various members of this House, government members of this House, when they were both in opposition, but I'm not going to go there. I am not going to go there because I wasn't here in those years. I can read the quotes, but I would like to relate this back to a more personal level. It comes from business experience. I realize that there is very little business experience on that side of the House, but if any of them happened to be in business in the late '70s, as I was—

An Honourable Member: We're all too young.

Mr. Pedersen: —I guess if you're too young you really need to listen because it is the voice of

experience here. If you were in business in the late '70s and the early '80s, there was a lot of debt around; there were very low interest rates. When the early 1980, '81, '82, whatever the year was, the interest rate went to 20 and 21 percent. That killed a great deal of businesses. I paid for that out of my business for the next 15 years to get back out of that.

When I see this government going into debt—and they've raised our provincial debt. We've been on historically low interest rates for a number of years, historically low interest rates, and we know that what goes down will come back up again. What is going to happen to this province when the interest rate goes back up and then you're going to have to pay off this debt? I realize that there's no experience on that side of the House and they have no business experience; they don't know that. Perhaps they should take this into account.

There's a liquidity crisis in the U.S. If the interest rate only goes up a couple—*[interjection]* Borrow more money. The interest rates are going to go down. Maybe this government is hoping that it would be like in Japan where it was actually a negative interest rate. Mr. Speaker, they actually paid you to go into debt; you know, maybe this is where he's getting his experience from. I'm not really sure.

This is all if; we don't know when it's going to happen. We're suggesting that it may happen if we have a drop in transfer payments, if we have a rise in interest rates. These are reasonable assumptions to make. These are reasonable assumptions to make, but there is no plan out of this government, contingency plan, for what would happen if those events really do happen. The debt-servicing costs on our debt, provincial debt, will climb astronomically. Our debt has gone—our provincial debt was \$13.5 billion in 1999. As of today, as of total debt, as of 2008, it is \$19.5 billion. The interest costs alone on those at today's rates are astounding. Now you're going to, if we see a rise in the interest rates, which we may very well when—

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have 21 minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, October 2, 2008

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<http://www.gov.mb.ca/legislature/hansard/index.html>