

Fifth 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.
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	N.D.P.
BLADY, Sharon	Kirkfield Park	N.D.P.
BLAIKIE, Bill, Hon.	Elmwood	N.D.P.
BOROTSIK, Rick	Brandon West	P.C.
BRAUN, Erna	Rossmere	N.D.P.
BRICK, Marilyn	St. Norbert	N.D.P.
BRIESE, Stuart	Ste. Rose	P.C.
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CULLEN, Cliff	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard	Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	P.C.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	P.C.
GRAYDON, Cliff	Emerson	P.C.
HICKES, George, Hon.	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
HOWARD, Jennifer, Hon.	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	La Verendrye	N.D.P.
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MAGUIRE, Larry	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
MARCELINO, Flor, Hon.	Wellington	N.D.P.
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McFADYEN, Hugh	Fort Whyte	P.C.
McGIFFORD, Diane	Lord Roberts	N.D.P.
MELNICK, Christine, Hon.	Riel	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	P.C.
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	N.D.P.
OSWALD, Theresa, Hon.	Seine River	N.D.P.
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Carman	P.C.
REID, Daryl	Transcona	N.D.P.
ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Rupertsland	N.D.P.
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ROWAT, Leanne	Minnedosa	P.C.
SARAN, Mohinder	The Maples	N.D.P.
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SELBY, Erin, Hon.	Southdale	N.D.P.
SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	N.D.P.
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STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon.	Dauphin-Roblin	N.D.P.
SWAN, Andrew, Hon.	Minto	N.D.P.
TAILLIEU, Mavis	Morris	P.C.
WHITEHEAD, Frank	The Pas	N.D.P.
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	N.D.P.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.
<i>Vacant</i>	Inkster	
<i>Vacant</i>	Lac du Bonnet	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, April 13, 2011

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 16—The Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Amendment and Criminal Property Forfeiture Amendment Act

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I move, seconded by the Minister of Family Services and consumer protection (Mr. Mackintosh), that Bill 16, The Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Amendment and Criminal Property Forfeiture Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi visant à accroître la sécurité des collectivités et des quartiers et la Loi sur la confiscation de biens obtenus ou utilisés criminellement, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Swan: Mr. Speaker, this bill will build on the success of Manitoba's Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act by expanding the list of specified uses to include criminal organization offences, a notice to be filed in the Land Titles Office to alert prospective buyers when a community safety order is issued against the property.

This bill will also strengthen The Criminal Property Forfeiture Act by creating a presumption that a property was used to engage in unlawful activity if a community safety order under The Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act has been issued.

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

PETITIONS

RCMP Rural Service

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

Manitobans deserve to live in safer—to live in a safe environment and feel secure in their homes and their communities. Some regions of rural Manitoba have been hard hit by crime, including residential break and enters, property theft, vandalism and other offences that threaten people's security.

In some areas, RCMP detachments are not staffed on a 24-hour basis. Criminal elements capitalize on that, engaging in crimes at times when the officers may not be readily available to respond to the calls for service.

Some believe the current RCMP detachment boundaries need to be redrawn so that services delivery could be faster and more effective.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Justice to consider working with the RCMP, the federal government and communities to develop strategies to address service challenges in rural Manitoba, such as the possibility of having response units that could be dispatched to regions affected by crime waves.

And to request the Minister of Justice to consider working with stakeholders to determine if the current RCMP detachment boundaries are designed to ensure the swiftest and most effective service delivery.

This petition is signed by W.C. Schultz, E. Turko, I. Ross and many, many other fine Manitobans.

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

Auto Theft—Court Order Breaches

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

On December 11th, 2009, in Winnipeg, Zdzislaw Andrzejczak was killed when the car that he was driving collided with a stolen vehicle.

The death of Mr. Andrzejczak, a husband and a father, along with too many other deaths and injuries involving stolen vehicles, was a preventable tragedy.

Many of those accused in fatalities involving stolen vehicles were previously known to police and identified as chronic and high-risk car thieves who had court orders against them.

Chronic car thieves pose a risk to the safety of all Manitobans.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To request the Minister of Justice to consider ensuring that all court orders for car thieves are vigorously monitored and enforced.

And to request the Minister of Justice to consider ensuring that all breaches of court orders on car thieves are reported to police and vigorously prosecuted.

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by J. Zon, P. Slorid, J. Paswarak and many, many others.

Convicted Auto Thieves—Denial of MPI Benefits

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

In Manitoba, a car thief convicted of stealing a vehicle involved in a car accident is eligible to receive compensation and assistance for personal injury from Manitoba Public Insurance.

Too many Manitoba families have had their lives tragically altered by motor vehicle accidents involving car thieves and stolen vehicles.

It is an injustice to victims, their families and law-abiding Manitobans that MPI premiums are used to benefit car thieves involved in those accidents.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To request that the Minister of Justice deny all MPI benefits to a person for injuries received in an accident if he or she is convicted of stealing a motor vehicle involved in the accident.

And this petition is signed by P. Grift, G. Wymer, D. Rinn and many, many more fine Manitobans.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Mr. Speaker: I am pleased to table the Annual Report of the Children's Advocate for the years ended March 31st, 2009 and March 31st, 2010.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to table the following report: the Manitoba Public Insurance Preliminary and Unaudited Quarterly Financial Report, the 4th Quarter for Twelve months ended February 28, 2011.

* (13:40)

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Flooding and Ice Jams Update

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

We are continuing to deal with river and overland flooding throughout the province. Brandon has declared a state of local emergency for the southeast portion of the city to deal with their retention pond at risk of overflowing and threatening homes. This water has now been drained.

Souris has also declared a state of local emergency as a precaution due to rising waters on the Souris River. Waters have contaminated one of the treated water reservoirs serving the town, so a boil-water advisory has been put in place until the distribution network can be flushed and testing confirms the water is safe.

Peguis First Nation is also dealing with rising water levels and is evacuating 190 vulnerable people due to loss of safe access to their homes.

I can also advise that in Gladstone, clients at the Seven Regions Health Centre are temporarily being moved within the community to Third Crossing Manor as a precaution due to rising water levels on the Whitemud River. A super sandbag dike is in place in the community. In addition, a precautionary

evacuation of the 21 patients in the Wawanesa Personal Care Home is taking place.

Overland flooding in Douglas has led to the evacuation of eight people due to overland flooding, and 70 people are on standby to leave, if needed. PR 340 was closed at Highway 1 as heavy equipment worked on the dike.

Rising waters near Ninette are being closed—or pardon me, are being closely monitored by local authorities and provincial highway officials, as they may overtop the roadway and there may be a need to evacuate at-risk homes.

Sandbagging is also occurring in Dauphin to deal with high water along the Vermillion River.

Finally, I can advise that the Province continues to closely monitor the situation at Morris and on Highway 75 and is assessing day by day the need for closure.

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): I would like to put a few words on the record in response to the minister's statement and thank him for that statement.

The situation in Manitoba revolving around flood waters continues to evolve rapidly, and we're getting consistent reports from many areas of the province of extreme overland flooding and roads being washed out and damage to municipal infrastructure. We have seen states of emergency implemented in communities like Brandon, Souris and Riverton. There's certainly the possibility of more of those being enacted in the days and weeks ahead. There'll also be evacuations of communities such as Peguis First Nation, Sioux Valley First Nation and Roseau River Anishinabe First Nation.

The community of Souris is under a boil-water advisory after the town reservoir was breached on Tuesday evening. Work is under way to address that challenge. The flood is hitting home in my own constituency today, and concerns are—about the rising water in the Whitemud River at Gladstone have led to the transfer of eight patients from the Seven Regions Health Centre to the Third Crossing Manor. A daycare that was located in the hospital is also being temporarily relocated.

I would also like to extend our condolences to the family of a 35-year-old man, who died after his vehicle rolled and ended up in a water-filled ditch in the RM of Lac du Bonnet. Again, it is another sobering reminder of the risk posed by the water-filled ditches that are so common around the

province right now. While a good percentage of the snow has already disappeared in the vicinity of Winnipeg, there is still a lot of ground—a lot on the ground in other regions of Manitoba, and diligence must continue to be the order of the day when it comes to flood preparedness.

We look forward to the continued updates on the flood situation. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Mr. Gerrard: I would like to thank the Minister for Transportation and Infrastructure (Mr. Ashton) for the update and for the information on various parts of, particularly, western Manitoba, where the high flow—snow levels resulted in rapid melting and concerns for overland flooding and flooding of small creeks and rivers, including the Souris River.

I, too, extend condolences to the family and friends of the individual in the Lac du Bonnet area who died in the water-filled ditch and want to say thank you to all the volunteers and those who are working throughout the province to address this serious flood situation and to indicate that in the Peguis area, clearly, a long-term solution is badly needed to prevent the multi-year evacuations and flooding that occurs there, and I would hope the minister is working hard with federal counterparts to achieve that multi-year solution.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today, we have a group from Daniel MacIntyre-St. Matthews Community Association, who are the guests of the honourable member for Wolseley (Mr. Altemeyer).

And also in the public gallery we have students from River Osborne Community College Adult Education, who are accompanied by their instructor Bob Thorstein, and they are the guests of the honourable Minister of Labour and Immigration (Ms. Howard).

And also from—in the gallery, we have from Westwood Collegiate, Erin Laforet, Stephanie Higgins and Catherine Teichroew, who are the guests of the honourable member for Kirkfield Park (Ms. Blady).

And also in the public gallery, we have from the Winnipeg Technical College, we have 15 Adult English as an Additional Language students under the direction of Ms. Jennifer Loewen. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable Attorney General (Mr. Swan).

And also in the public gallery we have HBNI-ITV System out of Fairholme School. We have 15 grade 9 students under the direction of Ms. Evelyn Maendel. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faurichou).

And also in the gallery, we have from Westmount School, we have 33 grade 9 to 12 students under the direction of Ms. Janice Beernaerts. This group is—this school is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Carman (Mr. Pedersen).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Budget Deficit Increase

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, we entered the Chamber yesterday in advance of the 12th budget from this government with low expectations. And I can say that those low expectations were almost met with yesterday's budget. There was, out of our areas of concern, a significant deficit in yesterday's budget, an increase in debt following a \$1.6-billion increase in debt which took place in the year just past, about 15 per cent of total spending, the increase in the debt.

The budget, while it contains initiatives that all Manitobans—including members on this side—would support, fails to address the concerns of the next generation of Manitobans who will have to repay that growing debt at a time when this government has no control over interest rates and is running the risk that those rates might rise.

I want to ask the Premier, in introducing his budget yesterday, why was there so much emphasis on short-term political desperation and so little concern for the next generation of Manitobans?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, let's not forget that it was just 10 months ago that the members opposite wanted to cut a half a billion dollars out of the budget, over \$500 million of cuts to put teachers on the unemployment rolls, to put nurses

on the unemployment rolls, to put front-line security and police officers on the unemployment rolls. That was their response to the recession. They panicked and wanted to take the impact of the recession and reduce expenditure all in one year.

We took an opposite approach. We protected front-line services. We invested in education. We invested in health care. We ensured that we had a five-year plan to restore balance while having a debt load that cost Manitobans 6 cents on the dollar. When members opposite were in office, it cost them 13 cents on the dollar to service the debt.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, with the potential for increases in interest rates going forward, debt-servicing costs will go up. Even in this budget, the Premier and his Finance Minister were forced to increase debt servicing by close to 6 per cent, one of the largest increases in spending in this budget, a sign of what lies ahead as debt servicing takes up a bigger and bigger share of expenditures.

*(13:50)

Mr. Speaker, at the same time, with an \$18-million reduction in the deficit, they're on track to eliminate the deficit over 24 years, not over the coming three years that they had previously promised.

I want to ask the Premier: Why is he—why, Mr. Speaker, is he imposing such a massive burden on the next generation of Manitobans? Why is everything he does dedicated to short-term political desperation?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, our third-quarter forecast showed us beating the target by \$78 million in 2010-2011. It also shows us coming in under target for the next year in our plan of recovery inside of the province of Manitoba.

The members opposite left a deficit in the health-care system where there were inadequate hospital and home-care facilities all around this province. They left a deficit in the education system with young people not getting a chance to go to college and university. They left a deficit in our infrastructure system with inadequate water treatment and sewage treatment in this province and poorly maintained and upgraded roads.

Those deficits have hurt the economy in the '90s. Our economy is growing faster than the Canadian average since we've invested in roads, water, education and health care, and the members opposite

have consistently voted against those things which have created a \$54-billion economy in Manitoba.

Proposed Amendments

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the numbers that were presented yesterday show a rapidly increasing debt. They show a deficit of close to half a billion dollars and no serious effort at all to trim waste and mismanagement, no effort to get rid of the vote tax, which would only line the pockets of the NDP political party, no effort to look at ways of saving money at Hydro, no effort to get rid of some of the waste that they've built up and do what's right by the next generation.

Mr. Speaker, this afternoon we will be introducing two improvements to the budget that was presented yesterday. Will the Premier allow the members of his party to seriously consider those two improvements to the budget or is he going to go in like a federal opposition leader and say no before they've even had a chance to look at the merits of those amendments?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I can tell you if they try to cut another half a billion dollars out of the budget like they did last year, we will vote against it. We will protect front-line services to Manitobans.

Now the member is asking us whether we'll vote for an amendment he hasn't even put in front of the House. Unbelievable. Unbelievable, Mr. Speaker.

Members opposite, they wanted to lay off teachers; they wanted to lay off nurses; they wanted to stop building schools in this province; they wanted to stop building roads in this province. They opposed the investments we made in flood protection in the province. All of those things they have opposed consistently year after year.

When we came into office, the debt was 32 per cent of the GDP. It is now 25 per cent of the GDP. It is lower, Mr. Speaker. The cost in servicing the debt is 6 cents on the dollar, less than half of what they paid to service the debt when we were in office.

We're moving Manitoba in the right direction. We're growing the economy. They're trying to drag us back to the '90s.

Budget

Core Operating Expenditures Increase

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, I'll remind the Premier (Mr. Selinger) as well, since they came to office they've almost doubled the debt of this province, and that is unfortunate.

Mr. Speaker, hard-working Manitoba families would like to know why the Minister of Finance, in last year's budget, agreed to limit core operating expenditure increases to less than 2 per cent when, in this year, she announced a 5.5 per cent increase in core operating expenditures.

Can the Minister of Finance explain why she diverted away from her policy of last year to limit those expenditures to less than 2 per cent in favour of this year by increasing them by 5.5 per cent? What does she have to say to Manitoba families?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Finance): Well, Mr. Speaker I could tell the member opposite that I have listened to Manitobans and I've listened to what Manitoba families want. And Manitoba families have stated very clearly that they want their front-line services protected. They want teachers in the classroom. They want nurses and doctors in the hospital, and they want police on the streets.

That's what we've done, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to know what the member opposite would cut if she had the chance to take out \$500 million as they proposed last year.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, I will remind the minister of the speech that she presented in this House one year ago when she presented a five-year plan to Manitobans, and it says: Over the five-year plan, core government spending growth will be limited to less than 2 per cent.

In this budget, one year later, they've now increased those core government expenditures by more than 5.5 per cent. What happened between last year and this year with their five-point plan?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, it's very simple. The plan is working, our economy is growing, people are coming to Manitoba, the population is increasing, and, if you look at the five-year plan, last year we came under—had an improvement of \$78 million. In year two of our plan, we are projecting to be \$10 million under the plan.

The members opposite want it both ways. They want to say that they support these things, Mr. Speaker, and the other hand they want to make cuts. I wonder if they're going to change their mind and flip-flop from changing—from cutting \$500 million to supporting these things that Manitobans have asked us to put in the budget to improve their quality of life, their health care and their education.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, the minister has just stated that the economy is growing, and we recognize that. The fact of the matter is—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable member has the floor.

Mrs. Stefanson: The Province doesn't have a revenue problem; they've got a spending problem.

Mr. Speaker, last year the Minister of Finance made a commitment to all Manitobans not to exceed a 2 point—less than 2 per cent increase in core operating expenditures. She has diverted away from her policy of last year and is now running—is now indicating that she's going to increase expenditures for next year by some 5.5 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, why is she breaking her commitment to hard-working Manitobans, something she made less than one year ago? Is this nothing more than a desperate government attempt to create policy on the eve of an election to try and win over government [*inaudible*]

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased that the member opposite has finally admitted that we are doing a good job and the economy in this province is growing. The economy in this province is growing because we have worked to increase the population. We have made changes in business tax, income tax, in corporate tax to get more businesses going in this province. We have made a difference and our economy is growing.

I'm really pleased that the member opposite recognizes that, and I'm very—I wish she would recognize what Manitobans want. Manitobans want to see better health care closer to home. Manitobans want more child care. Manitobans want more opportunity for education and to get a job.

Mr. Speaker, we're delivering with this budget.

Manitoba Hydro Bipole III Costs

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, part of the problem that the government is facing is that there's a gap between what they say to the public and what they know to be going on in reality.

Mr. Speaker, for three years this Premier went around the province of Manitoba and told people that his west-side power line was going to cost \$2.2 billion. We have just learned as a result of disclosures from Hydro that he was out by at least a billion dollars: at least \$1 billion according to the public estimate; \$2 billion according to Hydro's own internal documents.

I want to ask the Premier: On this project, which is 20 times more expensive than the stadium project that he mismanaged last year, why does he continue to mislead Manitobans on the price tag?

* (14:00)

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I always appreciate the opportunity to correct the record from the misinformation of the member opposite. He just gets his numbers wrong every single day.

The cost of the bipole is \$1.1 billion, half of what he's saying. He's the only member in Manitoba that doesn't want to build converter stations. He's the only member that doesn't want to protect the power supply in Manitoba to keep businesses and homes going. He's the only member that continuously runs down our Crown corporations, the same strategy he followed when he ran down the telephone system. It's all a precursor to his long-term plan to privatize Hydro in Manitoba.

Mr. McFadyen: The Premier has failed to acknowledge the fact that on this significant project—which he went around the province for three years, including representations to the PUB, saying it was a \$2.2-billion project—he was off by a billion dollars according to the most recent public numbers from Hydro and he's off by \$2 billion when it comes to the internal estimates that have been released at Hydro with respect to that analysis.

Mr. Speaker, this is going to have an impact on rates. Hydro today is in front of the Public Utilities Board asking to increase rates on Manitoba families. Those rates are going to continue to go up for the foreseeable future. It'll be the next generation of Manitobans who will pay for this mistake.

Why not just come clean with Manitobans about the real cost of this project? Don't pull a stadium, part two, with this very important bipole project.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, we know the member opposite and his party opposed the MTS Centre in Manitoba, which has been a roaring success for this community. We know the member opposite opposed a new stadium. We know the members opposite opposed new schools and improvements to the university and building hospitals in this province, and we know the members opposite oppose building Manitoba Hydro.

But I can tell them, when they opposed Limestone, they said it would be a failure. It cost \$1.4 billion; it has generated \$6 billion of benefits for Manitoba. It paid itself back in 10 years.

Now they won't admit that the bipole is costing \$1.1 billion. They still insist that we do not need to build converters in Manitoba. He's the only leader of a political party in this province that does not recognize we need increased reliability to ensure a power supply for a \$54-billion economy. That's more than \$1 billion a week.

The member opposite is not prepared to spend one week's of the economy to ensure reliability, affordability and a good reputation for Manitoba Hydro.

Mr. McFadyen: Well, Mr. Speaker, the trouble with everything that he says on this project is that it's contradicted by the experts.

It's contradicted by Len Bateman, the former chairman of Manitoba Hydro who wanted to come to committee, Mr. Speaker, to voice his concerns but who was shut down as a result of NDP members acting under his direction.

This is a decision that is opposed by the former vice-president of Manitoba Hydro Will Tishinski, who writes today, and I quote—and I'll table the letter, Mr. Speaker. He writes: The additional cost of the west-side line translates to reduced profits. This means higher cost for power for Manitobans. This Premier continues to be deceptive with Manitobans on Bipole III.

Mr. Speaker, this is the former vice-president of Hydro who calls him deceptive. Will he today apologize to all Manitobans for being such a deceptive Premier when it comes to Manitoba Hydro?

An Honourable Member: Mr. Speaker, the bipole will cost \$1.2 billion dollars. The member opposite—

Mr. Speaker: I haven't recognized the honourable member.

An Honourable Member: Sorry.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Just two issues I want to deal with here.

Any member that is dealing—that is tabling a document should have three copies to table. That's in our practices. *[interjection]* Did I say table three? Did you—*[interjection]* Okay, I thank the honourable member for that.

The other thing is I would like to remind members that all members in the House are honourable members, and I would kindly ask members to pick and choose their words very carefully because "deceptive" is a word that has not been accepted by previous Speakers. So I would just remind members to pick and choose your words carefully when dealing with other honourable members. So let's continue on.

The honourable First Minister has the floor.

Mr. Selinger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's time the member opposite came clean and acknowledged that the cost of the bipole is \$1.2 billion, that he is the only one in Manitoba that doesn't want to build converter stations, that he's willing to put \$22 billion of export revenues at risk, that he's the member of the Legislature that promised in the last election to lift hydro rates to market levels, which would be \$900 more per ratepayer in Manitoba.

The member opposite continues to mislead this House on the facts of the cost of the bipole even when accurate information is put in front of the public by Manitoba Hydro's independent review of that. If he is really honourable, he will today withdraw his inaccurate information from the House.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I just reminded members when dealing with other members, that's cutting it close to the line, where "if he is honourable."

All members in this Chamber are honourable. I want to remind all members of that and not to twist words around because every member in this House is an honourable member. So choose your words very carefully, please.

Manitoba Hydro Bipole III Costs

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, once again the Minister of Finance has tabled a deficit budget. She says she likes deficits but, even so, one would think that she would look for any opportunity to reduce the deficit of some \$437 million.

One way to achieve a reduction of the deficit is to allow Manitoba Hydro to build the Bipole III on the less expensive east side of the province. A better bottom line for Manitoba Hydro results in a smaller deficit for the Province.

Why won't the minister do the smart thing and let Manitoba Hydro do the right thing and reduce the deficit at the same time?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): Well, Mr. Speaker, these members opposite, we know that they don't support Manitoba Hydro. They never have supported Manitoba Hydro. They've never built a hydro dam, and they don't want power dams to be built, and they don't want Bipole III to be built. That's their record. So they will twist every number they can, and if you look at the information, they floated out about 12 different numbers on what the bipole will cost.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we know that we have numbers from Manitoba Hydro, and Manitoba Hydro has said that bipole will cost \$1.26 billion for the bipole line.

Mr. Speaker, that's an investment for reliability of supply, an investment to ensure that we don't have blackouts and to ensure that we can make-meet sales commitments.

Mr. Borotsik: Mr. Speaker, let's give the Minister of Finance some more numbers. Manitoba Hydro's net income has been eroding over the past four years. Forcing Manitoba Hydro to spend more capital than necessary is not the answer to reducing provincial deficits.

Mr. Speaker, for the last four years Manitoba Hydro's net income has dropped from \$346 million to a projected, in this budget, of \$134 million. Forcing Manitoba Hydro to spend more foolish capital on a west-side line and not an east-side line is not helping the provincial deficit nor is it helping Manitoba Hydro.

Will you change your foolish, foolish west-side march?

* (14:10)

Ms. Wowchuk: Again, Mr. Speaker, this is what the Conservatives did with Manitoba telephone. They tried to portray and move Manitoba telephone system as a not profitable system.

So I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, Manitoba Hydro is in the best position it has been in in a long time with \$2.2 billion in retained earnings.

Manitoba Hydro is a Crown jewel for a corporation. The members opposite would see it privatized and sold off to their friends like they did the telephone system. That's what we would do—they would do. That's not what we would do.

We will continue to build Manitoba Hydro, continue to build dams and continue to build lines, Mr. Speaker, so we can have reliability of supply and we can meet our export commitments. We will do that. Members opposite would have that all cut out.

Mr. Borotsik: What this party would do in government would save Manitoba Hydro, save Manitoba Hydro from that government.

Mr. Speaker, not only are the net profits dropping on an annual basis, but the extraprovincial revenue that this government says is going to pay for \$4-billion worth of capital is also being reduced. In 2008, we sold \$625 million extraprovincially to the United States. This past year we spent—or we got \$427 million in revenue.

The revenue is dropping, the expenses are going up, the net profit is dropping, and this government is driving Manitoba Hydro into bankruptcy.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, the retained earnings are \$2.2 billion. We know what the members opposite would do with Manitoba Hydro, the same thing they did with the Manitoba telephone system. They would run it down and then they would privatize it, and Manitobans' telephone bills have skyrocketed.

Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that this side of the House will have no part of that. We will continue to invest in Manitoba Hydro. We will continue—ensure that Bipole III is built so that we have reliability of supply, and we will continue to work to increase export market systems so that we can generate revenue.

The member opposite doesn't want to recognize that there will be over \$21 billion in revenue from Manitoba Hydro from export sales. They didn't support Limestone; revenue was generated there. They don't support Bipole or the development of hydro in the north, revenue—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Rat Creek Diversion Project Status Timeline

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, last night at 10:35 p.m., despite the extraordinary efforts of municipal government employees and community volunteers, the temporary dike protecting the small community of Macdonald in my constituency was breached by the flood waters of the Rat Creek.

Respectfully, I would like to ask: Will the government commit today to completing the Rat Creek diversion project that would have—that they have put on hold for over 11 years that would have protected Macdonald and area residents from this catastrophe.

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Water Stewardship): Mr. Speaker, we have been looking at the Rat Creek diversion. The member knows that he's been briefed a number of times. He knows water levels are high around the province. It is unfortunate that there was a breach in a dike last night.

I know the local EMO works with the provincial EMO so that—hopefully to be able to prevent such situations, but when they occur, to work to make sure that all in the community are safe and any measures that need to be taken to strengthen the flood protection measures will be taken. That's our focus today.

Mr. Faurshou: Mr. Speaker, I don't believe the minister totally comprehends the situation.

The Rat Creek diversion project was started by the Minister of Natural Resources the Honourable Glen Cummings in 1998. This government has failed to continue its construction after they took government in 1999.

I would like to ask on behalf of the citizens of Macdonald and Westbourne who are at this very moment facing a state of emergency in dealing with the flood waters of the Rat Creek, when the Rat Creek diversion project could have prevented all of this from happening: Will the government commit

today to completing the Rat River–Rat Creek diversion project? Thank you.

Ms. Melnick: Again, Mr. Speaker, we have high water levels starting around the province. We know that the Assiniboine River has yet to really thaw and the tributaries are just starting to thaw. We have to deal with the immediate situation, whether it's in the St. Andrews–St. Clements area, whether it's along the Assiniboine River or the Red River. That is the focus today.

The Rat Creek diversion is something that has been looked at, that has been studied. We know that there are immediate concerns concerning high water, concerning ice jams throughout the province, and that's where our focus is right now.

Mr. Faurshou: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister is correct in that final statement: the rural municipality of Portage la Prairie has received no support from the Province in dealing with the flood waters of the Rat Creek. Eight roads have been washed out and numerous others are now under water and closed.

Mr. Speaker, will the provincial government pledge today to work with the rural municipal council of Portage la Prairie in repairing the flood-damaged infrastructure and in the completion of the Rat Creek diversion project, so this damaging flood, like the one that is occurring today, never happens again?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize what the Minister of Water Stewardship just stated.

Our first priority throughout the province right now—and we're dealing with an unprecedented number of municipalities and communities being impacted by flooding—is to deal with the immediate flood situation.

I can indicate, Mr. Speaker, that just as we did in 2009 when we faced floods of similar magnitude on the Red River, particularly north of Winnipeg, and many other areas throughout the province, we did bring in a disaster financial assistance program. And I would anticipate, given the scale of the flooding, we indeed will bring in a disaster financial assistance program again.

I want to stress, by the way, that much of the damage was to both municipal and provincial infrastructure. So, to the member very specifically, that would be an eligible cost, and we will be

working with the municipalities both in terms of dealing with the flood and the response to the flood afterwards in terms of damage.

And we have a record, by the way, of investing a billion dollars in terms of flood protection this past year. We'll continue to do that, Mr. Speaker, and I would encourage members to support that kind of initiative.

Howden Area Water Levels Resident Notification

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, a number of families in the Howden area are concerned about conflicting information regarding flood water levels in their area. They say that according to the Water Stewardship website flood sheets, levels in the St. Adolphe area are predicted at 1997 levels while further downstream are predicted at 2009 levels.

People need to plan for the levels as their properties are filling with water. Why hasn't the minister notified residents of the levels that they can expect very shortly?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Water Stewardship): Well, Mr. Speaker, we know that levels fluctuate. They can fluctuate according to the melts and the speed of the melt. They can fluctuate according to ice jams. They can fluctuate according to the joining up of tributaries with the main water bodies.

We have installed 50 stations along the Assiniboine River and the Red River that give real-time water levels. That is being reported into the Department of Water Stewardship, into the flood forecast centre. That is being reviewed on a 24/7 basis.

Yes, water levels will change. Water levels will move around. We are reporting the most up-to-date information to all persons in Manitoba. It is being posted on the Water Stewardship website, also on the main Government of Manitoba site. There is a link to go directly to flood information, and we encourage people to stay focused on what is happening in their area.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's a very extensive email network between the people living in the Howden area, and as late as just a half an hour ago they had not received any further information that they've been requesting from the minister.

Mr. Speaker, it's very worrisome and to quote from an email, and I quote: If we are actually looking at 1997 levels for this area, someone better start telling the people. We know that rule 2 can push the water levels over the tops of the dikes and hills that most residents have. End quote.

Mr. Speaker, I'll ask again: When is the minister going to start telling the people so they can adequately prepare for the water that may be coming their way?

* (14:20)

Ms. Melnick: Again, Mr. Speaker, water levels are fluctuating. They're in a state of flux right now.

There is a local EMO that the member should be responding to. There—the member should be asking people, if they have questions, to go to their local EMO. There is the website. There are local offices that people can—*[interjection]* Mr. Speaker, these are serious questions and they deserve serious answers, which is what we're trying to provide on this side of the House without the heckling, particularly from the member of Minnedosa.

So, again, I would ask that the member for Morris and all other members ensure they have the contact information for their local EMO, they have the links on the provincial website and that they are also watching themselves to make sure that if they get a question they're able to inform their people of necessary information.

We've done a lot of work on asking people to—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that emails into the minister's own department from me have gone unanswered.

The emailer says that the floodgates went up at the area—when the floodgates went up in the area of Marchand Road intersection, it was soon covered in water. And I'm quoting again from an email: If people need to get more resources and materials into place, we need to know. If the people in this area are not prepared to take on '97 levels or greater, disaster will surely strike. In another email, it states: I don't trust these people to let us know what the heck they are doing, end quote. She says there appears to be two versions of water levels on the website, which is confusing to the residents who are watching very closely.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister provide for the House what communication she has had with the people in the Howden area so they can prepare for the waters that may be coming their way.

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Speaker, in regards to the raising of the gates, we gave near unprecedented warning—it was the night before, I believe around 5 or 6 p.m.—that the gates would be rising at 9 a.m. the following day. We have contacted, as has been organized through Water Stewardship, with all the local leadership around the province, a notification system for those who will be affected by the initial raising of the gates and other activities around the floodway.

There is the local EMO. I don't know if the member recognizes in raising these questions she is completely discounting the abilities of her local EMO, and that's a shame, Mr. Speaker, because these are well-trained people. They work very hard. There is direct connection into provincial EMO.

These are serious questions. We need to take this very seriously and help people understand that they need to prepare for high waters. That's why we started over a month ago to warn Manitobans, to give suggestions of how to protect their property and protect their homes.

Mr. Speaker, it's important we don't play games with this very serious situation.

Employment and Wages Government Priority

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, with yesterday's budget, Manitobans will continue to suffer under the NDP's minimum wage economy. Weekly earnings are lower in Manitoba than anywhere east of Québec, with Manitoba workers now earning, on average, more than \$3,000 less than comparable workers in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, we know that the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) wants to squeeze middle-class families and hit wage earners hardest. We know that the Minister of Finance is on record about boasting about Manitoba's minimum wage economy.

But, Mr. Speaker, when will the minister go on record and admit that it's because of her minimum wage budget that Manitobans are leaving in droves and going to Saskatchewan?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, this is a replay of the questions the member asked yesterday when he tried to allege that people were leaving

Manitoba. All the evidence from legitimate sources, including Statistics Canada, including the Manitoba Bureau of Statistics, indicates that Manitoba has the largest increase in population in the last 40 years, right here in Manitoba, 15,700 people.

Now, the member opposite likes to talk about the minimum wage. He opposed increases in the minimum wage. We have increased it every single year. We have lifted the floor of earnings in Manitoba. Many companies in Manitoba pay higher than the minimum wage. As a result, growth in earnings has been faster than the Canadian average.

Admittedly, it started from a low point. We did have 10 years of Tories in government who never raised the minimum wage but once every four years.

We have consistently improved the minimum wage in Manitoba. Only the member opposite—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, it's funny that the Premier is talking about the minimum wage because, as highlighted in a Canadian Federation of Independent Business report last month, minimum wage earners in Manitoba see less net money on their paycheques than minimum wage earners in Saskatchewan, even though Saskatchewan has a lower minimum wage.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan's personal income tax exemption is over \$5,000 higher than in Manitoba. Even in yesterday's budget the rise in the personal income tax exemption, announced by the Minister of Finance yesterday, won't be remotely comparable to that of Saskatchewan.

When will the minister going to admit it's wrong to take money from the working poor in our province?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite should take a look at the Saskatchewan budget. They rank Manitoba No. 1 in cost of living and affordability in this budget.

Now, if the member will look at the budget, he will see that a single person earning \$30,000 in Manitoba has the second lowest personal cost in taxes in the country. Saskatchewan comes in at No. 6. A single parent earning \$30,000 is the third best in the country. Saskatchewan comes in at No. 5. A single-earner family of four earning \$40,000 is third best in the country, exceeding Saskatchewan by

one. A single-earner family of four earning \$60,000, second best in the country. Saskatchewan's No. 5.

Saskatchewan has a very good economy and does good things for its people. Manitoba does even better, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, a middle-class family in Manitoba with a combined income of \$60,000, two children, earns, on average, \$3,000 less than somebody in Saskatchewan, a family in Saskatchewan on the same basis.

Manitobans, as has been shown, are leaving disproportionately from this province and going to Saskatchewan and other places. The budget saw the NDP treat the wallets of middle-class Manitobans more like an ATM machine than with the dignity that it deserves, yet the minister refuses to think beyond the Walmart economics to create opportunity in this province.

When is this minister finally going to admit that she's telling Manitobans that if they don't want big-box jobs with less money in their pockets they should move to Saskatchewan?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, a two-earner family of four earning \$60,000, which is what the member referenced, is No. 2 in the country for the lowest personal cost in taxes. Saskatchewan is No. 5.

The reality is, Mr. Speaker, by any objective measure—and this table, these constructed tables in here on *The Manitoba Advantage* come from the times when the Conservatives were in office. It's their model that we use to show the Manitoba advantage in this province.

The member only has to read the budget to see the tremendous advantage of living in Manitoba, the lowest cost of living in the country, definitely in the top two, always in the top three; according to Saskatchewan, No. 1.

Saskatchewan does many excellent things. They're a prairie province and a growing economy. Manitoba is a prairie with a growing economy, a \$54-billion economy that the members opposite do everything they can to derail every single day.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

* (14:30)

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Jeff Stoughton Rink

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the 2011 World Curling Championship team of Jeff Stoughton including third Jon Mead, second Reid Carruthers, lead Steve Gould, alternate Garth Smith and coach Norm Gould.

This curling team from the Charleswood Curling Club had an amazing season that started with them winning the provincials in Beausejour on February 13th. Jeff Stoughton won his ninth Manitoba men's title and Steve Gould won his sixth. For both of them it was a third consecutive title, a feat accomplished only once before by Doug Armstrong. For Jon Mead, it was a fourth Manitoba title. The team showed consistency and precision shooting.

From Manitoba it was on to the Canadian Brier championship in London, Ontario. After playing the round robin, Manitoba finished with nine wins and two losses, which qualified them to play in the Page 1 vs 2 playoff. They won that game, putting them through to the gold medal game. On March 13th, exactly one month after winning the Manitoba final, the Stoughton team beat Glenn Howard in the Canadian final eight to six. Who says 13 is an unlucky number?

I was honoured to be present at the Stoughton send-off, along with our leader, which was held at the Charleswood Curling Club on March 25th. Hundreds of Stoughton supporters and curlers turned out on Friday evening to meet the team, show their support and listen to some very entertaining stories from each member of the team. The send-off was originally scheduled as a way to raise money to help the team with their costs to travel to a world championship, but Jeff preferred to have the donations go to one of his favourite charities, the Children's Hospital Research Foundation.

On to the Worlds, held in Regina this year. The team was unstoppable, with only one loss to Norway: Steve Gould with his consistent tick shots; Jon Mead, returning from being almost retired to rejoin the Stoughton team and coming off an amazing personal run at the Brier; Reid Carruthers, the rookie in his first Brier and Worlds and recovering from knee surgery; and Jeff, the ever-patient, ever-focused skip. I'm not sure how he did it. Beating Scotland six to five required finesse shots and focus as Scotland

upped their game from the open style they like to play.

Congratulations to Jeff and his team. You make Canada, Manitoba, Winnipeg and Charleswood proud.

Thank you Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Marilyn Brick, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Westwood Collegiate Gay-Straight Alliance

Ms. Sharon Blady (Kirkfield Park): Madam Deputy Speaker, at their best, schools can become a home away from home for our children. This is the kind of environment Erin Laforet and Stephanie Higgins envisioned when they started Westwood Collegiate's first Gay-Straight Alliance student group to help ensure that all students, regardless of their sexuality, could feel safe and supported. In February, they won the YMCA-YWCA peacemaker award for their role in anti-bullying initiatives and gay rights advocacy in their school.

It's a tragic reality, but many students who are either gay or perceived as gay experience regular teasing, name-calling and bullying. Laforet saw this kind of discrimination happening to people at her own school, and so she and Higgins took the initiative to start their own Gay-Straight Alliance. The group meets once a week to do things like create information pamphlets on gay rights and education packages for teachers to discuss the harm bullying causes to gay students. They also ran a sticker drive for Gay Pride Week.

At a time when 75 per cent of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students in Canada reported feeling unsafe in at least one place in their schools, Westwood's Gay-Straight Alliance inspired 90 per cent of the student body to wear purple on October 20th last year in memory of gay teen suicides, particularly in the United States.

Laforet, Higgins and Westwood teachers have all noticed an increasingly respectful and open environment. One of the most obvious signs of change is the near disappearance of the pervasive phrase that's so gay from Westwood hallways.

Currently, Laforet and Higgins are helping other schools to set up their own Gay-Straight Alliances to fulfil their vision of making everyone feel safe and respected in schools everywhere. Huge congratulations to Erin and Stephanie for their well-deserved win and to all the students across Winnipeg who are living out the change that they

want to see. I hope every person involved in this initiative recognizes what a welcome difference they've made. Thank you.

Steve Gould

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Madam Deputy Speaker, Steve Gould of Headingley, Manitoba, is a 2011 world champion curler. Gould is the lead for the Jeff Stoughton team, consisting of third Jon Mead and second Reid Carruthers. The team representing Canada at this year's World Curling Championship in Regina beat Scotland's Tom Brewster in an exciting gold medal game.

Steve Gould is no stranger to championship curling. In 1996, he won the world championship gold medal as a member of Jeff Stoughton's team, and in 1999 he won the silver medal as an alternate player for Stoughton. He was also the runner-up in the 2005 Olympic trials and second runner-up in the 2009 Olympic trials. In past years at the Brier, Steve has also twice won the Ford Hot Shots skills competition.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Gould was able to advance with his team to this year's world championship by becoming the 2011 Tim Hortons Brier champion. The team was nearly perfect in the championship game and Steve in particular was an astonishing 99 per cent during the final. This was Steve Gould's second Brier win and his sixth Brier appearance as a lead.

During the 1996 world championships, Steve was nicknamed "the Tickman" for his ability to play one of the most difficult shots in curling. He was consistently able to tick guards off the centre line, while still keeping them in play because of the free guard zone rule. The shot has become one of Steve's specialities, and was used multiple time during the world's Brier and provincials this year, to lead the Stoughton team to victory.

Steam's—team's—teammates described him as a person who maintains positive energy for the team, while not getting too excited and keeping the team focused on its end goal. And I noticed this year his nickname was the Brain.

Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate Steve Gould, and his teammates, on an exceptional curling season. Their hard work and perseverance has brought the World Curling Championship title and the Brier title back to Manitoba for the first time in over a decade. I know that Manitobans could not be more pleased by

this accomplishment. On behalf of my constituents, I would like to wish Steve and the Stoughton team all the best, and hope to see them repeat their exceptional performance next year.

**Daniel McIntyre/St. Matthews
Community Association**

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commend the excellent work now under way thanks to the Daniel McIntyre/St. Matthews Community Association in my fine constituency of Wolseley. This organization receives core funding from our government through the Neighbourhoods Alive! program, which engages local citizens in revitalizing their own community. Once the local priorities are established, the hard-working staff at the DMSMCA assess—or access, rather, additional funds from the multi-million dollar annual budget of Neighbourhoods Alive! to implement programs that address the wishes of their residents.

Just some of the accomplishments already under way in Daniel McIntyre/St. Matthews include the following: an after-school program that filled up almost immediately with over 40 children attending per day; hosting a winter fair this year, which still drew over 200 people in February on one of the coldest days of the year; a community bike shop offering free lessons on the repair and maintenance of bicycles for safe, active transportation; small grants for local programs; vacant lots have been transformed into beautiful community gardens; new additional units of affordable housing have been constructed; a community composting program collects organic waste from local businesses in the West End, and turns material back into healthy soil; community safety's been improved by informing residents of such tools as the provincial Safer Communities Act, which has now lead to the shut down of nearly 500 properties that were being used for illegal purposes.

The strong environmental programs of the DMSMCA caught the attention of the Manitoba Eco-Network recently, which honoured the neighbourhood with a Protecting Our Earth award. At this time, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the staff and the board members of the DMSMCA, some of whom I see have joined us in the gallery today at the Legislature, for their tireless efforts and remarkable accomplishments to date. These include staff members, Kemlin Nembhard, Glen Koroluk, Robyn Webb, Dodie Graham, Jen Nagy, Jennifer Sparling; Board of Directors Executive Jamil

Mahmood, Margaret Bryans, Genny Funk-Unrah, Aileen Krush; and members-at-large Rob Marriott, Daisydee Bautista, Trevor Doner, Alex Wright, Christopher Parker, Catherine Chambers, Barrett Ens and Rebecca Blaikie.

Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased to see that our 2011 budget will expand the 10-year-old Neighbourhoods Alive! program to new communities, just as it was expanded to Daniel McIntyre/St. Matthews just a few years ago. I certainly encourage all residents of the neighbourhood to contact the DMSMCA through the Web, or by phone at 774-7005, and get involved with these impressive partnerships with our government, to build our province together for everyone.

(14:40)

**ORDERS OF THE DAY
GOVERNMENT BUSINESS**

**BUDGET DEBATE
(Second Day of Debate)**

Mr. Speaker: On the resume—adjourned debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) that this House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government, and it's in the name of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, and I'm pleased to offer some reflections on yesterday's budget, some thoughts in terms of steps that could be taken to improve upon what has been tabled before the House, and also to make some comments about where we stand today as a province and where we might want to go as we look to the future.

Mr. Speaker, I want to just begin by again thanking the table officers and Hansard staff and everybody else who does a great job, security and others who do a great job of serving all of us as elected officials. It's been a great pleasure to get to know each of you since I've been elected to this House, which is now just over five years. And we're always impressed with the dedication and professionalism of the staff that work day in and day out right here in the Chamber, and also those many others who support the activities of the Legislative Assembly in other places.

Mr. Speaker, I would also want to just start out by reflecting on some of the efforts ongoing, as we speak, in different places around the province today

to deal with the challenge of rising waters. We have seen, over 13 years since 1997, steps taken at different levels, municipally, provincially and federally, to better position our province to withstand the challenge of rising flood waters. It's clear that we have further lessons to learn arising from this year's experience. We recognize that no two years are exactly the same, and certainly there are challenges being presented with this year's flood that are unique to this year, as well as other challenges arising that we've seen in years gone by.

I want to commend the individual property owners who have taken steps to protect their own properties, those who have taken steps to assist with neighbours in a way that's very significant and important here in our province of Manitoba, also, to thank and acknowledge the work of municipal leaders around the province who recognized some of the vulnerabilities in the communities that they represent and to take some steps to better protect people and property in the face of the current challenges.

And it also has to be acknowledged, Mr. Speaker, that support from the provincial government has come in a variety of ways to different communities around the province to provide funding and expertise that has gone toward dealing with some of these challenges. And we'll certainly have a discussion and debate about the current problems and challenges being faced and, certainly, advice to the government and feedback to the government in areas both where things are going well and where things have fallen short.

Mr. Speaker, finally, the added steps taken at the federal level to permit more federal dollars to go into preventative works is a welcome step in the right direction.

So, Mr. Speaker, while many are facing significant challenges, we know that some progress has been made and that, certainly, as we look at the trend of rising waters that we've seen over the past number of years, it's clear that, as we look to the future, there will need to be another great round of planning and work done throughout our province in order to manage the challenges of excessive waters as we look to the future. It's quite clear that we are in a cycle, now, where the basin that we live in is more inundated than it has been in past years. We're beginning the season with higher water tables and dealing with the significant levels of precipitation which is resulting in significant challenges.

As we look at all of these flood-related issues, Mr. Speaker, we also have to take a long view and recognize that, at some point down the road, perhaps five or 10 years, we may very well, as Manitobans, be wishing that we had more water available for irrigation and for other needs of our citizens, for clean drinking water and for recreation, all of those things that are so important to Manitobans.

And, Mr. Speaker, we believe it's important that leadership be shown. And we certainly intend to begin that process of identifying those future needs and ensuring that steps begin immediately to produce a comprehensive water strategy for Manitoba that provides for better protection, better diking and protection, drainage where required, and also water storage, so that water can be used in later years in the event that we find ourselves in a drought situation. And we know, as big as these flood challenges are, drought situations can be devastating to our producers and create incredible hardship for Manitobans from all walks of life. And so, that sort of foresight is what is required.

And, certainly, we're inspired by the example of former premier, the late Duff Roblin, who showed that kind of vision during his years in government, a remarkably productive period of time, over nine years, Mr. Speaker. A lot was done in terms of preparing the province for the challenges that we face today.

The construction of the floodway, ahead of time and under budget, under the Roblin administration, is a project of particular importance and a matter of pride for all Manitobans, Portage diversion being another example. The Shellmouth Dam and the work to create Lake of the Prairies and provide opportunities for recreation in that beautiful part of our province near Russell, as well as to provide flood protection for Manitobans along the Assiniboine River, were significant and visionary projects undertaken by former Premier Roblin.

And the time has come, Mr. Speaker, for a similarly forward-looking vision to take the next step in Manitoba, as we prepare not just for high-water challenges, but also for the potential for drought in the years ahead. That's a challenge we look forward to undertaking in the months and the years ahead.

Mr. Speaker, as we look at this—at the budget presented yesterday, there are, as we have said, many initiatives within the budget that are matters that we had called for—in some cases, for many years. The support for increased policing, something that our

Justice critic has called for, that I have called for and others have called for, in order to ensure the safety of communities in our province, but we welcome that initiative. But we're disappointed that the government withheld money or sat on money that was provided three years ago by the federal government, for an election year when that money could better have been deployed sooner. And we are disappointed that election-year politics would be a higher priority than genuine efforts to improve the safety of our communities.

We see other initiatives—attention to health-care capital projects. After spending 11 years with an agenda to close the Grace emergency room under this government, and we've seen various documents come out over those 11 years wanting to close the Grace Hospital, we're happy to have this last-minute conversion, on the road to an election, that has the government wanting to make an investment in the Grace emergency room and we support that, Mr. Speaker, and we'll follow through with that investment if provided with that opportunity.

We have also seen in this budget a commitment to new schools, overdue but needed, in areas of the city where population is growing. We see a new school for Sage Creek, Amber Trails and other areas where population has grown, in parts of the city, in contrast to other areas of the city and province, where school population has declined. Again, Mr. Speaker, it took an election to cause the government to recognize the importance of taking action but we do support progress and we do support investment in schools and education for the future of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, we're also happy to see in this budget, finally on their 12th budget, recognition that we need to encourage excellence within our universities and colleges and some modest steps in this budget to move in that direction. Those are steps that we support and positions that we would want to maintain.

Mr. Speaker, we also see within the budget new-found commitments to other areas in the areas of child care, in the areas of education and in the areas of health care, as well as support for dealing with excess moisture conditions, that, we believe, are late in coming, but are certainly welcome in this budget, arriving just over five months before the next election.

* (14:50)

So let me be very clear that we support those initiatives. We support investments in community infrastructure. We support schools, hospitals. We support better housing for seniors in Manitoba, all of those things where there's a pressing need, Mr. Speaker, a need which seems to be acknowledged in election years and not acknowledged outside of election years.

We see some very, very modest measures, Mr. Speaker, with respect to taxes charged to Manitobans. Most of those changes will be eaten up as a result of other factors, but there are some modest steps in this budget. We support those steps. We will keep them in place.

Mr. Speaker, there are other issues and matters and steps within the budget that are steps that could have come sooner. They didn't need to wait until their 12th budget. They didn't need to wait until the alarm clock of an approaching election woke up the tired government in order to do some of these things. But we do nonetheless acknowledge that there are issues within and steps within the budget that are matters that can be supported. We see steps in connection with Brandon. Obviously, the Eriksdale hospital, which has been promised many times and not yet delivered, needs to be addressed; we support steps to improve that important facility. And we acknowledge that this budget, at the very least, makes certain promises related to these areas.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we have a couple of areas of concern. After acknowledging support for those initiatives, we have concern that for 12 years they've been making promises to Manitobans. They made a promise that they would end hallway medicine, and hallway medicine is still with us. They made a promise that they would manage Hydro well, and they have done anything but. They made a promise that they would make communities safer, and they failed to keep that promise.

They also made a promise, Mr. Speaker, that they would balance the budget each and every year, a commitment made by the then-NDP leader in 1999 and maintained, at least in words, a commitment to balanced budget on the part of Mr. Doer up until his departure for Washington. And Manitobans responded to those promises. We've had debates about whether those promises were, in fact, kept. But what we know is that there was at least an acknowledgement on the part of the former NDP leader that fiscal responsibility was important, that balanced budgets were in line with the concerns and

the priorities and values of Manitobans. And we are concerned that that commitment to fiscal responsibility and balanced budgets has gone out the window ever since the former NDP leader took up his new position.

And what we've seen, Mr. Speaker, with the arrival of the new NDP leader, are large deficits, rising debt. We see, with the third-quarter report that was just released yesterday, an increase of—in the debt of \$1.6 billion between December 31st of '09 and December 31st, 2010, \$1.6 billion, representing about 15 per cent of the total budget. That's a level of increase that's not sustainable. We see in this budget a further budgeted increase in debt of over a billion dollars, adding again to the total debt load that is going to have to be dealt with by the taxpayers and the ratepayers of the future.

And so, Mr. Speaker, what we see in the budget is a government that is focused on the next five months, a budget that seems to have a lot to do with the political health of the NDP but very little to do with the financial health of Manitoba as we look down the road, a budget focused on the coming five months with no regard for where Manitoba will be in five years.

And these are areas of significant concern for the Progressive Conservative Party, for the opposition. While we support taking steps in the areas related to improving the quality of life for Manitobans, we are concerned about the sustainability of the track that the government is on today, increasing debt by 10 per cent a year, increasing debt by levels that are unsustainable. And we see some of the consequence starting to arise already. We saw it in last year's budget with the big jump in the required repayment of the rising debt, and we see in this budget a very significant increase forced on the government as a result of their policies in debt-servicing costs, Mr. Speaker, of almost 6 per cent, one of the largest line item increases in this budget.

Now, what it shows is that with the passage of time, Mr. Speaker, that more and more money is going to have to be set aside to repay debt and that becomes a very significant risk if interest rates should rise, and many economists predict that they will. They are at historic low levels today and in all likelihood those rates will rise. And as they do, it will be that generation of taxpayers and Manitobans that will have to write the cheques and put in the hours at work in order to pay off that debt built up by this NDP government.

So, Mr. Speaker, the sustainability of the financial track is a matter of significant concern. We see, once again, very little regard for what happens two years or three years or five years from now, but an overwhelming and apparently desperate focus on the coming five months related to short-term politics.

We have, Mr. Speaker, other areas of comment about the budget. Firstly, concern about the government's plan to proceed with a long west-side power line against the evidence, against the advice of all of the experts, including former Hydro president and CEO Len Bateman, appointed to that role by former Premier Schreyer who wanted to come to committee and make comments raising his concerns.

We see concerns being raised by a former vice-president of Hydro in today's *Free Press* commenting on the misleading public comments that have been made with respect to how this project is going to be paid for, Mr. Speaker. Common sense says and reality says that if you overspend by billions of dollars, it's going to be Manitoba ratepayers that pick up the tab, and the evidence is already starting to roll in.

The government is already in front of the Public Utilities Board asking for rate increases over the coming 10 years, each and every year for the coming 10 years, a decade of rate increases at greater than the rate of inflation in order to pay for this decision. And we have yet to hear a convincing reason for this decision, Mr. Speaker.

We've heard concerns about some American special interest groups who don't want to see Hydro do any development. They don't want to see an east-side line. They're opposed to the construction of new dams. They're on the record opposing transmission lines no matter where they go, Mr. Speaker, but based on those comments this government rolled over without even challenging the assumptions and the incorrect information being put forward. They rolled over. They locked themselves into a position.

I know the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) tried to reverse that position in the course of his leadership campaign. He was shot down by the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger). And the member for St. Boniface has remained committed to an approach that all of the experts, all the facts say is the wrong way to go.

And, Mr. Speaker, with all the concerns we have, the good news is that this is still a reversible

decision. It would've been better if the right decision was made three years ago. We could've been three years further down the road but the second best outcome is that this decision can be reversed and that is an opportunity that will arise in the months ahead.

Mr. Speaker, future generations expect us to manage wisely, to be prudent as we look to the future, to make responsible decisions that are going to have an impact on them. Those future generation have no voice today. They don't have the ability to come into the House and raise concerns and to vote and to influence these decisions.

* (15:00)

So we owe an extra duty to them to get it right today so that the legacy we leave them is one of a reliable, public Manitoba Hydro that operates efficiently and operates for the benefit of all Manitobans, not a Manitoba Hydro that is weighed down and crippled by interference, driven by the noises coming from groups south of the border. That's not the Manitoba Hydro we would want to leave to that generation and it's not the Hydro that we will leave.

Mr. Speaker, the government missed an opportunity. The government missed an opportunity with this budget to show that they are concerned about deficits. At the rate they're going right now, it's going to take 24 years to get back to balanced budgets. The budget yesterday missed an opportunity to show real commitment to moving in that direction of reducing waste, managing dollars wisely, doing what households across Manitoba are required to do each and every day, and that's live within their means. That's an opportunity lost in this budget.

They could have taken steps that would have demonstrated a clear commitment to spending wisely. One such example would have been to repeal the vote tax and save hundreds of thousands of dollars for Manitobans each and every year. They could have reduced that expenditure line. They could have taken further steps to reduce the amount of bureaucracy that's built up within the health-care system. They could have said that instead of reining in the number of spin doctors that this government hires, that they could have made a real commitment to ensuring that people have real access to family doctors. But none of those things were done within the budget.

With that said, Mr. Speaker, there is an opportunity to correct this—some of the mistakes that

were made in this budget. There was an opportunity and there is an opportunity to move this budget a couple of steps in the right direction for the sake of the people of Manitoba. There are two simple, reasonable and moderate things—two simple, reasonable and moderate things—that the government could do to alter this budget in order to make it a budget that all members of this House can support.

And, Mr. Speaker, we can keep some of the positive things in the budget and we can correct those deficiencies and say that this is a budget not just for the next five months, but a budget for the next five years and beyond.

And that is why, Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson),

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

therefore acknowledges that this budget contains some worthy promises for Manitobans, including:

- (a) finally applying federal support toward an increased police presence in the province of Manitoba; and
- (b) allowing universities and colleges more certainty in their provincial funding and more flexibility to pursue excellence; and
- (c) providing capital support for needed improvements to our medical, educational and recreational facilities such as the Grace Hospital emergency room, expansion of the hospital at Ste. Anne and schools in locations such as Sage Creek; and
- (d) providing some additional resources for the protection of Manitobans from excess moisture conditions in both the short term and the longer term; and
- (e) providing modest tax relief for Manitoba families; including school tax relief.

However, this House must also point out that the budget could do more to address the needs of future generations of Manitobans by doing more to reduce waste and mismanagement in the provincial budget, and reduce the reliance on increasing the deficit and dependence on debt and avoid tax increases in non-election years.

Therefore, this House resolves to support the positive promises referred to above, but amends the government's general budgetary policy as follows:

- (a) by calling on the provincial government to reduce waste and mismanagement, starting with allowing Manitoba Hydro to build Bipole III on the east-side route, saving Manitoba families an extra \$11,748, protecting Manitoba Hydro's system reliability, reducing the impacts on the environment and lowering the long-term summary deficit; and
- (b) by calling on the provincial government to implement efforts to lower the deficit and control debt through a spending review process that will reduce waste, protect front-line social services and bring a more balanced fiscal approach, therefore ensuring a prosperous future for Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, seconded by the honourable member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson),

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

therefore acknowledge that this budget contains some worthy promises for Manitobans, including:

- (a) finally applying federal support toward an increased police presence in the province of Manitoba; and
- (b) allowing universities and colleges more certainty in their provincial funding and more flexibility to pursue excellence; and
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Therefore, this House resolves to support the positive promises referred to above, but amends the government's general budgetary policy as follows:

- (a) by calling on the provincial government to reduce waste and mismanagement—*[interjection]* Order, please. By calling on the provincial government to reduce waste and mismanagement, starting with allowing Manitoba Hydro to build Bipole III on the east-side route, saving Manitoba families an extra \$11,748, protecting Manitoba Hydro's system reliability, reducing the impacts on the environment and lowering the long-term summary deficit; and
- (b) by calling on the provincial government to implement efforts to lower the deficit and control debt through a spending review process that will reduce waste, protect front-line social services and bring a more balanced fiscal approach, therefore ensuring a prosperous future for Manitobans.

And this amendment is in order, so we will now—*[interjection]* Order.

We will now debate the amendment.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Innovation, Energy and Mines): You know, Mr. Speaker, during the course of the budget announcement—at the very positive budget announcement yesterday, I turned to the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and said: This is a budget of hope in a hopeful province.

And today's amendment is something like a faint hope amendment, Mr. Speaker. It's a faint hope amendment.

I am startled by the sudden conversion. The member was using reference—references to conversions earlier in the question period. It does rank up there, along with the Damascus road, Mr. Speaker, in terms of conversions.

Mr. Speaker, it was only a few months ago when the very member stood in his place and said that the government failed to preserve front-line health-care services, failed to emphasize preventative care, bloated bureaucracy, failed to recognize the important of agriculture, failed to offer a plan to encourage private investment—by the way which is 80 per cent and a major increase in this province.

And you know what, Mr. Speaker? Now, today, the member discovered there is more than five months ahead of us; there is need for a future vision. I agree. That's why we had a five-year plan that you

voted against. That's why we had balanced budgets for 10 years which you voted against every single year.

And now on the brink—on the brink of a provincial election, Mr. Speaker—I know you can have the tape measure and you can measure the cloths and the drapes in my office. I know members opposite have been talking about offering jobs to their friends. I know how it works. But, you know, sometimes you got to stand up for something. Sometimes, you've got to put your money where your mouth is and talk about going forward.

*(15:10)

I've been door knocking in my area for 20 years, Mr. Speaker, and I've heard the same thing for 20 years. We need help for our families. We need help for—to make sure our kids have child-care spaces so we can carry a second job. We need help for our parents who are getting elderly—that have been delivered in every budget since 1999.

The members opposite ridiculed, made fun of, voted against, Mr. Speaker—I've got the voting record here. I can go through the names here. I don't know if I can; I think I have to call members by constituency, which I could never do because they—well, I won't say, but, having said that, the point is that we have delivered on hope and on the future, and that's where the people of Manitoba are. They're a co-operative lot. They're a hopeful lot.

Mr. Speaker, when you go up north and talk to the people of Thompson, despite the challenges, they're—they don't brag, but, you know, the fact that Rolls Royce out of England has said Manitoba is the best place in the world to do business and that's why we went to Thompson, you know, they don't brag about it, but Manitobans know. If you go around this province, and I know the member for—the Leader of the Opposition was in Thompson, I think, once or twice. It's in the north. It's a thriving community.

There's thriving communities all around. In fact, there's thriving communities in southwest Manitoba. You know, you go around this province, go to southwest Manitoba, there's 1,500 people that work in the oil patch. There's a billion dollars invested in this economy of private—private—money in the oil economy in Manitoba, and for 10, 11 years members opposite did everything they could—everything they could—to stop the advancement of hydro—they need hydro down there, Mr. Speaker—to stop the development of the Manitoba economy. And all of a

sudden—all of a sudden—on the 13th day on the fourth month of the year 2011, we've seen a sudden conversion, a recognition that daycare, education, health care and a measured approach to the economy that deals with both public and private sector is worth looking at.

Mr. Speaker, this budget will take 5,000 people or more off of the tax rolls; that's the best—one of the best remedies possible. One of the best remedies possible for Manitobans is jobs. This budget and the last 10 years have developed jobs. All of a sudden, the Leader of the Opposition and the members have discovered that this economy is moving forward.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I remember when we came into office in 1999, when Brandon had not been built, when the emergency hadn't built, and there hadn't been development at Health Sciences Centre. When we saved Seven Oaks from being shut down, when we built Brandon hospital, when we put MRIs and CT scans around the province, members opposite voted against it and said we couldn't afford it.

Well, now 10 years and 11 years later, for the first time they think—they're thinking about the future. They're thinking about the five years ahead. Yes, it's correct to talk about intergenerational. We've been building this province for a decade, for the next decade and for the following decade. And that's what hydro development's about; that's why we want to double the capacity of hydro. And if we let members have their way, they will stop the development on the east side, and the Leader of the Opposition knows that. He's been a lawyer. He's practised law. Maybe he should talk to the Minister of Energy in Alberta who couldn't get a transmission line built between Calgary and Edmonton. They couldn't build a transmission line between Calgary and Edmonton, and the Leader of the Opposition, who knows about litigation and who just—who knows what difficulty it is and who knows how long it's taken us to even move one megawatt of power, could not get it through. He knows it's a risk not worth taking. He knows the fact that we have 5,000 megawatts of power in northern Manitoba that could be moved and shared with other Manitobans, that could bring in \$21 billion for the future, Mr. Speaker, is something worth fighting for.

He's wrong, Mr. Speaker, and except for the conversion of accepting all of the programs, accepting all the tax breaks, the member still has it

wrong on the west side, and he's still obsessed with the fact that our debt is less this year than it was when the member opposite was secretary to the premier of Manitoba, the former Gary Filmon. Our debt's gone down, and, you know, it was only a few months ago that in this Chamber the members called for an amendment that would remove half a billion dollars from the budget. Now think about it. A few short months ago they were going to take half a billion dollars out of the budget. Now where would that money have come from?

Now we know where it would come from because they have a track record. Now members opposite don't like talking about the '90s. They don't like talking about it and I don't blame them. It's—it was a terrible period in Manitoba history. It was the lean, mean years, Mr. Speaker. It was lean and it was mean. It was mean, and now—so they have a track record, they have a track record. They fired 1,500 nurses. They laid off doctors. Look at the contrast. They stopped the training programs for CT scanners and technicians. We've had to do back track.

I just talked to someone recently whose son was in the program of cross-training X-ray technicians and other forms of technicians, saying, thank God that you put those programs back in place. There's now shortages, Mr. Speaker, around the world and across Manitoba.

You know there's something enlightening about facing your execution and all of a sudden understanding on the eve of your execution that you've seen the light. You've discovered the light; you've discovered what's right for Manitobans. You've discovered that Manitobans are hopeful, Manitobans are co-operative and Manitobans want to develop this province not just amongst each other, but intergenerationally.

That's why we have a five-year plan. That's why we balanced the budget for 10 years, Mr. Speaker. That's why we chose to invest in doctors, invest in nurses, invest in policing. Members opposite have two-trick ponies that plays all the time. The one-trick pony is bipole; the other trick pony is crime. We know that. Conservative right-wing parties always do that. They always go to crime. If you got nothing to do, you got nothing to say, go to crime. Crime's the default position; we understand that. We understand that; we know they play that game. In fact, Filmon played it in '95 with television ads with Filmon being

inside the jail and outside the jail. You might want to check them out—inside Earls, outside Earls, whatever you want to do.

As it goes, crime and now the bipole that we talked about during the last election, that we committed ourselves to last election, that we put planning in place last election, and we know we have to do it. The members had a report. When the member was secretary to the premier, before he went off to help Mike Harris cut and slash, Mr. Speaker, that was on his website, before he was an expert on privatization, which is on the website, before all those things, he was with Premier Filmon. He knows what the reality is. He knows that a standard line has to be built, and he knows that the sooner we do it the better.

We have a route—we have agreement—88 meetings with the First Nations community, and now he wants to reverse that and put in jeopardy \$21 billion of revenue. Having said that, Mr. Speaker, if you walk around my community, if you walk around any community in Manitoba, you can see there's hope there. There's hope and people know the old adage, Tory times are tough times, applies.

They know that they have a government that's responsive. It's been responsive on daycare, creating thousands of more spaces, that's been responsive in education after severe, acute protracted restraint cutbacks of the 1990s. And health care, I dare not go much forward other than to say I was a Health critic when a government brought down a budget—when a Conservative government brought down a budget that talked about glowing capital expenditures. And I said publicly, when they're re-elected they're going to slash it all back. And you know what happened a few months later? That government was re-elected and all of those capital programs were slashed, all of them, Mr. Speaker. All of them were cut, including Brandon for the fourth or fifth or sixth time. So we have a track record.

You know, there is a certain—as the former premier used to say, you know, there's a record that you have and, you know, you have a good idea where someone's going by what they've done, Mr. Speaker, and we know what members opposite have done.

* (15:20)

With respect to the future, this is the first time I've heard in the House in 12 budgets, Mr. Speaker, that the members talk about the future. Yes, this

budget is about the future. It's about building and the expanding of the home-care system that you tried to privatize. It's like providing for—expand the health-care facilities, like the expansion at CancerCare. Finally, the members opposite are starting to get it. They're starting to get the fact that Manitobans like expanded health care. Manitobans like more doctors. They like more nurses. They like more police officers on the street. They like more child-care spaces. They like the tax cuts that have been in the budget. They're not overly aggressive, they're modest, but they fit with the lifestyle of Manitobans. We understand you have to pay for some of these costs, but you can grow the economy, you can grow the economy, and you can put more money in people's pockets, and you can provide superior services, all at the same time.

You know, it reminds me of the wind farm that was opened last week, that I had a chance to go at, and I—my good friend, the member for Emerson, (Mr. Graydon) was at and, you know, we opened the largest wind farm in Canada last year. Now this, Mr. Speaker, at a time when a recession was going on, and members opposite would have said cut \$500 million out of budget. And to add to that, I was here when members opposite criticized the deal. All members opposite did was criticize that deal and said it was a bad deal, but they were there when we had the silver clippers to open it all up. There they were, all cheering this clean wind energy.

And you know what? I don't blame them, because we're going in the right direction. Manitobans knows we're on the right direction, Mr. Speaker, and members opposite have all of a sudden U-turned. They've U-turned today on the 13th day of the fourth month, 2011. We've seen—in fact, the leader, the Leader of the Opposition even said a word I haven't heard in 12 years—he said Progressive Conservative Party. You know, I haven't heard the word "progress" in front of Conservative Party now for over a decade. All of a sudden they're coming back as the Progressive Conservative Party.

In words, Mr. Speaker, I commend that but, you know, a few months before an election, after having decried every single advantage that has been offered in this Legislature, and voting against every single budget with words like, you know, failing to preserve health care, failing to recognize the importance of agriculture, failing to offer a plan to encourage your private investment, a few months before an election they've forgotten.

All those members who voted on this, and I've got how many members of the opposition—20—voted in favour of that. Just a few months ago, Mr. Speaker, just a few months ago they wanted to fire nurses, doctors, teachers. They know that 80 per cent of the costs in our system are related to humans and people, and now it's an election time, gone are the ideas about flooding Point Douglas and making it into a recreation centre.

And, you know, Mr. Speaker, now for—they're talking about the future. I commend them; I commend them. There's more to Manitoba than just this, you know, playing political games in the Legislature. Five months ago it was cut and slash. We're coming up to an election—U-turn—put Progressive back on the Conservative name, change the brand and here we go.

Well, another thing that I found with Manitobans, Mr. Speaker, is that they have a certain sense of trust and a certain sense of decency—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Morris, on a point of order.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Official Opposition House Leader): It clearly says in *Beauchesne*, citation 332, that members may not rest their feet on the chairs while addressing the House, and I noticed that the member opposite was doing that.

Mr. Speaker: Minister, on the same point of order.

Mr. Chomiak: Same point of order. The member with her accurate eyesight is totally correct, Mr. Speaker. I did inadvertently rest my foot on my seat as I spoke, and—but members opposite are trying to rest their laurels on the success that we've done over the past few years, in terms of this amendment, and I admit to that fact.

Mr. Speaker: Order. On the point of order by the honourable Official Opposition House Leader, if you look at *Beauchesne* 332, it says: While a degree of informality in debate may be encouraged, members may not rest their feet on their chairs while addressing the House.

And we would like to follow the rules. At times we get a little leeway here and there, but it's been drawn to the Speaker's attention, and it's in the rules. The honourable member does have a point of order,

and I would ask the honourable member to refrain from putting his feet on the chair.

* * *

Mr. Chomiak: I must reflect on that, that it's the result of my yoga, an ongoing practice of yoga on a daily basis that I—in fact, yoga and love have inspired me the last little while, Mr. Speaker, so I thank the member for raising that point.

I—you know, Mr. Speaker, I've—it's—Manitobans can recognize when it's real and when it's not real. I have the distinct impression, and I'm getting the distinct impression from the actions of members today—two questions on the budget, I think that's all we're going to hear the rest of the session, two questions on the budget, an amendment that says you're doing everything really good and that's what we really want to do even though we've did everything differently in the past but, oh, don't do the bipole thing that we've been trashing you on for a number of years and do more about the debt and forget about the fact that we asked you to remove half a billion dollars from the budget a few months ago. Don't worry about that. We're forgetting about that and vote for us because—because why? Because why? What alternative has been offered by the members in the past five years under the leadership of the member—the Leader of the Opposition, the previous Leader of the Opposition. The only opposition that we've heard has been negative, has been small, has been against growth, has been antigovernment, has been antigrowth, has been, frankly, not in tune with Manitobans.

We have been hopeful and positive and growing and recognize every single day in this Legislature that we can do it better. The member said before he introduced his amendments to the amendments that we could do better. We agree, Mr. Speaker. We could always do better and we're always trying to do better. That's why we've been very cautious and laid out a five-year plan, have done better than we laid out, haven't changed it. One—some governments have decided to move it forward, move it back. We think that, coming out of the recession, notwithstanding the fact that we're doing well or better than any other province, as Manitobans we want to be cautious, but you don't reinvent yourself. You don't reinvent yourself, honestly and really, on the eve of your execution, on the deathbed.

You know, Mr. Speaker, you got to live with what you said and what you put on the record for

11 years, and for 11 years—it was—for 11 years, was acute, protracted restraint—acute, protracted restraint. And we're going to manage Hydro better. That's a code for we're going to sell it just like they did with MTS and just like we tried to do with the home care system, and all of a sudden on the 13th day of the fourth month, 2011, the members opposite find that the initiatives in our budget and our economic plan are worth supporting.

Oh, a little difference on the bipole and a little bit more about debt, Mr. Speaker, but fundamentally I guess I have to wonder what it was and what it is that changed members' position, changed the surge in members' position that's been there since 1999. And I can only offer the fact that we're going into an election where Manitobans will be asked to choose. Are they going to choose between a Conservative Party that has been consistently narrow, consistently conservative, and consistently opposed to growth and development of the economy, particularly the Crown corporations, or are they going to go with a party that's been consistently helping families? It's consistently put forward new ideas, that has moved the government forward, that has a—even *Maclean's* magazine called it—what did they call it? Manitoba miracle, the Manitoba miracle.

I—it's almost—you know, Manitobans don't brag. We don't like to brag, Mr. Speaker. It's not usual to hear that from someone outside of Manitoba, but it's heartening to know. It's heartening to know that people recognize around this country that we've managed to come through a recession, to come through a difficult time, and to create jobs, to have an expanded population, to have lower taxes, to have a future for Manitobans in terms of economic wealth with hydro in the north and with our, you know, I'd say, somewhat dynamic but small oil resource in the southwestern part of the province, compared to Alberta, and with our mining wealth, with our IT development.

*(15:30)

You know, Mr. Speaker, we had occasion to have—we had occasion to do some announcements with an Israeli company recently, and there'll be several announcements in the near future about energy, clean energy and developments that are world-class. And Manitoba is considered world-class in a whole series of areas. It's not just HIV, it's not just food development through the Richardson Nutraceutical, all started in the last decade, all but

mere imagination in members opposite minds, all of them not considered when the members opposite were in government. But all have come to fruition, have placed us in positions where we're considered world leaders. We could travel to other countries, and they'd say, we know what Manitoba can do. We know that Manitoba is a leader in the Level 4 lab. We know that Cangene's a leader. We know that HIV research is a leadership in Manitoba. We know that food and nutraceuticals is a [inaudible] We know that the space and the aerospace industry is a world leader in Manitoba.

And, Mr. Speaker, it's been recognized, I think, finally, by members opposite that they better get on the train because this train left the—they left the station a long time ago and you got a long way to catch up.

And so it's a very curious amendment brought by members opposite. I know the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) has been showing me graphs and charts, and, you know, I'll show him the size of the curtains in our offices any time he wants, Mr. Speaker. You know, I know he's just anxious just to get in there and start cutting and start, you know, start firing people as is want of the Conservative Party.

But, Mr. Speaker, I'd say today's acknowledgement by members opposite that the budget is a good step—that the budget is a good step—and I know the member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler) is noting, as he goes through his notes, I know he's been relatively quiet. I can imagine—I could only imagine the caucus meeting they had yesterday or today. Like, you know, I can't even believe what that caucus meeting must have been like with, you know, the well-known divisions in the Conservative caucus. We know. You know, I can't even imagine what that caucus meeting must have been like. I can't even imagine.

And, having said that, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased that members opposite have finally recognized, after a decade of—I have to find the right word—a decade of being out of touch that perhaps that some of the measures like: new police officers; new prosecutors; a police helicopter; new spaces in jails; three billion on highway infrastructure; 700 million on highway expansion; an additional 200, 400 more doctors, including 111 more doctors in rural Manitoba; 2,500 more nurses; five new MRIs; a new birth centre in south Winnipeg; 8,000 child-care spaces; 32 new child-care centres; 7,600 training spaces for

youth; 80 per cent increases for colleges and universities. What do you think that says about the future? I'm glad you acknowledge it finally. Finally, you acknowledged it. Investing in our children, investing in education, investing in apprenticeships is one of the reasons why we have the lowest unemployment rate in the country, why our youth unemployment rate is low, why people are coming to this province, why 100,000 people have come to this province through this government formed in 1999. And, before that, people were leaving by the hundreds, and that's just counting the nurses—and that's just counting the nurses.

So, Mr. Speaker, I react with some surprise, not complete surprise, that members opposite have flip-flopped and have changed their position. I think, you know, it's a recognition of reality that members opposite recognize that Manitobans care about their families and want these investments. All the time from members opposite, all of this was just debt and deficit. You know, paying for nurses and doctors was debt and deficit. Paying for teachers was debt and deficit. Paying for home-care workers was debt and deficit. Giving tax breaks was debt and deficit. Minimum wage was debt and deficit.

Now, perhaps you recognize that the investments made over the past decade and planned to be made over the next five years, and 10 years, and 20 years, with respect to Hydro—if you don't end up privatizing it if you come into office—that that is a bright future for this province.

I had a friend who had to go down to New Mexico. He had a friend who had to go down to New Mexico and was talking to a friend there. He said, you know, I was looking at a place to go live in North America, and they said there was two places to go, he said, Saskatchewan and Winnipeg. Isn't that something, Mr. Speaker? Saskatchewan and Winnipeg.

And I might add Steinbach, that's growing. Thompson, that's growing. Brandon, that's growing. You know, you can't even—you can't find enough people to work on the oil fields in southwest Manitoba. I know members opposite don't like to talk about that but it's a good thing. It's kind of a good thing and after 10 years of denial—after 10 years of denial, after 11 years of non-stop attack, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite have inched back towards the word progressive.

An Honourable Member: Well, they say they are.

Mr. Chomiak: Yes, they say they are. Yes, we might—this might be in the context of an election. I don't want to be cynical, Mr. Speaker. I don't want to be cynical but I haven't heard the word progressive attached to conservative for a long, long time in this Chamber. In fact, that word was derided in this Chamber. But maybe, just maybe, we're seeing a different face.

But I suggest to those Manitobans who I've talked to by the thousands and thousands, they know what the impact is of a Conservative government. They know that Conservatives equal cuts. Conservatives equal lean and mean. Conservatives equal net loss. Conservatives equal fewer doctors and nurses.

So I suggest that you can vote for a government that's been in touch and in tune and growing and looking to the future or you can lean towards the newly found on-the-road-to-trying-to-get-elected-as-a-government party, Mr. Speaker, that after 11 years of consistent voting against the budget has now come around and said, golly gosh, maybe some of these things that you're doing, like training nurses, doctors, teachers, health-care spaces, and preventative health, maybe that looks pretty good right now. But I warn people that last-minute conversions often don't result in an overall change in attitude.

I'm reminded of how members opposite used to criticize the former leader. You know, Mr. Speaker, and then as soon as the former leader left to take up another position, they beautified him like a saint in about 48 hours, it was so fast.

And, you know, Mr. Speaker, I have a little difficulty attaching a lot of credibility to what the members have put on the record today. But I welcome the fact that they acknowledge for the first time since I've been in this Chamber, I think, that our approach to government, which is steady, which is looking towards the future, and which is balanced, is the way that Manitobans want their government to be.

I thank you for this opportunity.

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): I appreciate the opportunity to debate the amendment that has been posed by the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) and I believe it is an excellent, well-thought-out and well-worded amendment to the budget. And I hope that the members opposite can consider and support the particular amendment.

Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by recognizing Mr. Rick Yarish and his ascension, shall I say, to the Deputy Clerk's position, a position to which he is most qualified, and I wish him the very, very best. Also want to recognize Mr. Blake Dunn, who is now our new Sergeant-at-Arms, and Mr. Ray Gislason, which is our Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms. Congratulations, gentlemen, on your appointments.

* (15:40)

And since our last sessional-session, Mr. Speaker, we have seen a change on the government side of the Chamber in recognizing the honourable member for Southdale (Ms. Selby) in her position as Advanced Education Minister. Appreciate that she will be looking after that portfolio and, hopefully, looking at her responsibilities in the light to which the budget was presented to the House yesterday and supporting adult learning. And perhaps one of those investments that she might consider is the return of the adult learning classes to the Portage Collegiate Institute, which was a very successful program that saw two classes, 32 students in each class receiving their adult education, to which we all recognize education is, indeed, the foundation of everything that we will aspire to be in our lifetime. And so I hope that she will reconsider the installation of that program back to Portage la Prairie.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I am relatively disappointed also, speaking from Portage la Prairie's point of view, that Portage la Prairie was only recognized twice in yesterday's budget speech. I recall years where Portage was mentioned four, five, six and as many as seven times in this government-government's efforts to win over Portage la Prairie, I believe, into the government's side of the House.

However, I don't know whether they've given up on that and only twice mentioned Portage la Prairie yesterday, but—in the budget. But it is welcome, insofar as the cataract surgery now being provided for by a surgeon in the operating room of the Portage District General Hospital. And I would like to say that the—that particular operation has been a welcome addition to the services in the Portage la Prairie area, to which my own mother received cataract surgery and it was a most successful operation. And I want to credit the surgeon and staff of the Portage General Hospital for the outstanding care my mother received. And that goes for all others that are patients of the hospital as well.

The Food Development Centre was also mentioned in yesterday's budget speech and

recognizing that food is, indeed, important to Manitoba's economy and that value-added processing can achieve a greater level of return and economic activity in our province. I will, though, say that even though it was mentioned in the budget, the level of support for the Food Development Centre in Portage la Prairie, in the line-by-line allocation of resources, remains the same as last year. So I don't know how the government expects perhaps to see a greater level of activity on the same amount of resources as they were allocated last year.

The government also, too, continues to put a lot of effort, and now, as we see, a very extensive advertising campaign towards the project known as Bipole III. Bipole III will enter my constituency and run along the western perimeter and then carry on south. It does affect producers, neighbours of mine, that are gravely concerned as to the impact it will have on their farming operations.

Also, too, in the redrawing of boundaries, Portage la Prairie will encompass the Long Plains First Nation's community, and it has been stated by the currently-current chief that the Bipole III construction project through their traditional hunting grounds will not be an easily accomplished task because it is an unwanted-towers-unwanted construction in their traditional hunting area. So, if you will recognize Chief David Meeches for his statements and add that to the words of-spoken by others against the project, I think that the government should, indeed, reconsider his position on Bipole III and the western routing which they are putting so much effort into.

The government, though, I will say, is an absolute master of confusion and illusion. This budget hails so many good things, but in so much, if I can say, half measures in each and every area. You know, as a farmer, I realize that this government is moving towards removing the farm tax as it pertains to education, and this government has had 11 years and we've moved in-up to 80 per cent. You know, for a minor amount of money, one could do it in-to 100 per cent. And that's the way it should be done and it could not cost, as the government is stating here, if it's done effectively and that is, why does this government have to administrate a rebate when in fact the collection of the tax is unnecessary in the first place?

All one has to do is slightly twig the program which issues our tax notices each and every year to incorporate the reduced level of education tax on our

farmland and that would save hundreds of thousands of dollars, if not millions of dollars, over the course of a number of years. And this is where the cost savings could be implemented.

So I thank you ever so much for the opportunity to speak on the budget today but also on the point of illusion and confusion. Why would the government make it only specific to young people as it pertains to the insulin pumps? Many, many Manitobans who have worked hard over their entire lifetime to build the province we have today, to be stated by this government that they are unworthy of consideration for support for insulin pumps, I think that that is a shortcoming and should be addressed.

Mr. Speaker, I know my time is very short and there's—all my colleagues want to have an opportunity to speak on this most vital motion, and so I thank the House today for allowing me the 10 minutes to participate in this debate. Thank you very much.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade): Mr. Speaker, it's indeed a pleasure to rise—[interjection] Oh, boy, here we go. I got to give the member from Springfield credit. It usually takes him a couple of days to lower the level of debate in this Chamber and I'm sure he's now right on schedule.

There's some things that are very predictable but there are some things that aren't very predictable right now. And that is the Progressive Conservatives, if we can use the term progressive, as my colleague mentioned before, and this sudden flip-flop, if you will, in their whole idea and understanding of what Manitobans want and what Manitobans need, and this motion that they've proposed and this idea that perhaps they might vote in favour of our budget for the first time in 12 years.

So it's really quite fascinating, and usually, Mr. Speaker, I like to stand in this Chamber after two or three days of budget debate because it gives me an opportunity to respond to some ridiculous things that the opposition members have said. But we have no shortage of ridiculous things to respond to after only a couple of hours of debate.

I think one of the first ridiculous things yesterday, when we're bringing down the budget and prior to that we have question period where the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) makes a *Star Wars* reference. And I don't know, maybe that's

part of that transition to supporting this budget, because now maybe he's watching science fiction and he can live in two different universes or something. I'm not sure, but I guess it's a bit of an improvement over the previous genre that they liked, and that was slasher movies, because they're always hacking and slashing everything in sight. So now he's moved into the science fiction genre. I find that rather fascinating.

But that said, you know, it certainly raises a lot of images to hear the leader talk about *Star Wars*. I guess we have Darth Debater on the opposition benches right now and the Imperial Stormtroopers who, once they're—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I'd like to remind members that all members in this Chamber are honourable members, and I ask the minister to withdraw that last comment, because all members are honourable members and they will be treated as such in this Chamber.

Mr. Bjornson: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, I withdraw that comment. But, certainly, when you make the references to science fiction, it certainly raises some interesting parallels that can be drawn to what we're seeing from members opposite.

* (15:50)

And let's take a look at what this budget means for Manitobans and what we will do as a government as opposed to what members opposite said they'd do last year. But, suddenly, they've had this renaissance, this recognition that perhaps they should look at or listen to Manitobans as well, and maybe try to put that progressive back into Progressive Conservative.

At any rate, when you consider our economic plan, the fact that they might be voting in support of it says that they're actually recognizing that it works, that our system is working, that we are keeping Manitoba on track, that we are climbing out of the downturn, that we are moving Manitoba forward. So perhaps the members opposite have finally recognized that, that we are going to move forward, and we have been moving forward. And we're building on our successes.

But, you know, I'm always a little suspicious of the members opposite because they do have a reputation for hacking and slashing. It was the hacking and slashing of members opposite that put me in this Chamber. I say that every opportunity I get, Mr. Speaker. Every opportunity I get, I will remind people that it was their hacking and slashing

of the public sector in the 1990s that brought me to this Chamber. And many of the members in this Chamber who were in the social services, who were in the education profession, many of us are in this Chamber because of their record of hacking and slashing in the public sector.

Now, I'm—I am concerned. Like, the suggestion that they might support the budget, Mr. Speaker, is rather concerning because it's very duplicitous for them because we did see their true colours a couple weeks ago when they did say that they would cut or they would reverse a decision on the waste water treatment and the CEDC or the economic—pardon me, the Clean Environment Commission, pardon me. And that was a couple of weeks ago. And that's really concerning, as someone who's lived by Lake Winnipeg all his life. Why is that concerning? Because they seem to think that they don't have to respect the rules of the Clean Environment Commission, that they will cut \$350 million in spending.

And how are they going to cut that? The only way they could do that is by eliminating the upgrade of an 80-year-old sewage treatment plant in north Winnipeg. Why is it that Manitobans do not deserve that upgrade to an 80-year-old treatment facility in north Winnipeg? Why are they saying we don't have to upgrade that? Why are they going to cut that, Mr. Speaker? Oh, we don't need to spend that money. Now, that is absolutely ridiculous, that they would take that position because what that means is more phosphates, more nitrates. It means more ammonia, more E. coli, more potential for raw sewage seeping into the lake. And I wonder if members opposite realize that 427 million litres of raw sewage came out of that system in one year alone into Lake Winnipeg.

But members opposite are saying, oh, no, we don't have to listen to Clean Environment Commission; we'll cut that, we'll save \$350 million. But you're going to destroy the lake. They have no vision for the future of Manitoba because the future of Manitoba, in my vision, includes a healthy Lake Winnipeg. But they don't believe that because they're saying that they're going to ignore the Clean Environment Commission. And I tell you that is absolutely ridiculous, that they would go that route because sometimes being in politics requires making very difficult decisions, and making difficult decisions means spending public money to do the right thing. But their decision—oh, it's easy, we'll save \$350 million; we don't have to do this—I think that's

absolutely reprehensible that they would not consider the science, not consider the fact that more E. coli, more ammonia, more bacteria, more harmful pollutants will be getting into Lake Winnipeg because they think, oh, we can save some money.

You have to do the right thing, Mr. Speaker, and that's what our government is committed to do. We're doing the right thing with this budget, and members opposite are starting to suggest, well, maybe they're right to do these things. They're starting to see the value in what we've been doing after 12 years. And when you look at what we are doing, we're not compromising front-line services. We're not compromising public health services; we're not compromising public education services. And today was a great example in our public education system, celebrating music in Manitoba schools, where we sat down and listened to the music that was provided by five different schools today on the grand stairs of the Legislature.

I remember their platform in the 2007 election where they were going to cut things that we didn't need, like music, like phys. ed., like arts. But today we saw an incredible example of being—offering all kinds of opportunities for students to demonstrate their talents, and one of those talents was the music that we saw today here in the Legislature.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there are so many things in this budget that speak to our commitment to the public service sector. As I said, we're not going to compromise the public service sector as members opposite have in the past, and they—and they will continue to do.

And, you know, this morning, it was rather interesting, I heard this silly commercial on the radio. And, you know, it talked about how you could use this so-called money to buy a car. Well, I guess in our world—[interjection] Now, just wait, just wait. We're—[interjection]—just go—just hang on—because in the NDP world, when you buy a car in Manitoba and you insure it in Manitoba, you get the lowest insurance rates. We have a publicly funded insurance company, and you get rebates.

Now, in the Tory world, they'll sell that public insurance company, and they'd see \$320 million get sucked out of the Manitoba economy, all across Canada in the shareholders' pockets. You know, Mr. Speaker, that's their world. Our world is public insurance for the good of the public.

Now, I think there was also some other mention of paying your tuition. Well, in the Tory world, they allowed tuition to go up every year, they underfunded the universities every year and now they're saying, with this silly commercial, that you could pay tuition.

Well, in the NDP world, you pay your tuition, you work in Manitoba, you get a 60 per cent rebate on your income tax. That's our world.

And this silly commercial also talks about this expense, but they don't talk about the revenue that is going to be generated by the bipole. They don't talk about the integrity, and the maintenance and supply, and the security of supply to the customers in the United States. They don't mention that that so-called bill is going to be paid by the customers who are buying the hydro. They don't talk about the fact that we are looking at selling hydro to Saskatchewan. And, you know what? Saskatchewan's a little bit to the west. So would it not make sense that a bipole goes down the west side to tap into a market which has over 50 per cent coal power right now? You know—

An Honourable Member: You don't know what you're talking about.

Mr. Bjornson: I guess I hit a nerve, Mr. Speaker.

But at the end of the day, we're talking about a budget that is providing supports for Manitoba families. We're talking about a budget that's providing supports for health care.

Now, there was a couple of things that really jumped out in the Throne Speech—or, pardon me, the budget speech yesterday, and one of them is the facts that were mentioned here on page 11: that in 1999, four MRI machines in Winnipeg performed more than 10,600 scans. Now, in 2010, eight MRI machines located around the province performed more than 56,700 scans. Now, Mr. Speaker, a 434 per cent increase in 12 years is a very significant increase, and it is bringing health care closer to home.

Now, Mr. Speaker, in the 2007 campaign, one of the commitments that we made was to bring dialysis to the Gimli health centre, and I have to tell you, everybody thought that was a good idea except my opposition candidate. And I tell you, it was a very proud day when we cut the ribbon for that dialysis unit in Gimli, and a gentleman who was over 80 years of age, who had driven to Selkirk three times a week to receive dialysis, with tears in his

eyes thanked me for the work that we are doing on behalf of people in the Gimli community to address their health needs and to bring their health needs closer to home.

The same can be said for the other diagnostics that we're providing throughout the province of Manitoba. The same can be said for the capital investments that we've made in health—hospitals throughout the province of Manitoba. The same can be said for the fact that we have more doctors practising in rural Manitoba.

Members opposite, a few months ago, were going to slash half a billion dollars, which would cut health-care services in rural Manitoba, cut health-care services throughout the province of Manitoba. They talked about—I heard a heckling about wait times? Imagine the wait times that we would be experiencing if they cut half a billion dollars out of the services for Manitobans, as per their motion last year.

So, Mr. Speaker, health care, education, core parts of our budget, important parts of our budget.

Now, on the education side, Mr. Speaker, very, very pleased with the funding announcements yet again. We've increased our education funding, I believe, over 40 per cent since our—

* (16:00)

An Honourable Member: Forty-seven.

Mr. Bjornson: Forty-seven per cent since our tenure in office. And when you look at what happened under the opposition Tories, cut after cut after cut. And, again, the reason why many of the teachers in this caucus are here today is because of the way they treated the education system, you know.

And I always go back to that particular commission that was struck by one of the members, Shirley Render, and there was another sitting member who was part of that commission where they were looking at teachers' salaries. And funding education wasn't a problem for the Tories; it's the fact that teachers are overpaid. That was a premise—that was a premise for that discussion. They were saying that teachers' salaries should be cut by one-third as the starting point in the terms of reference for that particular commission. And they paid the price politically for that. To even suggest that was absolutely reprehensible.

Teachers are doing one of the most important jobs in our society: preparing our young people for

the workforce, preparing our young people to be productive members of society. And they actually had the nerve to say that they were overpaid and they were the problem for education funding, not their ridiculous policies on cutting and slashing education funding.

And, you know what? I don't trust—it's like, trust me, I'm a Tory. That's what this amendment is saying. Trust me, I'm a Tory. I've suddenly seen the light. I realize that the budget has some good things, and we should, you know, we should be supporting this and endorsing it. But I don't actually put a lot of stock into that, because we know their record, and we also know their record on public utilities.

We do know that the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen), as mentioned by my colleague, the member from Kildonan, mentioned the fact that it was the Leader of the Opposition who had been an adviser to former Premier Filmon when they sold the Manitoba Telephone System.

We also know that the Leader of the Opposition had been an adviser to former Premier Mike Harris in Ontario when they sold Hydro One. And we know that he was talking about how proud he was of this record when he was running for the leadership of the Conservative Party of Manitoba—that he had worked so hard to privatize Ontario One hydro and the work that he had done to privatize MTS.

So we know where their true agenda is, and we know that it is not consistent with what Manitobans want. The fact that they sold MTS and your telephone rates went up 68 per cent, and many people made a lot of money off the sales of those shares, is not what we would like to see happen to Manitoba Hydro, Mr. Speaker.

Now, we are going to continue to support Manitoba families. As I said, that's our priority. Increasing the basic personal exemption by \$1,000 over four years is a fantastic measure, and almost 22,000 Manitobans will pay no provincial income tax at all once this is fully implemented.

The Children's Arts and Cultural Activity Tax Credit—it's a fabulous recognition of the value of participating in music programs and theatre programs and other arts endeavours, and the fact that this is all part of a healthy living strategy in creating opportunities for our students. Now we've brought forward this children's cultural activity tax credit, and I think that's a tremendous benefit for those who are engaged in theatre, those who are engaged in

music and the other pursuits that we have to offer here in Manitoba. And, you know, members opposite, I don't think they really recognize the importance of arts in our community. I believe that 17 per cent of Canadians who claim revenue from the arts reside in Manitoba—17 per cent, that's a very significant figure, a very important part of who we are, a very important industry, the arts and cultural industries here in Manitoba.

Now, child-care spaces—2,100 more child-care spaces. We all know the importance of that for young families with young children and how we need to provide more options and more nursery spaces and do so in a very efficient manner with the online registration province-wide.

Seniors—my home community of Gimli is the—has the average age the oldest in Manitoba. It is a very desirable community for people to retire, and it is the oldest community in Manitoba. I think a lot of that has to do with the longevity of many of the Icelandic residents who live often into their 80s, 90s and into the 100s. But certainly there are many people from all walks of life throughout the province of Manitoba who are calling Gimli home. And it is a retirement community. And we're doing more to support seniors by hiring more personal care home staff and enhancing the Primary Caregiver Tax Credit. Helping seniors to increase their minimum Education Property Tax Credit in the next three years will also be a tremendous benefit to the seniors who call the Gimli constituency home.

And I talked about investments in education and training, but I'd like to go back to that because, of course, it does tie into the Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade Department with respect to what we've been doing in the apprenticeship program. And there was a lot of good things said about that in our apprenticeship program by David Northcott on CJOB yesterday, talking about the apprenticeship and training program that, you're quite right, it is a good program; Kevin Rebeck from MFL saying 4,000 new apprenticeships. There's a plan in place for that; there's movement; 2,100 more child-care spaces created in our province. These are some good things.

The apprenticeship training for Island Lake's infrastructure—we heard from Ron Evans, Grand Chief. And I'm pleased to see the provincial government stepping up where the federal government does not. Island Lake are where we—where half of our residents do not have running

water, and we can work together with our communities. And a great example of how we work together with our communities to address their needs—and Ron Evans, Grand Chief, goes on to say: Apprenticeship training and retrofitting homes for the water and sewer is a good step.

Research and innovation, as we announced yesterday, to help manufacturers and innovators bring an idea to the market, and positive on the research and development side is that, you know, we being a big believer in making research and development tax credit refundable, and this is from Dave Angus from the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce.

So when you look at some of the things that we're doing with respect to apprenticeship and training and providing incentives and tax incentives and tax credits to support innovation that would ultimately result in more jobs, we see that the great work that's happening here in Manitoba with the diversity of companies and the innovative companies that we have here in Manitoba, the innovative companies that call Manitoba home, we know that we will need more training. We will need to continue to support training for these Manitoba companies so that they can meet their growing market demands and Manitoba continues to punch above its weight and continues to export more of its products throughout the world.

Now, one of the other areas that was very important and very well-received in rural Manitoba is our commitment to strengthening communities, our increase of municipal infrastructure and transit grants to the equivalent of one percentage point of the existing provincial sales tax. That's more money today than municipalities had two days ago. That's a great commitment to the municipalities, and we continue to be one of the most generous provincial governments, if not the most generous provincial government in terms of tax sharing with municipalities and the work that we do with them.

And, of course, I can't talk about what's been happening in rural Manitoba without talking about the investments that we've been making in flood protection. Now, there have been significant steps made, tremendous amounts of equipment acquired over the last couple of months, a tremendous co-ordinated effort with municipalities and the Province to address some of the concerns that the high-water episode has presented to us.

And I had the opportunity to visit all the St. Andrews Fire Department fire halls this past fall to celebrate their 40th anniversary of service to the people—the good people of St. Andrews, and thank them for the work that they'd done in the past, as St. Andrews has had flood issues, but also to thank them for their service in advance knowing full well that they would be called on yet again to address the flood episode that we're anticipating this year.

Now, this budget is talking about future investments in the existing investment in our flood protection, but one of the best investments that we made was to protect, actually, the firefighters and the volunteer firefighters and EMO people who were responding to the flood in 2009 when several homes were absolutely destroyed by the ice jams and the ice floes in very high water and very unusual ice-jamming conditions.

By going forward and working with the municipalities and buying out the properties and expropriating those properties, if you would've seen the results of the ice jam this year, those homes that were bought out would've been completely obliterated by the ice floes this year. So it was very good planning and good work and good partnership with the municipalities of St. Clements and St. Andrews to address that particular concern. But we've acquired a number of new flood-fighting tools; we're continuing to work with our municipalities to ensure that they are providing protection to their communities.

Speaking of protection, 66 more police officers and 10 more prosecutors to fight crime and protect families, and it's encouraging to hear that the opposition might actually vote in favour of this budget, the first time they've voted in favour of more police officers in the province of Manitoba.

*(16:10)

And the other—another couple of issues that I'd like to talk about. I did talk about flood protection, but another issue that I wanted to mention in respect to our water management strategies, I know that the Interlake area has suffered from tremendous amounts of precipitation three years in a row, and we certainly have some challenges in the Interlake area.

Now, it was our government that tripled the amount of funding to address drainage issues in the Interlake that had been neglected by the previous Filmon government, and we're continuing to look at the drainage challenges that plague the Interlake

area. And we're going to continue to find ways to address high-risk areas of the Interlake.

And, finally, Mr. Speaker, there's so much that I could say about the budget because we're certainly speaking to the budget as opposed to the—speaking in favour of the resolution. But I am speaking to the budget which is a great budget for Manitobans—the 12th budget for this NDP government and a budget that addresses the needs of all Manitobans. It's a great example of listening to the people of Manitoba, who, in our consultations, told us what they wanted us to do. The main message: do not cut services; do not cut programs; do not cut things that matter to families.

So, Mr. Speaker, very pleased that we're moving forward providing more supports for programs that matter to families, more supports for services that are essential to Manitoba families and more supports to the public sector to continue to enhance the quality of life that we enjoy here in Manitoba.

So, with those few words, Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much for the opportunity, and I'm looking forward to further debate on the budget.

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to get up and say a few words and put a few words on the record in regards to the budget that was presented yesterday in the Legislature here.

I've listened intently to the member opposite from Gimli, and he says, trust me. I'm the member for the new debt party, and, well, it certainly sounded like that. And, when we see the budget, that's exactly what it is. That's what NDP stands for: The new debt party.

But, Mr. Speaker, there are things in the budget that we feel is very, very important, these are initiatives that we on this side of the House in the Progressive Conservative Party has brought forward, real initiatives that were promised in yesterday's budget that we support.

Some of these initiatives would include more police. We've been saying that now for four years. I might point out, Mr. Speaker, that the federal government actually put some money forward for this project—\$14.4 million—that's been hid for the last three years. We're glad to see it surface at this point—certainly needed and certainly will be appreciated by all those that are in Winnipeg and all of those from rural Manitoba that come to Winnipeg to do their

shopping, their visiting and to deal with their medical issues.

We also believe that more funding for health care and the support for recreation and educational facilities in the provinces is another issue that we have been promoting for four years now in the House, and we're glad to see that that's been coming forward too.

And, if the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) would've been paying attention for the last four years, it wouldn't have taken her this long to bring it forward. We certainly appreciate her paying attention now.

Also, Mr. Speaker, there is some issues that we have grave concern about. One of those issues happens to be the Bipole III line. That particular initiative will cost Manitobans thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars. It's a line that also is not just the money that it costs, but it also 'travises' through highly priced agricultural land. This land is used for food production for the very people that are in this House, and there's been no–no–consultation with these landowners. There hasn't been consultation to say, do you want it or don't you? The consultation has been bullying: it is coming through your land. What do you want—what are you going to take? Are you going to take this or are you not going to take it? We'll expropriate it.

We listened to the member from Gimli said: you're either going to sell to us or we expropriate. And he just finished that in his speech, Mr. Speaker. And so I fully understand the bullying tactics that come from that side of the House.

But, with respect to agriculture, Mr. Speaker, there were things and items in the budget that we really appreciate. We appreciate the fact that they raised the tax exemption for property, a school tax exemption, from 75 to 80. We've also been promoting this for the last four years, and it should be a hundred now, had the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) been paying attention, but we're happy that she has heard some of the points that we've been saying.

The budget also addresses the issue of the compensation to producers who have sustained crop damage or losses of livestock from wildlife involvement, increasing compensation from 80 per cent to 90 per cent, and I commend the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Struthers) for living up to what he said he would do in the last budget. In the

last budget he said he would scrape and scratch and just eke out some money for agriculture, and that's basically what he has done. He has scraped and scratched and he got an extra 10 per cent coverage compensation, but at the same time, he's left us in a deficit position to the producers in the province west of us. We've been in that deficit position now for two years and it'll go on for another year. That's not exactly what I call representing agriculture in the province of Manitoba.

There was also a step in the right direction with wildlife damage that can be costly affected—it can costly affect the producers' bottom line. However, we must note that some other provinces reimburse the producers for a hundred per cent, and that's very, very important in the times that we are in today, when we see the effects of the BSE and the effects of some of the other issues that have affected our producers in the province.

The government says it's working to develop a range of livestock insurance programs. It has talked about that now for a couple of years. It's had consultation and I'm sure that the Minister of Agriculture has had 'consuntation' with other ministers when they have their minister meetings and we'd expected to see a pilot project, but, no, there was no scraping and scratching out a program this year. They just talk about it. So it is—there's no money in the budget for that, and it's unfortunate because we think that that type of a program should have been on a pilot program.

The Province is committing resources to further increase funding for production insurance to make sure the producers can deal with excessive moisture and we're appreciative of that, if they can find some more money, some scratching and some eking out of more money for this type of a program, which is very, very important to rural Manitoba. Rural Manitoba depends on agricultural production. And so what we're saying is, we need to see the nuts and the bolts of this particular program because they have forced the program. It is a compulsory program on all producers in the province of Manitoba, and, at the same time, they charge a huge premium that doubles from time to time if you happen to have a claim. And, unfortunately, that lowered my respect for the current Minister of Agriculture, for the current one. The former one had lost all respect previously, and that's why she became the Minister of Finance.

The government said it would launch a new program to help farmers identify locally grown and

products and more easily, and we know that these producers that are producers produce a high-quality, nutritious, and healthy food, and we certainly want to encourage that type of production and that type of an initiative to be taken forward.

The provincial government continues to tout the expansion of the Food Development Centre and says it will invest in research to identify potential opportunities for new prairie-grown and prairie-made foods. That is a great initiative. What we also need to attach to that, and if the current member from Dauphin would pay attention he would understand that we need to build on some of the industries, the agricultural industries, in our province, and he needs to provide an environment for those to grow.

And I just got a nice sign from my good friend. So I would suggest that the Minister of Agriculture, if he would like to sit down, I can give him some advice that will help him out in his future endeavours.

* (16:20)

An Honourable Member: Would you do that?

Mr. Graydon: I would do that. We believe that efficiencies can be found in AgriInvest and, of course, in the crop insurance. We believe that these efficiencies will pay huge dividends as we move forward. And we endorse the producer's opportunity to acquire this income from production rather than from their mailbox, Mr. Speaker.

We've also seen and we also support a comprehensive water management program in the Province of Manitoba. And if the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) and, of course, the minister from—the member from Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) would agree that it makes sense to conserve water in the province of Manitoba for—we don't always have floods; we do have droughts. And this would be one way—this would be one way of building efficiencies into their whole system.

So a comprehensive program will be beneficial to all Manitobans. It would be beneficial to rural Manitoba; it will be beneficial to the urban areas and to the greater city of Winnipeg and Brandon—also to Portage.

We've seen the continued indifference to rural Manitoba, to promote the growth in rural Manitoba. There's been a continued indifference. And we've

seen that shown in different ways. This government has cut the funding to regional development corporations, and I can attest to that personally as I've been involved in these corporations over a number of years. And these are very beneficial to all areas of the province.

So, when the minister says, I am scraping and eking out more money for agriculture, I would suggest that he needs a little bit of help from some of his caucus. But, in the meantime, if he would pay attention to the amendments that were made to the budget today, those amendments that were made today will achieve some of the goals that he has, and definitely the goals of Manitobans, and we could move this province forward together.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to put a few words on the table.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to the opportunity to again speak on the budget in this House.

I, first of all, want to, as Minister responsible for Emergency Measures, indicate that as we enter another flood season in this province, that we are very aware of the work that's taking place throughout this province. I particularly want to commend the volunteers, the provincial, municipal, federal and other staff that are out there, the NGOs, Mr. Speaker, because we are on track to a flood that is in the range of 2009, perhaps somewhat higher, broader geographic scale, and I want to indicate that.

And I also want to indicate that it's spring in Manitoba; it's a brisk north wind today, but it's spring and there's a very optimistic mood that's out there in this province. And it's a time of changes. It's a, you know, seasonal change here. You know, the flowers will be blooming soon, people will be enjoying, you know, their backyards; they were a couple of days ago, actually.

But, you know, that probably the biggest change coming this spring, by the way, is the members opposite. What a change. I mean, I've watched them as an opposition and positive is not exactly what the P in PC stands for. Okay, they—you know, every budget we brought in—it could be balanced; it could be creating jobs, supporting health, education, social programs—they immediately got out their word processing program. They looked last year at what happened, and they went out of their way. You know, they didn't just have a few sections criticizing

the budget, they would be adding them time and time again. It was like doom and gloom. It was attacking the government for this and that and anything else.

Mr. Mohinder Saran, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

I think if you go back and search *Hansard*, you could probably—you know, it's great now with computers. You could do a word search and, I think, any negative adjective that you could imagine you would find in those Tory speeches. It was like, you know, they had one format; it was basically to oppose, oppose, oppose. There wasn't a positive word in there.

You know, and the Leader of the Opposition, it was interesting. The other day he was talking about Star Wars. I mean, really, you know, I felt that really he would know something about Darth Vader because, you know, that dark sort of vision of the world put forward by the members opposite. I mean, there wasn't a single thing happening. Well, what a conversion. Well, at least that's what you'd like—they'd would like us to think here.

I mean, first of all, I've got to say, the Finance critic for the conservatives today, I want to thank her, by the way, because I'm going to take her quote and I'm going to put in my next householder—where she, on the public record, said, we acknowledge that Manitoba is growing. It took them more than 11 years to do it. We've only had the highest increase in population in more than 40 years. We are the province that had the best economic record in the recession. But, you know, it took until the 2011 budget for the Finance critic to stand up and say, the province is growing.

Well, you think it'd stop there. We watched, with interest, how the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) reacted to the budget yesterday. Now, remember what I said earlier. You know, we know what the Tories have done in opposition. It's oppose, oppose, oppose. And what's particularly noticeable, by the way, is about the only concrete thing they ever said that would give away their real agenda, was when in the last year's budget debate they criticized the deficit. They wanted immediately to bring the deficit down to zero. That would result in at least \$450 million of either tax increases or expenditure cuts.

And they didn't talk about too much in we have tax increases. I don't know, perhaps that's part of that agenda too. But, you know, we know from experience with Conservative members opposite—go

back to the '93 recession when they were in government—what that meant. That meant cuts to health. That meant cuts to education, cuts to social services. They would've cut infrastructure. They would've cut pretty well across the board. That's what they said in 2010.

Now I'm looking what they're saying in 2011. And, you know what? Reading it through, I—when I came in to the House and I read this amendment, it acknowledges that this budget contains some worthy promises for Manitobans. I nearly fell out of my chair. You know, I mean, I could sort of for a moment think, perhaps we convinced them. You know it talks about policing. Yes, we put money into policing, not just federal, by the way, but provincial resources—money where mouth is. University and colleges, I mean, I love their reference here that they're supportive. Let's not forget, by the way, that one of the things we brought in this budget was a guarantee of no increases in terms of tuitions above the cost of living. They think we should be having major increases in tuitions.

They talked about providing capital support for—need improvements to our medical, education and recreational facilities. Thank you for the compliment. Good government.

They talked about additional resources to protect Manitobans for excess moisture conditions. Well, it didn't mention all the work we put into flooding as well.

But, you know, then they talked about providing modest tax relief, including school tax relief. Well think about this for a moment. If you take the first part of their motion, what it really says is, this was a darn good budget. Now you think they would stop there. You would think they might actually consider voting for it.

But what's interesting is that the rest of the motion, it makes some reference to waste and mismanagement. It makes—it talks about here—but here's the real code word, just in case you thought that the wolves over there had turned into sheep. Okay? I know Easter's coming up. You know, a spring lamb's here. Just in case you thought that was the case, they call on the provincial government to implement efforts to lower the deficit and control debt through a spending review process. Okay—which we're review, which will reduce waste. Well, you know what? You read the rest of it. That is what Conservatives do whenever they're in government.

They did that in 1977. They did it in 1988. When we hit the recession in 1993 they cut back on everything across the board, particularly programs affecting vulnerable Manitobans.

So, you know, don't let the sheep's clothing fool you. Okay. This is the—and I know a bit about wolves, by the way—it's increasingly become the symbol of Thompson. This is the part—they're not—they're wolves in sheep's clothing. You know, they're going to—I want to predict this. Over the next few months going into the election, they're going to be, let's pretend, New Democrats. Okay? And now they can't quite get it out of their mouths to actually say that this government has done a lot of good things. But they're going to try and imply that. You know, the first section of this motion, they're going to say: Oh, yes, you know, there've been good things been happening with the government. And I can tell you why, and that is because the vast majority of Manitobans have said that this government and this province is on the right track. When it comes to the economy, when it comes to what we've done in building our health-care services, our educational programs, our infrastructure, even what we're doing today, you know, across the province in terms of flood protection, this is a province that's on the right track.

* (16:30)

Yes, I want to compare that, by the way, to when those members opposite were in government because they really haven't changed. I mean, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) has considerable experience. You know, he was the architect of many of their policies, and we're seeing some of the same patterns here. First of all, they're going to do the—we have no plans to, and then you can fill in the blank. I can guarantee you one thing. Over the next few months, they're going to say, we have no plans to sell Manitoba Hydro, guaranteed. Okay, that's what they're going to say. They're going to say, you can trust us. You can believe us. They might even say that about MPIC or the Liquor Commission or Manitoba Lotteries.

Well, what did they do in 1995 when they were in government? They said, we have no plans to sell MTS. Fact, they were re-elected, and in this house, the then-premier said, we have no plans to sell MTS, but what did they do? They spent years trashing MTS. They went after the integrity of MTS and what they then did around— they turned around and once

they were safely elected with a majority government, they sold it off, Mr. Acting Speaker.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Well, let me tell you. They—you know what they did after they sold off MTS? They handed out tombstones to all the brokers that sold it off. And it's interesting, by the way, to see those that benefited from that sale, some of whom sit in this House, some of them who are former senior members of the previous government that benefited from that sale. Can you imagine what kind of tombstone they'd be out to hand out with Manitoba Hydro? This has got to be the No. 1 strategic asset in this province. It is worth in the billions of dollars, Mr. Speaker. Can you imagine what the brokers would make in terms of commissions off the sale of that? Could you imagine the flipping of shares? They could do it like they did with MTS. Can you imagine what they would do with Manitoba Hydro if they put it up for sale?

Now, do you think that this is maybe a bit fanciful? I don't think so, Mr. Speaker, because, you know, the member opposite, apart from only ever criticizing Manitoba Hydro, I want to put on the record a couple of things with the Tories. Here's a trick question for you. Well, what was—well, how many dams have the Tories built in the last 40 years, hydro dams? Not one. Zero. They shut down Limestone when they got elected. They shut down Conawapa when they got elected. We started Limestone. We started—you know, the latest developments with Wuskwatim. This is a party that doesn't believe in building.

You know what they proposed in the 1980s, by the way? They didn't want to build dams. They wanted to buy power from the U.S., these great forward thinkers of—and I love, by the way, when they're trotting out, you know, various people that have differing views on some of the hydro issues of the day.

What strikes me, by the way, is a lot of times the quotes that they're bringing forward are from people who were part of the old model of hydro development because the new model is that we don't flood. We work in partnership with communities like Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation in my constituency, and you know what? Wuskwatim's scheduled to open this year. That's the difference. But you notice how they kind of weasel their way in on the hydro issue

and the member—you know, we're going to miss the member from Brandon West, you know, and his lively contributions from his seat, but I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, this is a party opposite that hasn't changed. Mark my word. Give them a majority and every day that they would be in power. You'd have to worry about the future of Manitoba Hydro, the future of Manitoba Hydro. And you know what? I wouldn't say that they wouldn't—that, you know, I can tell you. MPIC—MPIC, which has just rebated, you know, tens of millions of dollars, a well-run public corporation, back to the ratepayers of this province. What would that be worth in private hands, and where would that money have gone? And when people get their cheques, you know what? I hope they save their cheque stub, and I hope they remind themselves that when it comes to the provincial election on October 4th, thank you to Ed Schreyer and the NDP. Thank you for MPI. That's why we get that kind of rebate, and it doesn't go off to shareholders in New York and across the country.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to predict a couple of other things over the period of time, and you know what? You can just see members opposite—I'm getting a little bit concerned, like, because I'm the member for Emerson.

You know, I watched his speech and it was sort of, you know, you could just almost see him, like, reading these prepared lines. And I don't know if he was trembling or if it was just sort of having to say something positive about the government—you know, I agree with them on property tax and I agree with them—well, it's very simple. If you actually agree with what this government is doing in this budget, why don't you vote for the budget?

And you know what I say to members of the public? If you believe what they say in the first part of this motion, when it comes to the election that's obviously going to be happening later this year, why wouldn't you re-elect the NDP? Because you know what? Even the Tories are saying we're doing a good job as a government.

So there you have it. You have a choice, a government that is leading the Manitoba miracle. Okay. We have the best economic record in this country. We've got the best growth in population in the last four years. Even the Tory Finance critic acknowledged that earlier today. We dealt with the challenges in terms of health care. They even acknowledge it in their motion.

They give us good marks in terms of education, okay. They even reference infrastructure. I'm just sort of looking at this—

An Honourable Member: Get the defibrillator.

Mr. Ashton: Yes, I know. I'm just wondering, you know, what's happening over there. Perhaps someone should turn the oxygen back on in the Conservative caucus. There's something going on over there, but you know what? I know what it really is all about.

They're going to spend the next six months going around trying to pretend they're not the same Tories that they've always been. You know, they'll try and pretend that they're not a party of cutting back in terms of social programs, in health care and education. They're going to try and pretend that they really can be trusted when it comes to our Crown corporations. They're going to try and pretend that they really care about people throughout the province.

The real question, you know, it comes down to this. I believe the question in October will be based on this, very straight forward. We've had unprecedented growth in this province over the last decade-plus, and we've had a government that's done that and accomplished it with a social conscience. Why would you risk it on a reckless party that hasn't learned the lessons from what's happened, but still has an agenda that would cut back the deficit at the expense of front-line services and Manitobans, a party that would sell off Manitoba Hydro in an instant, given the charge?

And, you know what? I say to the member—I say to the member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) that we will, indeed—we will, indeed, miss him, but we're going to take the message to Brandon West because, you know what? I think they understand how good this government has been for the province of Manitoba.

That's the choice: economic growth and social economic justice under the NDP or the tired, old, cynical politics of the Tories. Mr. Speaker, I rest my case. Even the Tories are saying we're doing a good job as the government, and you know what? I know we have a fixed election date. I just wish we could go to election right now on this project. But whether it's tomorrow or whether it's in October, I have no doubt in my mind that the people of this province will select something that's proven its worth, an NDP government that can deliver on the economy and an

NDP government that can deliver on social economic justice at the same time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Speaker, I wish to take the opportunity to put a few comments on the record in regards to the motion put forward by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen), a wonderful motion I might add, an amendment to the budget. And I'm glad to see that the members of the government bench are looking at supporting our amendment to the budget. So we're very pleased about that.

Mr. Speaker, this will actually be the last time that I address a budget in this Chamber as the MLA for Springfield as, with redistribution, the constituency of Springfield will disappear. And I do want to thank the people of Springfield for having chosen me as their representative for the last 12 years and have elected me. And I know many of them are very concerned about the fact that the historic name that was there with the beginning of Confederation of Manitoba entering into Canada, that the name Springfield will disappear. I'd like to thank them once again for the trust they placed in me, and we look forward to representing, potentially, if the people so choose, the new constituency of St. Paul.

* (16:40)

I also want to just pause for a moment and welcome our new Deputy Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, Rick Yarish, and also Blake Dunn, who's now our Sergeant-at-Arms, as well as Ray Gislason, our Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms. I've always said that Blake Dunn would look way better with a bow tie on, and I agree with Mr. Speaker when he said that he sure is looking very dapper. And I agree with that. Great to see him at the table, and we certainly appreciate the things that—all of the employees who make this Chamber work—everything that you do, from the pages on up to the Clerk's table and, of course, our Clerk.

Just on a sad note, former Sergeant-at-Arms Mac Allen passed away just a couple months ago, who was also a servant of this Chamber and did a great job at it, and very sad to hear that Mac Allen had passed away. And, for those who remember him, if you know his wife, Nellie, perhaps give her a call and pass along your condolences.

I do want to make a few comments about this, the last budget, I'll be speaking to as the member for Springfield. And, as has been stated before and as in

the amendment to the budget, we see that there are many things that finally the NDP government have come our way on when it comes to issues that we've been putting forward.

We particularly want to congratulate them for finally seeing the light when it comes to justice issues and the fact that they are now willing to look at more police. And it's very telling that the NDP, especially after their failed mayoral campaign with Judy Wasylycia-Leis who—when it was a campaign promise by Mayor Sam Katz who said we should hire more police officers, she said, no, we don't need more police officers, and was actually offside with this current NDP government. And I guess that's probably one of the reasons why she didn't make it. In fact, it's good to see that the NDP realizes that there is a crime issue, and they've come on board with the Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba and have announced that they are going to be funding more police officers.

When it comes to funding for health care—in fact, a pediatric, the diabetes pump that we have, insulin pumps that we have been pushing for for years. It's great to see that the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) and her Cabinet members finally realize that this was something very important, and it was something good to do.

I was troubled, though, Mr. Speaker, when the—and because I—you know, I do have a niece who is struggling—struggling with diabetes. And she said to me on the weekend—I had some time to spend talking to her and she has one of these insulin pumps—she said to me, categorically, that she would not be here today if it wasn't for her insulin pump. So it tells you how important these pumps are. And she's a bright, beautiful, amazing, smart 23-year-old. And I'm so glad that this pump is working so well.

So the fact that the minister announced it in the budget, and there was absolutely no reaction by government members. It was sort of just moved on and—you know what, I guess because it was a little hard to swallow that they finally had to, again, come our way, come on side with us and put that in the budget—and a smart move. You know, imitation is the greatest form of flattery, and we thank the Minister of Finance for that, because that was actually a really good thing to have put into the budget.

There were other initiatives that had been put forward over the years by the Progressive Conservative Party when it came to recreation,

education facilities and so on and so forth, and, you know, we are pleased to see that the government saw the light and came our way on those issues.

One of the issues that we do have a few difficulties with and that's the issue of Manitoba Hydro. The fact that you have hydro being developed almost at the Ontario border, then being shipped all the way to the Saskatchewan border, run around all the way around the city of Winnipeg and it ends up actually in the RM of Springfield, where the Riel Converter Station is. And it is really borderline dishonest by saying that a lot of this power then is supposed to go to Saskatchewan, because the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Hydro and the Premier (Mr. Selinger), used to be the former Minister of Hydro, know full well, because it's a DC line, they can't just interrupt it any time they want. It has to come down to the Riel station where then it is converted.

And what is so amazing about this whole discussion, this debate, the electricity is produced almost at the Ontario border, goes to Saskatchewan, comes back and then, basically, goes almost to the Ontario border, and then goes further south and further east. It would make so much more sense, whether it's economic, whether it's environmental, whether it's the amount of people that are impacted because Hydro already has many of the right of ways on the east side because it was something that had been planned for many years. It's all there. The government just has to make the right decision, and that would save, in the short term, billions and, in the long term, many more billions. And we believe very strongly that this is a decision that the NDP somehow got themselves entrenched in, and they just can't see their way through it, which is really most unfortunate.

This is going to cost future generations bitterly. It is going to cost the province of Manitoba because in the end, this is debt underwritten by the Province of Manitoba. So it doesn't really matter how you view it, it is still provincial debt. And, furthermore, it is going to be the ratepayers that will eventually have to pay for this silly and poorly thought out decision. And we've seen letter after letter after letter from individuals who worked for Manitoba Hydro, and it's unfortunate that members opposite are trashing individuals who used to work for Hydro, retirees, and I think that's really unfortunate, by referring to them as yesterday's people or whatever else. I think that's very unfortunate because they worked diligently and they know the workings of Manitoba

Hydro and they know that the decision always was to come down the east side, so going west is purely a political decision.

It's not a Hydro decision. It is a NDP Premier and Cabinet decision, and what's going to happen is ratepayers, whether it's going to be the ratepayers for Manitoba Hydro or the taxpayers of the province of Manitoba, in either case, they are the ones who are going to be straddled with this terrible extra debt that is being put on for a decision that, when you listen to the NDP, when you listen to the Premier, the minister and any other spokesperson for the NDP, they can never articulate well. What they do often is they just attack the messenger. They attack the individual. They attack, try to attack their integrity. They try to attack who they are as individuals. What they do is they just try to attack.

They never try to explain why it is that they force—and it was the Premier and the NDP Cabinet that forced Manitoba Hydro to do this. It was not a decision of Manitoba Hydro. It was an NDP party-driven concept to go to the west side.

So we would like to see them reverse this. It is foolhardy. It is a terrible decision. We would like to see them reverse this and certainly save future generations billions of billions of dollars. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Labour and Immigration): It's my pleasure to get up and say a few words about Budget 2011.

First of all, I would like to join many of the other members of the House in congratulating our new Deputy Clerk, who I had the great fortune to work with closely at the Public Accounts Committee and so know well his commitment to this House and to the smooth running of this House and also his commitment to helping all members of this House do our jobs. So I think we will be well served by him in his new role, as well as the new Sergeant-at-Arms. I also want to join other members in congratulating him on his new position. It is certainly a position of honour in this House and a position, you know, that exists because of a time in parliamentary democracy when you actually needed a Sergeant-at-Arms to keep order in the House in case people got out of hand. Thankfully, we don't have that situation here. He's not actually going to be called upon to use the mace, I hope, but it is certainly good to have him with us and sitting at that table in a place of honour that he so deserves.

I'm proud to be able to support this budget because it's a budget, Mr. Speaker, that puts families first and it's a budget that continues to move Manitoba forward and it's a budget that is going to be very important for the people in my constituency. One of the things that's in the budget that we're happy to support is the funding for new schools and gyms and child-care centres, and one of those child-care centres that has been built by this government is the River Avenue daycare co-operative that exists in my constituency. And this was a project that had been supported and worked on and advocated for by the former MLA for Fort Rouge, Tim Sale, and it was one of those projects that was one of the first beneficiaries of the new capital funding that our government put in place for child-care centres.

* (16:50)

Previously, there was no capital funding for child-care centres available. It was totally reliant on parents and volunteers to raise all of the money necessary to build a child-care centre. And when you're looking at building something that could cost \$400,000 or \$500,000, that's a lot of pressure to put on parents to raise all of that money. So our government was proud to be able to come to the table with funding for capital for child-care centres. And now we're seeing those centres all over the province.

We've also put in place, in terms of child care, new rules, new regulations, that oblige new schools to make sure that they have space for child-care centres in them. And I think that is one of the innovations that shows how we can get even more value out of the spending of public dollars. When we're spending money to build a school, it only makes sense that we—in that building, make sure that there's also room for a child-care centre, because we know that child care will be a growing need for this province and for the working families in this province.

So I'm proud of the progress that we've made. I also looked carefully at some of the amendments that have been proposed today by the opposition. I see nothing in that amendment that disavows their position on child care, which is to take over \$100 million out of that child-care budget. That's 80 per cent of the child-care budget. There's nothing in this amendment I see that gives me any comfort that they wouldn't do that. And, you know, you talk about 80 per cent of the child-care budget,

\$100 million, what does that mean for families that need those child-care centres?

One of the things we know that the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) is on the record as saying is that he believes that families have no problem paying more for child care. He believes that families would have no issue with increased fees for child care. And so it's very clear to me that their plan for child care in this province is to increase fees, to decrease public support for those centres.

Another thing that I'm proud to support in this budget, as the Minister responsible for Labour and Immigration and the Minister responsible for the Workplace Safety and Health Division, is our continued progress and our continued building on the record that we've achieved in workplace safety and health.

You know, Mr. Speaker, when we came into government, there were 1,000 inspections a year done—workplace safety and health inspections—done per year in this province of workplaces. In fact, when we came into government, I'm told that our inspectors would show up at some workplaces, and they would be told that, in fact, you don't need to be here. We're not covered by workplace safety and health laws, because they had never seen an inspector before. So they believed that those laws didn't apply to them.

In our time in government, we've been able to take those—that number of inspections up from 1,000 a year to 10,000 a year. That means more inspections at workplaces that have high hazards. It means more inspections in workplaces that help to make sure that those workplace safety and health committees are in place—that they are functioning. It means that we can follow up more quickly on complaints, and we can do proactive inspections.

And just this week, I was happy to attend at the Workers Compensation Board, their launching of their summer ad campaign which will be to once again encourage those Manitobans who work at heights, who are roofers or work at other kinds of heights, to make sure that they are tied on. The campaign is called Tie One On, hopefully to encourage some safe behaviour among roofers and other people who work at heights this summer.

And part of the—the new part of that campaign this year is also going to be to encourage Manitobans who see people who are working at heights, who aren't using fall protection gear, to call the

Workplace Safety and Health Division and let us know so that inspectors can go out and remind people of the law and their obligations under the law. And, you know, we wouldn't be able to have that kind of ad campaign if we hadn't increased the number of inspectors and we hadn't increased the number of inspections. So I'm proud that we've been able to do that.

The other thing that I think we've done that's contributed to increased compliance for the workplace safety and health regulations is the fact that, for the first time in over a decade, we increased the fines for those employers, for those companies that disobey the workplace safety and health regulations. These aren't folks that are first-time offenders. These aren't folks who aren't aware of what their obligations because always when we send out inspectors, the first—the first—thing that they try to do is to work with the organization that they're inspecting.

I've had that occasion to be close to some inspections and listen to the interaction between the inspectors and the employees and the employers, and I've learned from that that really Workplace Safety and Health inspectors view their role as a partnership for safety and they want to work with employers and those employees to not only make sure that they have the proper equipment and the proper procedures in place but to make sure that they know how to use that.

So we brought in—I was pleased to be able to bring in legislation last session to increase the fines for workplace safety and health offences for the first time in over a decade. We had some of the lowest fines in Canada.

And I think all of these things that we've been able to do in workplace safety and health are showing real progress. This year, as you heard in the budget speech, the Workers Compensation Board is reporting a 40 per cent reduction in the time-loss injury rate. What does that mean in the terms of real people? Well, that means over 10,000 workers who have been saved from injuries, who've been saved from dying on the job because we've been able to work with industry, work with workers, work with the Workers Compensation Board to help put in place safer workplaces.

And I see nothing in the motion brought forward by the opposition that disavows their position on workplace safety and health. Their leader very proudly took the position in the *Brandon Sun* when

he was asked about the increased inspections, the increased inspectors in our last budget, very proudly said, well, these increased Workplace Safety and Health inspectors, increased inspection, that's nothing but more regulation and bureaucracy. That was his position on these kinds of inspections that have literally saved lives in Manitoba. And there's nothing in this motion that suggests that he believes any differently today.

I also sat in this House and listened as the legislation to increase fines, specifically to increase fines for repeat offenders of The Workplace Safety and Health Act, as that was debated, and I listened carefully to members of the other side talk about that legislation and oppose those fines. This is purportedly the party that supports law and order, that supports tougher penalties, but when it comes to unsafe workplaces, when it comes to workplaces that are repeat offenders, that repeatedly disregard the workplace safety and health regulations, they don't believe that they should be fined any more. In fact, some of their members said that those fines were unnecessary. It was unnecessary to bring in any kind of fines to fine workplaces that were unsafe. And I see in this amendment motion in front of me, there's no disavowal of that position. That is still their proud position. No need for Workplace Safety and Health inspectors, no need for any fines for workplace safety and health. That's what they believed nine months ago. That's what they continue to believe today.

The other thing that we talked about in the budget that also falls under my responsibility is our plans this year to increase minimum wage, as we have increased minimum wage every year that we've been in government. And this was a wholesale change from the past, Mr. Speaker. In the past, the minimum wage would be stalled until miraculously, in the year before an election, it would increase by a little bit and then it would be stalled for many years and then miraculously in year three of a term, it would go up by a little bit. And we have taken the position that minimum wage increases, they should be frequent. They should be every year. They should be predictable because those minimum wage earners, first of all, deserve to have their spending power restored.

We saw throughout the '90s that the spending power of minimum wage earners actually decreased. So, when we came into government, one of the first things that we had to do was get that minimum wage on a solid footing and make sure that people's

earnings were at a reasonable level, that people who made minimum wage were benefiting from the prosperity of Manitoba just like any other Manitobans, and so we've been able to increase it every year.

And that's made some real difference to those minimum wage earners, two-thirds of whom are women, Mr. Speaker. That's who earns minimum wage in this province. And every time we've increased the minimum wage, we've been opposed by the opposition.

And as early as last year, Mr. Speaker, when they were asked about the minimum wage, when the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) was asked

about the minimum wage, how did he describe it? He described it as nothing more than political candy and questioned whether a minimum wage was even necessary anymore.

And there's nothing in this motion, Mr. Speaker, that supports regular increases to the minimum wage. There's nothing in this motion that says that that's among the change of heart that they've had.

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable minister will have 18 minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, April 13, 2011

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