



Third Session - Thirty-Sixth Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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authority of
The Honourable Louise M. Dacquay
Speaker*



MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Sixth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ASHTON, Steve	Thompson	N.D.P.
BARRETT, Becky	Wellington	N.D.P.
CERILLI, Marianne	Radisson	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CUMMINGS, Glen, Hon.	Ste. Rose	P.C.
DACQUAY, Louise, Hon.	Seine River	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard, Hon.	Roblin-Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary	Concordia	N.D.P.
DOWNEY, James, Hon.	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
DRIEDGER, Albert	Steinbach	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
ENNS, Harry, Hon.	Lakeside	P.C.
ERNST, Jim	Charleswood	P.C.
EVANS, Clif	Interlake	N.D.P.
EVANS, Leonard S.	Brandon East	N.D.P.
FILMON, Gary, Hon.	Tuxedo	P.C.
FINDLAY, Glen, Hon.	Springfield	P.C.
FRIESEN, Jean	Wolseley	N.D.P.
GAUDRY, Neil	St. Boniface	Lib.
GILLESHAMMER, Harold, Hon.	Minnedosa	P.C.
HELWER, Edward	Gimli	P.C.
HICKES, George	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
KOWALSKI, Gary	The Maples	Lib.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LATHLIN, Oscar	The Pas	N.D.P.
LAURENDEAU, Marcel	St. Norbert	P.C.
MACKINTOSH, Gord	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	N.D.P.
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McALPINE, Gerry	Sturgeon Creek	P.C.
McCRAE, James, Hon.	Brandon West	P.C.
McGIFFORD, Diane	Osborne	N.D.P.
McINTOSH, Linda, Hon.	Assiniboia	P.C.
MIHYCHUK, MaryAnn	St. James	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie, Hon.	River East	P.C.
NEWMAN, David, Hon.	Riel	P.C.
PALLISTER, Brian	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
PENNER, Jack	Emerson	P.C.
PITURA, Frank, Hon.	Morris	P.C.
PRAZNIK, Darren, Hon.	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
RADCLIFFE, Mike, Hon.	River Heights	P.C.
REID, Daryl	Transcona	N.D.P.
REIMER, Jack, Hon.	Niakwa	P.C.
RENDER, Shirley	St. Vital	P.C.
ROBINSON, Eric	Rupert's Island	N.D.P.
ROCAN, Denis	Gladstone	P.C.
SALE, Tim	Crescentwood	N.D.P.
SANTOS, Conrad	Broadway	N.D.P.
STEFANSON, Eric, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	P.C.
STRUTHERS, Stan	Dauphin	N.D.P.
SVEINSON, Ben	La Verendrye	P.C.
TOEWS, Vic, Hon.	Rossmere	P.C.
TWEED, Mervin	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
VODREY, Rosemary, Hon.	Fort Garry	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, March 19, 1997

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING REPORTS BY
STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

Standing Committee on Public Utilities
and Natural Resources
First Report

Mr. Ben Sveinson (Vice-Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Utilities and Natural Resources): I beg to present the First Report of the Committee on Public Utilities and Natural Resources.

I move, seconded by the honourable member for St. Norbert (Mr. Laurendeau), that the report of the committee be received.

Mr. Clerk (William Remnant): Your Standing Committee on Public Utilities and Natural Resources present the following—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Madam Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Public Utilities and Natural Resources presents the following as its First Report.

Your committee met on Friday, October 25, 1996, at 10 a.m. in Room 254 and on Tuesday, March 18, 1997, at 10 a.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building to consider the Annual Reports of the Manitoba Hydro-Electric Board for the years ended March 31, 1995 and 1996.

Mr. John McCallum, chairman, and Mr. Bob Brennan, president and chief executive officer, provided such

information as was requested with respect to the Annual Reports and business of the Manitoba Hydro-Electric Board.

Your committee has considered the Annual Report of the Manitoba Hydro-Electric Board for the year ended March 31, 1995, and has adopted the same as presented.

Motion agreed to.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 3—The North American Environmental
and Labour Cooperation Agreements
Implementation Act

Hon. James Downey (Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to move, seconded by the Minister of Environment (Mr. McCrae) and member of the Legislature for Brandon West, that leave be given to introduce Bill 3, The North American Environmental and Labour Cooperation Agreements Implementation Act (Loi sur la mise en oeuvre des accords nord-américains de coopération dans les domaines de l'environnement et du travail), and that the same be now received and read a first time.

His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, having been advised of the contents of this bill, recommends it to the House. I am pleased to provide a copy of that message to the Legislature.

Motion agreed to.

* (1335)

Bill 2—The Arbitration and Consequential
Amendments Act

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson), that leave be given to introduce Bill 2, The Arbitration and Consequential Amendments Act (Loi sur l'arbitrage et modifications

corrélatives), and that the same be now received and read a first time.

His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, having been advised of the contents of this bill, recommends it to the House. I would like to table the Lieutenant Governor's message, as well.

Motion agreed to.

Bill 4—The Steam and Pressure Plants Amendment Act

Hon. Harold Gilleshammer (Minister of Labour): I move, seconded by the Minister of Rural Development (Mr. Derkach), that leave be given to introduce Bill 4, The Steam and Pressure Plants Amendment Act (Loi modifiant la Loi sur les appareils sous pression et à vapeur), and that the same be now received and read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Bill 5—The Mineral Exploration Incentive Program Repeal Act

Hon. David Newman (Minister of Energy and Mines): Madam Speaker, I would like leave to introduce Bill 5, The Mineral Exploration Incentive Program Repeal Act (Loi abrogeant la Loi sur le programme d'encouragement à l'exploration minière), and also Bill 6, the Natural Gas Supply Repeal and Public Utilities Board Amendment Act (Loi abrogeant la Loi sur l'approvisionnement en gaz naturel et modifiant la Loi sur la Régie des services publics).

This is moved by myself, seconded by the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Radcliffe), in both cases.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Energy and Mines, seconded by the honourable Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, that leave be given to introduce Bill 5, The Mineral Exploration Incentive Program Repeal Act (Loi abrogeant la Loi sur le programme d'encouragement à l'exploration minière), and that the same be now received and read a first time.

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Madam Speaker: Agreed and so ordered.

Bill 6—The Natural Gas Supply Repeal and Public Utilities Board Amendment Act

Madam Speaker: I would ask that the honourable minister now read Bill 6. They must be done one at a time.

Hon. David Newman (Minister of Energy and Mines): I was pressing for more efficiency, Madam Speaker.

Moved by myself, seconded by the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Radcliffe), that leave be given to introduce Bill 6, The Natural Gas Supply Repeal and Public Utilities Board Amendment Act (Loi abrogeant la Loi sur l'approvisionnement en gaz naturel et modifiant la Loi sur la Régie des services publics).

Motion agreed to.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members firstly to the loge to the left where we have this afternoon Mr. Herold Driedger, the former member for Niakwa. On behalf of all honourable members, I welcome you this afternoon.

Also, seated in the public gallery, we have twenty Grade 5 students from the Princess Margaret School under the direction of Mrs. Susan Siwek. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Justice (Mr. Toews).

Also seated in the public gallery we have seventy-five Grade 9 students from the General Wolfe School under the direction of Mr. Harold Driedger. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Wellington (Ms. Barrett).

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

* (1340)

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Home Oxygen Supply Service Rimer Alco Contract

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): We have debated the issue of privatization of health care services previously in this Chamber, Madam Speaker. Yesterday ministers were defending the decision of the government to award a specific contract on home oxygen therapy to the Rimer Alco company.

Madam Speaker, will the Premier (Mr. Filmon) today tell Manitobans why this government is extending the privatization of these services to the private sector? Will the Premier today table the cost and quality analysis of recommendations that led his government to award this contract to the Rimer Alco company?

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): First of all, with respect to the preamble of the Leader of the Opposition's question, the issues of privatization in health care, by and large, in these areas where we are purchasing services at better costs and looking at ways to trim costs of supplying various elements that are used in the health care system frees up dollars for other vital areas of patient care. So many of these things are about improving patient care.

Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition may wish to know that the process by which these bids were evaluated included a first stage which was the quality analysis. There were two companies who came through that process, Rimer Alco and VitalAire, I understand. Then their pricing envelopes were opened, and the Rimer Alco contract was the lower bidder and has received the contract.

Mr. Doer: Madam Speaker, I want to table a copy of the government's final report dealing with the awarding of the Home Oxygen Therapy Program to the Rimer Alco company, and the recommendation from the government's own group of experts made up of health officials and members of the community.

The recommendation is not to award the contract to Rimer Alco but to recommend, on the basis of quality

of care and cost of this service over a three-year period and even the minimal cost difference of a two-year period, to award this contract to a different company.

Why, and I ask the Premier (Mr. Filmon), did his Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) and his Minister of Health not follow the recommendations from their own final report and their own experts?

Mr. Praznik: In speaking today with the staff from Manitoba Health who provided the staff to that committee, it was confirmed to me that both companies met the qualification on standards and that both companies made it through that first stage of the quality control. There were other companies that did not, and their price envelopes were not opened. Of the two that made it through that quality process, the lowest tender was awarded and that is Rimer Alco.

Mr. Doer: My question to the First Minister is—they have the costs of the two bids, and they have the quality analysis done by the government's own steering committee of experts from the Department of Health, from the community, an accountant, a representative from the Rural Development department. The government's own group of experts is recommending, on the basis of cost and quality, that the 800 people that receive the Home Oxygen Therapy Program receive it from a different company than the government awarded it to.

I would like to ask the Premier why did they award it to a different company. Why did they go contrary to the recommendations of their own government expert group on quality and cost?

* (1345)

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Madam Speaker, we have a very interesting thing here in the Legislature being presented by the Leader of the Opposition.

Yesterday he and his members alleged that the company that was selected was not qualified or seen to be qualified by the selection committee. We now find they were wrong on that, wrong again, that the committee said there were two qualified bidders. One was Rimer Alco, the other was the company that he is promoting.

Then, secondly, they alleged that it was not the low bid. On a two-year contract, it is clear that Rimer Alco was the low bidder. They were wrong again, and again the Leader of the Opposition comes forward with his presentation based on wrong facts.

So, firstly, the company was qualified, according to the analysis done by the panel of experts that he is now quoting; secondly, they were the lowest bidder. Now you can imagine, Madam Speaker, what would happen if we awarded the contract to somebody who was not the lowest bidder. What would be their tack here in this Legislature? Secondly, it happens to be a Manitoba-based company, and if we chose somebody that was from outside or primarily from outside the province, what would be their tack then? You can imagine that they would be opposed to it on that basis.

Here we have an opposition who has sunk so low that they will do anything they can, twist any facts, come up with any justification just to oppose the government on every single issue. It is why they continue to be in opposition; it is why they continue to run third in the public esteem of this province.

Home Oxygen Supply Service Rimer Alco Contract

Mr. Tim Sale (Crescentwood): Madam Speaker, I can hardly wait till the Premier reads the whole recommendation from the committee.

The home care workers now employed in delivering this service are all Manitobans. Yesterday in Question Period the Minister of Finance said that Rimer Alco was the lowest successful bidder meeting all qualifications.

Will the Minister of Finance confirm that in the bidding process, Rimer Alco acknowledged to the committee that it was unable to meet the core essential requirement of the request for proposal and did not therefore submit a performance bond, contrary to the requirement of the request for proposal, an essential criterion for bidders? Will he confirm that?

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, no, I will not confirm that whatsoever. It is in keeping with the approach of the opposition, that they

are wrong on all accounts when it comes to this issue and bringing incorrect information as they did 24 hours ago to this House.

Rimer Alco has met the bonding requirements. They do have the bond in place, \$1.75 million, not like they were alleging yesterday that the bond was not able to be in place. The bond is in fact in place with the company. They are the lowest-cost bid for the two-year contract which was—

An Honourable Member: What about the three year? Where does your committee sit?

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Stefanson: The member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) should go back and look at the original request for proposal which was for a two-year bid. On a two-year bid, Rimer Alco is the lowest-cost contract. They were one of two firms that the evaluation committee said met all of the quality criteria. So, on quality, on price and on performance bonding, they are the logical firm to award it to, unlike the misinformation being provided by the members opposite yesterday.

Mr. Sale: The RFP had two options, Madam Speaker: a two year and a three year.

Will the Minister of Health (Mr. Praznik) or the Minister of Finance confirm that, during the Home Oxygen Therapy Program committee meeting, a phone call was received from a senior government person telling the committee to continue to consider Rimer Alco even though they did not meet the essential performance bond requirement which all other committees had to meet? Did that phone call take place?

Madam Speaker, I intended to table this document at the time of my question and would like to do so now.

Mr. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, again the member for Crescentwood—first of all, the request was for a two-year agreement. There was an option to put forward a third-year option. There was never a request for a three-year agreement. They are wrong again. If he has any information about any specific phone calls from

individuals, let him provide the information, provide the names of the individuals, any information he can provide.

I am not aware of any such phone calls. Once again it is the same kind of tactics that they bring forward day in and day out, incorrect information, innuendos and sleaze tactics.

* (1350)

Mr. Sale: I can tell the minister who received the call; I cannot tell him who was on the other end, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member for Crescentwood, with a final supplementary question.

Mr. Sale: Madam Speaker, will the minister admit that, according to the accountant on the committee, the company chosen, Rimer Alco, could not demonstrate financial solvency, another essential criterion, that the bid process was not fair to all companies bidding, that in fact it was hopelessly corrupt?

Mr. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, I will admit no such thing. I believe there were five firms that submitted bids. The evaluation committee said there are clearly two firms that meet the quality tests, VitalAire and Rimer Alco. So the first assessment was on quality. When the pricing was opened, the lowest-cost contract proposal came from Rimer Alco.

It is very clear, Madam Speaker, on the combination of quality and on the combination of cost, Rimer Alco was the logical firm to award it to.

Home Oxygen Supply Service Rimer Alco Contract

Ms. Marianne Cerilli (Radisson): Madam Speaker, let us get straight what this government is doing here in privatizing this home care service. They are willing to put the health and safety of more than 800 Manitobans at risk to save \$4,800 on a two-year contract, when their own committee recommended the three-year option on the contract which in three years is less cost.

I want to ask the Minister of Health how can he justify awarding the contract to Rimer Alco when his own oxygen supply committee recommended that the two-year bid was too short, that it would not fit in with the needs of the program and they clearly recommended the third-year option on the contract.

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, I think that the member for Radisson is stretching very much the particular report that was tabled in this House. That committee recognized both firms as being able to do the job. It ruled three others out on the quality side. So clearly this company is able to do it. They have posted the performance bond; they were the lowest bidder.

Are members of the other side suggesting that we should not have accepted the lowest bidder, Madam Speaker?

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

Ms. Cerilli: Madam Speaker, we have clearly tabled the document that recommends against the two-year option. I want to ask the Minister of Health: is he willing to make the care of more than 800 patients secondary when the same minutes from his steering committee also show that there are concerns regarding the failure of Rimer Alco to deliver the services required? It is in the document we tabled. Read it and tell us how could you award this contract to this company.

Mr. Praznik: Madam Speaker, let us understand the basis of that recommendation. It was because of one bidder's experience in the province in delivering that service. If you accept that analysis, that means that no new bidder could ever bid on a contract, that we would continually award the contract over and over again to the people who are in the business. That is not in the best interests of anyone.

Ms. Cerilli: Madam Speaker, the other concern expressed by the steering committee is about the gaps in service and the inability of this company to provide the technical and service supports to the clients that require oxygen supply. That is also listed in the minutes from the steering committee.

Will the minister consider delaying this contract from the start-up date of April 1 so that the gaps in services at least will not occur for these clients that depend on this service?

Mr. Praznik: Madam Speaker, if I am referring to the same part of the minutes as the member is, the recommendation is to ensure that that rollover be included in any future contracts or proposals with providers of service. If you accept what the member is saying, once you have awarded the contract to one company, you never could change. The member is stretching this far beyond what I think was intended in the minutes.

* (1355)

Home Oxygen Supply Service Rimer Alco Contract

Mr. Steve Ashton (Thompson): Madam Speaker, we are becoming used to this government corrupting the process in which government contracts are handed out, but when it comes to an issue involving health care where their own committee cites quality of care as a concern, is there any wonder why we question this government's agenda privatizing health care. I want to get to the root of the matter, and I want to find out who is pulling the strings on this.

I want to ask the Premier if he or his Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) or either of the ministers of Health at any time met with the principals or any representative of Rimer Alco to discuss this contract.

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Madam Speaker, you know, the innuendo and the very, very unsavoury kind of approach that is taken to every single issue in this House by the members opposite, really I think brings great discredit on the members opposite.

I can tell the member who has asked that question that I did not know anything about this issue until it was raised in the House yesterday, and I made it my business to check on the facts surrounding the various allegations. I can tell the member opposite that, firstly, they alleged that the company, Rimer Alco, that was awarded the contract was not seen to be qualified by the committee. In examination of it, they were one of

the two companies out of five bidders that were seen to be qualified to provide the service. So they were wrong on that one.

It was alleged by the member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) that the bid bond requirement had been dropped from \$1.75 million to a million dollars. In examination of that, I find that they were wrong again on that. No such decision was made. No such move was made. They alleged that they were not the low bidder on the basis of a two-year contract, which was what was asked for in the request for proposal in the tender, and they were the low bidder on that basis. They were wrong again, Madam Speaker. So how many times do they have to be demonstrated to be wrong before they stop playing all of these games of sleaze and innuendo?

Point of Order

Mr. Ashton: On a point of order, Madam Speaker, Beauchesne Citation 492 lists the terms that the Premier used as being unparliamentary. I would also point out that the Premier did not even answer the question once again as to why his government overruled their own committee in handing out this contract.

So, Madam Speaker, not only should he withdraw that comment, but if there is anyone looking at sleaze it should be sleaze in government as we are seeing on this contract.

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

Mr. Filmon: Despite the fact that the Free Press editorially has used that term in speaking about the New Democrats, I will withdraw that word because it is unparliamentary.

Madam Speaker: I thank the honourable First Minister, and I would remind all honourable members to pick and choose their words carefully. I think it would be very much in order now if the honourable member for Thompson would also withdraw the word "sleaze" attributed in his point of order.

Mr. Ashton: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will withdraw the word "sleaze."

Madam Speaker: I thank the honourable member for Thompson.

* * *

* (1400)

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

Mr. Ashton: On a supplementary question, Madam Speaker, since the First Minister did not answer the question. I want to get to the root. I want to ask him why this government overruled the recommendations of his committee that pinpointed as one of the key factors the quality-of-care issues. Who is pulling the strings on this contract? Why did they ignore their own committee?

Mr. Filmon: Madam Speaker, I have said and it has been repeated here by the Minister of Health (Mr. Praznik) and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) that we have to abide by requirements in government to ensure that contracts are awarded on a fair basis, and one of the requirements is of course that we have a process that identifies whether or not bidders are qualified to be able to provide the services or the products that are tendered. In that process, the committee that was examining it examined five bids and determined that two were qualified, one being Rimer Alco, the other being the company that the members opposite are speaking for. So they clearly were one of the two qualified bidders.

Secondly, they had to meet a requirement for a bid bond, alleged by members opposite they did not yesterday. They were wrong. They did meet the requirement for the bid bond.

Thirdly, they had to examine them then based on which was the best price and the lowest price of the two bidders. The lowest price of the two bidders was the company that was awarded the contract, Rimer Alco. Based on a two-year contract, they were clearly the lowest price. If we had not done it on that basis, members opposite would have found reason then to criticize us because either we did not award it on the basis of the best price, or something of that nature. They are constantly looking for ways in which they could disagree with this government, Madam Speaker.

It does them no credit, but the fact of the matter is from all the examination this was awarded on the basis of the best practices that should be followed in the awarding of contracts.

Mr. Ashton: A final supplementary: I want to ask the Minister of Finance, responsible for Treasury Board, how he can justify ignoring the recommendation that due to the quality of care that VitalAire is able to provide and a lower cost, how he can ignore that when he himself yesterday said that the company that was rejected in this process, that was outlined as recommended, could provide better quality care. How can he justify ignoring a recommendation for a cheaper contract and better quality of care, the most important thing for our home care clients in our province?

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I do not know how many times we have to explain the process to members opposite so that they will ultimately understand it. We have a very comprehensive process in terms of reviewing tenders and proposals that we are very proud of, and as has been outlined, when proposals are first submitted the analysis is first done by an evaluation committee on the basis of quality. It was determined two firms met the quality test, Rimer Alco and VitalAire. Both met the quality tests. When the proposals were opened, in terms of costs, the lowest cost two-year contract was Rimer Alco. On the basis of the firm meeting the quality test and providing the lowest-cost contract, the award was made to Rimer Alco. It is that simple. [interjection] The member for Thompson seems to have difficulty understanding two firms met the quality test. Two firms met the quality test. Rimer Alco and VitalAire both met the quality test as reviewed by the evaluation committee. Do you not understand that they both met the quality tests? Both firms met the quality test, plain and simple.

Home Oxygen Supply Service Rimer Alco Contract

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Speaker, I would like to refer to the minutes from the committee specifically dated Friday, December 13, 1996, where in fact it states, and I quote direct, "the committee recommends Manitoba enter into a contract with Vital Aire."

The question is: who in this government is going to take responsibility for overturning this decision? Someone in this government, whether it was the former Minister of Health, the current Minister of Health, the Premier (Mr. Filmon) or the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson), someone is responsible. Who is it?

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, the member for Inkster makes many accusations. I know there are many in the province who would like to know how his Leader got into the contract she has received from the federal government, what process she went through.

Remember the process here. The committee was to review the applications first for whether or not they could meet the quality requirements. Two bidders were successful. There were two option proposals for whether it would be a two-year contract or a two-year plus an option. There was a recommendation from the committee, as the member outlined, for one particular bidder based on a three-year contract. It was a recommendation. The view that was accepted in awarding the contract was that it should be for a two-year contract. The lowest bidder, Rimer Alco, also met the quality requirements of the contract.

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

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I would ask the Minister of Health if he can indicate whether or not this deal has been completely finalized. Has it been signed off? If it has not been signed off, can we get assurances from the Premier (Mr. Filmon) that he personally will investigate this whole matter before the agreement is signed off?

Mr. Praznik: Madam Speaker, despite the accusations that came from the opposition yesterday that there was an inability of Rimer Alco to meet bonding requirements, they have met their bonding requirements and their contract has been awarded.

Firearms Control Government Support

Mr. Gary Kowalski (The Maples): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Justice.

Yesterday, the chief of the Winnipeg Police Services, David Cassels, announced the publication of a document titled *Firearm, Homicide, Robbery and Suicide Incidents Investigated by the Winnipeg Police Services (1995)*. I would like to table that report in the House today because I believe that is an important document that clearly demonstrates the need for gun control legislation.

Given that the chief of police has now demonstrated the importance of gun control to the health and safety of Manitobans in this report, will this minister join with the majority of Manitobans and ask for the support of the official opposition and withdraw his government's support for the Alberta constitutional challenge?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Madam Speaker, I would thank my colleague from The Maples for tabling that report.

I think there is a large problem with that report, and I am not faulting the police service. I have the highest respect for the police service and for my colleague who is a police officer. But what I am very concerned about are the statements of Justice Minister Roche who indicates that Bill C-68 is intended to get firearms out of the hands of criminals and potential suicides. Now that is the purpose of the FAC, the firearms acquisition certificate. That is the process by which we determine whether someone is suitable to have a firearm.

What this is, very sadly I would say, is simply a political attempt to try to prop up a very bad bill which does nothing but take police officers off of the street. I would ask the member for The Maples to stand up and say that he supports police officers in the street and not this kind of legislation.

Manitoba Hydro Deregulation

Ms. MaryAnn Mihychuk (St. James): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Premier.

Given that Manitoba Hydro has been restructured into four business units and given that Manitoba Hydro has signed onto the Mid-Continental Area Power Producers grid and given that legislation will be before

this House in this session allowing for deregulation and given that some sections of Manitoba Hydro already operate in a nonregulated environment, will the Premier clarify for this House what he means when he stated Hydro was safe as long as it is in a totally regulated environment?

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Madam Speaker, I heard the member for St. James on the radio this morning proposing the same kind of phoney argument about the potential for privatization. I have to tell her that I have said consistently that, as long as Hydro is in a market in which it has no competition at the retail level, there is no reason for us to ever consider privatization.

It needs, of course, to do what it is doing with respect to the wholesale distribution on a utility-wide basis in order to ensure that it preserves its capacity to export energy into the United States. That brings some \$250 million U.S. annually into our economy, and it is very important that that is there so it keeps our rates the lowest in North America.

She, of course, would tie their hands so they would be in danger of losing that kind of ability to export to the United States by virtue of opposing this move. She is wrong, absolutely wrong. When questioned this morning and asked about operating in, as she says, already a partially deregulated market, she said, well, you know that they are in competition for installing hot water heaters, that they could have competition for that.

I thought to myself, my good heavens, that is a terrible situation, that somebody might be able to compete with them for installing hot—I mean, it might not be the end of the world, but I am sure you can see it, Madam Speaker, from here.

* (1410)

Point of Order

Mr. Steve Ashton (Opposition House Leader): On a point of order, Madam Speaker, Beauchesne is very clear. Beauchesne Citation 417 is very clear that answers to questions should be as brief as possible, deal with the matter raised and should not provoke debate.

The Premier was asked a very straightforward question about Manitoba Hydro, shades of MTS. I would appreciate it, Madam Speaker, if you would ask him to give a straightforward answer and deal with the very real concern expressed by the member for St. James, a question on a lot of Manitobans' minds on whether they can trust this government with anything to do with privatization, particularly to do with Hydro.

Madam Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable member for Thompson, I would remind the honourable First Minister (Mr. Filmon) that he should not provoke debate.

Privatization

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

Ms. MaryAnn Mihychuk (St. James): Madam Speaker, my supplementary question to the Premier: if the Premier feels that this is something Manitobans believe, will he give the commitment to the people of Manitoba that it will go to a vote before Manitobans before any part or all of Manitoba Hydro is privatized like MTS was?

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Madam Speaker, Manitoba Hydro is so concerned that they ensure that the public is well informed about the issues here—and there are serious issues—because Manitoba Hydro, and indeed the customers of Manitoba Hydro, cannot afford to have their market for export of electricity that is worth more than \$250 million U.S. a year to them cut off. They have a business plan that is intended to reflect a transition to ensure that they protect those markets and allow them to be a growing opportunity for the utility.

They are so concerned about it that they are going to have a series of public consultations so that they can put forward all of the facts surrounding this issue to the public, because they know that the public wants them to continue to strengthen and grow in public ownership, as they are today, and to maintain their ability to service customers at lowest possible cost. So they are going to put the facts forward, not the phoney things that are being put forward and false things that are being put forward by the member for St. James (Ms. Mihychuk).

St. Boniface Hospital Role of Nurses

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): One overriding legacy of this government is its total disregard for the role and value of nurses. We have seen, in the last several years, over 1,800 people, according to government figures, lose their work in the health care sector, mostly nurses. Today nurses, doctors and others were protesting at the St. Boniface Hospital about the elimination of nurses from the management role, policy role of the hospital.

I will table, Madam Speaker, the proposed organizational structure that eliminates nurses, and I would like to ask the Minister of Health is he not concerned, from a government that has eliminated nurses in the breadth and width of this province, that the elimination of nurses from policy-making roles at St. Boniface Hospital will have an effect on the delivery of patient care already hurt by government cutbacks?

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): The member's statement is so far from the truth and the reality, it is directly opposed.

St. Boniface Hospital, with their new CEO and their board, are currently in the process of doing some reorganization that will accommodate the centralization and reorganization in Winnipeg that is absolutely needed to provide better patient care. That is what it is about, and the most telling part of the member's question, he never once mentioned patient care. That is what this side of the House is concerned about.

Mr. Chomiak: Will this minister, who is so quick to defend this structure that eliminates nurses, explain to the nurses and the patients of Manitoba why they continue to eliminate the need to hear the voices of nurses? Will the minister meet with nurses? Will he discuss their concerns? And, will he be prepared to take action with regard to the elimination of nurses from the policy and management structure of St. Boniface Hospital and as a matter of fact, Madam Speaker, most institutions in the province?

Mr. Praznik: First of all, I would say that the role of nurses in this province is expanding in a greater way

than it ever has in the past. First of all, the change in the nursing school system, the requirement of a four-year nursing program, is going to produce better nurses who are more needed in the system.

Virtually every—not every but the vast majority of the liaison staff that Manitoba Health appointed to work with the regional health authorities are nurses.

As we move to program management within the Winnipeg Health Authority, each of the management teams include not only a clinical head but a nursing head. What St. Boniface Hospital is doing is reorganizing their structure to accommodate the reorganized Winnipeg program delivery system. The member would have us turn back the clock.

Winnipeg Beach Commercial Development

Mr. Stan Struthers (Dauphin): Tonight this government is giving out sustainable development awards to nominees such as Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting, a company that even mining associations says has the worst air pollution record around.

This government continues to do a snow job in the idea of sustainable development so no one is surprised to see this government eagerly selling off park land at the same time as trumpeting sustainable development.

This minister should be reminded that in adjusting park boundaries at Winnipeg Beach for condo developments he is breaking his own legislation. Why, when plenty of commercial sites are available outside park boundaries, is this minister anxious to dispose of park land at Winnipeg Beach, and why is he breaching Section 14 of The Parks Act that restricts the sale of park land to do it?

Hon. Glen Cummings (Minister of Natural Resources): After listening carefully to that question, I believe the member is starting to read his own press releases. The fact is the Winnipeg Beach issue is being put through the process as is required by The Parks Act. An information meeting was recently held at Winnipeg Beach, and further information will be taken from the public before any decision is finally approved.

Mr. Struthers: Before a decision is finally approved. Why then was a lease concluded in 1995 between the deputy minister and the Lions Club, complete with a lease-signing ceremony attended by the deputy, long before proposed boundary changes and long before any public hearings?

Mr. Cummings: Madam Speaker, for the very purpose of what I said, to begin the process of having input, consultation and to facilitate any decision making that will be required.

Historical Documents Private Acquisition

Ms. Diane McGifford (Osborne): Madam Speaker, yesterday in response to my questions regarding the privatization of historical artifacts and by what authority this government was selling historical artifacts to legal firms, I got bluster from one minister and bombast and bullying from the other; however, I will return to the questions today.

To the Minister of Culture: has the minister's office consulted with any stakeholder groups, including aboriginal people, since so many of the historical records for sale pertain to transactions regarding aboriginal people?

Hon. Rosemary Vodrey (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship): Madam Speaker, I will attempt to be as gentle as possible then in my comments back to the member as I tell her that she was wrong yesterday and she is wrong today.

Madam Speaker, I can assure you and assure this House that those documents are not for sale. For a second day the member has failed to check her facts. She was wrong yesterday; she is wrong again.

* (1420)

Hon. Mike Radcliffe (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Madam Speaker, I would like to address an issue which the honourable member for Osborne has just raised again in this Chamber, and it was a question on which I took notice yesterday. I would not be so audacious as to allege that the honourable member for Osborne is a purveyor or muse

of stygian murk, but I can assure the honourable member for Osborne that I have consulted with my department and there are absolutely no documents that are being sold or offered for sale.

In fact, the Winnipeg Land Titles Office has solicited offers from private law firms to contribute charitably to underwrite the cost, under the auspices of the Provincial Archivist, to have these documents preserved, mounted and framed to be displayed in the public domain. So the allegations that this government is selling 35 historical documents, including Riel's power, is categorically, unequivocally wrong.

Eaton's Store Closures

Madam Speaker: Technically, time has expired, but in order to acknowledge the member for Wellington who was on her feet well before the members started chiding each other across the Chamber, I think it is in order that we recognize the honourable member for Wellington for one very short question.

Ms. Becky Barrett (Wellington): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Last Thursday the Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism stated that he was in the process of preparing a communication outlining the government's response to the closing of Eaton's and that our concerns about Eaton's potential closing were highly speculative.

I would like to ask the Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism, in light of the announcement yesterday that most of the stores that Eaton's plans to abandon will be shut down on June 30, six months ahead of the schedule that was announced in late February, if he can table for us the communication that last Thursday he was in the process of preparing and if he plans to meet with civic groups such as Downtown BIZ and City Council in Winnipeg and Brandon to figure out what to do about this distressing situation.

Hon. James Downey (Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism): Yes and yes, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

NONPOLITICAL STATEMENTS

Winnipeg Music Competition Festival

Mrs. Shirley Render (St. Vital): Madam Speaker, do I have leave to make a nonpolitical statement?

Madam Speaker: Does the honourable member for St. Vital have leave to make a nonpolitical statement? [agreed]

Mrs. Render: Madam Speaker, it is with great pride that I rise to recognize the Winnipeg Music Competition Festival. The Winnipeg Music Competition Festival is the longest running consecutive music festival in Canada; 1919 marked the inaugural festival and since that year it has assisted in the development of countless local musicians. Now in its 79th year, the festival has witnessed dynamic change in popular music. It has gone from Charleston to Big Band, from classical to jazz, but one thing does remain constant and that is the tireless efforts of its organizers. Manitobans are well known for their volunteer spirit, and the longevity and the success of the Manitoba Music Competition Festival speaks volumes to that fact.

This year's festival had 3,550 entries and over 24,000 participating musicians from across the province. The festival began February 24 and will conclude with its final concert tonight. The festival pays tribute to the countless hours of practice on the part of our musicians, the tireless support of their families and the tutoring and adjudicating efforts of music instructors from all corners of our province.

I invite all honourable members of the House to attend the final concert of the Winnipeg Music Competition Festival tonight at Pantages Theatre at 7:30 p.m., and I believe that all members will join with me in congratulating the Winnipeg Music Competition Festival for another successful year. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Brandon Wheat Kings

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

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

Mr. McCrae: Thank you, and I thank my colleagues for their indulgence.

I would like to extend my congratulations to the Brandon Wheat Kings on their recent victory. For the third straight season Brandon captured the WHL's East Division regular season title. The Wheat Kings finished with a 47-24-1 record to edge out second-place Swift Current by two points. Despite numerous injuries, the Wheat Kings finished the year by winning five straight games.

The team will begin the opening defence of their WHL championship title with a best of seven conference quarter-final series against the Moose Jaw Warriors. This series will begin this Thursday at the Keystone Centre. Honourable members all know about the Keystone Centre in the city of Brandon. Hope to see them there soon.

The Wheat Kings have their sights set on attending their third consecutive Memorial Cup National Junior Tournament, which will be held in Hull, Quebec, this May. The Wheat Kings were led this year by most valuable player Peter Schaefer, as well as a total of 13 Manitobans, among them all-stars Justin Kurtz of Winnipeg, Brian Elder of Oak Lake, Stefan Cherneski of Thompson, and Kelly Smart of McAuley.

I would like to extend my congratulations and those of all of my colleagues in this House to the team's general manager, Kelly McCrimmon, and head coach, Bob Lowes, also assistant coach Mark Johnstone and all the players. I would like to wish the Wheat Kings the best of luck in their quarter-final series against Moose Jaw, and I am sure all honourable members will join me in that sentiment. Thank you.

Winnipeg Music Competition Festival

Hon. Mike Radcliffe (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Madam Speaker, do I have leave for a nonpolitical statement?

Madam Speaker: Does the honourable Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs have leave for a nonpolitical statement? [agreed]

* (1430)

Mr. Radcliffe: Madam Speaker, I would like to add to the remarks of my honourable colleague the member for St. Vital (Mrs. Render) who was talking about the Winnipeg Music Festival. I would like to congratulate the Kelvin Choir at Kelvin High School under the auspices of the conductor, Derek Morphy.

Kelvin High School, which is my old alma mater, entered Kelvin Chamber Choir, the Kelvin Girls' Choir, the Kelvin Boys' Choir and the Kelvin Choir into the music festival, and I am pleased to advise my colleagues in this Chamber and the people of Manitoba that the Kelvin Girls' Choir was the winner of the Beth Douglas Trophy for the most outstanding performance by a public school choir. Countless hours of hard work and skill go into this sort of a performance, and I congratulate the conductor and all the contestants. This is truly an event which makes Manitoba and Winnipeg a richer and more rewarding place to be.

My congratulations to Kelvin High School.

Antiracism Week

Mr. Gary Kowalski (The Maples): I would like leave to make a nonpolitical statement.

Madam Speaker: Does the honourable member for The Maples have leave? [agreed]

Mr. Kowalski: This being antiracism week in Canada, I had the opportunity to attend an event at Maples Collegiate, along with the Minister of Culture and Heritage (Mrs. Vodrey) today. It is their unity day. This is the second annual unity day to mark antiracism week. Their event today was called Making a Difference. I want to congratulate the students and the teachers who assisted them for the wonderful program that they are putting on attacking racism in the community.

They talked about how racism is not something that you are born with. It is something that you learn. They, as young students, are going to make sure that

knowledge is the best way to combat racism. His Honour the Lieutenant Governor was present at the opening ceremonies, along with the minister, myself, Bill Balan, regional executive director of the Department of Canadian Heritage, and others.

Again, the work being done by this unity group is becoming world renowned on the Internet, and I want to congratulate the work that they are doing. Thank you.

Committee Changes

Mr. Edward Helwer (Gimli): I move, seconded by the member for St. Vital (Mrs. Render), that the composition of the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections be amended as follows: the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) for the member for Kirkfield Park (Mr. Stefanson), the member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Tweed) for the member for Sturgeon Creek (Mr. McAlpine).

Motion agreed to.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET DEBATE (Fourth Day of Debate)

Madam Speaker: To resume adjourned debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) and the proposed motion of the honourable Leader of the official opposition (Mr Doer), in amendment thereto, and the proposed motion of the honourable member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) in further amendment thereto, standing in the name of the honourable member for Dauphin, who has 17 minutes remaining.

Mr. Stan Struthers (Dauphin): I am pleased to continue the words that I started yesterday on this government's budget. I want to repeat my appreciation to the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Enns), who yesterday invited so graciously in such a co-operative spirit those of us from this side to join with him in support of this budget.

Madam Speaker, one of the advantages of having your time split between one day to the next is that you

get the evening and the benefit of the next early morning to think about the debates that we have in this Legislature and to think about the request that was made by the Minister of Agriculture, which I must say I appreciated hearing from.

Yesterday, after hearing what the Minister of Agriculture had to say, I began to take a real good close look at the budget and the words that I was putting on the record. I had mentioned that the Speech from the Throne had been heartless, cynical and arrogant and that sometimes it is supposed to be this way, that the Speech from the Throne and the budget work together in tandem.

What I have to determine is whether this budget is just as heartless, cynical and arrogant as the Speech from the Throne was. I think after the words I put on the record yesterday, it is quite obvious that this is a heartless budget and it is a cynical budget, and I am assuming, as so many times we get the message from the members across the way, that this is indeed an arrogant government.

I want to continue my words in terms of the word "cynical." I have used the words "heartless," "cynical" and "arrogant." I want to key in on the "cynical" part. And I want to wonder aloud, for the benefit of members across the way, whether they very deep down agree with me or not, working still from the spirit of co-operation that was so eloquently put forward yesterday by the member for Lakeside.

Let us take a look at what this budget does in the area of helping people, because if this budget does help people, then I would not have any problem supporting it. The government is putting \$1 million forward to the Making Welfare Work program. That sounds pretty good on the surface of it, does it not? However, when you look at last year, they cut \$2.6 million. They are still \$1.6 million behind. Should I support that? Should I support a cut to a program by \$1.6 million? Should members across the way support such a cynical move?

Will the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Enns) support the cut of \$1.6 million to this program and try to portray to Manitobans that somehow they are there for working

people, that they are there to help out the everyday Manitoba family? It sounds cynical to me.

This government last year zapped some tax credits, \$8 million worth. Were they restored in this budget? I would suggest to this government that if they had restored \$8 million worth of tax credits that they got rid of last year that they might be able to make a case for support from this side. But did they do that in this budget? No, Madam Speaker, they did not restore those cuts, just as they did not restore the \$10-million cut from Income Maintenance that they levied on Manitobans last year.

This budget could have reinstated the \$5 million in income supplements for low-income families and for seniors. But did this budget do that? Did this government care to help out seniors and low-income families in our province? No, they did not. And now they want me to support this budget?

In the area of being cynical, this government has talked about the ChildrenFirst initiative in which they have put \$500,000, and they have given a 2 percent increase to Child Maintenance and External Agencies in this budget, and on the surface, again, it sounds like a pretty good idea. But when you look at the amount of money that this government has cut from some of those same programs, when you look at the amount of money that is transferred from other programs just to hit this new target that they have announced in the budget, again you can only apply the word "cynical" to moves like that on behalf of this government.

The initiatives that they announced fall way short of the \$4-million cut to daycare last year. These initiatives fall short of the \$10-million promise that they made to the Children and Youth Secretariat. These initiatives announced in this budget in the throne speech fall vastly short of the \$11 million that this government cut to the Children's Dental Program and to the foster-parent funding. How can the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Enns) and anyone else across the way ask me to support a budget as cynical as this one is?

Let us look a little closer at the aboriginal people and the programs that this government is talking about in this budget. In the budget this government announced \$1.3 million for Aboriginal Health and Wellness

Centres. That is over three years. What they do not tell you in this budget is they have taken this money from existing community health clinics. Now that is cynical. That is arrogant.

How can you support a budget that says on the one hand we are giving you money and take that money right out of the very programs that are helping aboriginal people in this province? Do you expect anyone to believe that that is the right thing to do? This government in the budget announced \$200,000 for New Partners for Career programs. What they do not tell you is that they financed this \$200,000 announcement by cutting the aboriginal development programs, simply taking the money from one program helping aboriginal people and putting into another and then packaging this cut as if it is something new.

Madam Speaker, the comments that I have put on the record so far lead me to conclude that I cannot support this budget. Despite the very eloquent, despite the very co-operative nature in which the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Enns) has portrayed it to me, I cannot see myself in all good consciousness on behalf of the people of Dauphin who are going to be negatively affected by this budget, I cannot see myself responding in a positive way to the request of the Minister of Agriculture.

While I am on the subject of how this is going to affect those people in Dauphin who I represent, let us take a good, honest look at what is happening in my riding because of this budget. Let us start with the schools in my area.

* (1440)

The Dauphin Ochre School Division is looking at a 2.8 percent decrease in funding because of the cuts of this government, and \$43.5 million over the last several years has been taken out of Manitoba public schools. Dauphin has not been spared these kinds of cuts. They are projecting that seven and a half positions are going to be lost in the Dauphin Ochre School Area. Last year, 14 positions were lost. What this government is asking the Dauphin Ochre School Area to do is turn to its own local tax base and raise taxes because this government does not want to have to do that. That is cynical.

Sticking to the area of education, the young folks around Dauphin who graduate from high school and then want to go on for a university or a college degree have a number of obstacles against them, and these obstacles have nothing to do with their level of intelligence. It has nothing to do with their work skills. It has nothing to do with the quality of education that they receive from the Dauphin community. It has to do with finances.

Everybody can understand that coming from a rural or from a northern community, you have other kinds of obstacles that are in your way, and they are financial in nature. Right off the top, anybody graduating from the Dauphin Regional School this year or from Grandview or from Gilbert Plains or from Rorketon are faced right off the bat when they come to university with finding a place to stay, an additional expense that many students in our province do not have to worry about because they can live at home, but from Dauphin we have that obstacle.

What is this government's response to that? Well, this government announces decreases in funding to universities. Then the universities turn and they look to get that money replaced through tuition from the students. That hits my constituents in Dauphin very hard. The young people who can contribute to society get hit hard by that. I cannot support that in this budget, and that is what this budget is doing. It is cutting universities.

The Dauphin Regional Health Centre and the Grandview Hospital and the several personal care homes in the Dauphin riding are also negatively affected by the cuts announced in this budget. Like I said yesterday, this government is trying to say on one hand that it is not cutting health care, that it is taking \$100 million out of the stabilization fund to finance health care, but what the government does not tell you are those special warrants that they had to fork out last year that affect the funding. In reality, when you look at the whole picture, it amounts to a \$66-million cut to health care.

I cannot support that. That means that the Dauphin regional hospital and now I presume in the move toward Parkland Regional Health Authority are going

to be working with a lot less money, and that is not going to produce good health care.

The last section that I wanted to touch upon just briefly is a concern to people in the Dauphin riding, has to do with park fees and fishing licences, and in particular fishing licences for seniors. I have heard a lot of comments around my riding and people contacting me who are very angry that after all these years of contributing to the Manitoba economy this government would have the nerve to charge a fishing licence to seniors on the promise that that fishing licence fee revenue would go towards fish habitat, fish enhancement, stocking lakes, and then find out this week when this budget comes out that that money is not going towards fishing. It is not going towards helping these seniors enjoy the outdoors and catching the odd fish. It is going back into the general revenues of this government to be spent on things like tax breaks to people who do not need a whole lot of our money.

The folks that I talked to in Dauphin do not see that as being fair, and that is exactly what this government is doing. [interjection] I have been asked by the members across to say what they say. Well, in Dauphin they are telling me to tell the government to stick to its word and not take that money out of fees and put it into general revenue, but take that money like it said it would and put it back into fish enhancement, fish habitat and restocking lakes. All they are asking you to do is do what you said you were going to do, not something else. And you are doing it with park fees too.

The entrance fees that you are charging people now, the fines that are being charged for people in parks, as a penalty for attending our provincial parks, the elimination of the seniors' pass that your government managed to do, where are those fees going now? Let us compare what your government said was going to happen with those fees to where those fees are going. Your government said that these park fees would go right back into building campgrounds, building picnic tables, building outhouses, building all kinds of facilities in these parks. [interjection] Whether the Minister of Justice (Mr. Toews) likes it or not, the money is not going back into where his government said it was going to go, it is going back into general

revenue so that a very few people can benefit from a tax break that this government is so cynically putting forward.

All they are asking you is to keep your word. They are saying, you took the money to put into parks, you should do it that way. This government is not keeping its word in the area of park fees or fishing licences, and the people that I talked to are not very happy about that. It is just another tax grab by this government.

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Enns) yesterday asked me to support the budget.

An Honourable Member: Indeed, I did.

Mr. Struthers: Indeed, he did. And he did it very politely and very co-operatively, and I was very impressed.

Now, is the Minister of Agriculture or anybody else willing to see the other side of that coin and not be governed by the whip that the boss over there has put on them, but instead take a good honest look at this budget, like I did, and then decide that indeed it is not worth supporting, and that he should stand with me and my colleagues on this side of the House to vote against this cynical, heartless, arrogant budget, instead of simply standing up and getting the whip applied to them and in a very partisan way, instead of being brave, instead of being courageous and standing up for what they believe in, simply going along with it because the Premier of this province said that they must?

My hope is that the Minister of Agriculture will take his own advice that he gave to the House yesterday and stand in this House next week and not support this heartless, cynical, arrogant budget. Give me a budget that has honest figures in it. Give me a budget that does not misrepresent the revenue. Give me a budget that does not cut health care and education, and then I will support it. Until that time, I am going to stand and vote against this budget. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Committee Change

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Inkster, with a committee change.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Speaker, I would move that the Public Utilities committee be amended as follows: the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Gaudry) for the member for The Maples (Mr. Kowalski), and would be seconded by the member for The Maples.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable member for Inkster, seconded by the honourable member for The Maples, that the Standing Committee on Public Utilities and Natural Resources for 10 a.m., Thursday morning, be amended as follows: the honourable member for St. Boniface for the honourable member for The Maples.

Agreed? Agreed and so ordered.

* * *

Hon. Rosemary Vodrey (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship): It is with great pleasure and pride that I rise today to address our government's very historic and significant budget. The fiscal year '97-98 represents a milestone for our government for many reasons. This is the tenth consecutive year that our government has tabled a budget with no increases in major taxes which affect the people of Manitoba.

My constituents in Fort Garry, and I am sure constituents in all honourable members' ridings, really appreciate this fact. Our government believes that Manitobans know exactly how they want to spend their hard-earned money. They do not need a heavy-handed government spending their money for them. I think that really that is the major difference of opinion with my colleagues on the other side of the House. Our side of the House holds that view very strongly. Members of the opposition appear to take a completely different view that they should be in charge of people's spending.

We all know that it is very easy to say something, to take a position, to make a promise, but it is not just in what we say, Madam Speaker, it is really in what we do. It is important to translate our beliefs and our statements into public policy. It is not good enough to dream; you have to wake up and take action as well. A good example of this is the federal Liberal government in Ottawa. They claimed to believe in a great number of things during the last federal election. They claimed, and they in fact promised a number of things. They

promised that they would scrap the GST if they were elected. Well, we know that promise has not been implemented; that in fact they never acted at all on their promise. They claim to support a strong health care system, but we see from the federal Liberal government hundreds of millions of dollars have been lost to the people of Manitoba as a direct result of federal government cutbacks.

* (1450)

Members of this House remember the federal Liberal Party for promising jobs to the unemployed, but we see a national unemployment rate that is virtually the same as when that federal administration took place. It is not difficult simply to promise things or to say and talk about what you would like to do. But my colleague from Portage la Prairie (Mr. Pallister) has said, the game is played on the field. The federal Liberal government has not lived up to what they said they believed in. They have not put their beliefs into actions.

I believe that is exactly what separates our government from the one currently presiding in Ottawa, from members across the way in opposition. In fact, despite harsh measures from the federal Liberal government—and I say this not only with reference to their substantial financial cutbacks, but also their failure to act on beliefs and very important issues to the people of Canada, their failure to improve important legislation such as the Young Offenders Act, their failure to deal with very important issues of the Criminal Code, despite the actions of the federal Liberal government—or, in fact, the inactions—despite this, our province has been able to stay the course. We have been able to deliver good government to the people of Manitoba.

Our government believes that the tax burden on families should not be increased, that citizens we represent can look beyond what we say. They can look to their previous tax returns. Our government has not increased any major tax in a full decade. We see here the realization of our beliefs and also action. We are putting our beliefs into actions, and it is easy for Manitobans to see that fact.

Madam Speaker, we have even gone further. As members opposite and the people of Manitoba know,

we have legislated balanced budgets, and we have made it impossible to increase major taxes in the future without first going to the people whom we represent by way of referendum. That, in fact, is a very strong action, one that I believe is being looked at across the country. This is a government which really believes what it says and does what it says it will do.

Madam Speaker, our government also believes that we cannot starve future generations of the opportunities that they deserve. We should not mortgage the future of our youth. I was with youth today at Maples Collegiate. I was just so impressed with everything that the youth have to offer and with what they want to strive towards. We cannot mortgage their futures and then have them pick up the tab for our deficits. Again, Manitobans can see our balanced budget legislation, and we are putting our beliefs into action.

Madam Speaker, this is the third consecutive year of a budgetary surplus. We are not running deficits like the tax-and-spend NDP governments of the 1980s. We are paying down the debt. We are reducing our debt-servicing payments, and we are freeing up more money for the services that we all need and the ones that we all cherish such as health, education and services to families and children.

In addition, Madam Speaker, our government believes that we should foster a climate for business to create jobs and for the economy to grow. The provincial economy of Manitoba has never been better than it is today. We have grown and we are poised for even more growth in many sectors of the economy.

Madam Speaker, my colleague the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) announced strategic tax reductions which will improve our position relative to other jurisdictions and attract even more jobs and private capital investment to Manitoba. The one I am particularly pleased about as Minister of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship is the tax credit for film producers right here in Manitoba. I say I am enormously pleased, and I do not think I am nearly as pleased as the film industry itself.

The film industry, I hope that my new critic and I will get the opportunity to actually talk about some of the great successes in this area of the economy, because the

film industry, Madam Speaker, has grown from a relatively small industry which amounts to approximately \$500,000 a decade ago to an industry of about \$35 million per year now. This industry is extremely optimistic about the future due to the fact that our government has improved the business climate in which they work. This is a boon to the film industry, to producers, to actors, to musicians, to writers. It is a benefit to the whole industry itself and a definite benefit to the people of Manitoba.

The opposition often claims that this side of the House is just too concerned with business and that we do not pay enough attention to the social side of government, but the film tax credit is a perfect example of how the two can successfully interrelate. I fully expect that more films will be produced here, and, as I have said, this translates into more films produced by Manitobans, more actors and technicians, and often these also touch on stories in Manitoba.

I take just one moment to say, too, that the cultural industries—as Minister responsible for the Status of Women, women, in fact, have a tremendous opportunity within the cultural industries, and, in fact, they were among the first industries that accepted women in the nontraditional professions, continued to employ them. The opportunities within this industry for all Manitobans are just tremendous.

I believe that there will be a multiplier effect associated with this tax credit, but I also believe that there will be extended and indirect benefits to our cultural industries, and they will benefit immensely from the initiative. Without improving the business environment for the industry, the full potential benefits to culture in this province would not have been realized.

Madam Speaker, I am extremely pleased to stand here today as the Minister of Culture, Heritage, and Citizenship and of Multiculturalism for our province. Our province is just wonderfully blessed to be as culturally diverse as it is. We have a rich history and many of us have participated in a number of events to recognize that. We have a strong commitment to the arts both at the community level and also what have been called the major agencies. I think that all

members of this Chamber would agree that we are just extremely fortunate to have such a rich heritage behind us. I believe that all Manitobans take pride in the diverse cultural life that we have in this province.

Our ballet, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, is world renowned, and dancers from all over the world aspire to dance here in Winnipeg. When I was growing up in Toronto, a friend of mine, a roommate, came to dance with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, and I remember at that time how admired it was in terms of the place where I lived then.

In recent years, the Manitoba Theatre Centre has attracted world-class talent. It has put on world-class productions and, when those productions are taken outside of Winnipeg, as one of the most recent ones is, you will notice at the bottom of the credits, it says that all of the stage work and the construction of the scenery was all done right here in Manitoba. So even though we are lucky enough to have some of the plays co-produced here appear in all other parts of Canada and some through the United States, Manitoba gets credit for the work that is done in the cultural industries.

The Winnipeg Art Gallery has one of the finest collections of Inuit art in the world and our Manitoba Museum and Planetarium continue to serve as important educational tools. Winnipeg Symphony is nationally known for its long-standing tradition of superior performance.

Madam Speaker, I believe that my department and this government in particular has been supporting the major agencies in partnership with a wealth of community volunteers as well, and we have created a climate where these industries can compete and succeed.

Impressive as all of this is, I believe that some of our support should be noted to the smaller, community-based cultural events and festivals that occur all across this province. I am so proud of the fact that our government has continued to support community arts events. All of our world-class performers got their start in their own homes and their own communities, and I am really pleased with the work that we do in our community-based projects.

There are many examples of where government has worked with local communities and nonprofit organizations to produce innovative festivals or performances. Through our Arts Development project support branch, our government supports audience and art skills development projects by festivals and arts councils and community groups. We also provide support to community arts councils such as the Flin Flon Arts Councils which provide significant benefits to their own communities.

* (1500)

Madam Speaker, our government provides support to cultural initiatives for innovation and for excellence such as the Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba, the Manitoba Children's Museum and Rainbow Stage. The Winnipeg Folk Festival is nationally known and it consistently draws brilliant performers and musicians as well as enormous crowds, not only from Manitoba but from all across Canada.

Again, when I was living in Toronto before we moved to Manitoba, a woman I worked with told me that in the year we moved here she was going to be here just a little ahead of us because she was coming to the Folk Festival. It is known all across this country.

I have also already touched on some of our support to Manitoba Film and Sound and some of the great successes in our film industry. I am pleased to say that our commitment to this industry continues to grow, and I believe we will see just great things from local producers right here in Manitoba.

I have touched on only a few of the impressive accomplishments that all of us can see in our own constituencies through our community arts, and all members have at one point or another benefited from the rich cultural life that we have right here in Manitoba. Make no mistake, Madam Speaker, we are truly privileged not only for our successes in the larger agencies, which I have spoken about, but for the very strong infrastructure development for community-based arts projects all across our province. I know that Manitobans recognize this. This government, again, has done what it said it would do through this budget and the budgets before it. We have provided support to our community.

Recreation and wellness promotion is also an important part of what my department strives to improve for individuals and community well-being through recreation, physical activity and wellness programming. I, along with my colleague the Minister for Sport (Mr. Stefanson), will be hosting a ministerial conference for ministers responsible for fitness, recreation and sport in Manitoba's Parkland Region later this year. In addition, the city of Brandon will be hosting the Canada Summer Games later this year as well as the Olympic team trials for curling.

Next year Winnipeg will be hosting the Brier, and then we all know that our province will be hosting the Pan Am Games in 1999. Over the next couple of years, Manitoba will be showcase to the world, and again, all members must feel a sense of pride about that. You do not always hear about it in this House from members opposite, but it is there in our communities. It is supported through our budgetary process.

On the citizenship side, I have responsibility for immigration issues within our province, and I would like to again say to my colleague the former Minister of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship that his signing of the Canada-Manitoba immigration agreement certainly has helped our province be much more influential with the federal government on making sure that people will come here to Manitoba and that we have the opportunity to market our province around the world.

We have been very successful with that, but I do have to say that I have concerns about the right-of-landing fee which has been imposed by the federal government. I know my colleague the former minister took the concerns of Manitoba to Ottawa. He met with the federal minister, and I believe that the federal government does need to rethink the way that they are applying this fee because, Madam Speaker, we have benefited from people coming to our province. Our province does have a very proud history of immigration, and our government would be concerned about any actions taken by the federal government which may impact on our ability to attract immigrants.

As I said, our government signed the Canada-Manitoba immigration agreement, and we have supported a promotion and recruitment campaign where

information about our province has been placed on the Internet and potential immigrants click onto Manitoba. This is a very innovative way of recruitment. It was applauded by the national media. I understand CNN carried a segment on this last April, and it has raised interest internationally in our province. All of this again supported through this government's budgetary decisions.

Last year, 1996, marked a strong year for immigration in Manitoba. Last year, I am told, approximately 4,290 new Canadians settled in Manitoba, and we are seeing our efforts paid off. In 1996, I am told that Manitoba showed an increase in all three categories of immigrants, including the independent class, and that is good news for us in Manitoba. Our government will continue to provide services to landed immigrants, and we will work with our community to ensure the federal government does not reduce support in the future.

I look forward to now going into some more detail in some areas, but I would also just like to acknowledge the good work done by the Settlement & Adult Language Training Branch, Credentials Recognition and other areas of the Citizenship Division as well as many of the programs offered in multiculturalism, and I look forward to speaking with my critics about those during the Estimates process.

So, Madam Speaker, I think you can see I am very, very pleased with the work that is being done and this government's continued commitment to the areas of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship.

Throughout our term in office, our government has also demonstrated its commitment to ensure that women enjoy equal rights and freedoms and opportunities within our society, and these were articulated in the statement of Government Policy on the Status of Women in Manitoba. That was introduced in International Women's Day in March of 1990. The principles outlined in the policy statement have served as the foundation and the guideline for policies and programs and activities of this government. Again, that is what we stand for, Madam Speaker, but we have in fact acted and we have provided service and assistance to women in our province.

Nowhere has our dedication been more dramatically demonstrated than in our initiatives to stem the tide of violence against women. Our province has adopted a zero tolerance policy towards violence against women, and we have worked consistently toward that goal. Many initiatives have been undertaken, and again I mention these because they involve our government's financial commitment to the people of Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, in 1990 we established the Family Violence Court which was in fact the first of its kind in Canada, and it handles cases related to partner abuse, child abuse, elder abuse, and the Family Violence Court provides specialized response to victims, acknowledging the unique issues and the dynamics of these offences, and the need to proceed through the court process as expeditiously as possible. The court is sensitive to the needs of victims, with judges and prosecutors and staff specially trained in family violence issues, and as we have covered at other times in this House, I believe it is well known that the court has been expanded to several centres outside of the city of Winnipeg.

There are also mandatory education programs for domestic violence offenders, and this is important to women that the offender who had left them a victim has in fact some opportunity to become educated and to change both behaviour and attitude about their offence. Offenders on probation who fail to attend or to participate in the education program are considered to have breached probation, and new charges will be laid for failing to comply with the court order. Culturally sensitive services are provided and probation services will help any person of any language, including sign language and aboriginal languages, so that they can obtain core information on family violence education programs in their own language.

Of particular importance to women who are victims of domestic violence and in need of protection from an abusive partner has been the introduction of easier and quicker access to restraining orders, nonmolestation orders and peace bonds. Manitoba has taken the lead in urging the federal Liberal Minister of Justice to toughen legislation dealing with stalking or criminal harassment. We did gain some ground there. My colleague, now the Minister of Environment (Mr.

McCrae), when he was Justice minister, had stalking recognized in the Criminal Code and we continue to look for recognition of victims.

* (1510)

Here in Manitoba, Madam Speaker, we made changes to the computerized names listings in the Land Titles Office to further protect victims of violence. This protected name status, as it is called, was raised at our ministers' Status of Women meeting last year. Manitoba was the first to do this and there is not a charge. This is simply done by our government in living up to its promises to move to make our province a safer place for women.

There are some other initiatives, such as the central registry for domestic violence that has been established, and it is a sensible and available to law enforcement agencies and in the area of advocacy, the women's advocacy program. This program provides support and consultation to more women who are going through the court process involved in family violence situations. It has been expanded by this government to Brandon, Thompson and The Pas, as well as staffing levels in the Winnipeg office, I understand, have been increased to help manage the caseload. This has been done by our government over the past few years, a continued commitment through the budgetary process.

I just have a few statistics that from April 1, 1996, to February 28, 1997, women's advocacy processed 2,712 intakes. Women from all walks of life attended women's advocacy and services, and the services are culturally sensitive—and I mention this as a Minister of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship. The services are culturally sensitive through English-, Cree- and Spanish-speaking staff, and translation services are also readily available for other languages.

Madam Speaker, to provide a safe haven and support system during a domestic violence crisis, Manitoba has developed the best system of shelters and support services in Canada for women and their children. In fact, over the past 10 years, the Department of Family Services has increased the funding in this area, I am told, by approximately 150 percent, an action by this government on behalf of women and children for their safety.

I understand that during the 1995-96 fiscal year shelter was provided to approximately 2,500 women and their children. Manitoba Family Services also covers the cost of hotel stays for women and their children when shelters are full to ensure that women have access to shelter services when they are required.

Madam Speaker, another initiative which I would like to speak about, again supported by this government, is that Manitoba also funds services through agencies such as the Family Centre of Winnipeg, Evolve, Ma Mawi centre, the Northern Women's Resource service, Pluri-elles, Immigrant Women's Association of Manitoba, Opasquiak Women's Centre, and the Native Women's Transition Centre.

Madam Speaker, another initiative in terms of women's safety is one called Keeping Safe at Work, and this is to help employers and employees identify ways of making their workplaces safer, making crimes more difficult to commit. This is a partnership project with the Women's Directorate, CIBC, our Police Services, and we launched it in 1996. It is ongoing now, and it has been presented across the province. Workshops have been given by members of the directorate, and now people who work at CIBC will go into communities and provide the training, assist them, using the booklet that was produced in this project to do safety audits of the places where they worked.

So there are Train the Trainer workshops. There have been public information sessions, and they have been conducted for participants from Flin Flon, Thompson, The Pas, Portage la Prairie, Brandon, Dauphin, Swan River and the city of Winnipeg. There have also been, I am told, approximately 400 hits, as they are called, on the Internet through Workplace Safety and Health's home page. About 43,000 pamphlets have been distributed across the province. Twenty-five workshops have been conducted throughout the province, and a number of TV and radio information sessions have been aired.

Madam Speaker, we intend to maintain our commitment to the goal of eliminating violence against women and making Manitobans feel safe on our streets and in our communities and in our homes. This government has not just been talking about it; we have been doing it.

I would like to speak a little about the economic climate now. We have created an economic climate, so that all Manitobans, including women, have the opportunity to gain economic independence and have stability and security in their lives. In the first two months of this year, Madam Speaker, there were 20,800 more jobs than there were a year ago, and while most women in the labour force work full time, approximately 67 percent in 1996, some women do make the choice to work part time, so that they can have time at home to take care of their family responsibilities.

Madam Speaker, just to give a perspective, given that part-time work accounts for about 21 percent, I am told, of total employment in this province, it means that at the end of the fourth quarter of '96, about 3.7 of all employed people, both men and women, working part time, only that small group was doing so because they were not able to find for them what they considered to be a suitable full-time job. So we are committed to promoting women's economic security. We strongly believe that the best security in the world is to have the means to be able to be economically self-sufficient, and to that end we have undertaken a number of initiatives.

Women entrepreneurs, Madam Speaker, are playing an increasingly vital role in Manitoba's economy and are starting their own businesses. They now start more small businesses than men do, and more women than men are successfully still in their businesses after five years of operation. Moreover, small- and medium-sized businesses continue to create more jobs than any other sector.

Both the departments of Industry, Trade and Tourism of our government and Rural Development offer programs specifically for women, designed to assist them and help them start their own businesses. The Business Start Program, through I, T and T, has been extended another two years. Targeted towards women and rural entrepreneurs, it is a loan guarantee program which allows entrepreneurs to borrow up to \$10,000 to match their equity contribution. This has provided about 207 loans to women to date.

The Rural Entrepreneurial Assistance program again has been of great assistance to women. To date 33 loans have been granted to women, a total of over \$1

million, of which 80 percent is guaranteed by the province through credit unions or through CIBC. Aside from loan guarantees, both I, T and T and Rural Development offer services such as start-up seminars, training in the development of business plans, how to conduct a market analysis, as well as a mentorship program.

Madam Speaker, there are a number of women who have been very successful in this area. I will just mention a few, since some of them have been award winners, very well recognized across the province. Linda Pizzev is one who has transformed a significant portion of the family's 1,200 acre farm in Angusville into a value-added bread and pancake mix industry; Shelly Drohomereski of Teulon has started a specialty greenhouse operation that produces herbs for hotels, restaurants and speciality stores on a year-around basis; and one other, Evelyn Smith Upholstery from Fisher Branch, specializes in upholstery work for industrial applications. She now specializes in the car and truck industry and now has distributors which carry her products in Ontario and Alberta.

Successful women, able to achieve economic independence, able to look at some of the initiatives this government has put forward as other women in Manitoba to become economically independent.

We are also targeting our spending in the areas where it is needed most. We provide significant benefits to lower-income Manitobans who are supporting children through the Manitoba tax reduction. This benefit provides up to \$250 of tax relief per child, and it is one of the few tax benefits in Canada that is related to children. This figure is amazing: It puts approximately, I am told, \$30 million each year into the hands of parents to provide for their children.

Madam Speaker, we are also very supportive of the National Child Benefit announced by the federal government. Manitoba will redirect any savings in provincial social assistance towards services and benefits for children.

We know that proper nutrition is vital to learning, so we have introduced Students at Risk funding to assist families as well.

* (1520)

In speaking of children and families, our government believes that the best form of social security for an individual or a family is a job. We are committed to breaking the cycle of dependence on social assistance. Job training, specific skills training are available for clients on social assistance. This enables women and all of our citizens to have the opportunity to participate in our growing economy. We have, therefore, refocused training and social assistance dollars, Madam Speaker, on assisting social assistance recipients to move to employment. Manitoba Education and Training and Family Services are working to help social assistance recipients attain the training and the job placement supports that they need to be able to support themselves and to take the first step on the road to self-sufficiency.

We know Manitobans want to work. They would like a hand up and not a handout. Since the introduction of welfare reform, there has been a reduction of almost 676 in the caseload of single parents, of which 95 percent of those, Madam Speaker, are women. In addition, I am told 22.7 percent, or approximately 3,900 social assistance recipients, are reporting incomes since the inception of Making Welfare Work. This is a government, again, who has moved towards programs that have a direct positive effect on the people of Manitoba.

I will just outline just a couple of the welfare work initiatives, such as Community Services, Rural Jobs Project, the Manitoba Conservation Corps, Opportunities for Employment, Taking Charge!, and Youth NOW. Each of these programs, Madam Speaker, will help more people achieve self-reliance and also independence, and we build on the success of these programs through the investment of approximately \$1.5 million more than budgeted in '96-97 to the allocation of Making Welfare Work.

Madam Speaker, I know in terms of working, particularly for women, the issue of child care is one which needs to be looked at, and I can say single parents, over 95 percent of whom are women, and who want to work to support their families, do need access to reliable and quality child care services; and, together with child care organizations and providers, the

Department of Family Services will be developing recommendations for a more flexible and accessible child care system for Manitoba. I know that our colleague the member for St. Norbert (Mr. Laurendeau) has been working very hard in that area with the Minister of Family Services (Mrs. Mitchelson).

Madam Speaker, I know I do not have much time left. I do have a few other programs which I want to speak about in terms of their benefit to women, programs which I believe our government has made a significant impact in a very positive way. First is Legal Aid. Manitoba is the only province in which the legal aid system has been revamped to provide 50 percent of its funding to civil cases and 50 percent to criminal cases. In the past, because the vast majority of defendants in criminal legal cases are male and because provinces have dedicated a larger share of public funding for legal services to criminal cases, women have not shared equally in the legal aid funding, and Manitoba has recognized this as an inequity and now provides equal funding for civil legal aid to assist women who primarily require legal services respecting issues such as divorce and custody applications.

Madam Speaker, in the area of Maintenance Enforcement, our government has taken major steps to ensure that court-ordered maintenance payments are enforced. Last year the amendments to The Family Maintenance Act came into effect, and there has been a marked increase in the amount of money collected through the program. There is as well increased authority to demand information from family members, employers and associates, and it means that the program can now gain what is vital financial information. As a result, I am told that during 1996 collections increased to \$3.7 million, the numbers of summonses issued to defaulting payers to appear in court have decreased, and the garnishment of wages was up approximately 240 percent over the same period in previous years. That is the benefit seen when we can get information about the payer so that we can make that person pay.

Madam Speaker, I understand too that there have been approximately a large number of driver motor-vehicle licence suspension notices, about 407, with 59 having been suspended, and 587 refused-to-renew notices have been issued. Also, many of those notices

which have been issued have resulted in cash payments of arrears.

Madam Speaker, in the area of Education and Training, as I said, self-sufficiency is really a high priority for our government, and there have been a number of initiatives which have been put forward by the Minister of Education (Mrs. McIntosh) in Distance Education. Distance Education is extremely important for women because they find it very difficult to leave their families and their communities in order to obtain training, and a number of initiatives that have been put forward to women living in communities, Manitobans living in communities all across this province, have been a benefit to women so that they do not have to leave their families.

Madam Speaker, I would just like to mention very quickly two other things. I am very proud of the Training for Tomorrow Scholarship, which is administered by the Women's Directorate, a commitment of this government, \$50,000 per year, developed and administered by the Women's Directorate. The program offers fifty \$1,000 scholarships to women entering two-year diploma courses, and, in fact, there have been 141 scholarships awarded to women entering diverse fields such as electrical engineering technology, chemical and biosciences technology, computer analyst program, just to name a few. Women have the opportunity now, by this government, a project introduced by this government.

I just want to mention, as well, for women in the area of breast screening that a province-wide breast cancer screening program first introduced in 1995 is aimed at the early detection of breast cancer primarily in women aged 50 and older, and I understand in the 18-month period, July 1995 to January 1997, approximately 17,809 Manitoba women aged 50 to 69 years accessed the screening program. Madam Speaker, this is a program that probably will save a life and will, in fact, provide for women early detection and the opportunity to fight a disease, to then become healthy and to continue for years living with their families.

For all of these reasons I am very supportive of our government's budget. I see it as a continuing effort to not only make a promise, but to follow through on our

promises with action, and actions that I am very pleased also affect the department that I am so privileged now to be the minister of, Culture, Heritage and Citizenship and Status of Women.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Mr. George Hickes (Point Douglas): I am pleased to be able to stand here and put a few comments on record, but before I do I would just like to share something that happened this weekend. My mother tried to get a hold of me on Sunday, and she was not able to because I was out, and by the time I got back it was fairly late, so when I did get hold of her she said that she was moved to a hotel and that there had been flooding. She is a resident of 185 Smith Street. I said, well, do you want me to pick you up and bring you home? Oh, no, no, she said, everything is going really good here, and she said everything is wonderful.

When they moved her back Monday, we had a nice long conversation and she was raving on and on and on about how well she was treated, all the residents of 185 Smith Street, how they were treated and everything, and I just wanted to take this moment on her behalf and on behalf of all the residents to thank the minister and the staff of Manitoba Housing for the wonderful care that they gave those residents, because they had nothing but positive things to say. The staff of Manitoba Housing went right out of their way to do what they could for the residents, and some of them were very elderly, and some of them had to be carried downstairs, but it was all done with a great amount of dignity, and they all appreciated it very much.

I just wanted to put that on the record because where credit is due, I think people should get the credit, and I think the staff deserve a great amount of thanks from all of us.

* (1530)

I would like to just start my few words on my critic area, dealing with immigration and multiculturalism. I am encouraged by the new minister's words and the action I saw the other week when she was attending the same function that I was at the Indian and Metis Friendship Centre for the Winnipeg Boys and Girls Club. She was well received and she had some very nice things to say,

and I hope and I think that she will carry that on and do the best job she can for the people who will need her assistance and help.

I know that a lot of people that I have spoken to in different committees that I have been part of and different public meetings I have attended, the thing that keeps coming over and over and over very loud and clear is the whole \$975 fee that is imposed on people who wish to come to Canada. Also on top of that is the \$500 nonrefundable processing fee per adult, and that is hurting a lot of people. The whole process of immigration to our great country is now being geared towards business class and people like that, where it is taken away from family memberships.

Family reunification, I believe—and I am sure the minister would agree with me to a certain extent—is very important because when we have family members just living in another community or in another town or, for my case, in the Northwest Territories, you miss them, and it is hard to keep that continuity within families unless you write letters and make a lot of phone calls. It is very important for families to be together, but when we are concentrating more on business class, and we are bringing a lot of the people in in that category—family reunification was cut 25 percent to offset the increase in the business class—I think we had better do some serious thinking here. It is okay for this year and maybe next year and the year after for the business class people to come here and start businesses and, hopefully, stimulate our economy, but there is a time when the business class is going to say, hey, what about my extended family or my family that is in another country?

The grandparents and uncles and aunts or brothers and sisters, if we are slowly decreasing the possibility of bringing family members over, I think we had better start doing some serious thinking, because it might work for now, but later on it will have a negative impact on the business class, the people that we want to attract to our country. Eventually, they might say, well, I had better not go to Canada because I know I cannot bring my family over. I had better go to some other country where I know my family will be able to come with me later on. That, I hope, the minister will do some thinking on and, hopefully, talk to the federal

Minister of Immigration and ask her to start thinking along those terms.

Extended families that I have spoken to that want to try and bring their grandparents over, some of them, their parents—they were saying, well, how can I come up with \$1,475 when it is so much to save and to not know for sure if I am going to get my family here or not? I totally agree with them, because that is, I think, something that the federal government will realize that it was a big mistake, hopefully, and will correct it, but right now it is still there. We know that we have to work hard on immigration because we know that immigration is the engine for economic growth.

When you have new immigrants come to Canada, right away you have a customer potentially to purchase a house, buy furniture and what else have you, even automobiles, and on and on and on. So the immigration that we get from other countries only helps to expand our growth in our own province. But, when we say that, when we say that immigration is the engine that drives our economic growth, and, yes, we agree we want—or I do anyway—increased immigration to Manitoba because it will stimulate the economy and it will continue to give us the diverse province that we have, then we look around—and I hope the minister will address this very serious problem—at new Canadians or new immigrants who come to Manitoba, and you see individuals who were highly skilled in their own countries who are driving taxis or working in restaurants or working at very minimum, low-paying jobs, but they are not maximizing their chosen career path that they had in their own country.

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

Where we keep talking about accreditation programs in Manitoba, I would encourage the minister to look at it in sort of a training/work experience model where, if an immigrant that comes to Manitoba has their country's accreditation or degree or diploma that we look at it and we do a task analysis and a skills analysis of that degree to meet our Manitoba or Canadian standards. That way when an individual walks in with their diploma or accreditation to whatever the accreditation office is there, it will be evaluated and then you look at engineering or lawyers or doctors or

electricians or plumbers or what have you, and then we say, okay, you have these skills, but you are missing these skills. What is wrong with setting up a specialized training program for the individuals to enroll and take the portion that they need to get their Manitoba or Canadian accreditation to work at their chosen careers at a salary, I am sure, that would benefit their families?'

You group individuals like that. Say, for instance, if you have 12 or 14 from countries that are wanting to be engineers or wanting to be lawyers or doctors or plumbers or electricians, and if that course is, say, regularly four years. well. why should an individual, if they have part of those skills and knowledge in those areas, go through the whole four years? Where if we did a specialized program, say, for a year or two years or whatever the need be, and specialized it to meet their needs, then upon graduation they will gladly go work in their chosen careers and I am sure they will be very, very happy citizens. A lot of individuals you talk to, they are very happy to be in Manitoba and Canada, but they are really not very satisfied with the employment opportunities that are out there.

On the next step, when we talk about that, we talk about skill shortages in rural and northern communities. I hear that many times, where you hear there is a shortage. In fact in northern Manitoba there was such a shortage of underground engineers that they had to recruit, I think it was from England at that time. Then there was a shortage of millwrights, when they were developing some of the dams, they had to recruit in England again. So the skill-shortage areas are out there in the rural and northern communities, but what I would encourage the government and the minister to seriously look at and consider is if you are going to develop the training and the job experience initiatives for people from another country, look at the funding process. If an individual is going into a training program for a year or two years, adequately fund those individuals at the start of the training program, to ensure that their housing needs, their family needs, their food, rent, whatever, is there. That way those individuals can concentrate on the first task at hand as their studies to ensure that they graduate.

* (1540)

When you fund that per individual, then everyone is going to say, well, it is going to cost the government a lot of money. There are two things. A lot of the people that go into these training programs are trying to juggle two or three part-time jobs, look after the family, plus study on top of that. Well, that is pretty, pretty difficult and awful discouraging for a lot of individuals, but if you funded the training program for these individuals and upon graduation if the individuals were asked to repay 100 percent or part of, whatever the government comes up with, at the degree of income that individual would be earning, it would be much easier than trying to make ends meet when you are trying to hold down two or three jobs and study; or if a person chooses to go to a skill-shortage area, then all of or a portion of the cost for training, if the individual stayed in a northern community or a rural community or whatever skill-shortage area for a certain period of time, would be forgivable. I think that would be of benefit to Manitobans, it would be of benefit to people that come to Manitoba to make their new home and it would help us to encourage more immigration to our great province.

I just wanted to leave those few things with the minister, and it is up to her. I hope she will do some thinking on it, and I know it cannot happen overnight—I am realistic—but it would be encouraging to do some thinking on that.

The other thing is I was very surprised when I was reading this paper. I guess what is happening with the whole process of immigration is that there is such an emphasis now on individuals' ability to speak English or French before they come to Canada, and what I am scared of is it is going to discourage a lot of people or make it difficult for people from Asian countries and the Philippines, different countries, to make Manitoba their home. When I looked at the cutbacks to English as a Second Language, the cutting of the funding, and I was reading the EthnoCultural Network from last year, they were speaking to this one woman, and she said, well, yes, most of us need language training, but in the future I do not know if we can afford it. She said, I just received a letter from Red River Community College's Language Training program. Next fall, each student will have to pay \$500 for a five-month English course that until last year was for free.

That is scary. I do not know if it is provincial or federal. I am not sure where that funding was, but that scares me because you know and I know that for a lot of the people who come here without that English as a Second Language training, it will be difficult to get real meaningful employment opportunities. They will be stuck at low-end-scale paying jobs, and I do not believe that people came here to just fulfill that. I think people have come here, like we all do, with a dream, and I hope we will do whatever we can to encourage people to fulfill their dreams and their career aspirations and their goals.

The other thing that I hope will be addressed at some time in the future is the whole funding that was taken away for the Manitoba Intercultural Council. I am a big supporter of that because I saw how it worked, and I valued the input and the commitment that the individuals had. All the organizations that were part of that were from almost every visible ethnic group that there was in Manitoba. I know that there were representatives from the black community, the Chinese community, the Philippine community, on and on and on, and they pooled their skills and their minds together to try and do what they felt was best for the so-called multicultural ethnic community.

The grant process was sort of arm's length from the government, and I am sure that they got together and they said there is X numbers, who needs it the most? And, you know, it is at the whim of the government now for funding. That was such an important program, I think, for us all and especially for the ethnic community that I am sure it was benefiting.

I hope the government will look at reinstating the funding for that. I am not too optimistic about it because maybe what they have in place is working, but I know that from my experience and from what I hear out in the community, MIC was an excellent program, and it worked very well. I support it 100 percent because that is what I know best from the information that I have received and the experience I have had in the past.

So I just wanted to move on to communities, and I will use the community I represent, Point Douglas, as a good example. There are a lot of individuals in Point Douglas who could really benefit from training that

would lead into employment opportunities. I know the government has put some programs in place, and we applaud the government for that, but there are also individuals, especially single mothers, single parents, single mothers, who have a difficult time trying to get into training programs, because of the numbers for one thing, and the other thing is opportunities for transportation away from the home and all.

But would it not be nice if we looked at a community, even as a pilot project, a community as a whole, and we looked at the schools in those communities, and those schools, the David Livingston, William Whyte, Norquay School, a lot of those schools are virtually empty in the evening, virtually empty every evening. Now, if we had those schools open to the community, where if we had training programs for computer training for single parents or aboriginals or whoever needs it and if you had the computer training program or other training programs and they were taught, and we say there is not a lot of money, well, let us look at some of the students we have in our education programs. A lot of the students need work experience. So if we had those almost-to-graduate students running the classes and if we had the gyms opened up with phys ed students or high school students that are looking at achieving credits, if they ran the recreation programs for the community children and if we had another space in the area to look after, say, like a daycare setting, now there should be nothing stopping an individual from being able to access training to upgrade or develop further their skills to be marketable or to be much more marketable than they are now.

I think those are the kind of ideas that we have to start looking at, because I know, I know, that there is a scarcity of dollars. We all know that, and we all talk about priorities of different parties, priorities of different governments, but I think we have to start looking at innovative, new ideas, and I am just throwing that out. Hopefully, people will discuss it and see if anything could be done about that.

(Madam Speaker in the Chair)

I know that in some community meetings that I have had, that was asked many times, and we have discussed it and we have talked about it, and that was raised many times: Well, why do we not use our schools? Look, we

are heating the darn things all night, you know, the lights, sure, the lights are off, but not all the lights are off. They are sitting there empty and we could use them as a community. I do not see anything wrong with that because, as you know, a lot of small communities, that is what they have to do, because there are not too many individual gymnasiums in some communities. The only gymnasium is in the school, and that is utilized more and more for children.

I wanted to move on into health care, because that has been a topic or subject that has been raised many times. We all know that without our health it would be very difficult for us to do a lot of things that we do today. We look at governments now, the so-called, well, I do not know if you call them cutbacks or tax increases or what have you, but they are a hardship on individuals. We just look at the Pharmacare, the eye examinations, checkups and on and on and on.

*(1550)

It does make it really difficult for individuals, but what really surprised me, and I do not think the government has thought this out too well, because now communities that want facilities in the health care area have to raise 20 percent of the cost. When I heard that I got to thinking right away, well, it might be fine and dandy for Winnipeg, where we have a big community, but look at some of the communities. You look at taking 20 percent out of communities that are smaller communities to say that is their share that has to go into building a health care facility.

Now, 20 percent of fundraising dollars has to come from disposable incomes that individuals have after they pay their rent, their mortgage, their food, clothe their children, pay their car payments, buy gas. That is extra dollars. Where do you think those extra dollars are going right now? I would venture a lot of it is not going straight to the banks or RRSPs or whatever. I bet you a lot of it is going to hockey teams, baseball teams, Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, Cubs and Brownies. So what happens to those that are dependent on those dollars now, those recreation funds or extra activities that the students and children have to raise funds for? Well, you know yourself there is many a time we have youth or children come to our doors with a box of chocolates or brownies or Girl Guide cookies, whatever. Why are

they doing that? That not only happens in Winnipeg, it happens right across the province, even the community of Churchill where I was raised. That is a small community. It is not a rich community. Most people are seasonal workers. Now, if they had to pay 20 percent, I can tell you minor hockey will be gone, baseball will be gone and the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides would suffer tremendously. So I do not know.

Also what it does, it might help communities that are so-called stable employment areas. I guess Winkler and Morden would be a good example, because a lot of people farm or a lot of the people are gainfully employed in those communities. Then you look at other communities, you know, like Cross Lake is a good example, and I know some people would say, well, Cross Lake is a First Nations community, it is a reserve, and governments should have no responsibility there, but across the road is the Metis community, and that is a Northern Affairs community. If they had to fundraise 20 percent of whatever health care facility that had to be built there, that would be very, very difficult because there is not a lot of loose change shaking around in people's pockets up there, because the cost of food is tremendously high, the price of gasoline is unreal and there is not a lot of extra dollars for people to fundraise to kick in 20 percent. So I think there has to be a little more thought put into it, you know, because if that is a requirement and it is carved in stone, I do not know, a lot of people are going to be hurt and a lot of people will suffer.

We talk about personal care homes. Like, I was in Island Lake quite a few times. That is a population of about 7,000 total people, and I went into visit some of the individuals. They said, George, come and see this, and I went to their homes. There are individuals and their families trying to look after their parents, and they were probably in their 40s to 50s and their father at that time would probably have been in his 70s. He had that colostomy bag that they had there and the family had to do all the changing and looking after and stuff like this. They said, you know we are not skilled at this, but we want our family here, because when they go to Winnipeg we never see them until they come home to be buried. That is exactly what they told me, and you think about it. Like, you hear in the news the highest number of people with diabetes is in the aboriginal community; that is no secret. It has been out there for

many years, and many people are flown in from remote communities to bigger centres because of the dialysis treatment.

The personal care homes, there is none there, so the elders in the community, people's grandparents, people's parents, are flown out of the community, put into hospitals or personal care homes here. It is not like southern communities where you can, even if your loved was in another community, you can hop in your car and drive there and visit them. It is not like that. Most places you cannot get in or out of unless you fly in and out, and the transportation costs are really, really high. So I hope that we will look at trying to expand services and personal care homes into northern and remote communities and not use the excuse that just because they are on a reserve—because everybody living here are all Manitobans.

There are always agreements, there are always agreements made between federal, provincial and stuff like that, so we should just drop that argument and look at how we can work for the betterment of all citizens with the federal government, provincial, the aboriginal leaders and with the people in those communities. So I hope the government will look at that, take that into consideration.

I want to use one example about emergency wards, and I hope the minister will look at this. I was reading—well, I first saw it on TV where there was an accident on the corner of Marion and Tache. This vehicle went right into this restaurant and there was a truck and then the car, right into the restaurant. I saw it on TV first that night and I guess there—well, I do not want to make light of it because I think it is very serious, but Tache and Marion, I am sure most of us know or are familiar where that is. [interjection] Okay, you drive through it every night.

Now, I was reading in the paper the next day, there was a couple, one was in his 70s and the other one was 68, in the accident, and there was another, I think it was a single driver of the truck, and if you know that location, you look down the street, St. Boniface Hospital is about a block and a half away, and these individuals had to be transported by ambulance—one was to Misericordia and the other was to Seven Oaks.

Seven Oaks is right across the city, and here is the hospital a block and a half away.

Now, when you are in that kind of an accident at that advanced age, anything can happen. You can go into shock, you could have a heart attack, anything can happen. Well, would it not make sense where you just take the individuals a block and a half? I could not understand that. And I thought, well, what is the problem? So I asked some people and they said, well, it is because it is a problem with a shortage in the emergency wards. I think that has got to be addressed because something serious could happen. I hope it never does.

I want to go on to our seniors. We all know, and we talk about it many, many times, seniors are—we must respect our seniors and our elders. They are the ones that built the country, they are the ones that made Manitoba what it is today, and that is true. They have worked hard, and they have made a lot of sacrifices for our benefit today. But what is happening? I totally disagree when I see government taxing our seniors. I totally disagree with that. I think seniors have paid their dues, have done more probably than some of us will ever achieve because they had it a lot tougher, and now we are seeing hits on our seniors.

An Honourable Member: Like charging them for a fishing licence.

Mr. Hickes: Well, that is what I was going to bring up. There are individuals that love to go fishing. Lots of seniors I know pass their time fishing. Now they have to pay for a fishing licence. It is not going to raise millions and millions of dollars. I am sure there are other better ways to raise the amount of dollars that that fishing licence is going to bring in. The other thing is park fees for seniors. Before, during the week, seniors could get in free. And you know, that was sometimes the only holidays some seniors ever got, and they really, really enjoyed that.

* (1600)

They would take their little campers out or take—I have seen some of them, because I camp quite a bit, and some of them were in their tents and stuff, but that was their only real holiday. You know what the sad

part of this is? When you bring in the fees for seniors, who are you really targeting? You are really targeting—go to the parks and see who is there. You are really targeting the poorer seniors, the seniors that are poorer than other seniors, because a lot of the individuals that have money have cabins. They already have cabins. They go to their cabins for the weekends and stuff like that, and that is fine, there is nothing wrong with that, but why should we penalize our seniors when they have given so much for us? There are different ways of raising funds, and I think we have to seriously address that.

We have all agreed to sort of cut our time down so we can get more speakers, so I am going to just cover more—I just wanted to touch on one more area, and that is the aboriginal issues that are out there today.

The government brought in a budget of \$1.3 million over three years for the Aboriginal Wellness Centre which comes to around \$433,000 per year, and that is fine. That is a good move. It is a good move and I know that it is much needed. Then we have the Partners for Careers program. I think it is about \$200,000 for that, to help graduates from universities or colleges to get into the workforce.

When I heard the speech about we were going into a new partnership with the aboriginal people, I thought to myself, what is happening here? What is causing that shift? I thought I was going to see a lot more than just those two initiatives that I saw, because over the years there have been so many cutbacks that it has really, really hurt the aboriginal community and the aboriginal people.

I will name some of them and try and balance it off to the money that has been allocated by this government in this budget. The Northern Development Agreement was not renewed. The Northern Youth Corps Job Program, that was a fund for northern youth, and what they used to do is a lot of them used to be involved in recreation for the community. They would look after the ball fields, or they would build boards for the outdoor arenas, or they would organize the baseball or the camping. They worked with the community. The community centre or the community hall needed painting. Those kids used to go there and paint it all

summer, so it helped a lot to offset a lot of the costs in those northern communities.

And then we have the Access program, BUNTEP and the Northern Bachelor of Nursing was cut; New Careers, totally eliminated; the Indian and Metis Friendship Centre, \$1.2 million was cut. If you look at the programs that the Friendship Centre was delivering, a lot of those programs are exactly what the aboriginal youth are telling us today when I was at a meeting at the Friendship Centre. They are saying we need counsellors in the community; we need recreation activities; we need to be directed into training and on and on. They even had elders programs where they would take the elders out to culturally appropriate aboriginal culture events and arrange for them to have cultural food, because the elders, a lot of them were in personal care homes or in homes where they were removed from their families, to try and help them along, and that was eliminated.

Then in '93, the grants to MKO, \$78,500 was cut, and the grant to the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs of \$325,000. Payments for foster parents who care for relatives was cut in half from \$20 to \$10. You know and I am sure many of you have heard that a lot of the northern communities, if a person like a foster kid or a kid is having problems, they go to extended families. It is an added cost for people to raise and help them, so it was seen in a lot of the First Nations communities as a direct hit on our parents and on elders. Then the funding to the Northern Fishermen's Freight Assistance Program and the AJI, where is that today? I have not heard too much about it.

The other thing that was very interesting, and I know we have a new Minister of Native Affairs (Mr. Newman), and I hope he will at least announce an urban aboriginal strategy, because I would be disappointed, because I have been hearing that every year, every year, every year since I have been here.

I would really like to see one, because I was here when—I was the critic at that time, and I asked the minister who is now the Minister of Trade and Tourism (Mr. Downey), and he said, yes, we are doing it, and I saw that they hired an individual and they did do a study. I think they spent about a quarter of a million

dollars on this urban aboriginal strategy, but what has happened? Where is the implementation of, I am sure, some great recommendations?

We have all these different initiatives, and I know that we have a movement going right now in the aboriginal communities. Aboriginal peoples want more involvement and they want more action. I am afraid that one day, because all levels of government, if they do not act, we are going to get sort of an uprising, and I hate to see what would happen there. I think it has to be all totally, totally, totally worked in partnership. The federal government has to be involved; the provincial government has to be involved; the aboriginal leadership has to be involved and that leadership has to communicate back to the aboriginal communities. The people have to be involved. I encourage someone, any one of those groups to set a meeting and to form a working group so that way we can have positive things develop for communities.

I only have a few minutes, so I would like to just offer—we always talk about our being negative, negative, negative. Sometimes we have positive initiatives that we would like to bring forward at times and I hope I have raised some of those concerns, and some of the initiatives I hope will be addressed by this government. I am more than willing to give my assistance, if I can, to the minister or to whomever is involved or can make the changes.

Some of the alternatives that my Leader has brought forward are the Healthy Child plan, The Health Reform Accountability Act, personal care home bill of rights, committee on economic co-operation and a resolution requiring the government to implement key recommendations of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry and the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, a gang plan, sustainability act, elected Speaker, The Privacy Act, mining safety.

So let not anyone say that we do not offer alternatives. We offer alternatives, but it is up to the government to listen and hopefully implement some of the recommendations that come from our alternatives. I think it would be better for all of us to work together and make Manitoba the best possible place that we can ever make it. Thank you very much.

Mr. Mervin Tweed (Turtle Mountain): Madam Speaker, I too am pleased to put some comments on the record in regard to the budget speech but, before I do, I would like to thank the member for Point Douglas for his presentation and his words today. I think he identified a lot of problems as he sees them in his communities and not only brought forth the complaints but also some suggestions as to how we can deal with some of the issues. I really believe that when a member opposite stands up and presents his facts and presents his feelings sincerely and with emotion that it does us all probably a great deal of service to pay attention to what he is saying.

* (1610)

I think quite often as we banter back and forth in the House here that quite often emotions and personalities get too involved in some of the comments that are being made, and I am not excluding myself from that situation.

I think both sides, when the discussion that takes place comes back and forth in a condescending form, that it is not good for the people of Manitoba and it is not good for the direction that government wants to go. I think it probably reflects poorly, in light of all Manitobans, as to how the House of government works and how it should work. I certainly listened very closely to the member's statements, and there are a lot of things he said there that I feel I could agree with and how they relate to my own communities. I do not think it is an isolated case where one member representing one certain constituency in the province of Manitoba does not share a lot of the same problems no matter what part of the province they live in.

I often think back to my personal life as far as the business that I was in. I quite often had the opportunity to attend conventions and seminars with business people of a much larger magnitude than mine but, when we sat down at the end of the day, we all shared the same problems. Theirs may be in multiples of hundreds of thousands and millions of dollars where mine was maybe nickels and dimes, but the problems remained the same. By sitting and listening to what they were saying and I felt sometimes by their listening to what I had to say, we managed to resolve some of the problems and some of the difficulties we face.

So I certainly respect the member for Point Douglas (Mr. Hickes) for the comments he made today. I did want to put that on the record, because I think it is through co-operation and conversation instead of confrontation that we will move ahead as a province. We will try and deal with some of the situations that confront us from time to time, and we will find similarities in a lot of the problems that we face.

I did make a couple of notes just in the sense of the member's comments in regard to the accident that took place at Tache and Marion. I agree with him wholeheartedly that there is a hospital down the street but, under the system that we currently are under, that would be the obvious first choice. With the new system that is going to be implemented under a WHA, the Winnipeg Hospital Authority, it will be a matter of one phone call, and those people will know exactly where they are going and that will be taken care of the minute they walk in the door.

I have the same problem in rural Manitoba. We have some hospitals that just cannot provide emergency 24-hour service, and that is a hard thing to tell people when they see the building and the structure and the people and everybody working there, but the fact of the matter is that it is not at this point capable of providing the services that we need under emergency conditions.

So what do we have to have in its place? We have to have a system where, upon a phone call to the service provider, they will direct us as to where we are going. They may bring that patient in for a stabilization period, but the idea is, if they require the emergency service required, they will be directed and immediately taken to that place, thus saving time, thus saving staff and thus saving a lot of the anxieties that the member put forward.

I think that getting back more directly to the budget, and I think in the previous days prior to the budget we heard the throne speech. I think the throne speech reflects to the people of Manitoba I think what we all share. We want to see the province of Manitoba continue to move forward, continue to prosper. We want to see the people have the health care that they so deserve, and we want to provide the best education that we possibly can. The throne speech sets that out and

the budget speech following just basically tries to I think show us the method and the ways that we are going to accomplish these tasks.

I think it is, and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) mentioned that it is, a historic budget. I have been fortunate since being elected that coming into government I have been a part of the balanced budget process. I never did serve in this government or any government when they were working with deficits.

Hon. Harry Enns (Minister of Agriculture): You missed trying times.

Mr. Tweed: I am sure, as the member for Lakeside says, it was terribly trying times. I do know, however, though, that in my personal life operating a business, I do know what a deficit is and I do know what it can do to your business and the limitations that it can put on your business when you are trying to move ahead and trying to create the opportunities and provide the services that you are putting forward in your business plan.

The budget itself is tremendous news I think for Manitobans, to have a surplus. Although the members opposite tend to suggest that we are underestimating, it is strictly for accounting purposes, I would suggest to you that the best way for any budget is to be very cautious. We never know what might come up unexpectedly and what we might have to prepare for. I think to mislead the public in that case would be something that would be unfair to them and would be unfair to the people in this particular building and very unfair to the people of Manitoba.

I was often told as I was working in my business that the only people that overestimate a budget are the people that desperately need to borrow money, and I think that is a statement that the Province of Manitoba does not want to put forward out there. There is no desperation on this side of the House or on behalf of the government of Manitoba. What we are doing is making conscientious decisions. We are preparing a budget that allows for the unexpected, the things you cannot prepare or budget for when you are dealing with such a large base of people and with so many needs and concerns.

One of the other things that I learned in the business that I was in is when you were making a presentation, you had to sell your own product, and it did not do you any good to downgrade or discredit the competition. I will try and stay away from that as much as I possibly can because I think that what we have to offer the people of Manitoba in this budget is not something that we have to go out and defend to the opposition, what we have to do is go out and listen to the people of Manitoba and let them tell us what they think of the budget.

I think they have talked and I think they have spoken. Many of the communities that I have travelled to since the budget was introduced last week have come forward and been very generous with their compliments to the government. It is very easy and comfortable for me to take credit for that, but I do not think that I should take the credit for it. I think it is to the credit of all Manitobans. We told them in 1988 that things were tough in the province of Manitoba and that if we all did not share and work together that things would be tough 10 years from now. Fortunately those people came forward and supported us and gave us I think the support that we needed at times. It is certainly easy to cave into demands to special interest groups, and I think if we had done that we would still be suffering from the deficits that we saw in the previous governments and that we endured in the early terms of our governments.

I think we all try and do the best that we can, and we all try and do what we think is right for the people that we serve, be it in our own businesses, be it in our own companies, be it working for someone, or in this case being the government of the province of Manitoba and for the million-one or million-two people that we represent. It is nice to see that by being responsible, being cautious, being unwilling to sacrifice principles, that we are able to reduce the deficit to such a point that we do have a surplus in our operating budgets, and the fact that we do and are reducing the annual costs of doing business.

* (1620)

Again I cannot relate back to my business enough in the sense that I understood fully what high interest rates meant to my business and to my bottom line, but not

just in the bottom line in the sense of dollars. When your bottom line suffers, the people suffer; the people that you work with and employ, they suffer. The people that do business with you, you are always looking for ways and means to try and reduce the overheads to accommodate for the high interest that you are paying. I think the province, by being responsible and acting responsible over the last nine years, they have really listened to what people have said and what people wanted to see done and have steadfastly stayed by that path, and we are at the situation that we are in today.

We certainly saw a lot of positive things introduced into the budget, be it in health care, education and social services. I know that when I go out and talk to the people of Turtle Mountain and when I talk to the people of Manitoba, and they recognize the amount of money that we dedicate towards health care, it is absolutely astonishing. I find that when you put it on a chart and show people the actual dollars—not only the dollars but the percentage of the dollars that are spent from a provincial budget on health care—it is pretty hard to argue that we do not have a strong commitment and a strong concern for the people in our health care systems, not only the people who work in it and serve it, but particularly the people who require it. If we do not invest the money into the health care system that we do, then obviously patient care suffers and that is the bottom line with health care. We are here to provide the best possible care that we can.

The people in Turtle Mountain, when I was elected in 1995, basically gave me one message and that was, go into the government, be responsible in your spending, do not neglect health care and education, and I think this budget that we have put forward highlights those three very things. We have had a government that has been responsible for a long period of time, in times when it was very difficult, and difficult decisions had to be made, were made and were lived by, and the success that we are seeing today is a direct result of that. I think we were told that we had to make health care a priority, and I think, again, this budget will exemplify that it certainly is.

When we talk about education and look at the dollars that we are putting into it, I think the percentage of the budget is certainly a large amount, but I think, and it is

often pointed out to us, that the future is in our children, and I think continuing to devote that portion of our budget to the education of our children is going to hold us in good stead in the future to come.

I think there is certainly some positive things in this budget in regard to the people of rural Manitoba and how it impacts them. I think the example that I would use would be the extension of the Business Start program providing loan guarantees of up to \$10,000 for new small businesses. It is an idea that I think is going to inspire and probably—I would like to say that in the future we will probably be run off our feet providing to administrate this program, but I think the real beneficiaries have been rural entrepreneurs. I think the statistics would probably show rural women entrepreneurs have particularly benefited from this particular program.

We always talk about gaming and gambling and how it affects us in our life and the social concerns that we have with this particular issue. But, again, when gambling was first introduced, it was introduced into rural Manitoba and it was strictly an economic benefit. Every community that lived within 20 miles of the American borders to our south were suffering dramatically because of the loss of revenue with people travelling south at that particular time to gamble and to leave their money there, and with actually no real benefit to the communities they were coming from and particularly no benefit to the businesses of the communities that the hoteliers were serving. We have made a commitment of \$5.5 million in unconditional video lottery terminal money for rural communities, and as I drive throughout the rural part of the province, I can see signs up everywhere where there has been a direct benefit from this. I am not saying we should ignore the social concerns and some of the problems that gaming and gambling have created or were there and maybe perhaps exemplified, but I think we also have to look at a lot of the positive things that are happening. I see this as being one.

The commitment to the infrastructure program I think has been a very positive thing for rural Manitobans. The province in my particular area benefited greatly from the infrastructure program last year. We saw natural gas come to several of the communities that I represent, Killarney, Boissevain, Souris, and much

discussion right now to try and add further communities to this expansion project, but these people have seen their opportunities to grow and to expand enhanced greatly by being able to offer the natural gas option. I would suggest that during the travelling of the province with the rural task force, in any of the communities that we visited that did not have natural gas, that was their No. 1 priority, to put them on a level playing field with the rest of the people of Manitoba in competing for the jobs and the opportunities that come with expansion.

The implementation of a priority capital project I think is a benefit to all Manitobans, again. We are going to see the redevelopment at the Brandon General Hospital, a hospital that serves, I would suggest, all of southwestern Manitoba as a centre of referral from the communities that I represent. I have had the, I would not say the pleasure, but I have been into the hospital in Brandon, and I certainly think that this redevelopment plan is needed. I congratulate the government for recognizing that.

I would also suggest that the new regional health centre to replace the hospitals in Morden and Winkler is a very positive step for the province of Manitoba. We have two communities that have sat down together and I think put pride aside and said this is what best serves the needs and the requirements of the people of the area, not just my community, which goes a long way in promoting the regionalization thinking that has to take place. I think they should be congratulated in the proposal that they are putting forward, and I look forward to the day of its completion to attend with the member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck) and, again, congratulate the people.

There has been a lot of comment put on the record in regard to the budget. You can certainly quote other people and you can quote the professionals, which I will, but after I do that, I want to give you some of the comments of the people that I talk to on a daily basis and the people that I have worked with, that I have lived with, and I will do so.

The one comment that I read in one of the papers was that the Filmon government continues in its tradition of delivering sound fiscal management. I do not think that there has to be too much more said on that except that

no matter how we look at things with our families, with our businesses, with our communities, with our community clubs, with any centre in Manitoba and in the entire province, if you do not have a plan and you do not stay the course and work the plan, then the outcome is never predictable and is quite often unpredictable, and that is when problems seem to occur.

Scotiabank is quoted as saying that the fiscal prudence does pay off and Manitoba is the better for it. I would certainly, again, agree with that statement. I think the opportunities that are presenting in the province, the opportunity that is presenting to the people of Manitoba with the jobs that are coming in—I know the Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism (Mr. Downey) is constantly courting businesses to come to the province of Manitoba, and I think the record that we have seen in the last couple of years as far as the expansions and new development not only probably show the good salesmanship that has been going on, but when you have a good product to sell, it is certainly a lot easier to promote.

* (1630)

CIBC Wood Gundy writes that Manitoba has delivered a budget that will live up to the high standing granted to the province by the financial markets. Again, through strong fiscal management, we are now seeing the growth that is deserving, I think, to the people of Manitoba. The opportunities are going to come and are coming now as we speak. I think that had we had ad hoc government and ad hoc budget planning and ad hoc spending of governments, none of this would have ever happened.

In order to build for the future, you have to build on the strengths that you now have, and I think that the government has done that very well. [interjection]

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

Mr. Tweed: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was actually having a hard time hearing myself there for a minute or two, so I appreciate those comments.

We always talk about—well, we do not—but we always hear about the cuts that governments have made and the decisions that we have had to make. I would say that the people of Turtle Mountain have told me for years that government is too big, it is overmanaged, and it is unresponsive, so try and get things under control, and that was me saying that too, not just the people of Turtle Mountain who I now represent. I am very pleased to say that I think the government in 1988 took that message and has developed a plan and a program to produce the types of budgets that we are seeing today.

We are seeing the most economically governed province in Canada. It is the lowest cost government per capita, and I think that that is what we wanted. That is what we voted for, that is what we asked the government to do, and they are delivering on it. I think for members opposite to stand up every day and say that the people of Manitoba are upset about this or the people of Manitoba are disturbed about this, they are very pleased with the way we have done the business of governing the province of Manitoba.

They are benefiting from the way we have governed the province of Manitoba, and they will continue to benefit in the future with the budgets that we have brought forward and that we will bring forward in the future with a surplus, with a rainy day fund, with the ability to identify situations and circumstances and deal with them on a head-on basis without having to worry about the taxpayer and how we are going to generate the revenue to offset some of the things that may come along as we proceed into the future. It is already there, and I think like a good family plan and like a good business plan, it is a good government plan, and it is a plan for the people of Manitoba and for the future of Manitoba.

We always talk in the House about the money that we save on the interest that we pay and being able to provide better services. Well, I ask a sincere question. Does it not? When you can reduce your servicing costs of debt by \$50 million or \$70 million, it is still revenue that is coming into the province. It is still money that can be used to enhance the services that we provide, and it can still benefit the larger share of the people of Manitoba. Does that not make sense? Every year I

hear this it frustrates me to no end that that cannot be understood. It is certainly understood outside this building, I can tell you that.

When you ask anybody who has ever farmed or run a business or anything, they know that the minute they can cut their operating costs down by paying interest and paying less interest, they have more money to spend on their families. They have more money to reinvest in their business to help it grow. They have more money to enhance the communities in which they live in, and they do. They do not throw it away or say that it does not exist. They identify it and they use it to benefit all. I think that is what the province of Manitoba has done and has done very well. It is certainly hard for me to understand that reasoning.

There are a lot of things I do not understand, but I do understand when you have high debt servicing costs and you have an opportunity to reduce them, not only does your bottom line get better but your ability to do things in a better way and without looking over your shoulder constantly at the banker, in this case, or the people who pay out these enormous interest rates to, it can only be good for the people of Manitoba.

I would also like to put some comments on the record, Madam Speaker, in regard to again some more of the things that I have heard. I have talked to people out in the, again, rural parts of Manitoba. I think one of the real positive things that we are going to see with this type of budget and in the years to come is the fact that when you have stability in a system, the opportunity for you to enhance and encourage and bring in new partners in a lot of the development of the province, it happens, because they are not constantly worrying about where the tax rates are going to go. If I start becoming too profitable, will they decide to take a larger chunk of my profits?

Do not forget that people that come into Manitoba with the businesses that they do, employ people in the province of Manitoba. Again I just have a hard time understanding that why would we do anything in this province to discourage businesses to come to the province? Whether they employ one person, two people or 2,000 people, they still contribute to the province of Manitoba, and by contributing to the province of Manitoba we all benefit.

I think that the reduction in the business tax which I guess I could never understand and agree with at the time it was implemented as to how that was going to encourage growth in Manitoba, and I have a hard time looking across the floor, and they are saying that we are giving breaks to people who are employing people, who are earning money and paying taxes and benefiting the entire province. The two do not seem to make sense in my mind, but again it is something that we hear about on a constant basis.

I think that by reducing the people that are brought under that amount of taxation, reducing it somewhat, again I hope in the future that 100 percent of all our businesses are exempt from the payroll tax. I hope in time that does come to fruition. But at this time I certainly know that it benefits a lot of businesses, and it certainly sends the right message that we are on the right track to elimination.

Something that we are seeing, a big, I would say, surge in rural Manitoba, when we talk about housing starts in the communities I represent, four or five new houses in a community in a year is a pretty good success rate. We are seeing developments in our larger centres right now where they are moving ahead. A lot of these people are first-time home buyers, and they are getting a true benefit with the provincial tax rebate. Again it is an opportunity for our communities to offer something and also the government to encourage the growth and prosperity of these homes.

There are certainly new houses going up throughout rural Manitoba and probably in the city of Winnipeg, which I do not say I am that familiar with, but it is a very positive sign when you can do that.

The benefits of the 10 year of tax freezes that we have offered, again I would suggest, never having been a part of the start but certainly fortunate and happy to be a part of the team that continues that type of tradition is the fact that in the province of Manitoba if you are single and earning \$20,000 a year, you now have the lowest provincial taxes in Canada. Who is benefiting from this type of situation? I would suggest it is the people that most need it. It is certainly an opportunity for them, and hopefully they will move up into that \$40,000 and \$50,000 and \$60,000 income range where we have the fourth and fifth best tax rates

which are still, I would say, very good in the province of Manitoba.

* (1640)

Some of the benefits that we see in rural Manitoba through a balanced budget and the paying down of the debt is that the opportunity will come if we continue on this path for the growth and the future prosperity of rural Manitoba. It is certainly the beginning of an era, and I think that we are now one of three provinces that have continued to pay down debt.

We always talk about house mortgage, and I think we all would like to have our mortgages paid off and be free of debt, but I think we have to ask the question, why? Well, why? Because we can invest in other things and move forward and we could see more benefits perhaps for our children, for our families, for our parents. You know, it only makes common sense that we would try and reduce our overhead and our expenses as much as we possibly can to provide better services for the future.

The infrastructure program that I talked about earlier, we have allocated approximately \$22 million towards a \$66-million infrastructure program into '97 and '98. There has been a lot of discussion as to where it should go or how it should be utilized. I do not think Winnipeg is isolated from rural Manitoba in this situation where we certainly have more costs of providing transportation services to all the people. I think that we should certainly try and develop a plan or look at something that would enhance that possibility and would benefit not only the city or rural Manitoba but all Manitobans at the same time.

The tax freezes that we have had in Manitoba for the last 10 years I think have been probably the strongest sign that we have sent to the people in Manitoba as far as identifying what they are telling us day in and day out and what they want us to do. I think that by creating that kind of an atmosphere, small- and medium-sized businesses, that I think and I think most members on this side and I am sure most members on the other side consider to be one of the most important parts of our economy, are very positive that they have a future in this province and that they will not be taxed to death or be chased out of the province by high taxes,

because we have made a commitment that that is certainly not in our plans and not the way we would like to see it.

The Toronto Dominion Bank, as of today actually, has forecasted that Manitoba would grow at a 3.5 percent growth rate, slightly higher than what we had predicted. If that does come to fruition, I think no one would be more pleased than us on this side of the House that that has happened but, again, I think the approach that we have taken where we put our estimates forward and based on those I would say conservative estimates, we will not increase or heighten anyone's expectations falsely or wrongly. If things do turn out to be better than they are now, then I think we all benefit again as a province and as people in the province of Manitoba.

There is certainly lots of good news as far as Manitoba's economy and what is happening. I think it has been put on the record before, but I always like to get a chance to add it again just in case someone did miss it, that total employment in Manitoba rose to 541,400. That is unreal as far as the numbers. You know, when you think of that many people in Manitoba working, in a population of, what, 1.1 million people, it is a tremendous sign and it is a tremendous indication that growth is evident in Manitoba and will continue to be so. I certainly would wonder if the federal government could not perhaps take a look at what Manitoba is doing and maybe take some lessons as far as the process and the procedure that they should do. I note that our job growth in Manitoba is approximately four times higher than Canada's growth over the same period of time. [interjection] The member for Portage (Mr. Pallister) brings forward a very important suggestion, and I believe it to be true. I think it is leadership. I think it is the strong leadership from the Premier (Mr. Filmon), who inside this particular House I would say takes a lot of hits, but outside the House he takes a lot of compliments from the people of Manitoba that perhaps really know what is going on in their lives and in their worlds and recognize the things that we are doing as a government are impacting them positively and perhaps not the negative suggestions that we hear in here on a constant basis.

I think the fact that our unemployment rate fell to 6.7 percent in February, the lowest level in nearly seven

years, is another strong indication of the leadership of the Province of Manitoba and the direction that this province is going. We are creating jobs. We are creating opportunities, and I think this budget only enhances the possibilities of more to come.

I think one of the other things that Manitoba is doing very well is the exports into the United States. When you look at the numbers, again it is coming from a business background but \$4.47 billion exported to the United States in 1996, a 12.6 percent annual gain, like double-digit numbers, increases in things like that, in business, particularly today, I think is a very positive sign.

I would note, Madam Speaker, since you have raised your hook and are getting ready to tell me to sit down, I would just like to put on the record that the people of Turtle Mountain are very pleased with the budget that the government of Manitoba has put forward. It shows leadership, it shows integrity, it shows responsibility and it shows compassion. I think we can all benefit, and I think all people of Manitoba will enjoy the fruits of the budget that we have brought forward today. I look forward to the next many years of balanced budgets, of reducing deficits and surpluses in the province of Manitoba, so I certainly have no problem supporting the budget today. Thank you.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to the Budget Address. I would like to first of all congratulate the new ministers that were appointed. I want them sincerely to enjoy their final two years in that position and two years in government, and I also want to say that we on this side have some concerns for the way some of the retiring ministers were treated by the Premier and this government. It does not speak well for what had been a fairly decent record in the office of this Premier (Mr. Filmon) in dealing with people.

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the issue of the Speaker has been front and centre for the last few months, and it seemed to me that the Premier, I think, when he has time to sit and reflect will come to the conclusion that in actual fact he should have applied a different

solution, such as closure to the resolution surrounding the telephone system debate last fall. In trying to do what he did, hide behind the Speaker, he miscalculated in that and caused himself some serious damage, I believe, with the public.

I tell you that period, I think, will be marked by a recognition by the government of a point of decline, a point of miscalculation on their part and a point of decline. I will tell you that we have sent out surveys to our constituents, and we have had quite a number of those back. I would tell you that, unlike previous surveys that we have sent out, we have been surprised to find numerous negative comments on the Premier (Mr. Filmon). This is just a sample of some of the surveys that I got back.

* (1650)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the past, over the past nine years, we have regularly sent out these surveys, and we have had decent responses regarding the government's programs, but this time they came back with comments such as resign, get rid of Filmon. I never got responses like that when I sent out surveys.

Interestingly enough—I know the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Pallister) is making comments from his seat—and I want to tell him that the comments that I am reading, the get-rid-of-Filmon comments, are from the identified Tories. These are from the Tories. I am not reading you the comments from the NDP supporters. Those are unprintable. I am reading you the Tories. At least two responses that I have gotten—

Point of Order

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The honourable Minister of Education, on a point of order.

Hon. Linda McIntosh (Minister of Education and Training): Yes, on a point of order. I believe the member is reading names, quotes from a piece of paper that he has in his hand. My understanding is, if members are reading from script that they should have to table what they are reading. So I would ask the member to table the correspondence he has got from his constituents since he is reading from them in the House. [interjection] Thank you very much. I do not read from

my briefing notes, the member for Wellington (Ms. Barrett). He is holding a piece of paper. He is reading comments from his constituents. I believe he is compelled to table them, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The honourable minister did not have a point of order. The rule clearly states that it is a private letter, and this is a survey result.

The honourable member, to continue.

* * *

Mr. Maloway: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

You know, I am not surprised, coming from the Minister of Education, that she would make, as the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) says, another bogus point of order and constantly interrupt. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think it bodes repeating for the Minister of Education that not only NDP supporters returned this survey to us but Conservative supporters. People with Tory signs on their lawns over the last three elections sent back surveys saying get rid of Filmon. Here is a copy of the survey. Resign is another one. Give the NDP a chance. They should get rid of Gary Filmon.

An Honourable Member: What about the one that says vote Liberal?

Mr. Maloway: Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are none that say vote Liberal.

Now, I noted in the throne speech of the government that the Premier, I think, has been smarting by what happened here in December regarding the Speaker. I think he is licking his wounds. I think he is regretting how he handled the situation regarding the telephone system, and I think he is aware, he is aware through his polling that the surveying that we are doing is showing him the same results that we are getting. The people are not happy with this government, and he recognizes that he had better mend his ways, or things may deteriorate a lot quicker and a lot faster than he would like. So I think it is no surprise to us that in the throne speech the government is now talking about beginning programs for aboriginal youth, aboriginal wellness, and

all of a sudden is developing a concern for social services which it has shown a disregard for over the last few years.

The Premier (Mr. Filmon), when he was interviewed on TV, said if you cut me I bleed. It reminds me of Bill Clinton and feeling people's pain. This Premier recognizes that he has caused a lot of pain. He has recognized that he is getting into trouble, and he is now trying to work out a plan, a plan to get out of that trouble that he is in right now.

So that is what we see with this Premier. I do not think any of us here seriously think that there is any real directional change on the part of this government, that this is simply here because he has a public relations problem that needs tending to, and this is his method for dealing with it.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let us deal for a moment with the apparent instability of the government opposite. For the first time in nine years, you have members of that caucus who are openly hostile to the way the government is run. You have members who were unceremoniously thrown out of their positions after showing years of dogged loyalty to the Leader, were just cast aside by the Premier.

I want to appeal to these members, the member for Emerson (Mr. Penner) and Charleswood (Mr. Ernst) and Steinbach (Mr. Driedger) and St. Norbert (Mr. Laurendeau), that the four of you are more than enough to defeat this government. You have a vote coming up; you have a vote on the budget. This is your chance to make amends, makes amends with your past, come clean, come clean and vote with the opposition to defeat the government.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is not a good omen for this government. The mid-term rot is setting in to this government, and people like the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Pallister) are getting out. They are gone, off to greener pastures. They know the ship has sprung a leak. One has to only look at the way the Minister of Education (Mrs. McIntosh) conducts herself in this House in Question Period day after day to realize that it is time to leave the ship because the ship is starting to rock, seriously rock, and is in danger of sinking.

So perception is the key for how good the economy is. This government came down with a budget a few days ago, and it has put up speaker after speaker to extol the virtues of how well the province is being run by this government. and in actual fact what we see this government doing over the last several years is basically a case of smoke and mirrors.

The perception of how good the economy is depends, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on where you stand, how the economy affects you. Let us take the brokers. Let us take those brokers who were handling the MTS shares last December, those brokers who went right out and cleaned out every Jaguar out of the Jaguar dealership in Winnipeg. Those brokers, if you asked them what they thought of this budget, if you asked them what they thought of the economy, they would think it is rather good. They would say we want more. You privatized the telephone system; bring on Hydro. So these brokers will be legitimately happy with the way the Conservatives are running the province because they have been the big beneficiaries to date of how this government runs the province.

* (1700)

But, on the other hand, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let us deal with people who are unemployed; people in my constituency who responded to these surveys who are unemployed. They do not have the same view of the brokers to this government nor this budget because no matter how good the government says the numbers are, if you are unemployed, that is a small solace that the government's revenues are doing better than expected.

Ask the teachers who have been cut over the last couple of years. The public school education in this province is being throttled by that irresponsible minister across the way and her irresponsible government; being throttled at the expense of private schools and her friends in the private schools who have been benefiting by this government, who have been the big beneficiaries of Toryism and Tory tactics and Tory ideology in this province. This Minister of Education (Mrs. McIntosh), catering day by day by day to these private school interests, giving them increases that are multiples of what the public schools are getting, how she can shamelessly stand up and claim to be a

defender of the public school system just taxes all credibility. It is absolutely impossible.

And so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the education system in this province has been suffering because of this government. Certainly that is a group of people who will certainly think twice about supporting Conservatives in the next election. I do not think you are going to see a lot of teachers and people in the education system lining up to donate to the Tories or vote Tory two years from now in the election.

University students have seen tuition fees increasing because of this government. They will not think that this budget is the best budget that they have seen in years because they are not winners out of this budget, they are losers with university tuitions going up. The universities in general will not take kindly to this budget because they too are being squeezed by this government who is trying to wring every last cent out of the system so that it can provide further tax reductions to its business friends.

The health care system, the 1,800 nurses who are no longer working in Manitoba, the optometrists who have been cut when the province cut the reimbursement of the eye exams last year, these people are not the winners of this Tory government. They are not the winners of this budget, and those people will have their say in two years time; those people will have their say in two years time as to whether this government should stay or should go. The native organizations have received cuts from this government.

So the question I guess is that the government may win a battle here, it may win a battle there, but it will not win the war. The trends that are developing clearly indicate a race to the bottom, clearly indicate a system that is developing and promoted by the Conservatives opposite whereby the rich continue to get richer and the poor continue to get poorer.

It is the old trickle-down economics theory that the Tories have been promoting for years and years and years. And sure they dress it up a little bit each election, put a new face, bring in a new Leader and try to sell the same old snake oil election after election, through the '20s, the '30s, the '40s, the '50s, but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they are the same old bunch, same old

gang that were here 30, 40 years ago selling the same old snake oil.

Now, the social programs that the Conservatives are ignoring are going to increase over time. I think their attitude seems to be that if we can just adopt the trickle-down economics and concentrate on giving tax breaks to the wealthy and the privileged in the province that somehow the social programs will just go away, somehow they will cure themselves. If we put our heads in the sand and ignore the problem, maybe it will just go away, but that clearly is not going to happen.

In the last election, we had the Premier running ads claiming that he was going to get tough on crime. Well, we have seen anything but an improvement in crime since this government has been elected. In fact, we have seen the destruction of one of the prisons. The prisons are breeding grounds for crime, and here you have a Premier out campaigning, getting votes on crime reduction, something that he has done absolutely nothing about. So the bottom line is that you have Tories governing for Tories. That is the bottom line here. You do not have Tories governing for socially disadvantaged people. That did not happen in past generations, it is not going to happen now, and it is not going to happen in the future.

Now, I guess there is a point that should be dealt with here when you deal with tax breaks to businesses. This government is foolish enough to believe that somehow it is going to make major improvements to the taxation system or to the economy if it reduces taxes to businesses by a point here or a point there, and somehow that is going to mean the difference between whether companies stay here or move.

I want to tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I do not know of any business that has either come to Manitoba or left Manitoba or closed down because of a 1 percent reduction in the corporate income tax. Any company that is that close to the wire in corporate income tax is not going to be brought down because of a 1 percent decrease or conversely a 1 percent increase in the taxation rate. That just is not going to happen.

So I feel sorry for the representatives of the business organizations that come crying, and that is what it is, come crying and whining around budget time, talking

about how desperate it is out there in the business community and that a one-point drop or a one-point increase in business taxes is going to mean the sky is going to fall, they are going to fail and they are going to leave the province. Then they hop in their cars and they head over to the Westin Hotel for a hundred-dollar lunch. I mean, the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Pallister) should know and understand a little bit about business. I kind of doubt that he does know that much, but I think that if he does know what I always thought he did know about business, he would have to agree that a percent increase or decrease in the corporation tax is not going to be a major determining factor in having businesses go bankrupt or shut down. On the other hand, a percent increase or decrease in the sales tax or broadening the sales tax to deal with children's clothes or baby clothes, baby supplies, that 1 percent can in fact represent a major hardship for single parents who are earning small amounts of money.

* (1710)

Now just before I leave the area of corporation taxes—because the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Pallister) pretends to know something about that—the member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) points out that the taxes coming in from corporation taxes, I believe, are \$172 million in corporation income tax, and I believe they have dropped over the last few years. The fact of the matter is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that most corporations in Manitoba or in Canada do not even pay corporation taxes because the corporations spend their money, the income they make, expanding their operation, buying cars, taking out money for this expense or that expense, living reasonably well—[interjection]—employing people as the member for Portage la Prairie says, employing people, and in fact they do not really leave a whole lot in the company to be taxed in the first place.

So it is not as though you are seeing a tremendous amount of money being left in corporations that is being taxed by the corporation tax in the first place. If you have done all the expanding you are going to do, and you are running a decent operation as a business, and you paid off your bills and at the end of the year you cannot think of anything to spend money on, and you have \$50,000 sitting there, then why would you have a problem in paying an extra point or two of

corporation income tax? Tell me why you would have a problem with that.

Obviously, people across the way do, and I do not know that they have any intimate knowledge of the subject. It is just they believe it to be true because they are fed the line by their corporate handlers that this is the thing to do. The people who write the cheques, I guess, the people who write the cheques to the member for Portage la Prairie obviously can yank his chain whenever they please, and he runs up there like a little puppy dog and sits on his hind legs and says, you know, what can we do for you, as he is wagging his tail. He will get a lot of experience in wagging his tail in his next exercise trying to win a federal seat for the Conservatives. He is going to have to do a lot of chasing to get the donations he needs to win that one. Nevertheless, I want to say on the record that I am not writing him off at this point, but I am not ruling out the possibility that he might be back here.

Remember the member for Brandon West. He headed off down the great nomination road, down the great nomination road, you know, a hero in his own mind or legend in his own mind and headed off, going to go down and help Kim Campbell run the country. He got bushwhacked. He went out into the nomination process and found out, geez, things have changed since I ascended to this great position down here, and he got beat in the nomination. So this member actually won the nomination, so I give him credit. He has a leg up on his colleague there, but we will see whether he manages to leave for good or whether he comes back here.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, where did I leave off here? This government is operating, has been operating, continues to operate based on the election cycle. Having been around for a number of years, I know there are certain sensitivities that governments have when dealing with elections and the election cycle, and what this government is doing is attempting to squirrel away money to be used when the election is a little closer.

I want to deal with the amount of money that the Tories have lined up and are planning to use to attempt to—I will not say buy the next election. That is not good to say, that they are attempting to buy the election. I am going to say that they are hoping to persuade people

to their cause in the next election with some goodies from the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, or as the member for Brandon calls it, the BS fund, which is a name given to a similar type of fund that the Socreds set up in B.C. a number of years ago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, at the end of next year, the government should have roughly \$316 million in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. I want to deal for a minute with some of the figures that the member for Brandon East (Mr. Leonard Evans) dealt with the other day, and that is that as early as the time the NDP left office in 1988, this government started its creative accounting.

This government had the opportunity back in 1988 to start paying down the debt. It had that opportunity. It had \$56 million, I believe, where it could have, if it really believed that strongly in debt retirement, taken the \$56 million and put it directly towards the debt, which is what they should have done with it, but in actual fact, Mr. Manness, at the time the Finance minister, and the Tories who were a minority government, they decided at that time to set up the Fiscal Stabilization Fund which basically became a fund for them to hide money, to move money around. So they took the \$56 million and rather than paying down the debt, they ended up putting it in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, and then they could show a loss for that year.

Then what did they proceed to do? I have to deal with this from memory now, but in the next six years they managed to pile up debts at an almost unprecedented rate. They had one year, 1995 I believe it was, where one of their former ministers Harold Neufeld was prepared to walk out on them because he was suggesting the debt that one year was going to increase by, I believe, \$865 million or around that figure. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was the largest debt/deficit year in Manitoba history. [interjection] The member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) says \$760 million.

So do not let anyone ever kid you, the government opposite are no pikers when it comes to running up deficits. In the same period of time that the Howard Pawley government was in power, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they only marginally missed beating the Howard Pawley government in running up debt. To give them

credit, they stopped just short, but it was not very short. So, for a government that pretends somehow that it knows how to govern and knows how to be fiscally responsible and pay down the debt, this is total hogwash because collectively they ran up the debt almost as much in the last six years as they had in the previous six years.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it has only been in the last two years that they have finally started to do what they have been talking about. I remember the Premier the other day talked about one of the reasons he had to run up the debts in early 1991 and '92 was because of the recession, and that is true. He is right. Those are the exact same reasons that we had to run up debts in the early '80s, because Sterling Lyon left us in one of the biggest recessions since the '30s and, likewise, the Conservative Premier had to deal with the recession in '90 and '91. So he is right. There was a need to run a deficit that year, but he has to recognize that while it was right for him to do that, it was tantamount to the NDP doing the same thing in the early '80s. [interjection] That is right. What was the difference? That is right. And the member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) talks about the interest rates being at 10 percent.

* (1720)

The interest rate policy, the high interest rate policy of governments in this country contributed largely to the problems that we faced at the time. You have to understand that we just did not spend the money and get nothing for it. We built hydro projects. In fact our last hydro project came in below budget. That hydro project will be producing income for Manitoba consumers, Manitoba taxpayers for years and years to come.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, would anybody suggest for a moment that that was a bad move, that that was in essence bad debt? The \$13 billion that government and related organizations owe is backed up by hard assets. It is backed up by—it used to be backed up by a telephone system, but take away the telephone system, it is backed up by hydro assets. It is backed up by schools. It is backed up by hospitals which, if we had to build them today, we would pay a lot more than we did in those days, and they have been fulfilling a function.

Take Premier Duff Roblin back in '65 and '66 when he announced he was planning to build the ditch. I am sure, and someone could correct me if they know more about the circumstances surrounding the ditch, but I do not think we went out and had the money in the bank to build the ditch. I am sure that it was deficit financed and, in fact, who in this province would say that that was not a good thing to do?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, who in their right mind in this province would today say that we should not spend whatever money we spent as taxpayers to build that diversion around the city of Winnipeg? We have saved year after year countless billions of dollars of damage to the taxpayers of Manitoba because of that ditch. You know, this expenditure, these expenditures are discounted by people of the Tory persuasion. They have got blinkers on when it comes to any type of government involvement unless it involves some direct money into their pockets.

They seem to turn a blind eye when it comes to giving out money to save the Jets and stuff like that and money into friends' pockets. That seems to be okay, but there seems to be a serious problem in their ideology when it comes to government spending but, yet, they can point back to governments of their stripe doing the right thing in previous governments by building things like the floodway.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the budget announces another special operating agency. This government has gone hog wild on hogs, too, but has gone hog wild spinning off these new special operating agencies, the SOAs. Now they plan to spin off the Land Titles Office; that is their latest one. They have done Vital Statistics, and they have done, like I said, 15 others.

We have noticed on this side of the House that there is a distinct increase in user fees. I am sure that there are user fees popping up all over the place, but I think that wherever one of these SOAs gets spun off, that seems to be kind of a magnet for more user fees. For example, Vital Statistics has now increased marriage licences—and God knows what else but probably everything they sell—and they have been a special operating agency now for the last year or two. There are a number of agencies, the Land Titles Office, any agency that spins off as a special operating agency now

has a mandate to be self sufficient, to be cost effective and to make a profit for the government.

I guess, we have to make as many comments here on a special operating agency. At what point do we stop? How many are we going to have? We have 15 now. Are we going to have 50 or 100? Then, Mr. Deputy Speaker, how long will these agencies stay as special operating agencies before they are sold off, before they are privatized? Are we going to find after the next election, if this government gets re-elected, that we are not only going to find Manitoba Hydro being sold, but we are going to be seeing the Vital Statistics Agency sold, that we are going to be seeing the Text Book Bureau, that we are going to be seeing the Fleet Vehicles Agency—are we going to be seeing all of these—Property Registry—all these agencies being sold by this government to friends of the government?

We do not know what the overall plan of the government is. We see pieces of it, but we see enough pieces to be able to paint a picture. We can sit back and we can paint a pretty good picture, and we think that we are on the right track. We have been accurate so far in our predictions. We said the telephone system would be sold; the government said it would not. Who was right and who was wrong?

We say that Manitoba Hydro will be chopped up and sold. As sure as we sit here today, it will be chopped up and sold. The government says no; time will tell. But if I were a betting person, I would have to put the money on us.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member's time has expired.

Hon. James Downey (Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism): Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me, at the outset, say that I want the member who just spoke to know that he did not disappoint us. He delivered the kind of speech that we expected, and I think that was no surprise to anyone. I do want to make one comment, though, because it was something that I think he referred to that should be elaborated on just a little bit more. I will not take a whole lot of my speech to talk about it, but he seems to have a whole lot of concern for some of our colleagues individually, and the members opposite are showing great compassion.

I think that there is something that needs a little more explaining. They have so much concern for some of us individually, but collectively they would like to kick us all out. Now, if that is not contradictory, I do not know what is. Now let them deny that they do not want to kick us out and they want us to stay as cabinet, as a collective group. So, again, the New Democratic Party speaks hollow. They speak hollow showing this great compassion for individuals and then would like to say they would like all of us out. So it is really a contradictory statement. There really is not any compassion there at all.

* (1730)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I guess I have to put on the record, and I am going to do so—not that I have to, but I do want to—that this, as has been stated by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) and by many of my colleagues, is probably one of the happiest times in the history and is a historic event. After 20 years in the Manitoba Legislature and having put four of them in government in my first four years as an elected member for the constituency of Arthur and then to go into opposition to watch the devastation that took place under a New Democratic government and to see the irresponsible spending, to see the kind of manipulation that took place and the devastation that this province went through, and then to return and see after 10 hard years of budget making by seeing the kind of foundation that has been laid by my colleagues that were here from 1988 until this particular period of time—to those that were here, those that have decided to retire and do other things, I take my hat off to them. I take my hat off to all my colleagues who have worked hard, whether it is at Treasury Board, whether it is in cabinet, whether it is in caucus, because this has been a team approach to getting the province of Manitoba back on track to where the people of Manitoba want to go.

I could spend, as I have done in a lot of my speeches, pointing out what has been wrong with the New Democratic Party, Mr. Deputy Speaker. One could spend a long time in their political career talking about what went wrong and what has been wrong with the past, but what this budget is is truly about the future and those people who we are here to represent. I think it is time to emphasize again how important it is for the

children of our province to understand clearly what this government has done—this government, after a lot of hard years of work with my colleagues on Treasury Board and again in cabinet of making sure that we did not succumb to the false feelings or the false directions that the New Democratic Party took us when they were in office. You know, when you look at the message from the minister, and I think it is worth repeating the message from the minister because it says a lot. The first thing that it says, and it is a reflection for me as well as it is for the rest of my colleagues, that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) is proud of our government's 10th budget to the people of Manitoba.

The budget continues our commitment to spending taxpayers' money wisely. That is a word that we all are attaching ourselves to, and you can see it in our colleagues how proud we are of being able to do that. I would hope the members opposite when it comes to the date of vote on the budget, and I say this particularly to the Liberals who have a chance to really express where they want to see this province go—an expression of confidence in the future of the province of Manitoba and the young people and how proud we are to be able to present a document like this to the people of Manitoba.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the budget is historic, because we are now starting to pay back the moneys that have been borrowed on behalf of the people of Manitoba, not us as politicians individually, not us as a group of individuals who are doing this for our own personal benefit. This is historic because the government of Manitoba is starting to pay back the debt of the province of Manitoba, \$7 billion that we have to start paying back, and we have finally started.

You know, my colleague the Minister of Natural Resources (Mr. Cummings) is here. He is a great conservationist; he is a good man; and he is a promoter of the production of trees. I have heard many times that the best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago, the second best time is today. The first best time to start paying back debt would have been 20 years ago, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the second best time is in this budget and, you know, we have started. You have to start something to get to the end, and we had to first of all arrest the debt, the sink that we were in, the black hole

of debt that we were in, that we were put there by the New Democratic Party.

They can talk all they like, and I will digress just for a minute, because here we have the New Democratic Party sitting there, how great they are, when in fact Jim Walding, the former member for St. Vital, sitting in this Legislature passed judgment on his own kind to say, you are doing the wrong thing, and he voted against them. He deserves a lot more recognition and thanks from the people of Manitoba than he gets. [interjection] That is exactly true. The member for Inkster said if it were not for Jim Walding he would not be here. Well, I do not know whether that was such a great trade-off or not, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but at least he is not a New Democrat, I can assure you that.

(Madam Speaker in the Chair)

So it is a historic time, and it is a time for celebration, Madam Speaker. When you reach these kinds of milestones in the history of a province, it is time for celebration. That is what these speeches should be all about, celebration of an accomplishment of stopping the running of the red ink in this province and getting on top of the pile of debt and starting to whittle away at it.

It is interesting that the New Democratic Party are once again going to do the wrong thing in the province of Manitoba when they vote against this budget. They are voting against the future of the youth of this province and the children. Every day we hear them stand up with their so concerned feelings about all the people in Manitoba and how poor it is. They could do the right thing and support the youth of this province by voting for this budget, to vote to start paying off the debt for the people of Manitoba. Well, that would be too much to expect and, of course, one should not hold out any hopes, but at least at one time one New Democrat did have the foresight to vote to kick out the bunch of irresponsible people that he sat with, and we are here today.

Again, let us look on. The budget signals an era of opportunity and achievement. What are we celebrating? It is an era of opportunity and

achievement. We have made some tremendous strides, and we have accomplished a lot and we have achieved a lot. This does not come though, Madam Speaker, just from the government or from the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson). This comes from the Conference Board of Canada. It comes from the bond rating agencies. It comes from the financial community. It comes from the average working people on the street that say it is a good budget.

Well, there have been a couple of pieces of information in the last couple of days that the New Democratic Party will not want to acknowledge but, again, yesterday, what did the Toronto Dominion Bank say about what they project for next year? They are projecting a growth not of 2 percent, not of 2.5 percent of some of what the previous forecasters have said, not 3 percent, but 3.5 percent projected growth for the coming year.

What happened today? There is even more news out today. Another financial organization, the Bank of Montreal, came out with their projection today. What was the projection of the Bank of Montreal? Well, I will tell you because I think it is not the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson), it is not my colleague saying it, it is the Bank of Montreal that has said our economy is going to grow not by 2.5 percent, not by 3 percent, but 3.3 percent. Two days in a row, two major financial organizations have projected what our growth is going to do.

* (1740)

Reason for optimism, Madam Speaker, reason for tremendous optimism. In the last week what have we seen on the front page of the newspapers? What have we seen? Yes, we have seen Palliser Furniture going to add 400 jobs. What did we see yesterday? We saw Boeing with the projections of not only 300 but an additional 400 more jobs.

This is not the Progressive Conservative Party or this government putting out a press release saying that they are out there in some way giving them cheques to get on with the job. Do you know what it is, Madam Speaker? It is confidence. It is pride in Manitoba, and it is opportunity and because we have done the right thing with the finances of the province of Manitoba.

In contrast, what do the members opposite like to do? Well, I will only be a short part of this because their big support for the business community was the introduction of a payroll tax. You know, we all remember this tremendous payroll tax that the New Democratic Party said is going to help with the health and education. But what did the payroll tax do? What does a payroll tax do? A payroll tax is a direct tax on job creation. Every time we turn around, we have companies coming to us and saying the payroll tax is a detriment to jobs.

We have made, I believe, tremendous progress on the actions taken with the payroll tax. We now have an exemption on payrolls of up to a million dollars. Ninety percent of the businesses—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Downey: I would hope the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) who would like to kill the small business operator in the lunch room down here, the young woman who is trying to make a go of it and his negative comments about her trying to do something, I would hope that he would pay attention to this, because he is nothing but negative any time somebody tries to do something to better their way in life, he has to find something wrong with it.

The point is that the action we have taken to remove the payroll tax off of small business will pay dividends, pay big dividends. So I am proud to be able to show some action, to show some movement on the payroll tax.

So it is a time for celebration. It is a time for celebration because we have achieved a lot of things. The member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen) said he has not seen it. Well, you know, he should maybe go home to Flin Flon once in a while and see that there has been over \$200 million invested in the Flin Flon smelter which Jerry Storie could not get done. He was the member for Flin Flon and also a minister of the Crown, but could not get the upgrade of the Flin Flon smelter, over 200 jobs, assuring not only of jobs in that community but a cleaner environment. Not the member for Flin Flon, and now he is saying he does not see it. Why does he think, Madam Speaker, the government of this party did it? Because we believe in the working

people. We believe in the North. We believe in the opportunities.

Something else, Madam Speaker, is that we are celebrating our accomplishments, the fact that we have had three budgets in a row that have neither taken more taxes out of the taxpayers, that have not added to our deficit but, in fact, have reversed the many years of irresponsible management when the NDP had it.

I could go on and on, Madam Speaker, about the good news that is out there. We also have challenges, and we have challenges that we have to deal with in the near future but also in the distant future. We are faced this spring with a major challenge of a tremendous amount of water that is going to be coming into the water system. You know, we are also going to be safe in the city of Winnipeg because a Progressive Conservative government of Duff Roblin invested in the future of this province by putting in what they refer to as Duff's Ditch or the floodway. It was that kind of vision and foresight that Duff Roblin brought to this province, the same kind of vision and foresight that is brought to this government by our Premier (Mr. Filmon) and by my colleagues, that we see the future, that if we get ourselves out of debt, we get our confidence built, that we will be able to do the things we have to do.

Let me make one other statement as it relates to flooding, and I am again proud to have been part of a government that took some action not only to build the Shellmouth Dam and to build the diversion at Portage or to build the floodway, but to do what for the communities of southern Manitoba and the Red River Valley? Do you know what we did when we were in government under Sterling Lyon? We built a lot of dikes and some that are around the farms and the communities. We raised the buildings. We put in some water retention projects under our conservation programs so that we can store it, and I see in the future, Madam Speaker, where we have to do more of it.

I think we have to put in place a major policy, and I am strongly supportive of it and advocating it to my colleagues, and at this particular time my colleague is here, the Minister of Natural Resources (Mr. Cummings), where we have to take every advantage to store some of the surplus waters that are going to come

at us year after year after year, because with the demands that are placed on the world and particularly our country, our province, to satisfy those demands, we need those surplus waters, Madam Speaker, to use during the summer months to produce the kinds of crops that are going to be needed to feed the world. Rather than trying to get rid of the water as fast as we can and get it into Hudson Bay, we should be developing greater, greater systems.

I am not talking huge, megadams. I am talking reasonable structures that will store the waters that can be used in the future, because it is causing a lot of taxpayers' money now to put in place emergency systems to make sure we have the capabilities to deal with the protection of life and limb. We have to do that, but we also have a responsibility to plan, to conserve and to save that water so that it can be used in a productive way. You will not save it all, but you can certainly save a large part of it. So it is the kind of vision and foresight that this kind of a government brings to the province of Manitoba, Madam Speaker, that does the things that have to be done.

I have never in my life seen anything from the opposition that would do anything more than call for more money, more money, more taxation, more taxation, without anybody putting a plan forward that is going to generate it other than hiring more government employees. That is the New Democratic style of governing.

Madam Speaker, there is another area that is extremely important, and I want to put it on the record because we are seeing tremendous growth opportunities. We see 20,000 more jobs this year than last year. I have in the last few days had more people tell me what their challenges are for growth and expansion in this province; one is to get the available educated and trained people so that they can hire them. The big challenge today is to make sure. We have 6.7 percent unemployment. I believe, as is projected by the financial organizations, and those people project where we are at, that we will continue to be one of lowest, have one of the lowest unemployment rates in all of Canada. I honestly believe that. I believe that the challenge to the Minister of Education (Mrs. McIntosh), the challenge to myself as the Minister of Industry, the challenge to all of us collectively will be to make sure

that we are able to train and put those people in place to provide the needs of the industries that are developing. I can tell you that is the case.

* (1750)

We have to better define the kinds of jobs that are needed. We have to better define the capabilities. We know we have got some of the most capable and advanced universities and community colleges in the province of Manitoba. We have to work with them in a very positive way. The Council on Education that my colleague has just established, I believe, is a tremendous step forward. It is visionary to have the community work with the educational people of this province to make sure we meet the needs, we hit the targets, that are out there. [interjection] Well, the member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) said there is a difference between a vision and a bad dream. I am not sure when he was a Liberal what one would consider. I think being a Liberal wanting it both ways, he would maybe call it a nightmare. That is maybe where he is at, and then to become a member of the NDP party, I do not think there are words that can describe that. That is sliding back a long ways.

The opportunities are here, Madam Speaker. the opportunities are right here in Manitoba. I believe there will be a time come in the next few months where we will have to travel throughout the country, Canada, telling them about the opportunities in Manitoba so they will come to fill the jobs that are here. The garment industry is a good example. We have had over the last few weeks the unfortunate situation at Rice Sportswear, because of financial reasons, had to close their doors. The employees, I understand, have jobs offered to them now, that they have been absorbed within the industry.

I have talked to many people and they need employees. The computer-related businesses today are desperately in need of people. That is the big challenge, and it is our job to work with society to make sure those jobs are filled first with Manitobans, trained Manitobans. Our next job is to make sure, I believe, that Canadians are fully aware of the opportunities in Manitoba, and then it is our responsibility to make sure that we have the availability

of immigrants to come to this country to help satisfy the needs.

What is this all about? What is this budget all about? This budget is about the future. It is about the base that we have built so the young people of this country can live and can work and can play and enjoy life in Manitoba without the government being in their face all the time, taking out more tax money, directing their activities through government policies. [interjection] Madam Speaker, it is not true, and I invite the members to take a copy of the budget in brief. I would invite the member to take this little document because it tells it all. It is a very easy read. She could, I am sure, understand it quite easily, being of the intelligence she is she could understand it quite easily. It is a very straightforward document, and I would encourage her to read it and to study it because I think at the end of it she would think a lot different than she thinks at this particular time.

Madam Speaker, why will they not support such a document?

An Honourable Member: Health care cuts and taxation.

Mr. Downey: Madam Speaker, they refer to cutting of health care. This government is putting more money in health care as a percentage than any other province in the country; 34 percent of the budget is going into health care. You know, I am glad they raised health care; 34 percent of the budget in Manitoba going to health care. We have done that. We have done that at the same time that the federal Liberal government has taken \$220 million out of our revenues to the Province of Manitoba. We are putting in \$500 million more out of the taxpayers' money in the Province of Manitoba than when they were in government. So we have had to find over \$700 million dollars to satisfy Health and Education through the additional money we have put in and the \$220 million we have lost. We have done it at the same time we have not raised the sales tax. We have not raised any of the major taxes.

So I think it is a time for celebration. I think it is a time for celebration that the people of Manitoba truly get the message. That is what it is all about, get the message that we are proud to be sponsors of this

budget. I guess after 20 years that I would have thought that you almost give up hope that you are someday going to be able to start paying off the debt that has been incurred. But we have arrived. We have managed that milestone. We have managed to get to that milestone.

You know what, Madam Speaker? I believe, as tough as it is in government, that if we continue to make sound investments, sound judgments, we keep growing our economy, we keep creating the jobs, but the people of Manitoba will be rewarded, not our government. You know, the members opposite, every piece of action, everything they do, I very seldom hear that they are doing it on behalf of the people of Manitoba.

Question Period today was quite interesting. You see the New Democratic Party standing here railing away because this government took and bought a product from a small Manitoba company that had a quality product, had the best price, and they are railing against us because we did not take the bid from a multinational corporation. Next week what we are going to hear is the New Democratic Party railing away against some multinational corporation.

It is all for their own political benefits. I have not heard one of them speak on the interests of Manitoba. I have heard them speak in the interests of trying to get the New Democratic Party elected again. I have heard them speak many times about that.

So it is time for the people of Manitoba to celebrate. It is not this party that should be celebrating. We should be happy, but the people of Manitoba should celebrate, and I will tell you something else. More importantly is that what will go on the record for the people of Manitoba, particularly the young people of Manitoba, is that this government has delivered something for the long-term future of our province.

Not unlike Duff Roblin's ditch, not unlike the Sterling Lyon of the developing of the projects to help defend the communities in southern Manitoba against the flood waters, this government has put in place the dikes against the future irresponsible actions and the flow of red ink by the New Democratic Party. That is what

balanced budget legislation is all about, that is what accountability is all about, that is what this budget is all about. So the people of Manitoba, I think, should have a major celebration, and I think over the coming weeks and months we will have.

I think it is important as well to make comment about one other area, because I am a strong believer in the continued development of the infrastructure for the communities of Manitoba. I am pleased that we are able to commit some of the resources and, again, the Leader of the New Democratic Party and the member for Thompson said, how irresponsible, you sell your furniture to pay off the debt. We did not sell our furniture. We sold the Crown corporation that was not any longer going to generate the revenues that would do the things we want. What I am happy about is we are investing in the future of our province through the use of some of those resources in our health care facilities. I am a strong believer in that.

I am a strong believer in the research and development that goes on. We have got the Health Sciences Centre, we have got St. Boniface Hospital, we have got tremendous hospitals in the city of Winnipeg. We have got tremendous hospitals throughout our rural communities, health care facilities and, more importantly, we have extremely qualified people that are out there and committed people to look after the health care needs of the people of Manitoba. We do have to signal, we do have to send the message, that we are supportive of them, whether it is in new facilities,

whether it is in conversion of facilities from hospitals to personal care home facilities, those are the right kinds of decisions, Madam Speaker. We have given ourselves the capability of now doing that.

Members opposite say, well, we are establishing a slush fund for political benefits. That is not the objective. The objective is to better the lives and the futures of the people of Manitoba. To give security to the seniors of this country, to give opportunity to the youth of this country is what we are all about. To put in place the tools that we can accomplish these goals with is extremely important. To put the defences in place when people cannot look after themselves is what our responsibility is all about, whether it is dikes, whether it is ditches, whether it is safety nets for the farm community, whether it is the tools for the business community like getting our Workers Compensation program in order so that it is a safety net for the workers.

You can look at a broad range, and what I would put this budget down to is a document to celebrate. It is a balanced approach to the future of this province—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The hour being 6 p.m., when this matter is again before the House, the honourable Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism (Mr. Downey) will have nine minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, March 19, 1997

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