

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLAN, Nancy, Hon.	St. Vital	N.D.P.
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ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
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<i>Vacant</i>	Elmwood	
<i>Vacant</i>	The Pas	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 26, 2009

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYER

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 11—The Highway Traffic Amendment and Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Amendment Act

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Family Services and Housing (Mr. Mackintosh), that Bill 11, The Highway Traffic Amendment and Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Amendment Act; Loi modifiant le Code de la route et la Loi sur la Société d'assurance publique du Manitoba, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, this bill will incorporate changes in the Criminal Code into our vehicle forfeiture act as well as incorporate changes in the Criminal Code that have been made with regard to speeding into our provisions and entitlements under The Manitoba Public Insurance Act.

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

PETITIONS

Long-Term Care Facility—Morden

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

The background for this petition is as follows:

Tabor Home Incorporated is a time-expired personal care home in Morden with safety, environmental and space deficiencies.

The seniors of Manitoba are valuable members of the community with increasing health-care needs requiring long-term care.

The community of Morden and the surrounding area are experiencing substantial population growth.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) to strongly consider giving priority for funding to develop and staff a new 100-bed long-term care facility so that clients are not exposed to unsafe conditions and so that Boundary Trails Health Centre beds remain available for acute-care patients instead of waiting-placement clients.

This is signed by Sarah Peters, Sarah Wiebe, Phyllis Loeppky, Betty Penner 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.

Seven Oaks Hospital—Emergency Services

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

The background to the petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Premier of Manitoba consider how important it is to have the Seven Oaks Hospital

provide full emergency services seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by K. Coates, H. Enns, R. Waluk and many, many other fine Manitobans. Thank you.

Emergency Medical Services—Rural Manitoba

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

The communities of Eddystone, Bacon Ridge and Ebb and Flow First Nation rely on emergency medical services personnel based in Ste. Rose, which is about 45 minutes away.

These communities represent about 2,500 people. Other communities of similar size within the region are equipped with at least one ambulance, but this area is not. As a result, residents must be transported in private vehicles to the nearest hospital if they cannot wait for emergency personnel to arrive.

There are qualified first responders living in these communities who want to serve the region but need an ambulance to do so.

A centrally located ambulance and ambulance station in this area would be able to provide better and more responsive emergency services to these communities.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) to consider working with the Parkland Regional Health Authority to provide a centrally located ambulance and station in the area of Eddystone, Bacon Ridge and Ebb and Flow First Nation.

This petition is signed by Jackie North, Caroline Cabak, Diane Cabak and many, many others.

Traffic Signal Installation—PTH 15 and Highway 206

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Speaker, these are the reasons for this petition:

In August 2008, the Minister of Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) stated that traffic volumes at the intersection of PTH 15 and Highway 206 in Dugald

exceeded those needed to warrant the installation of traffic signals.

Every school day, up to a thousand students travel through this intersection in Dugald where the lack of traffic signals puts their safety at risk.

Thousands of vehicles travel daily through this intersection in Dugald where the lack of traffic signals puts at risk the safety of these citizens.

In 2008, there was a 300 percent increase in accidents at this intersection.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Transportation consider the immediate installation of traffic signals at the intersection of PTH 15 and Highway 206 in Dugald.

To request that the Minister of Transportation recognize the value of the lives and well-being of the students and citizens of Manitoba.

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

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Eric Robinson (Acting Minister charged with the administration of The Communities Economic Development Fund Act): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the Third Quarter Financial Statement for the Communities Economic Development Fund.

Messages

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I have one revised message from His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor which I would like to table today.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will members please rise for the reading of the Lieutenant-Governor's message.

The Lieutenant-Governor transmits to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba Estimates of sums required for the services of the province for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2010, and recommends these Estimates to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

* (13:40)

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Provincial Ice Jams and Flooding

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

Mr. Speaker, large ice jams developed late yesterday afternoon near Lockport causing significant flooding in the rural municipalities of St. Andrews, West St. Paul, St. Clements and East St. Paul.

This morning the Premier (Mr. Doer) and I toured the affected area and met with community leaders to assess the situation. We also met with officials from the Manitoba EMO, Manitoba Water Stewardship, the Office of the Fire Commissioner and Manitoba Conservation who are working diligently to help affected municipalities meet the needs of their residents.

So far, approximately 50 homes in the area have been affected by either overland flooding and/or water rising from the ice jam. The Province has moved heavy equipment into the affected area to try to resolve the ice jam. Additional provincial assistance has also been put in place to protect the homes and communities.

Two sandbag machines, 100,000 sandbags have been dispatched to the area. As well, approximately 9,000 feet of water barriers have been deployed to the highest priority areas.

Initial reports this morning have indicated the ice jam broke up and began to dissipate. It's very likely the ice could jam again as it moves down river. Provincial crews are on location monitoring the situation and will continue to work closely with municipalities and emergency co-ordinators to protect homes and communities from the flood.

This government takes flood protection very seriously. Last week, I met with the federal Minister of Public Safety to ensure that he was aware of the serious flood potential in Manitoba. As a province, we work closely with the federal and municipal governments to prepare for flooding. In fact, we've spent approximately \$875 million on flood protection.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and if members wish a briefing—I mentioned this yesterday—it is also available from EMO at any time.

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take the opportunity to thank the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs for his update on the flooding situation.

It's always a tragedy when homes are threatened and some flooded and some evacuations take place, but it's always equally important that we are updated, that we know what's going on, that the staff of the Province and the various offices are out there on the ground assessing the rather quickly changing situation that needs to be monitored immediately.

This morning our Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler) was able to tour the area in West St. Paul and speak with municipal officials out there, so we're getting updates from other directions, too, that are very valuable to us. We're quite willing to work with you every step of the way through this process to deal with the problems that might arise. Once again, thank you.

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

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

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I share with others in the Manitoba Legislature the concern about the effects of the ice jam on people north of Winnipeg, in the Lockport area. This is clearly a serious situation.

Last week, Mr. Speaker, I was in Selkirk to meet with residents who were very concerned about the adequacy of provincial measures to deal with ice jams north of Winnipeg. The residents were very specific. They expressed concern that the Amphibex was not sufficient in dealing with ice jams like this and that the measures taken by the Province were not adequate. They felt that their Province should have, in fact, brought in Hovercraft that they have used in Québec and the rivers there, St. Lawrence and others, as have been used in the rivers in Illinois, because they can be used effectively in the cases of ice jams.

So I would ask the Province to take a serious look at the use of Hovercraft in the future because, clearly, the extent of ice jamming can't be prevented by the measures that have been taken this year.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the table. I ask all members to assist me in welcoming Greg Recksiedler, our

newly appointed Clerk Assistant/Research Officer to the table.

I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today representatives from the Epilepsy and Seizure Association of Manitoba. We have Phyllis Thomson, the executive director, along with Danielle Thompson, Raye Brook and Shelly Boychuk, who are the guests of the honourable Member for Fort Rouge (Ms. Howard).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Flooding Government Strategy

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Minister responsible for Emergency Measures (Mr. Ashton), as well as others who have offered their comments today with respect to the current situation facing many Manitobans as a result of the ice jamming and high water levels that exist along the Red River and other rivers and tributaries flowing into it.

I would just want to emphasize the point that these significant acts of nature that occur in our province from time to time are not events that anybody should be attempting to score political points off of. These are times when Manitobans come together and work together, and I appreciate the fact that the Premier has extended an invitation to tour some of the affected areas tomorrow, as well as to learn more about preparation for flooding as the ice begins to melt.

I just want to ask the Premier if he can provide the House with an update on the discussions he has had, observations made and strategies in place on the part of the government, with the support of the opposition, to deal with the situation we today face and the situation we may face in the weeks ahead.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): I agree that when Manitobans have been faced and this Legislature has been faced with challenges of nature, we have always worked in a non-partisan way. We continue to believe that's obviously in the public interest, and I respect that from the Leader of the Opposition. I know I'll have that as well from other colleagues in the Chamber.

I would also offer our best wishes to the people of North Dakota, particularly in Fargo, who are dealing with the pending crest within the next 48 hours in that community.

In terms of the areas north of the city, late last night after meetings on the budget, I determined to go out there early this morning. I want to thank all the community leaders and I want to thank all the volunteers that came forward, the volunteer firefighters that helped fill the tubes with water to protect areas in West St. Paul. I want to thank all the people in St. Andrews that sandbagged and were still sandbagging this morning. I want to thank the people of St. Clements who also worked against very difficult odds last evening and into this morning until the ice dropped at 7:30 this morning. It is always a human story. I met a couple that I knew that had water in their basement last evening and it was rising right till 6:30 until the ice moved a little bit on the river.

We certainly will take any advice we have from our experts on how to deal with ice. I know there are other questions pending because I've only touched a bit of the surface on the question raised by the leader.

*(13:50)

Ice-Jam Mitigation Strategy Components

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments, and we certainly share the Premier's desire to express to the people in the United States, and in North Dakota in particular, our concern for what's happening and certainly our support as they attempt to overcome the challenges that they currently face and will be facing in the coming days.

A couple of the issues that have arisen through some media comment and questions and comments that we have received relate to efforts with respect to the ice jamming, which is significant and greater than other levels that we've seen for a very long time, and also questions about the operation of the floodway in the coming days or weeks.

I wonder if the Premier can provide any update on those two issues. Sorry, Mr. Speaker, if I could, I would also like to thank Mr. Warkentin, Mr. Topping and the staffs of their departments for the briefing that we received last week.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): The task force did meet with our experts and will continue to be available to

all members of the House in a judicious use of their time because they're also working as hard as they can, working with EMO and highways and the reeves and volunteers on the flood prevention side.

On the issue of localized flooding based on ice jams, we have more capacity to deal with ice, but we don't have complete capacity ever to deal with some of these situations. We purchased another larger Amphibex after the situation in Selkirk. We had the machinery up in that area for the last two weeks to try to have the ice be able to move a little quicker in that area. We have ice cutters that, according to the reeves today and the mayors today of West St. Paul, St. Andrews and St. Clements, all said that these ice-cutting machines are really working well. They're adjusting them as they go in terms of advice we're receiving.

We are concerned that the floodway, which has been expanded dramatically, needs to have an ice-free situation to work effectively. The floodway's working; its spillway is working now. We have opened the Shellmouth Dam, I think, on two occasions. It's now closed to make sure that the peak of the Assiniboine is earlier and less than when the peak of the Red takes place in Winnipeg. When the ice is free—[interjection] Well, the member opposite will know our legislation in that regard, and I thank him for his applause. The whole issue of the Assiniboine Diversion, again, we're very sensitive in Portage about the use of that, again, with ice.

Ice is crucial to manage ice for the floodway operation. We need a couple of days of weather that will allow the ice to move through and for the capacity to open the floodway and relieve both the potential of localized flooding in Winnipeg and the potential to relieve, somewhat, the pressure north of Winnipeg.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, we know as Manitobans how fortunate we are to have such dedicated and experienced municipal leaders around our province and community leaders who have been through challenging times previously, as well as provincial and federal government leaders and officials who are also bringing to bear resources and support to this fight which is being led at the front lines.

So I just want to indicate our support and thanks to those municipal leaders and folks working on the ground today, both regular citizens and elected officials around our province.

Mr. Speaker, there have been comments made about the floodway expansion, and there was an announcement made seven days ago by the Minister of Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick) in Selkirk where she made reference to an ice-jam mitigation strategy.

I want to ask the Premier just if he can expand on the components of the government's ice-jam mitigation strategy. We've heard about the Amphibex machinery. Are there other elements to that ice-jam mitigation strategy in addition to the Amphibex and the equipment that's being used to bore holes in the ice as well?

There was reference to that strategy. I'm wondering if they could just expand on it. Thank you.

Mr. Doer: Well, the machinery operates to break up the ice and cut the ice. There are two. We've ordered a second and larger one after the situation in Selkirk, and we now have two of those devices. We also have the ice cutters. They can't operate when the conditions become so serious that the operators could, in fact, have their life at peril. That's what we're very concerned about.

We are operating one at Lake Manitoba to allow the Assiniboine Diversion ice jams to be facilitated and, again, to allow (a) water to be diverted from Winnipeg and north of Winnipeg and (b) have ice move more effectively through Lake Manitoba through the Assiniboine Diversion.

As I said before, the Shellmouth Dam situation has retained water after it was flowing. It flowed twice this winter and, again, to reduce water impact on the Assiniboine River with the Capital Region.

On the issue of ice management, we have deployed the Amphibex in the past in Winnipeg when ice jams took place on bridges. I think there were a couple of bridges where ice jammed up and affected, again, localized flooding in Winnipeg. We will continue to use that if we can in a very safe way. We're not going to put an operator's life in jeopardy.

Obviously, this is better capacity than what we had a few years ago, but it can't deal with every challenge of Mother Nature. This has been a winter, I think, that all of us could acknowledge, with rain in February and cold weather since then and rain again this week and then cold weather and a blizzard, or storm, since then that are very challenging.

It's also affecting overland flooding. There is a considerable amount of ice in culverts from the rain in February, a considerable amount of ice in those culverts that we are trying to determine, along with the municipal officials, which ice can be used with steam heat and freed up, and the other side of that, when we have flooding come from one direction and the other direction, how do we manage the culverts so we don't have flooding coming from both directions affecting people's property and obviously their safety.

Ice-Jam Mitigation Strategy Amphibex Usage

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, in the rural municipalities of East St. Paul, West St. Paul, St. Andrews and St. Clements, evacuation orders were delivered at about 5 p.m. To those families that were flooded and affected, certainly our hearts go out to them. The reason why evacuation orders were sent out was due to an ice jam and there was a danger of extensive flooding.

I would like to ask the minister responsible: What effect did the Amphibex or ice-breaking machine have on the ice jam when considering the challenges of the cold temperatures, the time it took to deploy and the darkness that was already setting upon us at about 5 o'clock yesterday?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Water Stewardship): Mr. Speaker, the EMO, working with Water Stewardship, is watching very closely. The evacuation orders were delivered, a precautionary; we want to make sure that people and their homes are taken care of and that they're given as much notice as possible.

The ice, the way that it was formed, it would have been unsafe to actually put the Amphibex into the water. We have to also take care of the workers, make sure they're in a safe environment. So the Province acted very quickly to move two large backhoes to the river's edge to push the ice down the river and break up the ice jam. The jam formed in a V towards Lake Winnipeg. It's by cutting off the edges of the V-shape along the shores that we were hopeful that the ice would move forward on its own.

Tube Diking System Effectiveness

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Speaker, with the evacuation orders, residents of East St. Paul, West St. Paul, St. Andrews and St. Clements asked for sandbags and found out that they were in limited

supply. Even worse, they found out that sandbags didn't actually work, considering there was so much ice on the ground. The flash flood came very quickly so there was a time issue and, again, lack of supply.

I'd like to ask the minister: What is the effect of the water barrier tube diking system and how is the tube diking system working?

* (14:00)

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): I want to be very up front here. The situation that the emergency response crews were dealing with yesterday couldn't have been more difficult because of the fact that you're dealing not only with ice jams; you're also dealing with overland flooding. In fact, a number of houses were evacuated because of that.

You have frozen culverts, and on top of that the normal ability with sandbags is more limited when you have icy conditions. You need a stable base for sandbags, and, indeed, that was not there.

We have taken the initiative over the last couple of years and, in fact, more recently brought in some additional flood tubes, if you like, the barriers that I referenced. There were even difficulties with them, largely because the pumps were freezing. I think people are all aware of the fact that we may have spring flooding, but we certainly don't have spring weather right now, and it creates all sorts of difficulties and I can add to that—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Distribution

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): With flash floods being a concern to East St. Paul, West St. Paul, St. Andrews, St. Clements and even St. Norbert, will the Province commit to acquiring a supply of the tube diking. They're highly mobile, fast response and very effective. If the tube diking was centrally distributed by EMO, they can then be used throughout the province at any time.

Will the government inform the local authorities that the tube diking is available to them on a fast-response basis at no cost to their local governments?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): Mr. Speaker, that was exactly the message I relayed to the reeve yesterday. In fact, I talked to him in terms of East St. Paul. That was communicated, again, the Premier (Mr. Doer), with the four affected municipalities.

Our approach in this province has always been if you need something, you do it first and, quite frankly, you deal with the bill afterwards.

I did raise it, by the way, pre-emptively last week with Minister Van Loan, the Minister of Public Safety, and I talked to Joy Smith, the Member of Parliament, last night in terms of this, because we certainly would welcome some federal support for this.

But we indicated last night, and I said directly to East St. Paul, we will order it for East St. Paul. We'll deploy it as soon as possible in addition to the flood tubes we already had in place, and in terms of the funding for it, Mr. Speaker, we will talk to the federal government because, quite frankly, the federal and provincial governments should be the ones looking at the significant part of the cost, not the local ratepayer—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Highway 59 Need for Upgrades

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Do the work and send the bill didn't work for Sandilands in the past.

Mr. Speaker, flooding will cause considerable disruptions for the trucking companies, particularly if the ports of entry at Emerson are closed and access to Highway 75 is restricted. Unfortunately, rerouting truck traffic onto 59 highway is not an option, as it's not up to commercial standards.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation provide a time frame for upgrade on 59 highway so that it can be used as an alternate route for truck traffic during future floods?

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): I have to state to the member opposite that this government, through the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) and my department, have also issued orders to the Department of Transportation that they be very cognizant of the fact that a lot of farmers are trying to get their oilseeds and grains and possibly animals and cattle moved to market prior to any flood waters coming. So we've issued orders to make sure that special permits be authorized to the farming community.

So in answer in part to what the member is stating, or at least raising, is that we're very, very

supportive of the agricultural community in rural Manitoba and also trucking companies and also agribusiness in trying to assist them prior to any huge flood waters arriving in the province.

Emerson Border Crossing Public Notification if Closed

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): I think the minister missed the question. It was if the border closed, and as far as the agricultural people moving their stuff, we agree that that's important. His 10-year plan, however, hasn't included any particular instances of these floods which happen more regularly.

Mr. Speaker, we're on the eve of a spring break, a time when many Manitobans are on the move visiting friends and family or taking short trips into the United States. Many of these travellers will cross the border at the very busy Port of Emerson.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister responsible advise under what flood conditions the Port of Emerson would be closed to vehicle traffic and how this information will be conveyed to the motoring public?

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): We're certainly working very closely with EMO and our close friends in the United States, and I'm sure the member opposite would know that if I-29 is closed, many Manitobans certainly wouldn't be travelling to North Dakota with I-29 being closed, even if 75 is still open.

With regard to communications, our government certainly has been working closely with our friends and neighbours to the south of us and trying to stay on top of the issues related to the flood. I know our EMO people also are working with our transportation people and people in Infrastructure and Transportation to determine the safety of our roads and the routes that should be used in case 75 is overtaken by water.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, safety comes first to make sure that the travelling public—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Alternate Routes if Closed

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, there's a possibility that some Manitobans may be inadvertently caught in North Dakota when the flood conditions lead to the closure of the Port of Emerson.

Would the minister advise how motorists travelling to and from the United States will be diverted if the Port of Emerson is closed to traffic?

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Well, the member opposite raises a lot of what-ifs. Having said that, Mr. Speaker, we're certainly looking at alternative routes for the travelling public, either coming in through the southern port at Highway 12 or Highway 59, and also looking at possibly going further west. Again, I just want to reiterate, safety comes first and we're going to ensure that it's not just Manitobans travelling to and from the United States but also our American friends or people who are travelling from other provinces. We want to make sure that their safety is ensured.

I can assure the member opposite that we're doing everything that we can, and we will make sure that we're doing everything we can to ensure that the travelling public is safe. We're going to make sure that we use all the media and communication at our disposal to ensure that that message is transferred to the travelling public.

Budget Deficit

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, challenging economic times requires bold actions. Instead, yesterday we received a shell game played out on the good people of Manitoba. By his own admission, outlined in his own budget, we see our own-source revenues dropping. Expenses are up 4.4 percent and there's an actual budget loss of \$88 million, yet the Minister of Finance hides in his fantasy world and refuses to face reality.

My question is: Will the minister simply admit that he has a deficit in budget 2009?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): I can do no better than quote an economist from the Toronto Dominion Bank that says: The Manitoba government could have taken the easy way out. Notably, it could have opted to run a deficit as has become the norm across Canada and around the world in 2009, or it could have elected to postpone previously announced tax cuts.

We did none of those things. We balanced the budget. We kept Manitoba one of the foremost affordable places to live in Canada and we did it

under generally accepted accounting principles, which you yourself demanded we follow just a few brief months ago.

Debt Retirement

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the minister did not balance the budget. In fact, the minister can't even hide behind Bill 38. Even with Hydro's \$265 million brought forward, he can't balance the budget. The Finance Minister has to amend Bill 38 to retract his commitment to retire debt from \$110 million a year to \$20 million a year, just another example of this pathetic shell game.

Why can't the minister live up to his legislative responsibilities as outlined in Bill 38 that they forced on Manitoba?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, one of the more important features of legislation we've brought before the Legislature for balanced budgets is that we no longer can sell off assets like the telephone system, put the money in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, count it once as revenue, take it out of the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, count it twice as revenue and then say we've balanced the budget. That's illegal in Manitoba right now.

We made a prudent choice to retain liquidity in the budget and at the same time use money for infrastructure spending, which will generate jobs, generate economic activity and build long-term assets, which will increase the prosperity of all Manitobans.

Mr. Borotsik: Mr. Speaker, if we depend on this Finance Minister to increase the prosperity of Manitobans, unfortunately we're all heading in the wrong direction. I can assure you of that.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 38 that this minister was the author of, that this minister put forward to this House, that we opposed because it's not balanced budget legislation, says that the minister has to retire debt of \$110 million. In this budget it's already been changed to \$20 million.

Is he just taking this House for granted? Why can't he live up to his own legislative responsibilities? Why can't he live up to his own legislation?

* (14:10)

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, back in the good old days when the members opposite thought they ruled the world, they did nothing on the pension liability. They had no plan to deal with that. In this budget, for the second year in a row, all the employers' responsibilities for teachers and civil servants, for the employers' portion of that pension fund, are fully funded at \$135 million.

In addition, because we now follow generally accepted accounting principles, we have an additional \$135 million for amortization pay-down in this budget. Every asset now has a discipline built into it to pay it off during its useful life. In addition, we have \$20 million for general purpose debt.

That's \$290 million of debt obligations being paid down. You, when you were in office, paid down only \$75 million. This is at least three and a half times that, way more than what you ever did and way more than what you will ever do.

Personal Income Tax Rate Future Reductions

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, there is one important item that is missing in this year's budget. This budget lacks a plan for the future and a vision for Manitoba.

Now, in last year's budget—this is back when times were better—this government promised to reduce the personal income tax rate in 2010 and 2011. However, this budget does not show any sign of reducing personal income tax in the future.

Why has this minister abandoned his previous plan to reduce the personal income tax rate into the future?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): I can do no better, once again, than to give a quote from the Bank of Montreal, Mr. Speaker: Manitoba's 2009-10 budget takes a balanced approach against a weakening economic backdrop, offering modest spending growth and continued gradual tax relief. Manitoba will be one of the few, select few to balance the books this coming year.

Mr. Speaker, this budget reduced taxes for individuals and families. It reduced taxes for small business. It reduced the corporate tax rate. It introduced refundability for research and development investments in this province.

All of those things, Mr. Speaker, make Manitoba one of the most competitive jurisdictions in North America to do business or to live and work.

Mr. Cullen: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact remains that Manitobans will continue to pay some of the highest rates of income tax in Canada. Manitoba is one of only two provinces which do not index tax brackets due to inflation.

In last year's budget, they did indicate that brackets would increase in both 2010 and 2011. However, this budget does not show any future savings for Manitoba taxpayers. Why has the minister reneged on his previous commitment?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I wish the member would take a few minutes to read the budget. If he read the tax reductions that we have in the budget for this year, he will see \$110 million of tax savings for Manitobans—individuals, families and businesses. If he looks at that same page in the budget, he will see there is a further \$50 million of tax reductions next year.

The member is simply wrong: \$150 million of tax savings over the next two years; Manitoba families and businesses in the top three for affordability in this country. You wish you could do as well.

Mr. Cullen: Well, the unfortunate part of the minister's statement is that more Manitobans are out of work, and actually the Province won't be taking in as much income tax.

We're getting a lot of spin from the minister. Here is a fact for the minister. A family of four in Manitoba with two income earners making \$60,000 a year is now the second-highest taxed in Canada behind only Québec.

Why in this budget has the minister broken his previous commitment to reduce personal income taxes?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, in this budget we again have kept all Manitoba families in the top three for affordability, whether it's a single individual, whether it's a single mom, whether it's a family with a single-income earner, a family of four, or a double-income earner family of four. We have kept all of them in the top three for affordability in this province.

Mr. Speaker, it's no accident we did that. We designed our tax policies to do that. We've kept the cost of energy among the lowest in North America,

the cost of auto insurance among the lowest in North America. Daycare costs are very affordable.

All of these items that are in the budget, I must remind members, they voted against every single one of them. I don't know why you would vote against something and then ask for it now. Why would you do that?

Provincial Debt Increase

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Well, Mr. Speaker, I must say affordability is fine if you have money in order to spend, but this minister is keeping most of his money for the coffers of the Province of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, it seems the Finance Minister's stimulus package relies not only on an unrealistic dependency on Ottawa transfers but also on a very dangerously high level of debt. This year, budget to budget, Manitoba's debt will increase by \$1.5 billion. The Finance Minister has the audacity to say that he has a balanced budget while at the same time placing our children and our grandchildren in debtors' prison.

Why is the Finance Minister so addicted to debt and when is he going to say enough is enough?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the member comes from the time of the Bennett buggy and the Hooverville village of unemployed people of the United States. His political philosophy on how to deal with budgets was the one that put North Americans out of work for an entire decade.

We have a stimulus plan in this budget, \$625 million of additional expenditure which will generate up to 10,000 person years of employment. We're doing that having reduced our debt as a proportion of our economy by 25 percent. We will keep that debt lower by 25 percent than when we came into office.

The stimulus package is prudent, the debt levels are prudent and the economy has grown over 45 percent since we've been in office. Every Manitoban is better off with higher personal disposable income and more assets for the public well-being.

Mr. Borotsik: Mr. Speaker, that is nothing but smoke and mirrors. It's this minister who's living back in the early 1990s.

Mr. Speaker, it's time that this minister and this government stop living in the past. This is 2009 and the Finance Minister has to wake up to his own economic demons. He has to take responsibility for his own economic mismanagement.

We compete, Mr. Minister, with western Canada. Do you understand? Debt-to-GDP, Mr. Minister, in Manitoba is 23 percent. Debt-to-GDP in British Columbia is 15 percent. Debt-to-GDP in Saskatchewan is 6.3 percent. Alberta is zero.

We are first with the highest taxes in western Canada, first with the highest debt in western Canada, first with the highest equalization requirements in western Canada. Are those first places, Mr. Minister, that you're proud of?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the member is just wrong on the face of it. His facts are wrong. We don't just compete with Canada; we compete with the entire world.

When KPMG recently did a study on where's the best place to have business in North America, Manitoba and Winnipeg were at the top of the list. We were at the top of the list, and the member wants to deny that. The member wants to deny that.

The reality is, Mr. Speaker, that our assets, our net book value of our assets have grown by \$2.1 billion in the last five years. Our debt has grown by \$1.1 billion. We are one of the few provinces where the assets have grown faster than any investments we've made in them.

We're better off today than we were five years ago. We're wealthier than we were five years ago. The member's approach would throw hundreds and hundreds of Manitobans out of work, unemployed and looking for Employment Insurance which the federal government refuses to offer.

Federal Equalization Payments Government Dependence

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, after that talk by the Minister of Finance, it would seem that we are well placed in the province of Manitoba.

But I would like to ask the minister: If that is so, the truth, why is it that we depend for 40 percent of our revenue in the province of Manitoba on the federal government and on other provinces in this country to make sure, Mr. Speaker, that we can pay for the reckless spending of this minister?

If things are so good, why do we need 40 percent from the federal government?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Well, Mr. Speaker, if the member can prove that there's 40 percent transfers from the federal government, let him do it. He obviously hasn't read the budget.

The reality is that Manitoba's economy has been performing well above the Canadian average for at least the last three years. The forecast shows that it performed in the top three last year. The forecast shows that it will perform in the top two this year. We are outperforming the rest of the economies in Canada as we go forward. As that happens, equalization will decline.

The reality is Manitoba's economy is the envy of all of the Canadian economies. We have a very diversified economy. We owe the credit for that to the people that run the businesses, that go to work every day and make things happen in this province. This government has every intention to support those people to greater prosperity, not put them down like members opposite.

* (14:20)

Corporate Income Taxes Revenue Forecast

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance is forecasting corporate tax revenue this year of \$380 million. Presumably this is based on the first three quarters, but with many Manitoba firms facing difficult times in the last quarter because of the global recession, it's quite likely that the final revenues from corporate income taxes will be less than \$380 million.

Can the Minister of Finance tell this House the basis of his prediction of \$380 million in revenue from corporate income taxes, and will he admit that there's a chance that the corporate tax revenues will be less than he has predicted for this year?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Revenue forecasts are done by the Department of Finance using a standard methodology that goes back many years. Citizens should know that revenues are collected by the Canada revenue collection agencies. We collaborate with the federal government to do forecasts. We look at the Conference Board of Canada forecasts. We make assumptions; we revise those assumptions. Then, with the best information that our economists and our forecasters provide to us

based on all the data that they've collected, we put a number in the budget.

Will there be variances? Inevitably, every year there are variances in revenue. We do the best forecast. We monitor it as we go along, and we will let Manitobans know if there are any precipitous changes in those revenues. These are the best forecasts we have right now.

Members must remember manufacturers in Manitoba have done very well compared to other manufacturers in Canada. Members must know that when we look at Manitoba—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, during the recession of the early 1990s, corporate income tax levels revenue dropped from \$201 million in 1989 to \$152 million in 1990 to \$78 million in 1991, yet this government believes we will not experience such a significant drop-off in corporate tax revenue. Based on the experience of the early '90s, it's likely the minister is overestimating corporate tax revenues for the coming year by about \$50 million to \$100 million.

Given the numbers from the 1990s and that the recession the country is facing now is worse than that of the 1990s, how can the minister tell Manitobans that there will be such little impact on corporate tax revenues?

Mr. Selinger: I didn't tell them that. The member opposite is suggesting that. The member opposite should be careful of what words he attempts to put in others' mouths.

I explained to him the methodology that we use to forecast revenues. We do a forecast for the overall economy based on the Conference Board of Canada and the leading banks, what forecasts they have. We don't confuse that with our own analysis. The Manitoba Bureau of Statistics has their own forecast as well.

We take those forecasts into account. We take a look at them. We monitor them as we go forward, as collections come in, and we will report, through our quarterly reports, the progress we're making on revenues as well as expenditures.

The methodology remains the same. The vigilance is even higher this year, more so than it has been in previous years. I will let the member know if there are any significant changes, and I'm sure he'll be willing to ask me questions as we go forward.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, you know, the minister says he's using long-standing predictions, but in 1991 the then-Conservative government, presumably the same predictions, made a serious error when it estimated corporate income tax revenues in the 1991 budget of \$173 million, and they came in at \$78 million. That was one of the most shocking mistakes in the history of Manitoba, overestimating by almost \$100 million the revenue.

Today the present Minister of Finance is about to repeat a Tory mistake. The integrity of the budget is in jeopardy. He hasn't paid attention to the normal changes expected during an economic recession.

Why is the minister so determined to repeat the Tory mistakes of the past?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, if the member carefully looks at the budget projections, we have a forecast of corporate revenue of \$380 million for '08-09. For '09-10, we have reduced that forecast to \$346 million, a reduction of \$34 million.

Mr. Speaker, we are showing the revenues going down. We are also showing individual income tax declining, and the total of corporate and personal income taxes decline 4.4 percent. Those are the estimates that we've been provided by our professional forecasters and economists in consultation with the federal government. If anything materially changes, we will report it in quarterly reports.

The member should be careful not to overstate the case or understate the case. We should go on the best information we have and try not to be alarmists. If something occurs, we'll let you know.

Federal Equalization Payments Government Dependence

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I was feeling good about those Liberal questions until that last one. The most shocking mistake in recent Manitoba history was their prediction four days ago that they were going to win the Elmwood by-election. From first to worst, inside of a news cycle. That was a shocking mistake.

Now, Mr. Speaker, speaking of shocking mistakes, my question to the Premier is that over the last 10 years, Manitoba has increased our reliance on handouts from our neighbours to an unprecedented extent. We have gone grovelling to provinces like B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario and Newfoundland for handouts in order to get by from

year to year. Those handouts are now at over \$4 billion, more than double the amount of reliance that we had in 1999.

To put that in perspective, Mr. Speaker, for a household with an annual budget of \$60,000, that's like relying on your neighbours for \$22,000 a year on a \$60,000 budget. Now, those neighbours are so fed up with Manitoba's grovelling that they're not even inviting us to meetings of western cabinets anymore because they're tired of this pattern, of this government grovelling for handouts and then bragging about how they're outperforming other provinces in the country. They know it's not true. We've got the sixth-highest GDP in the country that's based on handouts from other provinces representing \$22,000 out of \$60,000.

My question to the Premier is: Why is he gambling with health care, education and the livelihoods of Manitobans by putting so much reliance on handouts from Manitoba's neighbours?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite reads the O'Brien report, it fully documents the issues of federal transfers to provinces. Manitoba is in the middle, not at the high end of that equation. Just to let members know, about 20 percent of health care under the Canada Health Act is paid for by the national government, 80 percent by the Province. About 94 percent for post-secondary education is paid for by the people of Manitoba, not by the federal government. The number on equalization is comparable to the past, but it's going down because our economy is going up in relative terms.

I would also point out, Mr. Speaker, that four banks, Scotiabank, BMO, CIBC and TD Economics, independent banks, totally contradict all the statements made by the members opposite in terms of the fiscal situation in Manitoba. Independent, non-partisan experts talk about the balanced approach of this government, a balanced approach to education and training, to infrastructure, to running a surplus and investing in health care, at the same time making moderate and achievable tax reductions for the people of Manitoba.

That's why the people of Manitoba have, again, maintained their faith in this party and in this government last Tuesday in those elections, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Keystone Agricultural Producers 25th Anniversary

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the 25th anniversary of the Keystone Agricultural Producers. As our province's largest general farm organization, KAP is responsible for representing and promoting a broad range of interests of Manitoba commodity groups and farm families.

The formation of KAP followed the demise of Manitoba Farm Bureau. In early 1984, an ad hoc committee of people committed to creating a new farm organization held 25 meetings across the province. They sought feedback from producers on the make-up of the new farm group, how it would operate, how it would be funded. The concepts generated from these meetings helped shape KAP as we know it now.

KAP representatives actively lobby the various levels of government about the policies, programs they enact, and how they affect the agricultural sector. The organization has now close to 20 committees that examine a broad range of issues such as the environment, transportation, trade, input costs, research, biosecurity, food safety, and others.

* (14:30)

KAP has tackled many challenging issues, such as the need for income farm levels. For example, KAP members played a key role in the creation of the national business risk management programs such as the Gross Revenue Insurance program and Net Income Stabilization plans. KAP also lobbied diligently at the provincial level tackling issues of education funding, nutrient management regulations, and debate over Bill 17, just to name a few. The respected Alternate Land Use Services program, which aims to provide financial recognition for the work producers take in managing and protecting the natural landscape, also was developed by KAP.

The enduring success of KAP was due in no small part to the dedication of members and commodity groups who have made up its membership. Tens of thousands of hours of voluntary service has been provided by those members and created policies and services that provide benefits to all Manitoba producers and farm families. This work is greatly appreciated.

On behalf of the House, I'd like to congratulate the Keystone Agricultural Producers on their 25th anniversary. KAP has played a fundamental role in the development of agricultural policy in Manitoba, has worked to become an advocate for farmers and commodity groups in the province of Manitoba.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It also should be noted that the former Member for Emerson, Jack Penner, was the first president of this organization.

Purple Day

Ms. Jennifer Howard (Fort Rouge): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of a very important day to bring awareness to a very worthwhile cause.

The honourable Minister responsible for Persons with Disabilities (Mr. Mackintosh) has signed a proclamation to declare today Manitoba's first annual Purple Day.

Purple Day is a global grass-roots effort dedicated to promoting awareness, reducing stigma and improving the quality of life for people with epilepsy. It was started in 2008 by a nine-year-old girl from Nova Scotia, Cassidy Megan.

Cassidy wanted to help kids with epilepsy know they're not alone by encouraging people to wear purple on this day. I thank honourable members for wearing their purple buttons to show their support.

Epilepsy is much more common than many of us realize, affecting more than 50 million people worldwide and more than 300,000 Canadians. Every day in Canada, an average of 38 people learn that they have epilepsy and 60 percent of new diagnoses are young children or senior citizens.

Epilepsy is not a disease and it is not a psychological disorder. People living with epilepsy are disabled by the stigma and negative public attitudes. We can support people with epilepsy by educating ourselves and each other about the realities of this condition and the best way to offer appropriate assistance to people living with epilepsy.

I would like to thank the members of the Epilepsy and Seizure Association of Manitoba who are joining us today and they're all wearing their purple proudly. The association provides vital information and support to people with epilepsy and their families and helps to reduce stigma through initiatives like Purple Day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Manitoba Scotties Tournament of Hearts

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, the residents of Neepawa and area once again played host to Manitobans in a first-class sporting event. From February 4 to 8, Neepawa hosted the 2009 Manitoba Scotties Tournament of Hearts. The many, many volunteers who dedicated their time and energy toward the ladies curling championship made the event possible.

Volunteers were instrumental in the success of this year's Scotties, as they worked extremely hard to make sure that the tournament went according to plan. Some volunteers have said that the Scotties have almost become a full-time job for them, but they have enjoyed contributing to the event. Their efforts are very much appreciated by the community as the Scotties was a big success thanks to their help. Through their efforts, \$50,000 was raised; \$25,000 of which was donated to the Neepawa Curling Club and \$25,000 to the Yellowhead Arena.

The town of Neepawa was treated to some exceptional curling throughout the week and fans were delighted to come out and support their favourite teams. There were two home town favourites in this year's Scotties, Tina Kozak from Neepawa and Terry Ursel of Plumias. Other notable teams included four-time provincial champion Maureen Bonar and three-time Manitoba champion Janet Harvey.

The final game featured the Barb Spencer rink and the Karen Porritt rink. Both are club mates from the Fort Rouge Curling Club. It was a close game and a lot of great shots were made. In the tenth end, Spencer was down by one point but was able to come from behind to win the game.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of this House I would like to congratulate skip, Barb Spencer; third, Darcy Robertson; second, Brette Richards and lead, Barb Enright for winning the 2009 Manitoba Scotties Tournament of Hearts.

I would also like to congratulate the volunteers that made this year's Scotties a success. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

International Day for the Elimination of Racism

Ms. Marilyn Brick (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, in 1960, 69 black demonstrators were killed and 180 wounded by armed police when they stood together to challenge the pass laws in South Africa.

This set of rules relied on racial profiling to segregate and sanction the oppression and exploitation of South African communities of colour. This horrendous massacre compelled the United Nations to call for the end of racial discrimination by proclaiming March 21 as the International Day for the Elimination of Racism and calls on the world to recognize the equality of individuals.

As people begin to lose their jobs due to the world's current economic climate, many men and women are deprived employment, denied promotions or poorly paid because of race or ethnic origin. As unemployment rises around the world so do the incidents of racial, ethnic and gender discrimination. But now is not the time to be torn apart. It is a time for people to come together regardless of their ethnic or cultural backgrounds and work to rebuild our economies and lives.

Here in Manitoba we are striving to build a society that judges individuals on their abilities and not the colour of their skin. Our province's multicultural landscape is a strength that we should all be proud of. Soon our province will be the home of the national museum of human rights which shall serve as a reminder to all of the importance of acceptance, how far we have come and how far we have yet to go.

Racism cannot be eliminated solely by government actions or international proclamations. It is eliminated in our own backyards when we help our neighbours, smile at strangers and stand against intolerance. Each and every one of us can make a difference and it is only with the will of individuals within our society we can begin to make a difference. Thank you.

Increase of Diabetes Diagnoses

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, first on Epilepsy Awareness Day, this is an important day and we clearly need to do more to prevent, to treat and to support those who have epilepsy. We need to make sure that they are not stigmatized, make sure that they have adequate opportunities for a good quality of life, good employment opportunities and they are not disadvantaged or stigmatized.

Second, on the situation in Manitoba with diabetes, for almost 10 years, the NDP government of Manitoba has watched almost from the sidelines as the number of Manitobans with diabetes has grown and grown and grown. The diabetes epidemic is running rampant in our province and many

Manitobans are losing their limbs, their kidneys, their eyes, their hearts and their lives as a result of the inadequate action of the NDP government.

Under the NDP watch tens of thousands more Manitobans have become diabetic. The toll on lives and the cost to our health-care system is enormous. Yet, the diabetes epidemic wasn't even mentioned in last year's Throne Speech or in this year's budget. The NDP appear to have no eyes to see the devastation happening in our province. The NDP appear to have lost the ears to hear the cries of those affected. Elected almost 10 years ago to act on these health-care issues, the NDP have failed to act in a way sufficient to reverse the largest and most costly epidemic of our time in Manitoba. The cries of affected individuals and families must be heard. The tens of thousands of affected Manitobans must be listened to. It is long past time for a major emergency plan to address and reverse the costly diabetes epidemic sweeping our province.

Point of Order

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

Mr. David Faurischou (Portage la Prairie): No, on a member's statement.

Mr. Speaker: We're concluded. That's five. We agreed yesterday to use the rotation that was allocated for yesterday today. That is No. 5.

Mr. Faurischou: Mr. Speaker, I believe that all members understood when the Government House Leader (Mr. Chomiak) rose yesterday and stated that today's allotment, as indicated in *Hansard*, yesterday's allotment of members' statements would be allocated and applied to tomorrow which is today. So I understood, as I believe other members did, that the members' statements that were slated to be heard yesterday should be heard today in addition to today's allocated members' statements.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, on the point of order raised, my interpretation was that we were just following yesterday's rotation today, and then tomorrow we will follow the regular Friday rotation.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I did not interpret it as we would be doing 10 members' statements today. My understanding of—and Mr. Government House Leader, correct me if I'm wrong, but that's the way I understood it, was that we were doing five, but we were doing Wednesday's rotation today, not doubling

up. So, Mr. House Leader, please correct me if I'm wrong.

* (14:40)

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker, in fact, that was the understanding, as I take it, with the House leader from the opposition, but we are prepared to grant leave to the member to make a statement today under the circumstances.

Mr. Faurischou: Yes, Mr. Speaker, in that case I would ask for leave to continue with members' statements that were prepared yesterday to be heard today. If there are other members that were on schedule yesterday to be heard, I would like to see that it be heard.

Mr. Speaker: What I'm hearing right now is a request from the honourable member, that is, seeking leave for the House to grant unanimous consent for all members up to five that wish to make a member's statement. That's what I just heard the member ask for. Is there leave for that?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: No. There is no leave for that.

Mr. Faurischou: Well, Mr. Speaker, then I will revise my application for leave to the House to include only the member's statement that I have prepared for myself. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable Member for Portage la Prairie have leave to present his member's statement, which is in addition to the five that are allocated for today? Does the member have leave?

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Mr. Speaker: Leave has been granted. The honourable Member for Portage la Prairie will present his member's statement.

Portage Collegiate Institute Teen Health-Care Clinic

Mr. David Faurischou (Portage la Prairie): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure for me to rise today to recognize and congratulate the Portage Collegiate Institute on the recent opening of the teen health clinic there.

This facility provides a long-anticipated service for young people in Portage la Prairie and surrounding areas which will help them make intelligent choices that promote a healthy lifestyle. The goal of the teen-centred health-care services is to ensure young people in Manitoba can access the help they need in the most effective way, respectful of the young people who are going through tough years in teenagehood. A primary health-care centre, the clinic's mandate is to promote health, prevent illness and manage ongoing health problems.

The Portage la Prairie School Division partnered with the Central Regional Health Authority and the provincial government to make this centre a reality, and the students at the Portage la Prairie institute were involved in the development of the new clinic by providing input into its design and the services it now offers. Over 1,000 students attend the Portage Collegiate Institute, and the school has been serving education needs to the community since it opened in 1884. It is therefore a natural extension to be able to provide health education and services in addition to this mandate. A nurse practitioner, a public health nurse, addictions counsellor, mental health worker and a dietician will all be working out of the new clinic in partnership with school staff.

I would like to recognize the leadership of the Portage la Prairie School Division chair, Charles Morrison, and the board of trustees, as well as the principal, Mr. Jim Pehura, and his staff, along with students in partnering with the RHA and the provincial government to make this project happen.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to give special acknowledgement to the students that had vital input into the design of this new facility. Please join with me in congratulating the Portage Collegiate Institute in the opening of this new teen health-care clinic. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: As previously agreed, that concludes members' statements.

MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I would move that, under rule 36, the ordinary business of the House be set aside to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely, the threat to the health-care system posed by this government's plans to limit emergency services in the city of Winnipeg community hospitals. This is seconded by the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard).

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before recognizing the honourable Member for Inkster, I believe that I should remind all members that, under rule 36(2), the mover of a motion on a matter of urgent public importance and one member from the other parties in the House are allowed not more than 10 minutes to explain the urgency of debating the matter immediately.

As stated in *Beauchesne's* citation 390, urgency in this context means urgency of immediate debate, not on the subject matter of the motion. In their remarks, members should focus exclusively—order, please.

In their remarks, members should focus exclusively on whether or not there's urgency of debate and whether or not the ordinary opportunities for debate will enable the House to consider the matter early enough to ensure that the public interest will not suffer.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, some members might actually recognize the wording of this particular motion in the sense that this is the very same motion that the Member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) had introduced in the '90s—the exact same motion.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to tell you why it is so very important and critically urgent. The Premier (Mr. Doer) himself talks about the importance of providing care, and I'm going to take a quote from the Premier.

But, before I do that, Mr. Speaker, I want to share with you what took place at a constituency meeting last night. I met with several medical officials, and these medical officials had indicated to me that there was a very close call at the Seven Oaks Hospital. It had more to do with luck than anything else that an individual did not die. Because of the changes that have now occurred at the Seven Oaks Hospital, we had an individual, recently, that was at the Seven Oaks Hospital that was bleeding internally and would have died had it not been for luck. This individual was fortunate in the sense that there was a doctor who was not on call, that was in proximity to be able to provide emergency surgery to this particular patient.

Had it not been for that, had the person been transferred, or they would have had to wait for a longer period of time, the medical professionals that I had talked to clearly indicated to me that, in their opinion, the individual in question would have died.

I've even received and read a letter from a medical professional that was there on the day in which the incident occurred, where it's even inferred in terms of, well, what would have happened had it not been for? Mr. Speaker, that's ultimately why I would argue that we need to have the debate in terms of what's taking place at Seven Oaks Hospital and other community hospitals.

I want to take a quote—this is from the Premier of our province back in the '90s when he was the Leader of the Opposition. And I quote, Mr. Speaker, from *Hansard*: "I would like to ask the Premier, in light of the subcommittee's report which indicates that bypassing an emergency department at a hospital and adding an extra five minutes to a call could affect the quality of care that a patient receives, is it his decision to put into jeopardy or potentially put into jeopardy the safety of Manitoba patients or people in the community areas who rely on these community hospitals, to add that extra five minutes, and is it worth risking life or limb?"

Mr. Speaker, this is what the Premier (Mr. Doer) said back in the '90s. Nothing has changed. The Filmon government back then recognized the importance of the Seven Oaks Hospital and providing those emergency services because we were talking about life and limb. If we do not see a government that recognizes the mistake that the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority has made, we are putting at risk the lives of Manitobans, and that's the urgency of the debate.

If we do not recognize that the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority has not provided any information whatsoever to legitimize the decision that they have made, Mr. Speaker, or allow for any sort of public consultation, information that contradicts what other health-care professionals are in fact saying, Winnipeg Regional Health Authority is wrong, and the direction that they're taking our community hospital facilities is to the detriment of our communities in the city of Winnipeg.

* (14:50)

It even goes beyond the Seven Oaks. The example that I give today I believe to be accurate. I believe that it had more to do with luck, and had that individual not been lucky, by chance, and had to be transferred, that person—that I would be standing today in all likelihood saying that someone died in an ambulance because they couldn't get service over at the Seven Oaks Hospital. But, because of luck and good fortune in terms of that particular individual,

I'm not saying that today, and I thank God that that's not the case.

But let this be a red flag for the government. Let the government recognize that when Winnipeg regional health-care authority makes a mistake, especially of this magnitude, that there is a responsibility for the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) to reverse the decision. It is not too late, Mr. Speaker. I'll suggest that if the MLAs of the NDP caucus do their homework on this, talk to the experts, don't believe everything that regional health care authority says to be true, that community hospitals can in fact provide that emergency service that Winnipeg region is taking away from our community hospitals. They can do it.

It can even be more cost efficient. In fact, on the issue of cost, because some might argue that that's the reason why they're doing it, at the public meeting where Winnipeg regional health care came and attended that I had in North End Winnipeg, they admitted it. It had nothing to do with cost; it's more of a vision. They can talk about the number of surgeons. The number of surgeons has actually increased dramatically in that area, Mr. Speaker. I believe it's from 30 to 41 or something of that nature. Don't buy what Winnipeg Regional Health is trying to sell you, Madam Minister. I believe, and when I say I believe, I have had the opportunity to talk to the experts also, and I believe what the experts are telling me, that this is a mistake and it's not an issue that is going to go away.

This is an issue that touches the lives of the people of Manitoba, in particular in the city of Winnipeg, where we're seeing some of these profound changes that are taking place in our community hospitals. It's either you believe in community hospitals, saving lives, providing the essential services and providing those essential services in terms of emergency at our hospitals. You either believe in it and support it or you do not. The Premier, back in the '90s, made it very clear in terms of the impact. I just raised one example, Mr. Speaker, which speaks to the urgency because I believe that there are other things that are taking place, that are putting in danger the lives of Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker, today I would argue that it is urgent that it be debated just like in the mid-'90s when the Member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) argued that it had to be debated. The Member for Kildonan was right back then because he saw the

merits in terms of having a seven-day-a-week, 24-hour, functional emergency service. Well, if you take away the services of the Seven Oaks emergency—and that's what's happening.

An Honourable Member: You don't understand.

Mr. Lamoureux: You see, this is where the Government House Leader (Mr. Chomiak) is wrong. I do understand because I have done my homework on it, and I would ask that those North End MLAs, the Member for Kildonan—it was the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) that actually challenged the ruling of the Speaker back then because he felt that it was something that we had to have in terms of a debate. Where are those North End MLAs today, Mr. Speaker? Let's have the debate. What is the government afraid of by allowing for the debate to occur? With the consensus of the minister or the Government House Leader, we can have the debate. I believe the facts are there, and if the government truly understood them, that they would recognize that Winnipeg Regional Health Authority has gone too far and the decision needs to be reversed.

So, in that sense, I ask for the government to recognize the urgency. Thank you.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, I stand in support of having this issue discussed here in the Legislature because it is an urgent issue, and there are doctors out there that are adamantly opposed to this policy that has been put into place and supported by this Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald).

This Minister of Health is on record as supporting this change. This change is the cutback of emergency surgeries in three community hospitals. It amounts to a total of 750 patients who are going to be diverted from three community hospitals, shuttled around the city in ambulances we don't have and hopefully be able to land in another ER that can actually accept them.

The reason it should be debated here today is because it hasn't had a debate. The Minister of Health has never notified the public that this is happening out there. This has happened under the cloak of darkness. There are families and patients out there that have never been told that this new policy is in place and, for that reason, I think we do need to have a fulsome debate. I don't think the Minister of Health understands fully enough what policy she is supporting, and she has accepted wholesale the kind of comments that have been made by the WRHA.

The WRHA also has said on record that all of the surgeons support this when that is, in fact, not true, Mr. Speaker. There are surgeons out there that have been vehemently opposed to this since last June, and I would urge the minister to, in fact, stand in this House today and support why this policy has been put into place. That's why I think we need the urgent debate today. We don't know why she is just willy-nilly supporting a policy that experts out there and some top-notch surgeons in this city are totally opposed to.

When you take 750 patients who need emergency surgery, we're not talking about stable patients. It's been determined they need emergency surgery, and you're putting them into ambulances, and you're shuffling them around the city. That is not good health care. I received a letter from a doctor who was so concerned about a patient that could not have emergency surgery at the Concordia Hospital. This patient ended up having to go to Health Sciences Centre, only to be turned away because there was no ability to accept that patient there. That ambulance then was trying to go to St. Boniface hospital; again, the hospital there couldn't accommodate the patient, the two hospitals that should have seen this patient, that were more equipped to deal with this type of patient. Instead, this patient ended up having to go to the Grace Hospital all the way from Concordia Hospital. Now, this doctor felt that this patient could have ended up in trouble. As the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) just indicated in another situation, fortunately, in this situation, this patient didn't run into trouble but could have.

So, Mr. Speaker, there have been some close calls; we're hearing about it. If the NDP really care about patients and patient safety as they like to say, but they don't want to walk the talk. They need to walk the talk, and part of that today would be them standing in this House and having this debate because it is an urgent debate. We don't want to see one of those 750 patients end up in big trouble and end up in a situation where they're going to fall through the cracks because of a very poor decision and one that this government seems to support.

So, Mr. Speaker, I do think that we do need to have that debate. We need to find out why this minister is supporting it, and she has not stood so far and given us valid, good, solid reasons for why she is so wholesale in support of something that doctors out there, the experts out there, are adamantly opposed

to. I do urge that we do have some debate on this, and it is an urgent situation.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, in terms of the urgency of this matter, I would have thought, if it was so urgent, members would have perhaps asked a question in question period yesterday or today. I notice that that did not happen. I suggest this is more a forum of the members to try to score political points.

* (15:00)

Mr. Speaker, I don't think there's a ruling going back to 1985, during budget debate, where a matter of urgent public importance has been allowed by the Speaker with respect to a time going into budget, where members could debate whatever they want. At a time when people's basements are flooding, when rivers are overflowing, the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) is looking for a seat to run next election, and is crawling all over the North End looking for a place to run, and is trying to use this Legislature as a forum.

One of the things that Larry Desjardins advised us, Mr. Speaker, when we became government, was to be very careful who you take advice from with respect to medical decisions. We don't take medical decisions from laypersons who are elected to office because if we did we'd be in the same boat the Tories were in when they laid off 1,500—fired 1,500 nurses and had doctors scattered from this province.

To that point, Mr. Speaker, it was the same kind of decision making that led to the baby death scandal. It was an attempt by some people to say, yes, we can have pediatric-cardiac surgery everywhere. Twelve babies died, major cover-up by the Tory government, and we found out that you needed specialty of care to do pediatric surgery. To this day, yes, we ship patients to Edmonton to have pediatric surgery. Yes, we do. We don't do it here, pediatric heart surgery. Why not? Because the expertise is not available everywhere to provide the best type of care.

Now, Mr. Speaker, if we were to follow the advice of the Member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger), who crowed in this Chamber that the Grace Hospital was closing, the Grace Hospital was closing. I'm still waiting for the member to stand up and apologize for her fomenting concern amongst residents of that end of town about Grace Hospital closing. Not a word, hardly ever, from the Member

for Charleswood's mouth is factual in this House. It's fomenting.

The Member for Inkster ought to know better. When we stood up and stopped the actual closure of Seven Oaks, expanded the operating room, expanded the cancer care, expanded the dialysis, Mr. Speaker, where was the Member for Inkster? Not only did we not close the hospital, we expanded it. As long as members are on this side of the House, you'll have a functioning, effective emergency room at Seven Oaks, at Concordia, at Grace, at Health Sciences Centre, at St. Boniface, unlike the previous government—and Victoria.

Mr. Speaker, one has to be very, very careful as to whose advice one takes. There was an incidence in this House when the member's leader stood up and said the regional health authority should not fire a doctor. Now I said—at that time I was Health Minister—I don't hire and fire doctors, but I said talk to the regional health authority. The leader of the third-party Liberals made it a major issue. We had to do an investigation and study and, unfortunately, the doctor's reputation was destroyed by virtue of having to go public with that information. Why? Because the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) wanted to make a political issue out of something like that, as the Member for Charleswood does regularly, bringing incorrect information to this House.

Officials of subspecialties have looked at this situation. If you want surgery, if you want best surgery, if you want neurosurgery, you don't go to every hospital in Winnipeg. Now, I'm sorry. We want specialists. We have the best neurosurgeons, probably, in North America, but you have to go to Health Sciences Centre, Mr. Speaker. That is well and good. As we move to subspecialties, the specialties tell us that they cannot cover all the time, everywhere. When faced with the situation of covering all the time, everywhere, for every instance, you would not have enough medical professionals to go around anywhere. There is nowhere in North America that has the subspecialties and the services available in as many places as we do in Winnipeg, and as we continue, there's been no government in the history of this province that has done more to expand emergency rooms than members on this side of the House.

There's been no worse example of politicizing and giving out wrong information than the Member for Inkster, who called public meetings, who confused the public, and I had many people talk to

me that said: Are they closing Seven Oaks Hospital? I said not over any of our dead bodies, Mr. Speaker. We're not like Tories. But the member opposite, the Member for Inkster, put out inaccurate information. I used to ask: Why, why is the member having this public meeting about closing the emergency rooms? Not only has it expanded, but we've put in new services.

I suggest it's another political attempt by the Liberals to get recognition. They could talk about it in the budget; no, they didn't. They could talk about it in question period; no, they didn't. They talked about hovercrafts today, and now they're talking about emergency medical treatment, and they're wrong.

The leader of River Heights has been wrong before, has not apologized. I think the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) should stand up and apologize to the officials of the WRHA, to those doctors who made the decision.

Mr. Speaker, these decisions ought not to be made by politicians. They ought to be made by people who are experts in their field, unlike the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) who destroyed a doctor's reputation by his political stubbornness, unlike the Member for Inkster who raises an issue inaccurately, and unlike the Member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) who stands up daily with inaccurate information including—how many times did she stand up and say the Grace Hospital was closing?

Not only is it—Mr. Speaker, it's functioning and it has expanded. So I take umbrage with the fact that it's the wrong time, the wrong place and, in fact, the wrong facts upon which the member is basing his case. He's not only wrong, he's not within the rules. If he'd only accept the invitation from the WRHA to get a briefing on it, perhaps the member would understand, perhaps if the member chose to take a briefing.

I have talked to doctors who are contrary to lots of decisions that we've made. I agree. There's no unanimity about all these decisions. You take the best medical, you take the best administrative, you take the best practical advice and you do what you can, Mr. Speaker, with more doctors, more nurses, more emergency room hours opened now, more patients to the emergency room at Seven Oaks than ever before and you take that information going through faster and you build, you don't cause dissension as does the Member for Inkster politically

by trying to skew the issue by giving inaccurate information and try to make politics out of political stunts when he causes people in the North End to be put at—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The member still has time. I'm just rising to caution the member because—
[interjection]

Order. I've allowed a lot of leeway to all speakers, but when it starts to get a little too personal I'm just cautioning the members to be careful. In general I've let a lot of things go and I've given a lot of leeway to members on any statements, but I'd be very, very careful when the attacks are becoming too personal to honourable members in this House. I'm just raising it as a caution. The honourable member still has time.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Inkster, on a point of order.

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, Mr. Speaker, it is a point of order.

I was, and I appreciate you standing and giving the cautionary note to the minister or the Government House Leader (Mr. Chomiak).

I stand because of a point of order regarding imputing motives. The Government House Leader—and I was going to let it slide by the first time when he indicated that it's because I'm doing this for political reasons, and what deeply offended me was the fact he gives the impression that I'm doing it because I'm trying to decide if I'm going to be running in The Maples, possibly, or Tyndall Park. Mr. Speaker, if the Government House Leader was paying attention to what the media has already reported, very clearly I'm running in Tyndall Park which is not The Maples where the Seven Oaks Hospital is in.

So to be able to make that sort of an accusation then followed by saying that everything that I'm sending out is not factual is just not true and I would ask the minister, the Government House Leader, to table any document that I have circulated that is not factual, and if he's not prepared to do that then he should apologize to me personally.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, on the same point of order?

Mr. Chomiak: Yes, thank you—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Chomiak: Not only does the member not have a point of order, Mr. Speaker, it's a dispute over the facts.

The member, by the way, was reciting from a letter which I'd like to see tabled, but I'm still waiting for the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) to resign as he promised in this Legislature.

When facts he had stated in this House were found to be not true, he went, both in this House and in the hallway, and said he would resign. I'm still waiting, not just for an apology, but his resignation, as he promised in this Leg. It speaks for itself.

* (15:10)

Mr. Speaker: Order. This point of order is not going to turn into a debate, okay. I've already dealt with the issue that the honourable member rose. I cautioned all members that—I do normally allow a lot of leeway to all members, but when it gets personal, that's when I will draw the line, because we're all honourable members in this House. I'm not only referencing the comments of the honourable Government House Leader. There were some other comments from other speakers prior to him that were very personal. I'm cautioning all members, all members, that I do allow a lot of leeway but I will not allow personal attacks because that's not what this House is all about. *[interjection]* Order.

On the point of order raised there's going to be information back and forth that members do not agree with, but me, as the Speaker, whatever—even if the comments are contradictory that are put on record, because you are all honourable members, I take those as factual. And a lot of times they will be different, and the Speaker cannot be everywhere to verify information that is brought to the House by honourable members. So I accept them as factual and many times you will disagree with those. So the honourable member does not have a point of order. The point of order that she rose on, I believe I have addressed it and I hope members will debate the urgency of the MUPI.

The honourable member still has time if he wishes. No? The honourable member does not have time? Okay. Just wait, okay—Order. Just a minute.

So that is the three speakers for the MUPI.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, were you getting up on a point of order?

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): On a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: On a point of order.

Mr. McFadyen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was clear, from the comments that were being made by the Government House Leader, he was impugning the motives of the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux). The Member for Inkster made the point and asked for an apology. Rather than providing an apology, the Government House Leader got up and continued to impugn the motives of the Member for Inkster by raising the issue of the attempt on the part of a member of the Premier's (Mr. Doer) staff to encourage somebody to drop out of a nomination meeting. There was a finding by Elections Manitoba: the charges couldn't be laid on the basis of a fact that the individual involved fell outside the definition of candidate under The Elections Act and therefore they didn't have jurisdiction to deal with the matter.

Normally speaking, Mr. Speaker, matters dealing with inducements to drop out of a political race, improper inducements, whether it's appointing people to posts in government, of the judiciary, or anything else are matters for criminal law, and so the members opposite, when they continue to call on the Member for Inkster to resign have completely missed the point of what that debate was about. We're getting tired of listening to that call for resignation on the part of the Member for Inkster in light of the way they know the issue was resolved.

I would suggest that the member could end this debate immediately by simply getting up and apologizing for impugning the motive of the Member for Inkster quite improperly, both in his response to the point of order and in his earlier comments.

Mr. Chomiak: On the same point of order. I see that the Leader of the Opposition is playing lawyer again, Mr. Speaker, as he often does. All I can say is the Monnin report spoke candidly and frankly about the motivations of members opposite. The comments of the Member for Inkster remain as they are. Not only is it not a point of order, but it's not a matter of urgent public importance and I suggest we get on with the business—the very urgent business of the House, and stop playing lawyer on the part of the member. If he wants to play lawyer, he can apply for

any number of positions that are right across the government.

Mr. Speaker: Order. On the point of order raised by the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, he does not have a point of order. It's a dispute over the facts.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: We will now continue, okay, because we have now heard from the speakers. Now I will give a ruling on the MUPI.

I thank the honourable members for their advice to the Chair on whether the motion proposed by the honourable Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) should be debated today.

The notice required by rule 36(1) was provided under our rules and practices. The subject matter requiring urgent consideration must be so pressing that the public interest will suffer if the matter is not given immediate attention. There must also be no other reasonable opportunities to raise the matter.

I have listened very carefully to the arguments put forward. However, I was not persuaded that the ordinary business of the House should be set aside to deal with this issue today. Although this is an issue that many members may have a concern about, I do not believe that the public interest will be harmed if the business of the House is not set aside to debate the motion today.

Additionally, I would like to note that there are other avenues for members to raise this issue, which include the budget debate, questions in question period and also members' statements.

Therefore, with the greatest of respect, I must rule that this matter does not meet the criteria set by our rules and precedents, and I rule the motion out of order as a matter of urgent public importance.

House Business

Mr. Chomiak: Yes, Mr. Speaker, on House business.

Mr. Speaker: On House business.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, I believe that the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) is going to be giving his comments with respect to the budget speech, and then the House, I believe, will adjourn itself into interim—resolve itself into Interim Supply.

I'm asking leave of the House to sit from 5 till 6 o'clock this evening without quorum and without votes to deal with matters of Interim Supply.

Mr. Speaker: You'll only deal with Interim Supply between 5 and 6; that's what you're saying?

Mr. Chomiak: To clarify, Mr. Speaker, we will commence Interim Supply following the response of the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker: You're asking for the House to be adjourned—or to extend the sitting of the House to 6 o'clock?

Mr. Chomiak: Correct.

Mr. Speaker: Between 5 and 6?

Mr. Chomiak: Correct.

Mr. Speaker: *[inaudible]*

Mr. Chomiak: Yes. I'm asking for the House to be extended sitting to deal with Interim Supply until 6 o'clock.

Mr. Speaker: So is there agreement of the House that when we will deal with Orders of the Day, we will deal with the budget debate that is standing in the name of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition once the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition has concluded his comments, then we will go to Interim Supply and we will stay on Interim Supply until 6 o'clock if the House agrees.

Does the House agree for us to sit until 6 o'clock? *[Agreed]*

For the Speaker not to see the clock till 6 o'clock, okay, there's agreement on that.

So then we will deal with Interim Supply until 6 o'clock once the Leader of the Official Opposition has concluded his comments. Is that agreed? *[Agreed]*

Okay, it's been agreed to. Well, today is only till 6; tomorrow is a different matter.

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

Just an added point. I believe that amongst House leaders we had talked about, and I believe there is concurrence of the House that there is no vote, no quorum between 5 and 6, and I believe you have leave of the House to do that.

Mr. Speaker: *[inaudible]*

Mr. Chomiak: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement of the House that between the extended hour between 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. there will be no quorum called or counted by the Speaker. Is that agreed to?

An Honourable Member: Agreed.

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Speaker: So there'll be no requests for—
[interjection]

Order, here. There's some confusion. Members are saying no votes be taken. First let's deal with the quorum, okay? So there will be no quorum call between 5 and 6, and no votes to take place between 5 and 6 p.m.

Okay? That's agreed to? [Agreed]

I'm just going to reword that because the Clerk has a very good point here.

Not, no votes, it'll be no recorded votes because as you move along in Interim Supply you might require some votes. So it's an excellent point by the Clerk.

So is that agreed to? [Agreed]

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

BUDGET DEBATE

(Second Day of Debate)

Mr. Speaker: So now I will call Orders of the Day, and we'll resume adjourned debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), that this House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government, which is standing in the name of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen).

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am rising to speak against the motion presented yesterday by the Minister of Finance.

* (15:20)

Mr. Speaker, as we were approaching this budget, our looking at a global context in which economies, people and organizations around the world are facing economic challenges of an almost unprecedented nature. The roots of that crisis go back many years and the manifestation of it really started in about September and October of 2008. It was during that period in time that we started to call on this government to lay out a plan for dealing with

the new, rising crisis that was coming about in the economy and in the financial markets, with a particular view toward protecting people's jobs, protecting those who were seeing their pensions, particularly those with privately invested RRSP accounts, seeing their pensions eroded to a degree that few have seen in their lifetime, and to take measures that would ensure that those who are at the low end of the wealth and income scale in our province were protected.

Also, Mr. Speaker, we asked the government to take a longer-term view of where we would be as a province when we came out the other side of the recession that we knew we were getting into, to lay out a plan for how our province would generate the wealth, the opportunities to ensure good employment for the young people of today, to ensure that incomes would rise again at some point down the road, that pensioners could feel secure about their incomes and that those who are currently in the work force could look forward to retirement with some degree of comfort and certainty about what standard of living they could expect as they approached retirement.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

We started back in November asking for the government to move up the date of the budget in order to send a signal of confidence and action to the people of Manitoba that the government was on the job. Those calls were ignored. The government took a steady-as-she-goes, don't-rock-the-boat, nothing-to-look-at-here approach in terms of both their public comments and the comments that they were making in the House. They said things as the Minister of Competitiveness (Mr. Swan) said, just eight weeks ago, that Manitoba's economy is in great shape. We're continuing to grow and that there's nothing to worry about. These are the sorts of blasé, out-of-touch comments that we heard from minister after minister, including the Premier (Mr. Doer) and the Finance Minister, in the lead-up to yesterday's budget.

As worldwide conditions deteriorated, and we started getting news, particularly in January, of declines in manufacturing shipments, job cuts, reductions in pensions in Manitoba, both in the public pension plans and in people's private pensions, we said in January that it was up to the government to bring forward its budget to allow all Manitobans to have a look at what the game plan was and to begin the process of having the debate

that was needed in order to arrive at a plan to lead Manitoba through the current crisis.

The Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik), myself, members of the third party and others began to call on the government to make clear their plans for dealing with the current economic crisis. In fact, the federal government, to their credit, moved their budget up to January, the third week in January, an unprecedentedly early budget in order to send a message to Canadians that they were at work, they're on the job. They were concerned about what they were seeing, and they are committed to protecting the pensions, the jobs and the livelihoods of Canadians.

Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, that budget came down at the end of January, and we again said, let's shake ourselves out of the complacency that's gripping the current government here in Manitoba and bring forward an early budget. We've got the federal numbers now. We've had them since the end of January. We have a sense as to where the economy is going, and Manitobans are looking for a signal as to where this government plans to take us.

Instead, what we got was more foot-dragging. We got excuses about the need to hold the budget until after by-elections took place, even though there are plenty of precedents for the House sitting while by-elections were taking place. We got the usual political games and short-term tactical manoeuvres that we've gotten used to over the last nine years under this all-spin, no-substance, NDP government.

So what they did is they positioned things to hold by-elections before the budget could be introduced, of course, so that voters in those seats wouldn't know what the government had up its sleeve in terms of its budgetary policy until after they went to the polls, Madam Deputy Speaker. So this was the sort of posturing, this is the sort of cheap, short-term political tactics that we saw from the government, and that is why we are among the last provinces in the country to introduce a budget this year.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we were hoping in this budget to see an action plan for growth and opportunity, a budget that would deliver a message of hope, even if the short term was going to be tough, that there was a vision for where the province was going to be in two, five or 10 years from now so that young Manitobans and others could look forward to a better future, whatever short-term challenges we may face.

Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, what we got instead yesterday was a budget that takes us further and closer to the precipice in terms of the level of debt, the drawdown on the savings account, the attempt to pull back on debt payments and attempts to spin and spend without results, as they've done for the last nine years.

Now one other issue that is of a procedural nature, Madam Deputy Speaker, but which is also an important one to put on the record, a concern, is that the government has put us in the position of introducing an Interim Supply motion with only a couple of days to go before the end of the fiscal year. They've introduced this motion on a Thursday, and they are expecting members of the Legislature to review that motion, ask the appropriate questions and then make a decision about whether or not they would vote on that motion within a span of less than 24 hours.

This motion contains a request of the Legislature to grant the government the power to spend hundreds of millions of dollars without any adequate oversight or scrutiny in terms of where that money was going to go. This is a great concern, particularly in the environment we're in today, where Manitobans regardless of where they live are saying to us be careful with our money. We can't any afford any more NDP fiascos. We can't afford any more corruption in the health-care system when it comes to tendering. We can't afford any more fiascos like Crocus. We can't afford any more bad business deals like the one with Maple Leaf Distillers which will soon be in front of the courts.

They are saying to us we can't afford any more of these fiascos, Madam Deputy Speaker, so be careful. Ask the hard questions, and don't let the government get away with what they've done for the last eight years which is to try to spin their way through every crisis. Demand apologies every time somebody asks a question, as the Premier (Mr. Doer) did with Mr. Loewen, the former member for Fort Whyte, when he asked questions about Crocus. That's the old game and that's the old tactic that they play. Manitobans want us to ask hard questions and demand answers to those questions, not the usual spin that we get from government.

So here we are with less than 24 hours to consider an Interim Supply motion to authorize the government to spend hundreds of millions of dollars. Madam Deputy Speaker, they are, in essence, playing a game of brinkmanship by saying if you

don't allow it to go to a vote by tomorrow, we're not going to have the authority to spend any money as of midnight, April 1. It is the government, not the opposition, that have painted themselves into a corner, backed themselves up against the wall and created a phony short-term crisis to jam through their Interim Supply motion on less than 24 hours' notice by attempting to position it that it's the fault of the opposition for not allowing a vote to come on that motion within a period of less than 24 hours.

This is the old-style game playing that we've seen for the last nine years. It's what they tried to do on Bills 37, 38—introducing them on the last possible day, then trying to rush them through. We're seeing the same thing on the Interim Supply motion. It's despicable. It shows contempt for this Legislature. It shows contempt, more importantly, for the people of Manitoba who voted for members of this Legislature to come here, to ask questions and demand answers about where their money is going, because they see a government that is about to run out of their money, Madam Deputy Speaker, because they've chewed through more than \$10 billion of it, a record amount over the last 10 years, without any results. Then they're right to be demanding answers.

We have a responsibility as members of this Legislature to demand answers, to ask questions and to ensure scrutiny of the hundreds of millions of dollars in Interim Supply that they're going to be asking for tomorrow. It's a shameful way to run the process. It is a crisis that they have created of process. In other circumstances this is a situation where the public would expect members of the Legislature to say no to allowing this to happen, to not allow a motion like that to be rushed through and to put the government in the position of having to explain to Manitobans why it is that they delayed the budget for political purposes, delayed their Interim Supply motion, and put them in a position of then coming at the last minute and saying, oops, sorry, we mismanaged the process. Give us hundreds of millions of dollars and trust us. Well, you know what, Madam Deputy Speaker, the era of trust us is over in Manitoba.

* (15:30)

This government has time and again abused legislative procedures to rush matters through. They're doing it once again on the Interim Supply motion, and they're attempting to play the old games of rushing through motions and bills without allowing the public and without allowing the public's

representatives in this House to properly examine it. Now I don't know about members opposite and members on the government side whether that's a concern for them or not. It is a concern for members on this side. I know and I've heard the concern from members of the third party.

I don't know whether members of the government party have any concern about the fact that people who voted for them expected them to come here and examine the planned spending, examine the numbers, and ask hard questions on their behalf. But their lack of concern, I think, sends a message loud and clear to their constituents that they have come here, in effect, to allow the government to get away with passing anything they want with any time frame that they like, and I would say to those members, Madam Deputy Speaker, including the Member for St. Norbert (Ms. Brick) and the Member for Radisson (Mr. Jha), and other members in this House who were sent here to stand up for their constituents, I would encourage them to go to their Premier (Mr. Doer), to go to their leader, and to members of Cabinet and demand why it is that in less than 24 hours notice they're walking into this House asking for permission to spend hundreds of millions of dollars. If they don't, it is an abject failure of their responsibility to their constituents.

Madam Deputy Speaker, beyond these concerns about the mismanagement of the process, the complacency and foot-dragging that has led up to the introduction of yesterday's budget, we have many, many concerns about the position that we start from as a province as we enter into the coming economic challenges. The position that we start from is a situation of record debt for the province of Manitoba. Never in our history have Manitobans faced the amount of debt as we face today.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

This is the most shameful legacy of this NDP government during the decade of plenty that came about as a result of the sound policies of previous governments at the federal and the provincial level to balance budgets, to control spending, to create an environment for growth. They have been handed a golden opportunity over the past decade to lay the groundwork to ensure that Manitoba would weather whatever storm would come.

Now we know, Mr. Speaker, that storms do come from time to time, that economies go in cycles. There have been economists writing now for as many as five years that there was an unsustainable

bubble in the housing markets, unsustainable levels of government spending and that a crisis would eventually arise. What are governments doing in order to prepare for that?

Well, Mr. Speaker, I know the Member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk) is concerned about the comments about the housing bubble. I also made comments about the unsustainable levels of spending for which she is responsible. I'm also going to make comments about the fact that pensioners in Manitoba are not strangers to the sort of crisis they see in their pension accounts today to the extent that other pensioners are because 34,000 of them suffered the abuse of their pension accounts caused when Crocus collapsed as a result of the mismanagement of this NDP government. So Manitoba pensioners, working people in this province, have gone from the Crocus collapse and the harm that that did to their pensions, to the predictable global collapse which this government did nothing to prepare for. They went from an act of gross neglect to an act of mild neglect in allowing Crocus to collapse, and then failing to prepare for the predictable collapse that we see today.

But, over that decade of plenty, Mr. Speaker, what they did was they took the \$10.1-billion bounty that was handed to them by the federal government and our neighbours in other provinces, as well as moderate growth in our own source revenue. They took that \$10.1 billion and what did they do with it? They spent \$8.9 billion of that amount. Almost 90 percent has gone out the door never to be seen again. Ninety percent of that bounty is gone, never to be seen again. Where has it gone? It's gone to inflated contracts within the health-care system as a result of their brown envelope, corrupt tendering practices. It's gone to special deals for friends of the government on tendering and contracting on the floodway project. It's gone to all kinds of things that relate to enriching the friends of the NDP, but not a lot of it has gone toward improving the lives of everyday working Manitobans.

So that \$8.9 billion is out the window. That leaves us with another amount, Mr. Speaker, of \$1.2 billion, of which a moderate amount has been handed back to Manitobans in the form of tax relief. Not nearly as much as what other provinces have refunded to their citizens, because in other provinces, they trust their citizens with their own money. Here in NDP Manitoba, they view it as the government's money, not the people's money, and that's why they have been so stingy with Manitobans when it's come

to relieving taxes, unlike other provinces, which has left us with the highest tax load west of Québec. It's created a situation where, in this budget, as a result of their failure to plan, they are cancelling personal income tax cuts for regular Manitoba families at the same time as they're lining their own pockets with a million dollars over four years in vote-tax money.

A million dollars for the NDP, cancelled tax relief for regular Manitoba families. That, Mr. Speaker, is the clearest indication of how far out of touch this government has come when it comes to the concerns and the priorities of Manitobans. They are AIG-like when it comes to lining their pockets at the expense of regular working people in the province of Manitoba.

So what they've done, they've done paltry reductions in taxes, which have left us in an uncompetitive position. We still have a job-killing payroll tax going into a recession. The last time they had a chance to run the province into the ground, during the 1980s, they put in place the job-killing payroll tax.

The Member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) doesn't like looking at history. He is like a broken record when it comes to talking about—I think he was going on about something that happened in the 1960s a while ago, Mr. Speaker. What happened was the last NDP government brought in a job-killing payroll tax. This government has had nine years of bounty to start to phase out that job-killing payroll tax. They've failed to act when they had the opportunity, and today in Manitoba, we're one of two provinces that taxes companies that create jobs. Here in Manitoba, when you create a job, the message from the NDP government is: You owe us money; pay up if you create a job. That's what they say to people who are out there running businesses when they hire somebody: Pay up. That's your penalty for hiring Manitobans. We want more of that money.

We're only one of two provinces that says that to employers in Manitoba, and that's shameful. It should have been dealt with before now and here we are, where Manitobans in the thousands are losing their jobs in manufacturing and other sectors and, when companies are saying, as they look at the future, should we be hiring people, the first message they get from the government is a bill saying: You owe us money if you create this job.

That is a record, Mr. Speaker, not to be proud of. It is a record to remember.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the other concern we have about the lack of preparation, in addition to the record level of debt and the high taxes that Manitobans pay compared to other provinces and the fact that we're one of the few provinces that punishes companies that create jobs, is the fact that we have a drawdown in the savings account which leaves the savings account at 6 percent of total government spending—6 percent of total spending and only 3 percent of the total debt load. It's like a Manitoba family having \$3,000 left in their savings account after spending hundreds of thousands of dollars running up the credit card bill, drawing down the savings account and leaving themselves in a position where, as things worsen, they are in no position to be able to meet the pressures and demands of the future.

So what we see happening in Manitoba, to put this into some context, the credit card bill that they have run up now stands at \$21.1 billion. That is a credit card bill of \$18,380 for every man, woman and child in the province of Manitoba. That is a \$72,000 credit card bill for a family of four in Manitoba—\$72,000 on the NDP credit card. Hands in their pockets, Mr. Speaker, as they get their government hooked on credit with a \$72,000 credit card bill for every Manitoban, and climbing. They increased the bill in this budget. They increased that bill last year. They increased it the year before. All through these years of so-called balanced budgets, the credit card bill has been going up and they've got barely anything left in the savings account.

* (15:40)

I know they say, oh, we've got all this money in the savings account. Well, sure, you can leave 6 percent of your spending in the savings account if you just keep going out and borrowing and running up the credit card bill. That's going to work for a little while, Mr. Speaker, and you can create the temporary impression that you've got money left in the savings account if you just keep running up the credit card, but Manitobans are smart people. Manitobans are practical people, and when they look at what the government is doing, and as they take a careful look at these books, what they are saying, what they are seeing is that the credit card bill is going up, the savings account is being drawn down, and at the same time as these things are happening, the government is out there saying, we're doing a great job, the economy is growing, we're going to run a surplus this year.

Well, Mr. Speaker, Manitobans aren't fooled by this budget. I ran into somebody—[interjection]—and I know, when he's on about Elmwood, I know that the newly elected Member for Elmwood got 60 percent of the votes of Mr. Maloway, the former incumbent. He's 60 percent as popular as the former Member for Elmwood and we are looking forward to having somebody in the House who's got 60 percent of the support of Mr. Maloway. I'm sure he'll make a great contribution to this Chamber.

But, Mr. Speaker, before we talk about—[interjection] It's okay. I'm glad he was able to get enough time away from campaigning for the separatists' coalition to run his campaign, his quarter-million-dollar campaign in Elmwood, and we'll talk more about that later, but we're talking about the budget today.

Today, Mr. Speaker, we have a budget that is a sham. We have a budget that runs up the credit card bill, draws down the savings account and claims a surplus. Well, this morning, in Tim Hortons, I was approached by an individual. I was approached in Tim Hortons this morning by an individual whom I'd never met before. It was somebody who was on their way into work this morning. They came up and they said, I heard your comments yesterday about the budget. I don't understand. How can they run up the debt, reduce the savings account and have a surplus all at the same time? That doesn't make any sense to me. And I said, that's exactly the right question. You're exactly right.

It's because they don't have a surplus, Mr. Speaker. That's a phony, made-up concept because what they did last year was they changed the accounting rules. It's the same thing Enron went out and they promised their shareholders certain returns every quarter and when they weren't able to make those returns, rather than addressing the underlying issues, they changed the accounting rules. That's what Enron did in order to create the impression that they were meeting certain returns.

That's what Bernie Madoff did when people came looking for money. When he promised his investors he would reach certain returns and when he didn't actually make those returns, he changed the accounting rules in order to make it look like he did, and that works for a while, Mr. Speaker. You can fool people for a certain amount of time by changing accounting rules. I give them credit, and I agree with Dan Lett this morning when he said that the numbers

were slippery and that this is a game, and that the Finance Minister is playing a game.

That is what Dan Lett said in the *Free Press* this morning. That is exactly what this budget is, it's a game. As Dan Lett said, the numbers are slippery. It's a slippery game that the government is playing and it's much like what we saw in earlier days when other companies, when they were in trouble, instead of fixing the issues and coming clean, they changed the accounting rules.

It's the same thing they did with Crocus, Mr. Speaker. Instead of coming clean about problems of the fund, they kept changing the way the accounting and the reporting worked in order to delude and trick people into thinking that things were going a certain way. When somebody came out and said, wait a minute, there's something wrong here with these numbers, they got up, demanding apologies. They were ranting from the other side like Howard Dean was screaming in the United States.

They were ranting, demanding apologies, making threats, and what they did, Mr. Speaker, was they caused, unfortunately, some people to back down when they shouldn't have. We can all learn a lesson from that, and the lesson we're going to learn is that when we call the government on their slippery, shady accounting and they demand apologies, we're not going to back down, because the numbers don't lie. The people of Manitoba have figured out you can't run up the credit card, run down the savings account or run a surplus all at the same time.

Now, Mr. Speaker, perhaps even of more concern than the spin and the smoke around the budget is what the impact is going to be. This is certainly of greater concern—what the impact is going to be on regular Manitobans as we move down the road.

They were quoting TD Bank earlier today. Well, let's quote TD Bank's most recent economic forecast for Manitoba. TD Bank said last week Manitoba's economy is going to decline, shrink this year by 1.2 percent. This is a larger decline than what they're budgeting for in this budget. TD Bank is saying Manitobans are right to be worried; the economy is going to shrink by 1.2 points this year, even though Manitoba is sixth in terms of GDP, not second as they've been telling people, No. 6 in the country in terms of GDP per capita. We are going to see a decline in the economy of 1.2 percent. And that, when they talk about being second, all they're saying

is that our economy is shrinking at the second-slowest rate in the country. Wow, now that's a bragging point, Mr. Speaker. We started in sixth place and we're only shrinking, and the amount that we're shrinking in terms of the economic output is the second least in the country. That is not something to write home about. It's something that they should be a lot more concerned about and something that we're concerned about, and it's something that Manitobans are concerned about.

I noticed in the speech that they left out a lot of things that they used to talk about in budget speeches. They used to talk about the bond rating agencies and the way they rate Manitoba's debt. There was not a single reference in yesterday's budget to bond rating agencies and the rating of Manitoba's debt. I wonder why they would leave that out after all the years in a row that they talked about bond rating agencies. Could it be, Mr. Speaker, that they left that out because they're increasing the debt? The debt-to-GDP ratio is going up. The Canada West Foundation has raised the red flag about Manitoba's growing and unsustainable debt-to-GDP ratio. Maybe they're getting a little bit worried about the fact that the rating agencies, which gave Lehman Brothers a AA rating, gave his government the very same rating. The same rating agencies that gave Lehman Brothers AA on their debt gave this government the same rating on the debt of the Province of Manitoba. I wonder why they didn't mention the bond rating agencies in yesterday's budget speech.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we can talk about Costas Ataliotis and David Wolinsky and their other business partners, but we'll save that for a later day, as well. [*interjection*] Okay, all right, okay. Well, the Attorney General (Mr. Chomiak) is good from his seat, and let's not talk about all those things.

Now the issue with this debt and the issue with this budget is that debt is going up and went up during good years, unlike the rest of the country. Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, all paid down debt during the good years because they operated under that common-sense idea that you fix the roof when the shine is shining, and the sun has been shining as a result of the decisions of prior governments over the last decade. The sun is no longer shining. They failed to fix the roof during those good years, and now we have a high and growing debt that threatens to contribute to rising interest rates, that threatens the sustainability of our finances going forward, and I note no more bragging about Manitoba's debt rating.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the last point I want to make is this. It's the level of dependence on the goodwill of our neighbours. Here in Canada we have a system of equalization that says that when a province is doing poorly in its economy, other provinces chip in to help bail them out. That's what's happened over the last eight years, and we welcome the support from other provinces that has flowed in to the province of Manitoba. As a result of creating a good economic environment, we have seen Manitoba companies and workers respond in spades with growth in their businesses, with increases in their sales, with new investments, new ideas over the last eight years, and they've done a terrific job. But the problem is that they've done it in spite of the provincial government, not because of the government. Over top of that, as they have been out there building their businesses, making good decisions and employing more and more Manitobans, they have had a government that has gone in the opposite direction and has dragged them down compared to where they could have been had they been responsive to the needs of those who are creating jobs in the province.

*(15:50)

Now we have a government that is offside with the rest of the province; that, while others were paying down debt, they increased the debt. They increased their dependence on our neighbours so that now we're getting cheques mailed in to us to the tune of \$4.1 billion every year from the federal government, much of which comes from transfers from other provinces in Canada, including B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Newfoundland. All of these good Canadians have been sending bailout cheques to Manitoba for the better part of the last nine years. Instead of investing that money wisely, the government ran up the debt and has left us in the position of becoming dependent on those payments. So 40 percent of our budget is now dependent on those transfer payments from Ottawa. What we find ourselves in the position of today, to put it into some context, is a situation where a family with an income of \$60,000 a year, a household budget of \$60,000 a year, would be relying on their neighbours for \$22,000 of that every year. That's where Manitoba stands today, vis-à-vis our neighbours; \$22,000 out of their \$60,000 budget is coming from neighbours.

Now, Mr. Speaker, those neighbours are experiencing financial troubles, as everybody is, including our province of Manitoba. Some of those neighbours are getting together and having meetings, including the provinces of Saskatchewan, Alberta

and British Columbia, to talk about how they, together, can work to get out of those troubles. Those neighbours are getting together and they're resenting the fact that here in Manitoba, as they're dealing with these challenges, mailing the cheques in to Manitoba, the politicians in Manitoba, of this government, are getting up and saying, tut-tut, if they'd only managed their finances better, they would be in the enviable position that we are here in Manitoba.

Those provincial leaders are sick and tired of hearing Manitoba brag about its finances after they've got their affairs in order, mailed the cheques in to Manitoba, and are then lectured to by the NDP about how to manage finances. It's absolutely unbelievable. It's the spoiled child of Confederation lecturing the others on how to manage their finances after the others have bailed them out time and again.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this is the position we find ourselves in where what they have done is they've built up that dependency and the net result of that, which is where things get worrisome and serious, is that they have rolled the dice and they have gambled that that money was going to keep flowing to Manitoba. As a result, they have jeopardized health care, they have jeopardized education, they have jeopardized our ability to build roads and protect our citizens. They have jeopardized jobs. They are creating a situation where Manitobans are going to have to work longer hours for less pay in order to dig out of the debt and that are going to be faced with the challenge of dealing with the situation where that \$22,000 out of their \$60,000 household budget is suddenly in question and what are we going to do?

We very much hope, Mr. Speaker, that we do not find ourselves in that situation. The wise thing to do, and what Manitobans would do, is prepare for the worst and hope for the best. What the economists are saying in a worst-case scenario is that this recession could last for three, four, or five years. In a worst-case scenario, it's a five-year phenomena. In a best-case scenario, it's a one-year situation. That's where we hope it'll be.

Our fingers are crossed because there's nothing else we can do but cross our fingers because the government has put our backs against the wall. So all Manitobans have their fingers crossed that they get lucky on this one and that we're out of it within a year. If we don't get lucky, we're in a difficult situation. That's why we can't support the budgetary policy of this government. That's why we have great concern about the direction that we move in as a

government and what direction that means for regular working people here in the province of Manitoba.

So, Mr. Speaker, as a result of those concerns, we're concerned about the big picture, general direction of government. There are many individual initiatives in the budget that are good initiatives, provided the money doesn't get wasted and caught up in administration as has been the pattern over the last nine years. If the money actually gets to where they're saying it's going to get to, then we will applaud those initiatives.

We're looking for more investment in schools. South Winnipeg, as an example, just to be a local MLA for just a second, is in need of a new high school. There are many other areas of need around the province—a personal care home in the community of Morden. There are needs throughout our province of Manitoba, which other members will speak to and address as they make their comments. There will be individual projects that we will support. We look forward to the schools capital budget and some good news in that budget for local communities, but it's the big picture, it is the big ship that we're sailing on, as opposed to the individual deck chairs, which may be very good. The deck chairs may look very good, but it's the ship we're worried about now, Mr. Speaker, and that's why we are going to not support this budget.

So, for that reason, we can't support the budgetary policy of the government as outlined very late in the game yesterday by the Finance Minister.

And so, for that reason, I move, seconded by the Member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik),

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

therefore regrets this budget fails to address the priorities of Manitobans by:

(a) increasing our province's debt to an all-time high of \$21.1 billion, which creates a credit card bill of \$18,380 for every man, woman and child in the province. Hardworking Manitoba families will be forced to pay off this bill in the months and years ahead; and

(b) gambling with incomes and social programs by increasing our dependence on Ottawa handouts to a record level of \$3.8 billion, more than double the handouts we received in 1999, which is like a family with a \$60,000 income

relying on neighbours for \$22,000 a year when those neighbours are now in serious financial trouble; and

(c) running a deficit and misleadingly calling it a surplus by using the misleading accounting practice of calling Crown income "revenue" when in fact that income is not available to government because it is required to meet obligations such as Manitoba Hydro's record \$7.4-billion long-term debt; and

(d) attempting to introduce a new, misleading accounting practice with a proposal to reduce by over 80 percent the minimum payment on Manitoba's credit card debt, taking that repayment to \$17.54 per person this year on a bill of \$18,380; and

(e) failing to announce a plan to tackle corruption, waste and mismanagement within government by:

(i) endorsing the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority "brown envelope" tendering scheme; and

(ii) failing to repeal the "vote tax," leaving the New Democratic Party in line to pocket \$1 million over four years at the expense of Manitoba taxpayers; and

(iii) failing to cancel the reckless and environmentally harmful west-side Bipole III project and instead proceed with the east-side line, which is supported by the vast majority; would protect the boreal forest; would protect the Riding Mountain UNESCO Biosphere Reserve; provide a far more reliable backup to Bipole I and II; save 40 megawatts of line loss which will allow for the closure of a coal-fired power plant, and save Manitoba Hydro ratepayers a minimum of \$640 million, or \$2,000 for every family in the province; and

(f) failing to offer a plan to create opportunity and wealth so Manitobans can feel hope that we'll one day emerge from the hole of debt and dependency and see a brighter future.

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

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The amendment is in order, and it's been moved by the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, seconded by the honourable Member for Lac du Bonnet,

THAT the motion be amended by deleting—dispense?

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

An Honourable Member: Aw, we should have heard it again.

An Honourable Member: Yeah.

An Honourable Member: Can you read it, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: Do you want it read?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: No. Okay.

Do we have other speakers to the amendment?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): I wonder if there might be leave to resolve the House into a committee of Interim Supply.

* (16:00)

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Healthy Living): I move, seconded by the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers), that debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

As previously agreed to, we will now go to Interim Supply. The House will now resolve into Committee of Supply to consider the resolutions respecting the Interim Supply bill.

Madam Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

Interim Supply

Madam Chairperson (Bonnie Korzeniowski): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. We have before us for consideration two resolutions respecting the Interim Supply bill.

The first resolution respecting operating expenditures for Interim Supply reads as follows:

RESOLVED that a sum not exceeding \$4,810,056,480, being 48 percent of the total amount to be voted as set forth in Part A (Operating

Expenditure) of the Estimates, be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2010.

Does the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) have any comments?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): No, it's fine.

Madam Chairperson: Does the official opposition Finance critic have any comments?

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): No, Madam Chairperson.

Madam Chairperson: Is the committee ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Madam Chairperson: Shall the resolution pass?

Resolution agreed to.

The second resolution respecting capital expenditures for Interim Supply reads as follows:

RESOLVED that a sum not exceeding \$565,306,500, being 75 percent of the total amount to be voted as set out in Part B (Capital Investment) of the Estimates be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Is the committee ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Madam Chairperson: Shall the resolution pass?

Resolution agreed to.

That concludes the business currently before us.

Committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

* (16:10)

IN SESSION

Committee Report

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski (Chairperson): Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has considered and adopted two resolutions respecting Interim Supply.

I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Kirkfield Park (Ms. Blady), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

* * *

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

THAT there be granted to Her Majesty on account of Certain Expenditures of the Public Service for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010, out of the Consolidated Fund, the sums of \$4,810,056,480, being 48 percent of the total amount to be voted as set out in Part A of the Operating Expenditure, and \$565,306,500, being 75 percent of the amount to be voted as set out in Part B (Capital Investment) of the Estimates, laid before the Legislature at the present session.

Motion agreed to.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 10—The Interim Appropriation Act, 2009

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak), that Bill 10, The Interim Appropriation Act, 2009; Loi de 2009 portant affectation anticipée de crédits, be now read a first time in order for second reading immediately.

Motion agreed to.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 10—The Interim Appropriation Act, 2009

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak), that Bill 10, The Interim Appropriation Act, 2009; Loi de 2009 portant affectation anticipée de crédits, be now read a second time and be referred to Committee of the Whole.

Motion presented.

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, I take some pleasure, not a lot, but some pleasure in rising to speak to this motion of Interim Supply.

The reason why I say some pleasure because quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, it was not necessary that this motion of Interim Supply even be placed before this Legislature had the Minister of Finance and the government of the day brought forward a budget prior to the fiscal year end of March 31, 2009.

They brought forward a budget. They could have had the budget passed and Interim Supply wouldn't have been necessary. To bring forward to this House an Interim Supply bill at the present time and have it debated in less than 24 hours, Mr. Speaker, puts an awful lot of responsibility not only on the opposition, but certainly onto the government.

As everyone is aware, whether it be on government side or opposition side, money is what makes the government go round. Quite frankly, this government has decided that the way they campaign is to throw a lot of your money and my money and other people's money around and without that money, unfortunately, the operations of this government would come to a standstill.

* (16:20)

There's a need for operating dollars as well as capital dollars to go forward. As we are well aware, we're in the situation right now in the province of Manitoba where we have the possibility of a fairly serious and fairly substantial flood coming up the Red River Valley and affecting quite a number of not only municipalities, but also individuals, Mr. Speaker, who are going to be dependent upon the provincial government not only for flood protection, but, perhaps, they may require the provincial government for some flood restoration.

Mr. Speaker, the only way that that's funded is to have a government, a provincial government, have the opportunity or the ability to expend funds which comes from the authority of this act. As I said, I find it very distressing that we are going to turn over, in a period of 24 hours, the ability to have this Finance Minister and this government expend somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$5 billion taxpayers' dollars, and that this government we expect to spend those \$5 billion in an efficient manner. I can honestly say that this government has not given us a lot of confidence in the fact that they can expend in an efficient manner. I don't have to go over the fact that we do have a number of examples of where this government has mismanaged the business of this province, where this government has in fact wasted tens of millions of taxpayers' dollars and mismanaged other dollars going forward in other departments.

I don't have to tell you about Bipole III and \$650 million of taxpayers' dollars, hard-earned dollars that have been proposed to be wasted on behalf of this government and its policies. I don't have to talk about the Crocus funds that were totally

mismanaged and, how many, 35,000 Manitobans who have lost retirement funds going forward and hold this government responsible. I don't have to talk about a simple thing like the Spirited Energy campaign that cost millions of dollars that we have given the government of the day the responsibility to expend and expend it improperly. I don't have to talk about the health care in this province where we've spent literally billions and billions of taxpayers' dollars and, quite frankly, have not received value for that expenditure.

But here we are. In 24 hours, we're asked to pass an Interim Supply bill that is going to give this government billions of dollars to once again waste—waste, Mr. Speaker—and mismanage as they have proven to mismanage and waste in the past.

Mr. Speaker, we know that citizens in the province of Manitoba have certainly not been well received by this government when it comes to tax relief, when it comes to the managing of the debt levels that we have in this province, and certainly haven't been well received when we look to this province with respect to dependency of equalization and transfer payments that we depend upon now for our lifeblood from the federal government.

So I don't want to confuse this with a budget debate because it's not meant to be. This is, in fact, Mr. Speaker, the opposition and the government passing a bill that is going to allow dollars to flow after April the 1st of this coming year.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Again, this government didn't even have to bring this legislation forward had they come forward with a budget in the first part of March, which we asked for. We stood, Madam Deputy Speaker, we've sent letters to the government asking that they put this budget before this Legislature prior to yesterday. We wanted them to bring forward a plan, a well-thought-out plan that was going to allow Manitoba to go forward in the 2009-2010 fiscal year that would put us in a position to compete, not only in this country, but globally. That plan wasn't put forward until yesterday.

Now, all of a sudden, we're asked to debate an Interim bill in 24 hours to give them the financial wherewithal to go forward and expend dollars on our behalf. Well, I'm very disappointed that we have to do that at this time. I wish that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) had have considered what

this was all about prior to holding the budget back until yesterday.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I know that we don't have an awful lot of time today or tomorrow. We've even gone to the extent of extending debate time for an hour so that we can have ministers who are responsible for their departments to explain why \$5 billion should be given to them and to their bureaucrats to be able to put and spend on behalf of Manitobans. It's up to them to explain why they want this money and how they're going to expend it. We're concerned that it's not going to be expended efficiently, and I think it's up to the ministers to explain whether they are or are not going to be able to do that.

So, I will speak very briefly on second reading. We do have another opportunity in third reading, but I would like to give my members an opportunity to speak to Interim Supply. They want to talk. They want to talk about their departments. They want to talk about their critic portfolios. They want to talk about their priorities. But we're going to be shut off, Madam Deputy Speaker, in a period of two days. And it's wrong, but I think what we have to do is get those messages across to the members of that bench on the government side that, in fact, they cannot take this bill frivolously, that they have to look at their dollars that they're expending on behalf of taxpayers of the province of Manitoba seriously and do so like it was their own money.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I'll turn the floor over to the next member.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Let me thank my colleague from Brandon West for the brief words he put on the record in terms of this bill. It is very unfortunate we do have just a very limited amount of time to discuss a very important piece of legislation the government has brought forward. Quite frankly, we're looking at spending almost \$5 billion under this particular bill, The Interim Appropriation Act, and the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) is absolutely correct. If the government would have been doing their job, we should have had a provincial budget several months ago. The federal government undertook to bring forward a budget for the entire country. They put their discussions and their ideas on the floor several months ago, and there's no reason the Province couldn't have done the same thing, so that we would know where we're at in terms of the economy of Manitoba and where we stand financially.

You know, we just received not too long ago the third quarter report from the province, and that has raised a bit of an interesting view of where we're at here in terms of the province. We know, notwithstanding what the government's saying about how good things are in Manitoba, that Manitobans are suffering. There are going to be substantial implications to the financial implications here in the province of Manitoba. We know things are certainly going to be significantly challenged by the Province, and you just take a look at the budget here.

I just took in one line in terms of what the Province is going to generate from the mining industry alone. And previously, in the last year's budget, the Province collected somewhere in the neighbourhood of about \$130 million from the mining sector. This year, they're looking at collecting somewhere closer to only \$10 million. So the mining industry is under significant amount of pressure, which reflects quite dramatically on the revenue that's going to be generated to the Province. So there are some very substantial financial implications there.

The other thing I did want to mention quickly here: the provincial budget has grown from 1999 to about \$6 billion in 1999 to where we are today, and over \$10.2 billion is what the Province is spending on an annual basis. A very, very substantial increase in terms of percentage dollars being spent in the province.

The scary part for me, you know, we've had relatively good times here in the province of Manitoba. I think wise people, when they're handling money, would say, you know, if we're having good times, we should probably set a little money aside for when the rainy day comes. Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, the rainy days are here. In fact, even the *Free Press* acknowledges, "Province's rainy day has come."

So what we've done, we haven't put money aside in the province of Manitoba, we actually increased the debt in the province of Manitoba. Last year the debt increased approximately a billion dollars, and even when we look at this budget document, we're talking about increasing the provincial budget again to the tune of \$700 million or \$800 million, somewhere in there. So it's very disturbing to see these kinds of things happen. And here we are at the last minute, trying to debate a bill worth almost \$5 billion, and it's very disturbing.

* (16:30)

The one thing that is saving this government from very substantial additional cost is the fact that we have relatively low interest rates. Could you imagine what would happen if we went back to the '80s when we had really high interest rates and the Province was paying high interest rates? Well, that would very seriously impact the amount of money that the Province would have to support programs across the province, build infrastructure and all the things that Manitobans are looking for from a government.

We know this government can spend money. I think the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) did point it out. We as opposition members and, I think, Manitobans recognize, yes, money has to be spent. Well, we want to make sure that the money is spent wisely, in the best interests of Manitoba, and that's really the job here. I think that's what the province of Manitoba and the government of Manitoba really have to take to heart. Once this particular legislation is passed and \$5 billion is turned over to their hands, we as taxpayers want to make sure that money is spent wisely.

We certainly are looking forward, on this side of the House, to get into budget debate. Obviously, there are a lot more things that can be said in terms of the budget. So I won't get into all those things today, but I did want to point out just a few things with respect to this Interim Appropriation Act today. Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): It's my pleasure to rise in the House today to speak on this Interim Appropriation Act, 2009, Bill 10, that the Finance Minister has brought forward today to deal with the appropriation of—as my colleague from Turtle Mountain indicated—\$4.81 billion to be spent for operating expenditures in '09-10 fiscal year. Only 48 percent of the total appropriations set out in Part A of the Estimates, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I have the budget documents here before me. It's quite startling to see the levels of spending and expenditure that the government has in the process. We agree with some of the areas that the government is trying to make improvements on in Manitoba with regard to some of the housing issues and others. But there are some glaring areas that the government didn't want to talk about in this bill, and two of them seem to be health care and agriculture—in this budget I should say. But we'll get into more of that, I'm sure, in the budget debate itself.

I wanted to just say, though, that a bill like this, to be debated in the last few days of March like this, in the time when we could have been using it to debate the budget itself, shows a lack of planning that we've been talking about for years from this side of the House in regard to this government's ineptitude in regard to being able to run the finances of the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

The increased spending that the members for Turtle Mountain and Brandon West just talked about is just one example of the callous disregard for, I believe, of the way that they have looked at managing the affairs of this province. Right on the front of it, it's steady and balanced, as what the document says with the scales on the front of it. You know, Manitobans, it's been indicated many times in this House, know full well that as our leader, in his reply to the budget today indicated, you can't keep increasing the credit card and decreasing the savings account and saying that you've got a surplus budget.

The Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) himself, just a few short weeks ago when Alberta brought their budget down, and maybe some of his colleagues aren't aware of this, but when Alberta brought their budget down, they actually used some of their rainy day fund as well to have a balanced budget this year. But they didn't call it balanced, they were honest, and said, we're running a deficit budget. Well, when asked by the press, our Finance Minister said, yes, Alberta's running a deficit budget because they took funds from the rainy day fund, but he just finished taking funds from the rainy day fund in Manitoba. He actually is going to be looking at making changes to legislation in this House to reduce his obligations under the balanced budget legislation that was presently in place, in fact, Bill 38 that they just passed last year—his own balanced budget legislation, Mr. Speaker, to reduce the debt payment by \$90 million this year in that regard. Yet, he still maintains that he's got a balanced budget after taking from both. So it was okay for Alberta—and he agreed that they were running a deficit budget—but it's not okay in Manitoba. Oh, I see he's still shaking his head the right way. He's still as confused as he was when he made those statements earlier.

Mr. Speaker, this last-minute kind of a passage of an Interim Appropriation Act with all of the—just before spring break, just before the end of the fiscal year of the government, could have been time used for other things. I've mentioned that in my comments

earlier. If they really wanted to debate this they could have called the House back in earlier. They could have actually followed the leadership of Ottawa. Manitobans know that Canada's in a recession, same as North America. In fact, if you look around the world we acknowledge that there's a recession going on.

This government, unlike the federal government that took the initiative to call the House back in on January 27 and have a budget, didn't decide to do that in Manitoba. Took their lead from—maybe the '80 Pawley government, I don't know. *[interjection]* Oh, that budget never did pass, did it? That's right. I forgot about that. Well, nobody would ever forget that. Manitobans saw a great improvement in the change of government at that time, Mr. Speaker. That was leadership. Responsible, accountable leadership in Manitoba may have brought the budget back in earlier, set a precedent because we're in precedent-setting times with the recession across the country.

Manitobans knew that the federal government had provided Manitoba with hundreds of millions of dollars more money in their budget, and Manitobans wanted to know what this government was going to do with it and where they're going to spend it, but they didn't expect them to be able to—you know, and to their credit, Manitobans basically, some of them said, well, we don't need to run a deficit budget in Manitoba. We probably should have a balanced budget. So the Finance Minister was listening in that regard. So he comes out with steady and balanced. Well, he forgot the words responsible and accountable, because this is not what is in this budget in regards to future taxation of the children in the decades that we're going to have to live through in the future.

Without an influx of natural resources in the province of Manitoba, and a great turnaround in the economy which, of course, the Finance Minister's banking on happening, this budget will continue to put further debt loads on future generations of Manitobans. I think we need to be very, very cautious about that when, particularly, we're already seeing the government mishandling health care, particularly in our rural situations. They are making huge changes in some of the education financing that is causing a stir in some of the divisions across the province of Manitoba as well—the heavy-handed tactics that are being taken place in some of those—buying into it in many places, but at the same time leaving consternation and no consistent planning in

the school board system that can lead to long-term planning on those divisions' behalf. They are very concerned about that, certainly the ones that I've met with at least, anyway.

Mr. Speaker, I think that the infrastructure side of the budget that the government talked about—I was very disappointed yesterday when I heard that they tried to paint the picture that there would be a 30 percent increase in that area, knowing full well that if they go back to their own third-quarter report that just came out that they'll know there was a shortfall of spending last year in that infrastructure side. Probably eats up at least half of that 30 percent, but I don't suppose the minister of highways' colleagues are even aware of that. I'm sure the Finance Minister may be because, of course, the budget comes out of his area, and I would challenge them to maybe go back and look at why two-thirds of that increased \$135 million could be eaten up in that area.

You'd have to go right back to the \$400 million that was being used as a base level of that \$4-billion, 10-year program that has just kind of gone by the wayside since they brought it in three or four years ago, and utilizing some of the federal monies to put into that program. They committed about \$35 million to bridges last year in that program but conveniently forgot about it when they were doing their percentage-increased numbers in the budget.

* (16:40)

So, Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of areas that we could touch base on today in regard to this bill. I think it's just a lack of poor planning. Of course, I think that, actually, the budget was probably planned at the time that it was brought in by the Premier (Mr. Doer). Of course, he said he didn't want to do it until he could get the by-elections out of the road. Those could have been held earlier as well. So he's the only one that has the opportunity to call those whenever he wants.

The House could have sat earlier or the budget could have come in first and then had the by-elections in May or later, although I wouldn't have encouraged that. But, Mr. Speaker, I think that if they'd have done that, we would have been in a much more accountable situation than we are today in regard to being able to debate an appropriations act like this. We would have been in a much more accountable position as a province in regard to letting Manitobans know where they stand in relation to the whole financing of the province of Manitoba.

But, if you're going to bring in a budget like this, that takes from the rainy day fund, takes from the summary budgets, the surpluses of the Crown corporations, to balance the books as they did by changing the accounting processes last year, and then even standing up in the House today in question period in reply, saying, well, we didn't change anything; these are the rules that are put in place—but not even acknowledging the fight that it took for the government to force through the legislation over the angst that we on the opposition side, to make this happen.

I mean we predicted this well over a year ago, that the situation would be what it is today, that the government would be doing with the bills that they brought through last year what they are doing today. I think that we need to remind Manitobans again, just exactly that the government will be taking a route, I guess, that will allow future increases in many of our Crown corporation fees and charges to be used as a hidden tax instead of increasing taxation in the province of Manitoba.

The government knows that they can't get away with increasing the taxation in the province of Manitoba because we are already the highest personally taxed west of Québec. The small-business corporation, though they can brag about eliminating the tax on small corporations, small corporate tax, that's a very good thing, but at the same time, they didn't even increase the levels of taxation that the companies can have on small business corporations in Manitoba to the same level as what the federal government did in its budget in January. So now, we've got a two-tier system for them as well: one for federal that provides them with some benefit, and one in Manitoba that continues to restrict them.

So, Mr. Speaker, with those words, I think I would end my comments in regard to The Interim Appropriation Act for 2009, Bill 10, and look forward to the words of any other speakers who may speak to this bill. Thank you.

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to rise and put a few words on the record in regard to this very important subject.

It's clear that the budget that was presented yesterday and acclaimed as being steady and balanced is certainly balanced unsteady, neither is it true of the phrases that have been put forward in my mind. I have a serious concern about needing to pass this in such a short time. When we take a look at it, it's at least 25 percent, almost a third, of the

percentage of the budget, and we will pass that with virtually no debate whatsoever, Mr. Speaker.

I find that unacceptable and not without precedence that we could have sat much sooner. The federal government actually gave a prime example of what could have been done and should have been done. They addressed the recession and addressed the concerns of the taxpayers and the people of Manitoba, the people that have to make business decisions, the people that are working, the 8-to-4 people that have to make big decisions in their lives of what to buy, what not to buy and what plan that the government has going forward in this type of recession, which is probably one of the deepest recessions that we've faced since way back in the last century, Mr. Speaker.

More particularly, I would like to address, Mr. Speaker, some of the issues that refer to the Crown corporations and one of those, I would ask the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) if he could explain to me why the Crown corporations, Manitoba Lotteries, would need refinancing on \$9 million or \$9.1 million and need to borrow a further \$50 million to operate. It certainly does lend itself to making one wonder where that money has gone and what it's been used for. I would suggest that the Crown corporations are stand-alone corporations and an explanation is definitely required for the people in Manitoba as well as this side of the House.

I would also ask the Minister responsible for MPI how much of the \$13 million that he's allotted for the enhanced driver's licences and enhanced identification cards has been spent to date, Mr. Speaker. And in respect to the enhanced ID cards, after seeing the headlines the other day that Saskatchewan has scrapped their program for enhanced ID cards after spending \$600,000, I'm wondering if the Minister responsible for MPI is actually looking at scrapping that program in Manitoba as well.

Who's paying for this program in Manitoba? Who's fronting the program for MPI? Is that going to be paid for up front by the Manitoba government, or is MPI fronting this to be paid back by the Manitoba government at some time down the road? We really wonder who's paying the bills for this. How many additional staff has MPI hired to deal with these enhanced ID cards? That's a question I would like the minister to respond to today or anytime soon. It should have been responded to before.

Will the vehicle registration fees in this province in 2009-2010—is there an intent to raise these? Is that a part of a hidden tax to try and balance the budget here? The Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) really hasn't laid out where his money is going to be coming from, Mr. Speaker. What he has done is he's been depleting a savings account while he's been running up the expense account and says that this is all going to be fine at the end of the year. Well, it certainly doesn't work that way in real business, and I can't understand it working here. Rubber cheques don't seem to do anything in real business. They certainly won't do it here in the House either.

I'm just wondering also, Mr. Speaker, about the funding purchase of \$80.5 million, purchasing a building, City Place, for the purpose of office space. I'm wondering where this money came from. Did that come out of the government's general fund? Did that come out of a rainy day fund? Did that come out of a reserve fund? I would like an explanation to that. If the minister would be willing to pass that on, it would certainly be helpful. Does the minister plan to convert the existing retail space in this building they have bought? Is he going to convert that to office space, and is that office space required? That's a question and I'm hoping the minister is actually paying attention.

I'd also like to ask the Minister responsible for Gaming if he could tell us what the status is of the casino project in the R.M. of Elton. That's a very important project. He's made a number of efforts to get a casino established in western Manitoba, and it doesn't seem to be very fruitful at this point. I'm wondering if he would have an update for us on this casino project. Maybe it would be simpler for him just to own the casino and distribute the funds himself perhaps, rather than jumping through a lot of hoops and disappointment.

He must be suffering a lot of disappointments in not being able to get this casino up and running as he's been promising. He seems to show up quite often at the announcements that it's going to happen, but when it stalls, we don't seem to see him. I'm thinking he would like the opportunity to stand up and tell us where the casino project is really at.

* (16:50)

The Minister of Lotteries isn't here right now, but I'd really like to have some indication that they have done a study on horse racing and a Manitoba Jockey Club horse racing study has been completed, has been in the hands of the government for over a

year. The results haven't been made public, and we're just wondering what impact that would have on the budget process as well, and if there's going to be some money put forward to that. At the very least, we would like to see a copy of that study and a better indication of what effect it will have on Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, I see the time is moving on. I'd like to thank you for the opportunity of getting up and putting a few words on the record in regard to this budget.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: Any other speakers? Okay, seeing none, is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? *[Agreed]*

The House will now resolve into Committee of the Whole to consider a report on Bill 10, The Interim Appropriation Act, for the concurrence and third reading.

Madam Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill 10—The Interim Appropriation Act, 2009

Madam Chairperson (Bonnie Korzeniowski): Will the Committee of the Whole please come to order. We will be considering Bill 10, The Interim Appropriation Act, 2009.

Does the honourable Minister of Finance have an opening statement?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): No.

Madam Chairperson: Does the official opposition Finance critic have a statement?

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Thank you for allowing me a bit of an opening statement. We recognize, as I said earlier, that this Interim Supply bill is extremely important to the provincial government, as money does find its way into the different departments and certainly services have to be provided. Again, I'd just like on the record to show that, Madam Chairperson, I think it was possible that we could have had the budget prior to yesterday. We could've had the budget put forward to the Legislative Assembly and we could've debated the budget and passed the budget prior to fiscal year-end instead of having to go through the exercise of Interim Supply. That would be my opening statement.

I do know, Madam Chairperson, there are a number of members of my caucus here who certainly

have questions of ministers and I would certainly allow them the time now to ask those questions. Thank you.

Madam Chairperson: We shall now proceed to consider the bill clause by clause.

An Honourable Member: Question.

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): I have some questions for the minister that's here today. I would like to ask the Minister responsible for MPI: How much of the \$13 million for the enhanced driver's licences and enhanced identification cards has been spent to date?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Act): Madam Chairperson, I don't have that precise figure in front of me in terms of the actual expenditure. I do know that there's a pending certification and finalization of the actual card itself being produced. I will endeavour to provide that information to the member as soon as I can obtain it.

Mr. Graydon: I would ask the Minister for MPI—and I would thank him for that answer and look forward to that information. I would also ask the minister, who is paying for the up-front cost of this, whether it's the government paying for it, or MPI? *[interjection]*

Madam Chairperson: Order, please. I'm having trouble hearing. If you could take your conversations to the loge, please.

Mr. Graydon: Madam Chairperson, do you want me to rephrase the question or repeat the question?

Madam Chairperson: No, I was just having trouble. I'll be fine.

Mr. Chomiak: I believe the arrangement is the same as we indicated when we first announced that the cards would be produced, that MPI would produce the cards and then the government would refund the cost over a period of time.

Mr. Graydon: I would ask the minister: How many additional staff has MPI hired to implement the initiative and at what cost?

Mr. Chomiak: I don't have those figures in front of me but I either will endeavour to provide it to the member prior to or at the next opportunity we meet at Crown Corporations Committee, and if that's not for a while, I'll get the information to the member as soon as I can.

Mr. Graydon: I appreciate that, Mr. Minister. I would also ask you if at the same time perhaps you can give me an update on how many applications there have been to date for these enhanced identification cards.

Mr. Chomiak: Madam Chairperson, as well I will provide an update to the member on all of those matters in the same fashion I indicated in the previous answer.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you very much. Would the vehicle registration fees be increasing again in 2009-2010, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Selinger: I believe the rate increase was announced last year and it's fully annualizing this year.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you. I would ask the Minister responsible for MPI if the funding, the \$80.5 million purchase of City Place, where did that money come from? Did that come out of general revenue? Did that come out of the rainy day fund? I understand that it is not a debt. That's what I've read in the paper. Perhaps he can indicate to me where that money came from?

Mr. Chomiak: Madam Chairperson, I believe that money came out of the—it did not come from the government.

Mr. Graydon: Could the minister then tell me where that money did come from?

Mr. Chomiak: Yes, thank you, Madam Chairperson. That money came out of the reserve funds of MPI.

Mr. Graydon: Could the minister tell me if the PUB had access to that particular reserve fund prior to their ruling?

Mr. Chomiak: I believe that these and other matters are being discussed with PUB.

Mr. Graydon: Madam Chairperson, I'm wondering if that \$80.5 million is a fair price for that property? Perhaps the minister can give me some indication on how they arrived at that price and if that's a fair market price in today's recessive situation?

Mr. Chomiak: I believe that that price was arrived at through independent third party verifications and I believe if one were to calculate the cost, the least costs versus the costs of purchase, that it would be favourable to the Crown corporation.

Mr. Graydon: I would ask the Minister responsible for MPI if there are any plans on converting the retail space to office space in the near future.

* (17:00)

Mr. Chomiak: Madam Chairperson, as I understand it, the present occupancy of that building where MPI has been located for 28 years, that it had been leased, will now be owned by MPI, and all the other operations that operate will be operated by the same operator coterminous with that. It's not dissimilar from leasing a house over a period of time and determining that the lease payments over a period of time will be in excess of the mortgage costs and deciding to convert that into an asset.

Mr. Graydon: Madam Chairperson, maybe back to that same question, or a question earlier, that the minister will be getting back to me that they had hired a bunch of additional staff which would indicate that they are renting other spaces.

I'm just wondering why they would rent other space when, in fact, they now own a space. But I suppose it may be a short-term situation in hiring this other staff for the enhanced ID cards or the enhanced driver's licences, or is there some plan to scrap that as Saskatchewan has?

Mr. Chomiak: I was a bit surprised that Saskatchewan decided to not proceed with the production of their driver's licences. Obviously the issue of having the capability of producing the cards and making them available is one of some urgency, given the June deadline that's coming. I noticed, I think it was today or yesterday in fact, in *The Globe and Mail*, a full page advertisement from the government of Canada advising Canadians to either get passports or enhanced driver's licence where applicable. So the date is fast approaching and Ontario, British Columbia to a certain extent, and other jurisdictions, and quite a few American states are endeavouring to produce cards in order to meet that deadline.

Mr. Graydon: Madam Chairperson, I would like to ask the Minister responsible for Gaming if he could give the House an indication of the status of the project—the casino project—in the R.M. of Elton. He has made a number of announcements in western Manitoba for casinos, but they seem to hit a snag.

I'm just wondering if—what the status of this particular project is, Madam Chairperson.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister charged with the administration of The Gaming Control Act): The process that commenced years ago with AMC to negotiate the establishment of future gaming sites continues in the same manner and fashion that it did from the start. That is, a process with the Province and AMC working through a determination as to the future of gaming sites and distribution of revenue has continued. The economic development fund, which has been set up and established and is now operating, is a portion of revenues that is available to all First Nations in Manitoba. The project in western Manitoba, which would see the establishment of a medium size casino to be owned and operated by AMC and have sharing of revenues, is still in the process of negotiation.

The member might be aware that an RFP process was undertaken and three First Nation communities purchased land in the R.M. of Elton in order to establish that project, and that is the matter is now being discussed and negotiated between the AMC and the consortium that purchased the land on the lessor lessee negotiations.

Mr. Graydon: Madam Chairperson, the response from the minister kind of clouds what I have learned from some of the other casinos and how they have been established. It certainly is a deviation for this particular casino. It's a deviation from how the other ones are established and how the sharing process has been.

I'm wondering if the minister has a logical reason for this deviation.

Mr. Chomiak: After the initial casino projects were established and two of five were undertaken, a process of review took place where it was determined that a new process should be put in place to negotiate subsequent casinos and/or expansions. And, under that arrangement, it was determined that it would be appropriate to share revenues amongst all First Nations, as opposed to the previous splitting arrangement, 70-30, that had been established for the initial casino projects. That has now successfully been done with the establishment of the economic development fund, whereby revenues from Manitoba Lotteries gaming revenues, a percentage goes to First Nations economic development fund for distribution amongst all First Nations.

That process has taken place in negotiations and the establishment of that revenue-sharing has been a paramount principle throughout the process and continues to be, that is, that the effort is to establish

and to distribute revenue amongst all First Nations to ensure that all can take advantage of the economic development opportunities that are provided by the casino revenue.

Mr. Graydon: Could the minister then explain to me, is it going to be the advocacy group who is going to be the owner of the casino or is there going to be another organization formed to own the casino? Perhaps the minister can explain that.

Mr. Chomiak: It's not any different from any other commercial establishment. It's laid out in documentation and in the public record. If the member were to check the Web site, he would see that the process would see establishment of Newco, Newco to own the casino site and to deal with it accordingly.

Mr. Graydon: And that has been now established?

Mr. Chomiak: I believe it's either been established or is in the process of being established, but the structure had been very clear from the very start. The pattern and the structure of development with the economic development fund is similar to what was established with Newco, and that is a separate corporate entity was established to receive and distribute and operate the fund itself. And that is taking place with Newco.

Mr. Graydon: Can the minister please explain what has broken down in the negotiations?

Mr. Chomiak: There are negotiations ongoing. The RFP process has taken place, and the establishment and the development are continuing between AMC, Newco, and the proponents.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I have a few questions for the Minister of Health. The first one relates to the announcement today on a commitment to deliver new front-line staff to ERs.

Can the minister clarify what the 45 new positions are? It was left somewhat vague, I noticed, in the news release, and it doesn't specifically say what categories those new positions are. So, if the minister could break down what those 45 new positions are, that would be very helpful.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Yes, today we did make an announcement concerning the strengthening of emergency care in our busiest ERs. We committed to providing over 60 new positions across Manitoba in the busiest ERs, 45 of those for Winnipeg, and the breakdown as follows for positions would include 4.8 new positions for

community services workers at Health Sciences; 15.07 for night nurses at the five hospitals; 2.51 for positions for overnight triage nurses at HSC; 15.2 new positions for Seven Oaks; 8.5 new positions for Concordia.

*(17:10)

There are also positions in rural Manitoba. Did the member ask me about the remaining? Shall I go on with those? Those include: 6.5 new nursing and unit clerk positions at Selkirk; 1.4 social work positions in Brandon to assist with social work being extended to the evenings and on weekends; 2 new medical unit nursing positions in Dauphin; 1.2 new ER positions in Central, which will be shared between Portage and Boundary Trails; a new ER doctor position in the Central RHA that will be shared; .4 new ER medical director in Central, which will be shared; new security for the Thompson ER; 1.4 new nurse ER positions in NOR-MAN, split between Flin Flon and The Pas. That does not add up to 60. I'll endeavour to complete that complement for the member.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister clarify the 15.2 new positions for Seven Oaks and 8.5 new positions for Concordia? Are those positions nursing positions?

Ms. Oswald: They are combined positions and I can get a more detailed breakdown for the member going forward. With the capital expansion that occurred at Seven Oaks, an improved patient flow happening there, positions have been posted. Some have been hired already. Some we're going forward to hire, but they are new permanent positions in the budget and I can commit to get some details about that breakdown for the member.

Mrs. Driedger: I don't need so much a breakdown of that, but my question was: Are those nursing positions?

Ms. Oswald: Those new positions include nursing and other positions as well, such like I mentioned in the other emergency rooms, but I will commit to breakdown of the 15.2, how many are nurses and how many are other kinds of staff.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us, with the announcement, where she intends to find these nurses? We've got a chronic shortage of nurses in our ERs, and while the announcement sounds good, can the minister tell us where she intends to find these nurses to work in the ERs, because there has been a chronic shortage? She hasn't been able to fix that

chronic shortage in years and years, and now there are new announcements on top of the vacancies that already exist. Can the minister tell us where she thinks she's going to get the nurses?

Ms. Oswald: Certainly, the work of recruitment and retention of nurses in Manitoba is one that we have to stay dedicated to at all times. We know that the recruitment of health human resources—doctors, nurses, others—is a national, indeed, an international challenge. So we will continue to use a broad range of techniques, including a very significant investment in educating our students, our nurses, here at home as was mentioned in the budget yesterday. There'll be further investment in that.

We know that we have had very good success in recent months and years in improving vacancy rates in Manitoba. We know that in June of 2007 we had a vacancy rate of doctors in emergency rooms somewhere around 13 percent, I think it was. I don't have the number right in front of me. But we did open up the agreement with the Manitoba Medical Association, worked with doctors, and we've been able to bring that vacancy rate down by some 80 percent during that time, and now we have 90 out of 92 positions filled for physicians across the city. We also know that, from about June of last year, we've been able to cut the nurse vacancy rate just about in half. It was at, I think, 12.8 percent in June '08. It stands at 7.6 percent so, admittedly, we do still have vacancies.

We need to continue to recruit, to support, and educate our nurses, but our efforts in improving emergency room environments through our capital construction investments, continuing to improve environments as far as the work of interdisciplinary teams go, making it a positive place for teams to work has had an impact, and we've been able to see a decrease in those vacancy rates by about half since the summer. We're going to continue to work on that. So, educating our own, continuing to recruit, and working to create the conditions that retain nurses is how we intend to do that.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister talked about improving work environments to try to retain nurses. One of the questions I have in relationship to that is, when did the policy come in that nurses can be forced to work overtime?

Ms. Oswald: I would have to get a specific date in terms of how labour relations issues have evolved through various collective agreements. I would want to do some homework to find a precise date for the

member. I know that management and nurses have negotiated collective agreements over time in which, I believe, the language of mandatory overtime came into place. I believe it has been some years now but as the member, I believe, cites, this is not an ideal situation for nurses, or for recruitment scenarios for nurses to feel that they are compelled to do overtime. That is certainly why we are working with the regional health authorities to create environments and to create staffing complements that will lessen that practice. It was, as I say, some years ago. I can't cite the exact date but I'll endeavour to do that for the member where that language came into collective agreements and was settled upon by nurses and by employers.

I, too, have heard from front-line nurses that this is not an ideal situation by far, and it is something that we need to ensure the regions are doing, working with their nurses to ensure the staffing complements are such that these scenarios don't have to occur, and when nurses want to work overtime—and admittedly, many, many do—that indeed it is something that they choose to do.

Mrs. Driedger: When the nursing recruitment and retention fund was set up in 1999, the envelope of funding for that was \$5 million annually and, under the NDP, it has gone down to maybe \$1 million a year, or \$2 million a year. Considering the significant nursing shortage in Manitoba, can the minister explain why she wouldn't have maintained that level of funding over the years and why it has decreased so significantly?

* (17:20)

Ms. Oswald: We know that efforts that have been made over time to recruit and retain nurses have been diverse in nature. We know that repatriating nurses that left the province was a very important part of the strategy early on in the time of our government, and additional and augmented resources were needed during that time to begin to turn that ship around. We also know that we've been investing year after year in educating nurses here in Manitoba, and providing incentives for nurses to stay, and we've seen the fruit of that labour. We know Manitoba had a net gain of 200 more nurses just last year, which brings the net gain to date of over 1,800 nurses since 1999.

The Nurses Recruitment and Retention Fund has assisted over a thousand nurses in relocating to Manitoba and has assisted with 368 nurse positions having been filled with grants for nursing graduates that agree to work in rural and northern Manitoba. So

we believe that there are good successes in that regard as well.

We've been able to announce more positions for nurse practitioners. We've been able to continue to work to do capital construction, again creating environments in which nurses wish to work. We know that employers have negotiated with nurses very competitive remuneration that is bearing fruit in retaining nurses as well.

So that multipronged approach has helped us see over 1,800 nurses be added to the registry in Manitoba. This is not to say that the sun should set on any funds that are designed to recruit and retain nurses. We remain open and listen to the wishes of nurses about investments through our Joint Nursing Council and our Manitoba Nursing Advisory Council and listening to nurses on the front line.

So the Nurses Recruitment and Retention Fund is a very important fund. It was critically important early in the time of this government to turn the ship around, and it continues to be important to be used in a diverse way.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Madam Chair, I have a couple of questions for the Minister of Labour. In regard to the Office of the Fairness Commissioner—and I know that this was set up last year through legislation which we did support for fair, transparent, and impartial treatment of new immigrants in seeking employment, but I did have some questions. I notice Salaries and Employee Benefits is \$298,000.

Can the minister explain how many people are employed in that department? That certainly isn't probably one salary.

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Yes, there are three people in the new office of the Fairness Commissioner.

Mrs. Taillieu: So there are three people in the office. Are they equally paid \$100,000 each or approximately, because this is \$300,000?

Ms. Allan: No, there is the Fairness Commissioner herself, the new Fairness Commissioner, Ximena Munoz, who was hired through a civil service process, and I understand there are two support staff. That is the three individuals that are in there.

Mrs. Taillieu: Are these two support staff, were they existing staff that were seconded or moved to this office or were they new hires?

Ms. Allan: My understanding is that they were already in the department, but that's certainly something that I can get further information from the department and get that information to the member.

Mrs. Taillieu: I just notice under other expenses, \$72,000, I'm just curious if there's a new office been opened for this person or whether they're located in existing offices.

Ms. Allan: I believe it is a new office in existing space. It's part of the Immigration division over on, I believe, it's Notre Dame. If I'm incorrect, we're actually going to be having an opening in probably the next couple of weeks. I haven't been to the space myself, but we'd certainly be interested in inviting you to the opening when we have it.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Madam Chairperson, I'd just like to ask the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) a couple of questions, and that might be in relation to the establishment of some programs that they have in the province of Manitoba. I know that the minister was very influential in making sure that—maybe she can correct me if I'm wrong—but last summer they developed the Manitoba feed freight assistance program through her department. *[interjection]*

I was just saying that I just wanted a couple of quick questions in regard to some of the programming that the minister has brought forward for the livestock industry in the province of Manitoba over the last six months or so, and one of the ones that I think she had her department develop was the Manitoba feed freight assistance program. She can acknowledge that.

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Yes, indeed, when the weather became as significant as it was in the Interlake, we realized that the assistance program to move feed had worked very well, that the forage assistance program had worked very well in previous years to move hay around. So we contacted the federal government to look at whether we could put that program under the AgriRecovery program, and we did put that program in place to make the assistance to move hay in any part of the province for feed.

Mr. Maguire: They also developed the tax deferral program for the cattle in the southwest as well as the Interlake area, recently announced a couple of days apart. I know that she announced—I think it was

March 3 in the southwest and March 5 in the Interlake.

You were influential in developing the Manitoba feed assistance program, the one that just came out as well as the acreage recovery program as well? Is that correct?

Ms. Wowchuk: Yes, the tax deferral is a federal program, and definitely it was a program that producers raised with us because it covered drought, but it did not cover flooding. So we went to the federal government and asked them to make a change to that program so that the people who had to sell their livestock off could get the tax deferral, and we're very pleased with that. As well, our officials, both federal and provincial officials, worked together. When the forage assistance program wasn't working as well as we had anticipated, or had hoped it would work, then we worked with the federal government and came up with the program, the livestock feed assistance program; also, recognizing that the producers in the Interlake, West Lake had suffered significant hardship because of excess moisture, we also put in place the assistance to help them restore their forage.

Mr. Maguire: I know I have raised the issue of the drought in southwest Manitoba that the minister is aware of last June in the House here before the House rose. I also wrote her a letter that she replied to in October in regard to the hauling of water in southwest Manitoba because many farmers have been hauling water all winter. They very much appreciate the tax deferral program. It might have been a little late in coming because a lot of the farmers there sold their cattle off in the fall, thousands of head of cows.

But, I wanted to just ask her why she denied the farmers in southwest Manitoba the \$70 per breeding stock in the feed assistance program here that, thankfully, was brought in for the Interlake. I applaud the effort. But there are 13 municipalities in southwest Manitoba that have been extremely hard hit by the drought. They're very devastated, and they really need that \$70-a-head coverage for bred cattle and other bred livestock similar to the program in the Interlake. They just can't see why one disaster is treated so differently than the other.

Can the minister explain that?

Ms. Wowchuk: With regard to the tax deferral, it did take us a while to convince people that it should happen, but it shouldn't matter whether they sold

their cattle earlier or later. They would still be able to take advantage of that deferral on their income tax so that when things turn around, they haven't paid tax. That money, they can reinvest it.

* (17:30)

With regard to the AgriRecovery program, what happened, and does happen, is that federal and provincial officials review the situation in each region, and when we recognized that there were serious situations, and that's why a program such as the AgriInvest, the targeted advance, the emergency cash advance, advance payments were available to all producers. But, when federal and provincial officials looked at the situation, it was deemed that the situation in the Interlake was indeed something that would fit in under the AgriRecovery program, but the situation in the southwest was not the same kind of situation in that the cause of the situation was the excess rain, which was an unusual event.

Madam Chairperson, that's why that program fits under AgriRecovery.

Mr. Maguire: Would she consider changing that, relooking at it again?

Ms. Wowchuk: I had a similar discussion with the MP for the southwest part of the province, and he has suggested as well that this should be changed. What I said to him was this is the advice staff have given us, but if the federal minister is saying that he wants a change—I'm looking at the recommendation that my staff gave me, my staff recommended, and the federal and provincial governments agreed and went on the Interlake being the area that should fit under AgriRecovery. That's what we've put in there.

It would have to mean a change, and at this point I have not received any signals from the federal minister that he is looking to make those kinds of changes. As they are joint programs, I would wait till I have a discussion with him about making changes, but I've also asked the MP for the area who says he's had the discussion with the federal minister to further that discussion with him as well.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Madam Chairperson, I have a question for the Minister of Finance. I would like to ask the Minister of Finance: Seeing that the special warrant was not passed by Cabinet whether in fact the government is prepared to extend the period of time that Interim Supply is going to be debated for or does Interim Supply, in the mind of the government, have to be passed

tomorrow in order that bills can be paid for at the end of the month and at the beginning of April?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): On the sage advice of my colleague to the right, who's the House leader, we will work co-operatively with you to pass an Interim Supply tomorrow.

Mr. Derkach: Well, Madam Chairperson, again to the Minister of Finance: In previous years there has never been a deadline on when Interim Supply had to be passed, so is the Minister of Finance indicating that they as a government now expect Interim Supply to be passed tomorrow by 4 o'clock because they failed to pass an Order-in-Council to allow for a special warrant?

Mr. Selinger: As I said earlier, my understanding in my discussions with the House leaders is that there's a co-operative approach being taken on this appropriation act, and we would hope that it would resolve itself in a way that everybody is satisfied and that we'd provide the resources to continue the important services the government provides to the public.

I don't have a hard position. I take guidance from my House leader on this on how you would like to approach it and deal with it.

Mr. Derkach: So can the Minister of Finance indicate what in fact would happen should a special warrant not be passed tomorrow by 12:30?

Mr. Selinger: The member knows, as a very experienced member of the Legislature, we try not to deal in hypotheticals, and I'm assuming that we're going to co-operate in the best interest of serving all Manitobans.

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chairperson, I think we can pursue this tomorrow, but I would like to ask the Minister of Health a question if I might.

First of all, I would like to ask the Minister of Health whether or not the project in Russell regarding the dialysis unit is, *[inaudible]* in fact, going to proceed. We've seen it announced for the fifth time now in 10 years, and I'm wondering whether or not this time we're going to see some activity and, in fact, the development of a dialysis centre which is so badly needed in that area.

Ms. Oswald: Yes.

Mr. Derkach: Can the minister tell me when?

Ms. Oswald: Yes, work has been going on with the community in planning appropriate infrastructure,

appropriate staffing, and we will be making announcements about—providing information, I should say—about our go-forward plan for Russell and for the others indicated in the budget.

I concur with the member opposite that, when people are able to get the care that they need close to home in their communities, when they don't have to have the windshield time, it's better for their overall well-being, and we will endeavour to go as swiftly as we can.

An Honourable Member: Madam Chair, in light of the fact that there's been an agreement to allow for the—

Madam Chairperson: The honourable Member for Russell.

Mr. Derkach: Because there has been an agreement to allow the Liberal Party questions, I will defer my questions to tomorrow, but I do in fact have some more questions for the Minister of Health.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Chair, my question is for the Minister of Labour and Immigration regarding the Provincial Nominee Program.

The first question is in regard to processing time, if she could indicate to the House what the processing time is for the family support stream today.

Ms. Allan: As the Member for Inkster knows, we have a very successful Provincial Nominee Program here in Manitoba. We have a reputation all across the country as having one of the best immigration strategies of any jurisdiction in Canada. The Provincial Nominee Program is a labour market program. It's an economic program linked to labour market demand, and that has been a wonderful success story for the Province of Manitoba.

It gives me a great deal of pleasure to inform the MLA for Inkster about the migration numbers that came out this morning from Statistics Canada. They were, I think, a real testament to the hardworking staff in my department because the last quarter, the fourth-quarter inflow, is probably a record for Manitoba. It's the best fourth-quarter result for the last 38 years, and that really is exciting news for us here in Manitoba because we believe that that's really an economic success story for us to talk about here in the province.

Our Provincial Nominee Program has grown dramatically—*[interjection]*

Point of Order

Madam Chairperson: The Member for Inkster, on a point of order.

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Chair, I'm hoping that the minister would be respectful of the terms of the issue of time. The question was very specific in terms of what is the processing time for the family stream.

I would ask if she would just stick to answering the question. So, if she doesn't want to answer the question, I'll go on to a different minister.

Madam Chairperson: I'm afraid that's technically not a point of order. The minister has up to 10 minutes to answer a question.

Perhaps if you wanted to ask her if she—but it's not a point of order.

* * *

Ms. Allan: Well, thank you. I thought that the MLA for Inkster would like to know a little bit more about the success of the Provincial Nominee Program, but I guess what he really—all he really is concerned about is processing times. For some reason he is totally fixated on that.

* (17:40)

So I'll just inform the member that we have a—I was going to talk about our priority streams, and, as the member knows, because the Provincial Nominee Program is an economic program, we have priority streams, and the family stream that he is talking about is one of the priority streams. We are able to process those applications between about two and four months.

Mr. Lamoureux: The family support stream is two to four months. The employer stream, is that back on track now?

Ms. Allan: Yes, the employer direct stream, we were in the process of implementing the new WRPA legislation, The Worker Recruitment and Protection Act, so that we could provide an ethical and transparent immigration pathway for temporary foreign workers, and that has been a very, very successful piece of legislation. That legislation will be implemented on the first of April, and so what we had to do while we were implementing that and getting ready to implement that legislation is we had to have a look at what was happening with our employer stream.

We were working with the federal government in regard to the registration of employers and in regard to the labour market opinions that we worked directly with the federal government on. So what we basically did with the employer stream was that we put it on hold while we were having those discussions with the federal government. So the employer direct stream is definitely a stream that is something that we've relied on to bring workers into Manitoba. That's how we can get workers into Manitoba, get them in jobs, get them being paid into good jobs and getting them paid exactly what they should be paid in a fair way and treated properly. We are continuing to do that work, and we will be rolling that out in the next 10 days to two weeks.

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Chairperson, the last question's for the Minister of Health. If she could indicate to the Legislature if there was any public consultation done whatsoever related to the changes of emergency services at the Seven Oaks Hospital, and if so, when that occurred.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Madam Chair, I can inform the member that, of course, there was a great deal of discussion concerning the amendments to the general surgery process and the consolidation of general surgery. To my knowledge, the majority, if not all, of that consultation was done among medical experts and was done among representatives from the region. I believe, and I would want to clarify this as an absolute certainty, but my understanding is that a public meeting—or a public notice was not sent.

This process began as a pilot project to test its safety, its efficacy, and certainly evaluations are ongoing. I know that members from the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and from the Seven Oaks Hospital today believe that the communications that occurred on this issue indeed could have been better. Whether that took the form of a public consultation, a mailer or some other form of communicating with the public, they believe that they could have done better on it. I would not dispute that analysis on their part, and certainly as further adaptations to service at hospitals go—the bringing in of more dialysis, the increasing of staff for emergency rooms like we announced today, or any other such kind of changes—I think they will be communicated better to the public.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): My first question has to do with the epidemic of diabetes in Manitoba, to the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald).

The latest figures I have show that there were almost 7,000 new cases of diabetes in 2006, for an incidence rate of something like 6 percent.

Does the minister have information on the incidence and the number of new cases for years since 2006?

Ms. Oswald: In front of me, I don't possess such data. I do know that our department is acutely aware of the burden that diabetes brings to an individual and to families. I know that the Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross) has taken on the issue of diabetes, diabetes prevention and assessment and analysis and supports as a very important part of her portfolio. Of course, we're partners in that. I regret that she's not here to answer more fully for you on these questions today, but I certainly can let the member know that we are in communication with our partners in the regional health authorities, with family doctors. We are in a partnership with our First Nations communities as well in dealing with these issues.

So, in specific answer to the question, I don't possess that data in front of me today in the Chamber.

Mr. Gerrard: I thank the minister. I would ask whether the minister has figures there in terms of, for planning purposes, the lifetime cost for care of somebody with diabetes, both the cost to our public health care system and the cost to individuals.

Ms. Oswald: Again, in the Chamber today, I don't have a cost breakdown of same for the member, but certainly, we know from the investments we've made over time that the issue of living with diabetes has many burdens that come with it, the most significant of which are the debilitating physical manifestations, which is what we see as loved ones, as family members, in caring for someone that's living with diabetes. We also know that there are costs for expanding dialysis for the most acute stages of diabetes. We know that there are investments that we can make on the Pharmacare side and on the support sides for helping families in addressing diabetes. We know that we can continue to make investments in improving things like foot care to avoid amputation, the costs of which are measurable and immeasurable when we're talking about an individual's pain.

So, certainly, we can count the costs to the system. We can count the costs to an individual and, of course, we must acknowledge the emotional,

physical and spiritual costs to someone who has to live their lives with very severe forms of diabetes.

Mr. Gerrard: I would ask the minister to tell us what actions she is taking to prevent the onset of diabetes in Manitobans and whether she has any evidence that her actions are having any effect.

Ms. Oswald: Well, certainly the most significant and important investments that we can make with diabetes is working with our families in Manitoba, whether it's through regional health authorities, family physicians, nurse practitioners, indeed, schools, to do all that we can to prevent diabetes from coming in the first place, where we have those options, of course. We know that through a variety of investments.

* (17:50)

We've been working to prevent diabetes on a number of fronts, whether this has been through our Chronic Disease Prevention Initiative, which we have had the federal government as a partner in the past. Currently, this initiative runs in 57 communities, including 21 on First Nations, that are implementing their chronic disease preventative initiative primary prevention plans. The population being served by the CDPI initiatives would be about 330 Manitobans.

Over five years, Manitoba's committed \$3 million, which has been matched by \$3 million in federal funding for chronic disease prevention. In the area of the regional diabetes programs, we know that funding and effort is put forward on prevention, education, care and support services in each RHA. A three-year funding allocation of \$1.6 million starting back in '05 occurred, and, as of January 2009, over 700 multi-disciplinary providers, including 57 from First Nations' communities, have been trained. Providing education and supports in the area of prevention is critically important.

A regional diabetes program framework that was released in 2002 provided an opportunity to implement 29 of 53 recommendations in the areas of prevention, education, care, research and support, which came from collaboration with over 1,000 stakeholders, most importantly including representation from First Nations.

I'm conscious of the fact that the other member from the Liberal Party wanted these answers to be faster. I can say that those kinds of prevention initiatives, the renal disease prevention initiative recognized by the Canadian Institute for Health

Information for putting dialysis on reserve, which has, as accompanying components, information and education for individuals and families, been a very significant investment in Manitoba.

Foot care programs in Manitoba; the Home Care program education; personal care home education; Getting Better Together Manitoba, providing education, upstream screening for pre-diabetes and undiagnosed Type 2 diabetes, is occurring and continues to occur. The diabetes integration project and all of the activities that we're doing and investing in under Healthy Living, whether it's an in-motion program, whether it's working to provide healthy foods in remote communities, all of these investments, I think, roll up together to be part of the prevention initiative.

This, of course, doesn't capture in total the kinds of investments we are making in expanding physician services, nurses and nurse practitioners and, of course, expanding dialysis for those that get to the stage where they need to have such treatment.

Mr. Gerrard: I'm told that one of the significant complications of diabetes—and that is amputations at the Opaskwayak Cree Nation, I believe—that the rate is something like 16 times the national average of amputations. I would ask, what is the minister trying to do in terms of addressing this issue, getting to the problem and making sure that this very difficult, I would say horrendous situation does not continue, but we're taking more effective action?

Ms. Oswald: Certainly, we know that diabetes is on the rise in Manitoba. We know that we see rising diabetes as a result of any number of factors happening across Canada. This specific statistic that the individual cites I don't have in front of me at this time, but we do know that there are populations for whom diabetes is a greater burden than others.

We know that, unquestionably, on the specific point of amputation, the more front-line care we can be providing, and education that we can be providing and supporting our regional health authorities and our First Nations through partnerships with the federal government to do intensive and expanded foot care and education, will go a long way to help in that particular situation. But providing opportunities for improved overall well-being, whether it's through increased physical activity, improved diet, smoking cessation and all of the initiatives that you'll find captured under the Healthy Living portfolio, these would be critical investments that we can make to stem the tide of diabetes. These are investments that,

indeed, must continue to be made with our partners—with our regional health authorities, with the medical experts that will continue to advise us—whether it's on the specific issue of amputation or complications that result from diabetes in that regard, whether it's through increasing access to dialysis as, of course, this government has been investing in doing—crossing jurisdictional barriers in the process—things that have been unprecedented in Manitoba in providing service. I don't believe that there would be a member of this Chamber that would disagree with the fact that we need to continue in making investments to stem this tide of a very complex and oftentimes debilitating illness.

Mr. Gerrard: Just because we're getting close to time, I believe I may have some time for question tomorrow morning, so if you can look at the questions on the incidence and the lifetime cost for somebody with diabetes, that would be helpful when we get together again.

One of the issues here, and I have a note here that at the Opaskwayak Cree Nation one in five on-reserve band members have diagnosed confirmed diabetes, but there may be significant numbers who are not yet diagnosed, who are latent. I wonder what the minister is doing in terms of making sure that we have an accurate assessment of the extent of diabetes in Manitoba, and that we're working on a very solid foundation of information as we move forward.

Ms. Oswald: Seeing that our time is elapsing quickly, I would inquire of the member—given what I said earlier in my remarks concerning diabetes, this is a file that is held very closely by my partner, the Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross), and perhaps he could indicate to our House leader if he would like to have her present to answer some of the questions, particularly on prevention and so forth, for

our session tomorrow. I believe we would be agreeable to that. You can communicate through the House leaders.

I can also say that I'm prepared to continue on this dialogue as well, and continue to ensure that we work with our partners in the regional health authorities in our Manitoba Renal Program, with our physician and nurse practitioner partners in communities, to be acquiring and capturing the best data possible so that we're not only always working on the acute side, but working on early intervention and, wherever possible, the prevention side. That is a very important part of the Manitoba Health and Healthy Living's relationship with the regional health authorities of Manitoba and with the Manitoba Renal Program and will continue to augment that relationship to capture the best—

Madam Chairperson: This item will continue over until tomorrow.

Committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

*(18:00)

IN SESSION

Committee Report

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski (Chairperson): The Committee of the Whole has considered Bill 10, The Interim Appropriation Act, 2009, and reports progress.

I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Wolseley (Mr. Altemeyer), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: The hour now being 6 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow (Friday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 26, 2009

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