

Fourth Session - Thirty-Ninth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
Official Report
(Hansard)

*Published under the
authority of
The Honourable George Hickes
Speaker*

Vol. LXII No. 20 - 1:30 p.m., Thursday, March 25, 2010

ISSN 0542-5492

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 25, 2010

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

Order. I'd like to advise the House that the *Hansard* will be distributed later today. There was a little problem with the printing of it, but you will get it today.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 13—The Civil Remedies Against Organized Crime Amendment Act

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I move, seconded by the Minister of Family Services and consumer protection, that Bill 13, The Civil Remedies Against Organized Crime Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur les recours civils contre le crime organisé, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Swan: Mr. Speaker, this bill amends the existing act by providing that a director within the Department of Justice will now be able to bring applications to the Court of Queen's Bench to deal with businesses controlled by members of a criminal organization, businesses used for unlawful purposes and persons who conspire to commit unlawful activities that would harm the public. This bill is based on extensive consultations and research completed by the Department of Justice with organized crime experts across Canada. It builds on the successful model we have established for criminal property forfeiture.

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

PETITIONS

Mount Agassiz Ski Area

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

For several decades, the Mount Agassiz Ski area, home to the highest vertical between Thunder Bay and the Rocky Mountains, was a popular skiing and snowboarding destination for Manitobans and visitors alike.

The operations of the Mount Agassiz Ski area were very important to the local economy, not only creating jobs, but also generating sales of goods and services at area businesses.

In addition, a thriving rural economy generated tax revenue that helps pay for the core provincial government services and infrastructure which benefits all Manitobans.

Although the ski facility closed in 2000, there remains strong interest in seeing it reopened and Parks Canada is committed to conducting a feasibility study with respect to the Agassiz site and future opportunities in this area.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the appropriate ministers of the provincial government to consider outlining to Parks Canada the importance that a viable recreation facility in the Mount Agassiz area would play in the local and provincial economies.

And to request that the appropriate ministers of the provincial government consider working with all stakeholders, including Parks Canada, to help develop a plan for a viable, multiseason, recreation facility in the Mount Agassiz area.

This petition is signed by D. Grimstead, Bonnie Zdan, Jennifer Trotter and many, many other fine Manitobans.

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

Long-Term Care Facilities—Morden and Winkler

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

Many seniors from the Morden and Winkler area are currently patients in the Boundary Trails Health Centre while they wait for placement in local personal care homes.

There are presently no beds available for these patients in Salem Home and Tabor Home. To make more beds in the hospital available, the regional health authority is planning to move these patients to personal care homes in outlying regions.

These patients have lived, worked and raised their families in this area for most of their lives. They receive care and support from their family and friends who live in the community, and they will lose this support if they are forced to move to distant communities.

These seniors and their families should not have to bear the consequences of the provincial government's failure to ensure that there are adequate personal care home beds in the region.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Health to ensure that patients who are awaiting placement in a personal care home are not moved to distant communities.

And to urge the Minister of Health to consider working with the RHA and the community to speed construction and expansion of long-term care facilities in the region.

This is signed by David Wieler, Cornie Froese, Jake Brown and many, many others.

PTH 15—Twinning

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

In 2004, the Province of Manitoba made a public commitment to the people of Springfield to twin PTH 15 and the floodway bridge on PTH 15, but then in 2006, the twinning was cancelled.

Injuries resulting from collisions on PTH 15 continue to rise and have doubled from 2007 to 2008.

In August 2008, the Minister of Transportation stated that preliminary analysis of current and future traffic demands indicate that local twinning will be required.

The current plan to replace the floodway bridge on PTH 15 does not include twinning and therefore does not fulfil the current nor future traffic demands cited by the Minister of Transportation.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Transportation consider the immediate twinning of the PTH 15 floodway bridge for the safety of the citizens of Manitoba.

Signed by Dorothy Meads, Valerie Ralke, Nicole Remkes and many, many other Manitobans.

Ophthalmology Services—Swan River

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for the petition:

The Swan Valley region has a high population of seniors and a very high incidence of diabetes. Every year, hundreds of patients from the Swan Valley region must travel to distant communities for cataract surgery and additional pre-operative and post-operative appointments.

These patients, many of whom are sent as far away as Saskatchewan, need to travel with an escort who must take time off work to drive the patient to his or her appointments without any compensation. Patients who cannot endure this expense and hardship are unable to have the necessary treatment.

The community has located an ophthalmologist who would like to practise in Swan River. The local Lions Club has provided funds for the necessary equipment, and the Swan River Valley hospital has space to accommodate this service.

The Minister of Health has told the Town of Swan River that it has insufficient infrastructure and patient volumes to support a cataract surgery program; however, residents of the region strongly disagree.

* (13:40)

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Health to consider rethinking her refusal to allow an ophthalmologist to practise in Swan River and to consider working with the community to provide this service without further delay.

And this is signed by Evelyn Yufrym, Isobel Kushniryk, Bill Kushniryk and many, many others, Mr. Speaker.

MPI–Independent Claim Representative

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

Several citizens of Manitoba who have been injured in automobile accidents are being denied by Manitoba Public Insurance the right to choose who may be their agent or personal representative when appealing a decision to terminate benefits.

This has created serious challenges for claimants who feel that they need someone to represent them. The choices suggested by MPI are a lawyer, claimant adviser, or someone of their choosing, such as a family member or friend, who is not being paid.

MPI suggests that it is the Law Society which is advising it is not to accept independent claim representatives who are paid a fee. However, the legal professions act specifies that only claims founded in tort are subject to its provisions regarding the unlawful practice of law and The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Act confirms that the claims for compensation are non-tort claims.

Furthermore, neither The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Act nor MPI's Web site specifies that claimants may not hire an independent claims representative who is not a lawyer. Consequently, claimants feel that their rights have been arbitrarily discriminated against.

Claimants in other provinces under similar non-tort Workers Compensation legislation and claimants in other provinces with public auto insurers are allowed the right to choose and/or hire an independent claims representative.

As MPI is a Crown corporation and a monopoly, it has a profound duty of care to ensure that the citizens' rights and freedoms are not discriminated against.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the minister charged with the administration of Manitoba's public insurance corporation act to consider instructing MPI to allow claimants the right to select an independent claim representative of their choosing, whether paid or unpaid, whether a lawyer or non-lawyer, as claimants with similar claims in other provinces are permitted to do.

And this petition is signed by Imelda Valigdig, Donna Wiebe and Dawn Barrett and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Medical Clinic in Weston and Brooklands Area

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

Walk-in medical clinics provide a valuable health-care service.

The closure of the Westbrook Medical Clinic has left both Weston and Brooklands without a community-based medical clinic.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the provincial government to consider how important it is to have a medical clinic located in the Weston and Brooklands area.

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by K. Bushie, A. Aziz and W. Eaglechild and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Bipole III

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

And the background to this petition is as follows:

Manitoba Hydro has been forced by the NDP government to construct its next high-voltage direct transmission line, Bipole III, down the west side of Manitoba, a decision for which the NDP government has not been able to provide any logical justification.

Since this will cost Manitoba ratepayers at least \$640 million more than an east-side route, and given

that the Province of Manitoba is facing its largest deficit on record, the budget of this extra cost could not come at a worse time.

Between 2002 and 2009 electricity rates increased by 16 percent, and Manitoba Hydro has filed a request for further rate increases totalling 6 percent over the next two years.

A western Bipole III route will invariably lead to more rate increases.

In addition to being cheaper, an east-side route would be hundreds of kilometres shorter and would be more reliable than a west-side route.

West-side residents have not been adequately consulted and have identified serious concerns with the proposed line.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to consider proceeding with the cheaper, shorter and more logical east-side route, subject to necessary regulatory approvals, to save ratepayers hundreds of millions of dollars during these challenging economic times.

And this petition is signed by Raymond Massinon, Art Goerzen, Jacob Benthon and many, many more fine Manitobans.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Mr. Speaker: I am pleased to table, in accordance with the provisions of section 28(1) of The Auditor General Act, the report of the Auditor on the Follow-up of Previously Issued Recommendations.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Provincial Parks 50th Anniversary

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Minister of Conservation): Mr. Speaker, I have a ministerial statement.

Mr. Speaker, this year is the 50th anniversary of the Manitoba provincial parks system. It was in March 1960 that the first Provincial Parks Act received royal assent, setting the foundation for the parks system that Manitobans and visitors know and enjoy every day. As one whose generation who benefited greatly from this act, I want to congratulate the generation of that era for their vision and personally congratulate former Premier Duff Roblin for his leadership at that time.

The act provided for the formal establishment of a provincial park system that would conserve ecosystems and maintain biodiversity; preserve unique and representative natural, cultural and heritage resources; and provide outdoor recreational and educational opportunities and experiences in a natural setting.

On January 1st, 1961, the first four parks were designated: Duck Mountain, the Whiteshell, Turtle Mountain and Grand Beach. Today, 50 years later, Manitoba has 81 provincial parks and more than 4.5 million hectares of land, as well as 13 park reserves.

It is estimated that there are approximately 5 million visits to our parks each year. Manitobans and visitors alike have come to love our provincial parks and enjoy the amenities: 55 campgrounds, which include almost 6,000 campsites and yurts; 6,300 cottages; 150 businesses; 53 heritage buildings; eight interpretive centres; and 177 trails.

While much has changed since The Provincial Parks Act was first passed 50 years ago, the Province remains committed to continuing our efforts to protect these natural areas, while making improvements to Manitoba's provincial parks. And so, this year we are proud to celebrate 50 years of life's great outdoors in Manitoba's provincial parks. To mark this occasion, 50th anniversary celebrations will be held throughout many provincial parks on Canada Parks Day weekend, July the 17th, 2010. We will post details about these events at ManitobaParks.com.

At this time, I encourage all Manitobans and all honourable colleagues to join in the celebration, explore our parks, and help create new and lasting memories with friends and family of these very special places.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to be able to put a few words on the record in recognition of the 50th anniversary of Manitoba's parks as well. I've had the opportunity with my family to use many of them, as my colleague has just indicated as well, and we look forward to more information on the Canada Parks Day on July 17th, as well.

Our province is the home to a broad range of parks that help preserve and showcase our unique physical environment, our history and our culture. Our own constituency is home to—or my own

constituency is home to a number of these popular parks, including the Turtle Mountain, as was just pointed out by the minister, is one of the first four parks in the Manitoba system, and the facilities at Oak Lake.

As many Manitobans are from urban areas of the province, it is essential that we have a provincial park system to afford people the opportunity to spend some time in a natural setting. That could mean a family camping vacation, complete with swimming at one of the many beautiful beaches and enjoying time around the campfire, checking out the stars in an environment free from artificial light.

Our parks are often the very places where people catch their first glimpse of a turtle, a moose, a skink, a beaver or an eagle in the wild. Our parks and wilderness areas also provide opportunities for quiet reflection, such as paddling down a remote heritage river while listening to a loon or snowshoeing through fresh powder. As a society, we sometimes get fixated on visiting distant destinations, forgetting that we have access to many special, natural, historic and cultural resources in our own backyard right here in Manitoba.

* (13:50)

I would also like to offer thanks from my colleagues to all of the Manitoba's park staff, both administration and maintenance, for all their diligent efforts in keeping our parks in great shape for all visiting Manitobans. And as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of our parks I would encourage all Manitobans to take some time this year to explore all that our park system has to offer. You won't be disappointed. Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member have leave?

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Mr. Speaker: Leave has been granted.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I, too, rise to recognize and honour the importance of the 50th anniversary of parks in Manitoba and the important contribution that parks have made to life of Manitobans and, indeed, to the life of others who visit Manitoba. Like many other Manitoba families, my wife and our three children have spent a lot of time in our parks and

really enjoyed the outdoors and our visits and the many tremendous opportunities that there are to partake in this wonderful province that we have in Manitoba, from the Whiteshell Provincial Park to Turtle Mountain to the Grass River to Duck Mountains and many, many others. These are wonderful spots and allow us to get away from life in the big cities and to enjoy some time outdoors and rest and relax sometimes, enjoy more vigorous exercise at other times, but certainly get some renewed ability to participate in the hectic day-to-day life here in the Legislature and other places. Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the Speaker's Gallery where we have with us today the mayor of Killarney, Rick Pauls, who is the guest of the honourable member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell).

And also in the public gallery, we have from the University of Manitoba English Language Centre, we have 61 international students under the direction of Ms. Alison Hanks. This group is—this school is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Housing and Community Development (Ms. Irvin-Ross).

And also in the public gallery, we have from Louis Riel Arts and Technology Centre, we have 20 Adult Education students under the direction of Ms. Lucille Miller. And this school is located in the constituency of the honourable First Minister.

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Balanced Budget Legislation Ministerial Salary Reductions

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, less than two years ago in this House the Premier said, and I quote: If you don't balance the budget you will take a penalty as prescribed in the legislation.

The legislation he was talking about requires a 40 percent reduction in ministerial salaries if you run deficit two years in a row. Given that he plans to run deficits five years in a row, I want to ask the Premier whether he plans to honour the commitment he made in this House less than two years ago.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the budget under the existing law does balance this year. In spite of that, this Cabinet has agreed to a 20 percent reduction in their salary as part of a five-year program of economic recovery. Fundamental to that program is investing in front-line services such as health care, education, family services, justice, as well as items like infrastructure.

Secondly, the old balanced budget legislation would've required very significant cuts at a time of recession. We have chosen the opposite strategy of stimulating the economy with \$1.8 billion of investment to create 29,000 jobs at a time when Manitobans need to keep working.

And thirdly, Mr. Speaker, we have a program of managing public expenditure by reducing or holding the line in over half the departments so that we can invest in front-line services. At the same time we will come out of this recession with balanced budgets, and we will do it by keeping Manitoba among the most affordable places to live.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, he didn't respond to the question.

He made a statement in the House less than two years ago. I'll read it again, and I quote: If you don't balance the budget you'll take a penalty as prescribed in the legislation.

That was what the Premier said less than two years ago. The legislation he was talking about requires a 40 percent reduction in salaries if you run deficits two years in a row.

Given that he plans to run deficits five years in a row, will he honour the commitment he made in this House less than two years ago?

Mr. Selinger: I actually did answer that question. I indicated very clearly that this budget is balanced under current law, but our go-forward program is a program that responds to the greatest recession since the Great Depression.

And if the member wants to balance the budget this year and the next four years with the very significant cuts in front-line services that would be implied, that's his choice. Our choice is to protect Manitobans through this very difficult time. We do not choose to go back to the '90s, when doctors were leaving Manitoba, when nurses were being laid off, when school teachers were being put on the unemployment rolls, when there were welfare cheat lines, and everybody outside of this building was the

enemy because they wanted to live a decent life. We choose to work with Manitobans, to give them an education, to give them access to employment opportunities, to do it in a fiscally responsible way, and we will do it while keeping Manitoba one of the most affordable places to live.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, that was an incredible answer—that was an incredible answer. Keep going. Keep going. It was an incredible answer.

You know, Mr. Speaker, he's comparing this situation to the Great Depression. That's an insult to everybody who lived through the Great Depression. His own budget is projecting revenue-economic growth of 2.5 percent for this year, growth of 2.5 percent he's projecting, yet he plans to run five deficits in a row, and he will not respond to the question.

He gave his word in this House on May the 1st, 2008, less than two years ago, when he said in this House, and I quote: If you don't balance the budget you will take a penalty as prescribed in the legislation.

The legislation he was referring to requires a 40 percent reduction if you run deficits two years in a row, Mr. Speaker. He has laid out a plan to run deficits five years in a row. He's getting off light with a 40 percent reduction.

Will he answer the question? Will he keep his word? Yes or no?

Mr. Selinger: The members opposite would have us believe that in order not to take a salary cut if they were in Cabinet they would slash spending in Manitoba by over a half a billion dollars this year just so they could live with inside a piece of legislation that the dean of the Faculty of Economics at the University of Winnipeg said was inappropriate legislation for the times we live in.

The job of government is to step up to the plate and support Manitobans during a time of recession. We will do that by protecting front-line services, by generating 29,000 jobs with \$1.8 billion of investment in schools, hospitals, roads, sewer and clean water. We will do that while educating Manitobans and giving them opportunities to enter the labour market and have a good income.

Yes, the economy is growing this year, Mr. Speaker, because we have a budget that will grow the economy.

Mr. McFadyen: Thank you very much.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I'm asking co-operation of the members. There's no sense trying to shout one another down here. We got a lot of guests in here that come down to hear the question period and they deserve to be able to hear the questions and the answers. I'm asking the co-operation of all honourable members.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition has the floor. Thank you.

Mr. McFadyen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And when all of the smoke clears from these nonsensical responses that he gives in the House, where he contradicts himself not just from one year to the next, but from one answer to the next—in the House he went from the Great Depression to economic growth in the span of less than 45 seconds, in this House, I mean, does this Premier—and he wonders why people think he has no credibility. He blew it last year when he called a balanced budget and ended up with a \$600-million deficit. He told everybody that things were fine at Crocus when he was writing memos to Cabinet saying they're headed for a liquidity crisis. He said he was outraged by election finance irregularities, but didn't tell the public—got a letter to cover his own backside. Now he wants to bring in a bill to protect his own salary that should've been cut because of his mismanagement.

* (14:00)

Will he today apologize for breaking his promise and for putting his own income ahead of the needs of Manitobans, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Selinger: You know, it's not a surprise that a long-serving member of the Progressive Conservative caucus in this House, Marcel Laurendeau, has decided to go with the Liberals, because he says these guys are just too right wing. They're too right wing, Mr. Speaker. They would have—they would follow the orthodoxy of their legislation of '96.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Can't even hear. Let's have some decorum, please. We need to be able to hear the questions and the answers.

The honourable First Minister has the floor.

Mr. Selinger: You know, Mr. Speaker, the federal Conservative government is running a program of recovery over six years with deficits and stimulus spending. The Liberal government in B.C. is doing something similar. The Conservative government of Alberta is doing something similar. Every single government—every single government in this country has agreed to restimulate the economy at a time when private investment collapsed due to the shenanigans coming out of Wall Street in New York.

The members opposite want to cling to a piece of legislation of another era. They want to go back to the '90s when people—when the members opposite were laying off nurses, driving doctors out of the province, laying off teachers, putting kids on the street because they couldn't go to school.

This budget does things like bring in a co-op education tax credit—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. McFadyen: I'm pleased to see him using the Liberal candidate as his source of authority in debate, Mr. Speaker. Now, I want to ask the Premier if he can just get out of the trunk for a second and start to respond to the questions that I'm putting before him today in the House.

I want to ask the Premier today, given that he just said, Mr. Speaker, that two years ago was another era—and frankly, that's the only point in that answer we agree with. It was another era two years ago. It was an era when Mr. Doer was here, who campaigned on balanced budgets. It's a new era today.

It's a new era today, Mr. Speaker. We've got a union-selected NDP leader who's gutting balanced budget law, going back on the word that he gave to Manitobans two years ago.

Is he going to follow through on the commitment that he made, not a previous premier, that this Premier made less than two years ago? It wasn't in the '90s or the '80s or the last decade or the last millennium. Two years ago—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Selinger: You know, the members opposite want to drag us back into the '90s. They want—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. If members wish to shout—if members wish to yell and shout, please go to your office. You can yell all you want. We have guests in

here, we have the viewing public, and we have the dignity of this House to protect. Let's have a little co-operation here.

The honourable First Minister has the floor.

Mr. Selinger: The members opposite want to drag us back onto their ideological hobbyhorse of the '90s, where they cut nurses, they scared doctors out of Manitoba, they put young people on the street, with their school policies, without getting an education. They had higher unemployment rates. They want to do all of those things so that they can protect their legislation and protect their salaries.

We have taken a different approach. We have put a program together that responds to the times, the times of recession. We are growing the economy by stimulating it with \$1.8 billion of capital investment, 29,000 jobs. We are protecting front-line services in health care, in family services, in justice, in infrastructure. We are doing things that allow Manitobans to keep on working and building the wealth and the assets of this province, so that as we lift out of recession, we will rebalance the budget, people will be better educated, and we will be more prosperous, and we won't follow the ideological claptrap of the '90s of the members opposite.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, the individual I'm quoting is a fellow by the name—I can't say it in the House but it was March 1st, 2008—

An Honourable Member: The member for St. Boniface.

Mr. McFadyen: It was the member for St. Boniface I'm quoting. It's not some ideological claptrap. The member for St. Boniface, less than two years ago, said in this House, if you don't balance the budget you'll take a penalty as prescribed in the legislation. The legislation prescribes a 40 percent reduction if you run deficits two years in a row.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we're not asking that they take 20 percent over five years because they're running five deficits in a row. We're just saying the first two years. Do what the legislation says.

Are they going to follow the legislation or are they going to rewrite the legislation, a privilege not available to any other Manitoban. Are they going to use their privilege and abuse their privilege in government to rewrite the law to protect their own salaries? Yes or no, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, we are going to use—we are going to take the enormous privilege we have

been given to serve in this House to do what's in the best interests of Manitobans. And that is to keep Manitobans working. That is to keep Manitobans getting an education. That is to protect front-line services for Manitobans. That is to protect the environment. That is to do those things that, during times of economic difficulty, grow the wealth of the province, the people wealth, the assets wealth.

We have \$36 billion of public assets in this province. We are going to grow them and make them stronger and, by doing that, the economy will grow as well. And as the economy grows, we will lift out of recession and we will be better off than we were when we started.

Balanced Budget Legislation Ministerial Salary Reductions

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, the only people that members opposite are concerned about protecting are their own ministers and their own ministerial salaries, and that is why they will be introducing legislation to change the balanced budget legislation. It's to protect their own ministerial salaries. Make no mistake about it.

Mr. Speaker, this government, though, has a history of protecting itself rather than protecting Manitoba taxpayers. They have introduced the vote tax to ensure their own party can have an advantage in the future elections, all done at the expense of Manitoba taxpayers.

Mr. Speaker, my question for the minister is: Why are members opposite more concerned about protecting themselves than protecting Manitobans?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Finance): Well, Mr. Speaker, I can't believe that question because if the member opposite had listened at all to the budget—if she had listened to—at all to the budget, she would have heard that we are putting in a five-year plan, a plan that will help us stimulate the economy, protect front-line services, keep people working, spend \$1.8 billion in stimulus and, at the same time, we are putting a—our balanced budget legislation, thus, maintain the things that the member opposite says we are eliminating because our balanced budget legislation does keep the legal requirement—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, the only plan this minister and members opposite has is a long-term plan to protect their own ministerial salaries, and it's

unfortunate. And, I think, again, they have shown in the past that they're more interested in protecting themselves than Manitoba taxpayers.

The Premier was quick to ask for a letter exonerating himself from the Elections Manitoba scheme, Mr. Speaker, protecting himself over Manitoba taxpayers.

Let us not forget about Crocus when he chose to cover up that whole scheme at the expense of unit holders and Manitoba taxpayers. The list goes on and on and on. They have a history of protecting themselves over Manitoba taxpayers. Why is that? Why will they not do the right thing, protect Manitoba taxpayers? That's what they should be doing.

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will put our record of this budget against their record in the '90s anytime.

Mr. Speaker, our record keeps people working, our record [*inaudible*] protects front-line services—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

* (14:10)

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, I would put our record beside theirs anytime and I will stand by our record.

Mr. Speaker, we are training nurses; they fired nurses. We are training doctors; they drove doctors out of the province.

Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you what the Tories would do. They will do what the member from Carman said. He said the Tories will put less focus on other issues, such as health-care load, social services, agriculture, rural development and First Nations.

We're not going to win an election based on those issues. That's what they would do. They did it in the '90s and, if they had a chance again, they would do it again. I'll stand by our record anytime.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, members opposite are not concerned about the average Manitoban at all. They are much more concerned, and their actions prove it, they're much more concerned about protecting themselves over that of Manitobans. This budget proves it. Past actions that this government has taken prove it—to prove it.

Why, Mr. Speaker, do they continue to protect themselves over that of Manitobans?

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, let's just think about what some of the people are saying about this speech, Mr. Speaker.

What is the film industry saying, Mr. Speaker? They are saying the province is take-trying to get us the tools to be able to keep what we are building.

That's only one sector, Mr. Speaker, but there are many other sectors, and there are people in Manitoba who want us to spend on stimulus so that they can keep working. They want us to spend on front-line services so their services will be there. They want us to spend on education so they can get the training, so that we—when our economy turns around, they have the tools to take part in that economy. They want us to spend on infrastructure and in this budget that's what we're doing.

Saskatchewan Economy

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, on a new question.

Mr. Speaker: On a new question.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, 10 years ago—it was almost 10 years ago when I came into this Manitoba Legislature as an MLA, and back then, Saskatchewan was actually worse off financially than Manitoba. And through hard work and fiscal prudence, Saskatchewan has surpassed us today.

Mr. Speaker, let's just look at the facts here. Over the last number of years, Saskatchewan made some very difficult decisions. They reduced their deficit—or they reduced their debt by \$2.6 billion. What has this government done? They've increased it by almost \$10 billion. Even in yesterday's budget, Saskatchewan reduced expenditures by 1.2 percent and still was able to increase health-care spending by 5 percent. These guys are increasing health care by 5 percent, but they're also increasing everything else, and bloating bureaucracies and health care and everything else.

Mr. Speaker, it's clear that Saskatchewan has far surpassed Manitoba. What is their plan to make sure that we get back to where we should be, ahead of Saskatchewan?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Finance): Well, Mr. Speaker, I—it's interesting to hear what the member opposites say. She's saying that she supports the Saskatchewan plan that's going to lay off, in this year, some 600 civil servants and has a plan to reduce the civil service by 1,600. And I would say to

the member, she's talking about the Saskatchewan budget and she should look at what Saskatchewan—where Saskatchewan is on the summary budget basis, because Saskatchewan has a summary deficit of \$622.7 million.

So, Mr. Speaker, what Saskatchewan is doing is the path that they have taken. What we are doing is the path that we have taken to ensure that we can protect those front-line services, and make investments in education, make sure that we have the stimulus dollars so 29,000 people can continue to work. But, I would also tell the member to look at the Saskatchewan budget and see what Saskatchewan says about Manitoba, and what Saskatchewan says about our taxes and our cost of living in comparison to Saskatchewan.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, I would remind the minister that Saskatchewan is no longer dependent on the federal government for transfer payments for such a significant percentage. Manitoba is, and that's a significant difference between us and them. So I would remind this minister of that.

I would also remind this minister that over the last number of years, Saskatchewan has taken the fiscally prudent, responsible direction of paying down debt; this government has increased the debt in our province, Mr. Speaker. I would also remind the minister that taxes, personal income taxes, have been reduced in Saskatchewan over the years, and in Manitoba we are still the highest taxed in western Canada.

Mr. Speaker, we are falling further and further behind our neighbour, Saskatchewan. What is their plan to ensure that we get back ahead of them where we should be?

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, again, the member wants to talk about Saskatchewan. I would invite her to read their documents, where they say Manitoba is No. 1. In their budget, they say a single Winnipeg resident with a salary of—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, in the Saskatchewan budget, it says a single Winnipeg resident with a salary of \$25,000 pays \$1,440 less in Winnipeg than in Saskatoon. A family in Winnipeg with an income of \$50,000 pays \$551 less than a family in Saskatoon. A family in Winnipeg with an income of

\$75,000 pays \$207 less in Winnipeg than in Saskatoon.

So if the member wants to compare Manitoba and Saskatchewan, she should compare it fairly, talk about taxes, and she should think about what we are doing, and she should think about—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, we need to stick to the facts when we're talking about this today, and the facts are that Manitoba remains the highest taxes west—in the western provinces.

The fact of the matter is Saskatchewan has been prudently, fiscally managing their fiscal affairs. They've paid down the debt by 2.6 billion over the last number of years; this government has increased the debt by almost \$10 billion. Saskatchewan is no longer dependent on the federal government for transfer payments; Manitoba is still dependent on federal government for transfer payments. The list goes on and on and on about how Saskatchewan has far surpassed Manitoba, and yet this government has no plan to take us forward into the future, rather—other than the sinkhole budget that they brought forward before—or a few days ago.

Mr. Speaker, Manitobans want to know: What is the plan to take us out of this desperate stage where we are today?

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I would invite the member opposite to read our budget. I would invite the member opposite to read our five-year plan. If she would like, I will provide her with a copy of it. It's very short.

Our five-year plan is to invest in vital front-line services like health care, education, training, policing. We will stimulate the economy, Mr. Speaker, by \$1.8 billion, so 29,000 people keep on working. We are managing government spending. We're restoring balance and we're maintaining Manitoba's affordability, where in Saskatchewan numbers, it says Manitoba is No. 1, before Saskatchewan.

Agriculture Budget Expenditures

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, in an interview Monday with a rural media outlet, the Minister of Agriculture promised to eke and scrape together funds to support farmers. Apparently, he doesn't have the ear of the Finance Minister. Today's budget—Tuesday's budget speech doesn't even

contain the word "agriculture." Can you say that? Agriculture. The department's budget was cut 4.2 percent and the Finance Minister's taken nearly a half a million in extra fees from producers.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Agriculture explain to the Manitoba producers why he can't keep his promise to farmers? Does he have no influence whatsoever around the Cabinet table?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, there's the money and support in this budget for hog farmers, for cattle farmers, for grain farmers, for Canola farmers, for flax farmers; the list goes on. I would suggest the member reads the budget himself and take a look at that.

* (14:20)

I want to also clear the record a little bit. I mean, Saskatchewan—nice province, the minister over there I like, he's a good guy. He must have been really torn today, though, when he had to decrease agricultural spending by \$97 million. That's 20 percent, Mr. Speaker, 20 percent. They went on further. There was reductions. Maybe the Saskatchewan government has adopted the line of the member for Carman (Mr. Pedersen) where he's turned his back on agriculture because they further reduced AgriStability by about a third.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Speaker, the reason that's it's only 4.2 percent in Manitoba is because of a \$4-billion transfer fund from the federal government. Agriculture is responsible for 5 percent of Manitoba's gross domestic product. One in nine jobs in Manitoba is related to the agricultural industry. The government's own budget documents show that 2,300 jobs were lost in agricultural related sectors in '09. That's a very significant impact on the economy, yet this budget contains no long-term vision for agriculture. Instead, the Minister of Agriculture is chopping more than \$5 million out of the AgriInvest program. The Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) is saddling producers with a half a million in extra fees.

Mr. Speaker, why has the Minister of Agriculture failed to protect the interests of Manitobans and Manitoba farmers?

Mr. Struthers: Oh, far from it, Mr. Speaker, very far from it.

Just to continue on, members opposite talk in glowing terms about Saskatchewan, again, my counterpart Minister Bjornerud probably didn't feel

very good about reducing AgriInvest to the farmers in his province. He didn't feel very good, I don't think, about reducing crop insurance in that province. We're not taking that approach. We're looking to find supports for farmers. In the hemp industry, where there was, in this budget, a mention made of hemp and that kind of support. In the southwest of Manitoba, in the parklands of Manitoba, right across this province, we're looking for ways to work as farmers to get more money in their pockets and, Mr. Speaker, we know what is concerning across there is that they're not going to win elections, they don't think, by standing up for farmers. You're wrong.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Speaker, and this is from the Agricultural Minister, the former minister for the Environment—or Conservation—that killed the hog industry in Manitoba. Overlooking agriculture in the Manitoba budget speech is like not mentioning the energy sector in the Alberta's budget. But we wouldn't be surprised by the oversight; the Finance Minister was a failure as an agricultural minister. No slaughter plant in Dauphin, no hemp plant in Dauphin, no biodiesel industries struggling to get off the ground in Manitoba since 2004.

Budget 2010 makes vague promises to help Interlake producers get their crops in the ground this spring, but given this government's poor track record at handling excess moisture situations in the Interlake, producers have every reason to be sceptical that it will happen.

Mr. Speaker, cropping and insurance decisions need to be made soon. What kind of help is going to be delivered to the Interlake producers and when? The details need to flow.

Mr. Struthers: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll take the word of Karl Kynoch over the member for Emerson any day when it comes to this government's attitude towards the Pork Council and pork farmers. He doesn't have the bias of the member from Carman to worry, he can come out and honestly say that he likes working with this government—which he has. He can say we've met on these issues and that there's progress. He's said that.

I wouldn't be real concerned about what the member for Carman said except that the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) said nothing about this. He didn't come at all. You would think, Mr. Speaker, that if it wasn't the Tory position that the leader would have the guts to come out and say it's not the Tory position, and he's been eerily quiet on this.

**Manitoba Hydro
Wind Energy Development Capital Loans**

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, when the NDP government directed Manitoba Hydro to call for requests for proposals for wind energy, there were 83 proposals.

To the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro: Were all 83 proponents made aware that they would receive a \$260-million capital loan from Manitoba Hydro and be allowed to provide only 158 megawatts of power rather than the 300 megawatts called for in the request for proposals?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): I'm very pleased, Mr. Speaker, that in this challenging time we have been able to work with a company, and Manitoba Hydro has been able to work with a company, and have 138 megawatts of wind power on line by this fall.

Mr. Speaker, this is an important investment. It's one that the people in southwestern Manitoba have been looking for. And the member opposite wants—talks about lending money to the company. The company says that this is the tightest loan.

Mr. Speaker, we want to have wind energy developed in this part and we have worked with the company that had the lowest bid. This company had the lowest bid. They made a decision to lower their amount to 138 megawatts, down from the 300. That was their decision.

Mr. Borotsik: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the minister is aware that Pattern Energy from California is partnered with an American company called Riverstone Holdings LLC. In a recent news release Pattern Energy is described as one of the most experienced, and listen to this: best capitalized development companies in U.S. renewable energy.

It goes on to say that Riverstone has \$17 billion under management and is providing capital to Pattern Energy for its expanded energy. If this is the situation, why did the minister find it necessary to subsidize an American company with \$260 million of Manitoba Hydro's borrowed money?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, the member is wrong.

Mr. Speaker, we are not—and Manitoba Hydro is not subsidizing the company. In fact, Manitoba Hydro will make money on this loan. Manitoba Hydro will make money on this loan—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let's have some decorum here. Order.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let's have a little decorum.

The honourable minister has the floor.

Ms. Wowchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Manitoba Hydro will make money on this loan and the member opposite is also neglecting to mention that Pattern brought \$96 million in to invest in this project, Mr. Speaker. So there is investment. There is money for farmers in this. There are jobs. There will be around 200 people working in Manitoba building these towers. There will be about 15 permanent jobs. Farmers will have a significant income from this, \$38 million for the farmers over the time of the project. There will be revenues for the Province and \$73 million.

I can't believe that the member opposite is speaking against economic development in this province, jobs for rural Manitobans.

Mr. Borotsik: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the full \$350 million from the best capitalized company, the American company, could've brought their own \$350 million into the province without expecting \$260 million from the Province of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, let me understand, this is pretty simple—the only one making money, by the way, is the Province of Manitoba because they charge Manitoba Hydro a premium to borrow money. So the Province is going to make money but we're going to buy power from Pattern at a high cost. We're going to sell it at a lower cost. We're going to lend them \$260 million that Manitoba Hydro doesn't have but has to borrow.

Mr. Speaker, that's subsidization. Why is this minister subsidizing an American company on the backs of seniors who, yet again, have another 2.9 percent increase on their hydro rates and are going to get another one in the not too distant future? Why is she subsidizing on the back of Manitoba seniors?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is suddenly concerned about the rates that people are going to pay. They wanted to go to market rates. Where do you think the price of hydro rates would be if we went to market rates? Look at Ontario. What's the rate of power there?

Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is wrong. There is no subsidization here. I'll take Bob Brennan's word over his anytime. Mr. Brennan says on this loan the Crown corporation will make money. The Province will make money and farmers will make money for renting their land.

* (14:30)

They say they're in favour of farmers. They're speaking against these farmers, Mr. Speaker. There will be jobs in Manitoba. There is nothing that this member can speak against this project. It's good for Manitoba. It will create wind energy and create more power for Manitoba.

Health-Care Services Reprocessing of Single-Use Devices

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, we know that every second the Province spends roughly around \$140 on health care in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health has a heavy responsibility, and yet, time and time again, we see a Minister of Health that has demonstrated her inability to manage the needed changes in health care.

I have a very simple question for the Minister of Health that would save millions of dollars every year, Mr. Speaker, if, in fact, she had the courage to be able to take action.

The minister is familiar with single-use devices. If, in fact, the Province of Manitoba were to allow for reusing of single-use devices, there would be a million-plus dollars saved every year. The backbenchers yap, wow. Every dollar is a tax dollar. Every tax dollar is an important dollar. Shame on you for minimizing it.

Mr. Speaker, my question is—my question to the Minister of Health is: Will she not recognize the value of the tax dollar and take immediate action to allow for a reusing when properly sterilized single device uses in health care?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I support the member in his view about tax dollars being very precious in these economic times. Every dollar that we can invest in health care in improving the patient journey is critically important. That's why Canadians were so up in arms when the Liberals cut huge, huge chunks out of the health transfer.

On this specific issue of device reprocessing, I can tell the member that he's correct in stating that it has been our government's position not to allow the reprocessing of single-use devices on the recommendation of infection control experts.

We do know, however, that technology is emerging, that science changes. We are prepared to look, additionally, at new advances in sterilization of equipment. At this time we're not making that move, but we're open to looking.

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, Mr. Speaker, while the minister kind of ganders around losing millions of dollars a year in terms of tax savings, we have provinces and states all over North America are doing exactly what it is that this minister chooses not to do.

Does she believe that the departments of Health, whether it's in the States or in Ontario, don't care about their patients, that she is the only minister in North America that cares about the health and well-being of their patients? Why is she not acting on something that appears to be very straight forward, very simple and you can save tax dollars and reuse that money where it could be better utilized, such as supporting the Westbrook Medical Clinic serving constituents of Weston and Brooklands?

Ms. Oswald: Mr. Speaker, I always find it a little ironic when the member from Inkster accuses others of meandering around.

But I can say very specifically to the member that the issue of reprocessing single-use devices has been a topic of conversation across the nation among infection control experts, medical doctors who, in contrast to the member opposite, do not view this as a simple issue. He views a lot of things as a simple issue. No great surprise.

But I can tell you that infection control experts are split on this issue, and I can inform him that while we will continue to revisit this issue as technology emerges and safety issues emerge that are improving the nature of the reprocessing, for now, I can tell you that patient safety for our party is No. 1.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I would request leave to be able to ask my final supplementary question.

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member have leave to ask his final supplementary question?
[Agreed]

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, Mr. Speaker, major hospitals all around North America, even some teaching hospitals are recognizing the value of having—of reusing medical equipment, that it is not putting in jeopardy the health and well-being of those patients if it's done properly.

It seems to be only in the mind of the Minister of Health here in the province of Manitoba where we're not seeing the tax dollars and the health benefit by recognizing this as an important issue.

My question to the Minister of Health is: Why does she not realize that by acting on this today, we could be having additional dollars being spent in other aspects of health care that will improve the quality of front-line service to health care? Why does she not act today?

Ms. Oswald: Again, I've stated for the member in clear terms that as the technology emerges and infection control is improved, we are willing to look at this issue.

I might ask the member, as a result of an infection from a reprocessed single-use device, there were to be a death of a patient, what would his question be then?

Mr. Speaker: Okay, time for oral questions has expired so we'll move on to members' statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Midwinter's Night Dream—A Winter Festival

Ms. Marilyn Brick (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, while many Manitobans spent November to March cowering in their homes in fear of frostbite, the residents of Fort Richmond and St. Norbert embraced the cold and put on a family winter festival called the Midwinter's Night Dream on Saturday afternoon this February.

It was a magical event that brought together upwards of 300 people for a few hours of fun and laughter with family and friends. The event was free of charge for everyone who participated. Kids and adults alike came out in droves to tumble downhill in a toboggan ride, on a horse-drawn sleigh, pave a path on snowshoes and enjoy a variety of musical and cultural entertainment put on by our talented residents. Fantastic winter food was served at the event and many a visitor scalded their fingers on—and tongues on gooey s'mores bars and creamy hot chocolate.

As the MLA for St. Norbert, I joined the fun and helped student volunteers organize the exhilarating Turkey Bowl event. In this winter attraction, participants were invited to test their bowling skills by tossing frozen turkeys down a magic carpet in order to knock down some pins.

The impetus and driving force behind the Midwinter's Night Dream event were the students from Acadia Junior High and Fort Richmond Collegiate who wanted to improve their community.

Many volunteers donated their time to this event. I would like to thank the festival sponsors, including the Pembina Trails School Division, the United Way, Kings Park Day Care, the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, the Bairdmore Advisory Council, Granny's Poultry, the Fort Garry Community Network and many others.

Individuals like snowmobiler Tim Main, photographer Dave Benson, Evans Musanda, Vinny Jeanson and Brandan Simard also were a huge help. Volunteers from Southland Community Church ensured the success of the barbecue.

I hope to see many more events like this in my community. Thank you Mr. Speaker.

Hartney School Communication to Soldiers

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, as Canadians we are extremely proud of the work of our Canadian troops who are deployed around the world, and in particular, to Afghanistan. Canadian men and women who serve overseas provide selfless assistance to those who require it the most. At the same time they are forced to spend months away from their friends, families and at homes.

Although Sergeant Ian Hamilton of Deleau, Manitoba, is a proud member of the Canadian Armed Forces, the time that he spends separated from his wife Babs and his small farming community in western Manitoba, is difficult. For this reason, Babs Hamilton decided that she wanted to give Ian a Christmas gift that would bring him closer to home even though he would be in Afghanistan for the holidays. Babs decided that the perfect gift would be to ask school children to write letters to Canadian troops about their own lives in Canada and to send the soldiers their best wishes. After speaking to friends and neighbours in the community about her idea, Babs' plan was set in motion. Students in kindergarten, grade 3 and grade 4 at Hartney School sent cards, letters and pictures to Ian overseas.

Since Ian's family had not told him that he would be receiving the package, Ian was surprised to receive so many cards and letters from the students at Hartney School. The letters left a long-lasting impression on Ian and left him speechless and deeply touched. Ian was so pleased with the notes that he decided he would share them with his fellow soldiers so that they too could enjoy reading them.

Although we cannot fully understand the circumstances of what is taking place in Afghanistan for Canadian troops, the students of Hartney School have brought a bit of joy to some of the soldiers. The students may not entirely be aware of the impact that they have had on the soldiers, but Mr. Speaker, these students have made a big difference.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that the members of the Legislature will join me in applauding the work of our Canadian troops, along with the work of the kindergarten, grade 3 and grade 4 students at Hartney School.

* (14:40)

As the MLA for Arthur-Virden, I would like to thank the students of Hartney School for preparing these wonderful gifts for our Canadian soldiers. I am sure that they are extremely grateful to receive these generous offerings.

Thank you Mr. Speaker.

Southdale Community Centre Expansion

Ms. Erin Selby (Southdale): Mr. Speaker, last Friday, shovels hit the ground in Southdale at a ceremony marking the construction of the expansion of the Southdale Community Centre, an expansion that, I'm proud to say, fulfills a 2007 campaign pledge that I made to my constituents.

Our government contributed \$2 million towards the plan, which will add a second hockey rink, a pleasure skating rink and more locker rooms to the current facility. An investment like this, even in a time of fiscal caution, means that our province will meet tomorrow's growth with a strong infrastructure and a glowing sense of civic pride. This community centre is truly the heart of Southdale.

Our funding is helping to make the project possible, but credit must be given to the club's volunteers. Southdale Community Centre has a dedicated board of directors, with president Wendy Memryk, vice-president Gayle Farkas, past-president Rick Harding, secretary Dorothy Ross, treasurer Jess Leung and governance and accountability executive

Larry Mitchell, along with many other volunteers who keep our club running.

It is thanks to the energy and guidance of the current board, as well as the effort of past boards, that Southdale continues to grow in both popularity and vibrancy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Manufacturing Week

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, it's with great pleasure that I rise in the House today to mark the achievements of our manufacturers here in Manitoba and to celebrate this year's Manufacturing Week events put on by the Manitoba chapter of the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters.

Manufacturing Week, which began in 2001, is a great opportunity to demonstrate to all Manitobans the importance manufacturing and export industries play in Manitoba, and to show to our young people the lucrative career opportunities manufacturing has to offer. As one of our largest industrial sectors, Manitoba manufacturers build everything from buses to vital life science products that help save lives. This is an industry all Manitobans can be proud of.

This year's events have included the Dare to Compete Manufacturing and Trade Conference, which took place this past Tuesday, March 23rd, 2010, at the Winnipeg Convention Centre. This was a great networking opportunity, bringing together leading companies and industry stakeholders to discuss key issues facing the manufacturing industry.

Manufacturing Week is also a time to recognize the exceptional achievements individuals and organizations have made in manufacturing and exporting here in Manitoba. The gala awards dinner taking place tonight, March 25th, 2010, will celebrate these achievements.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to congratulate this year's inductee into the Manitoba Manufacturers' Hall of Fame, John Buhler of Buhler Industries and Ken Holland of Carte International Inc.

I also wish to congratulate the Pioneer Award recipient, the late John Klassen, founder of Monarch Industries, as well as E.H. Price and Westfield Industries, this year's recipient of the Manitoba Export Awards. These individuals and organizations have made an outstanding contribution in their industries and I am pleased to offer my sincere congratulations for their efforts.

Mr. Speaker, manufacturing is a vital economic sector in Manitoba, and I want to thank the Manitoba chapter of the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters for all of their hard work in making Manufacturing Week such a success.

National Nutrition Month

Ms. Erna Braun (Rossmere): Mr. Speaker, March is national Nutrition Month in Canada, and I rise today to highlight the importance of healthy eating for healthy living.

What started as a commemorative week in a few provinces during the '70s has quickly evolved to a month-long celebration promoting a nutritious and balanced diet for all Canadians. Organized every year by the Dietitians of Canada, this year's Nutrition Month celebrates food from field to table by promoting local nutrient-packed ingredients cooked just the right way.

Mr. Speaker, this month exposes our citizens to trusted advice on healthy eating. Some of the resources available on the Dietitians of Canada Web site during this month include quick and easy recipes for healthy cooking, resources on local and organic foods and where to find them, advice on getting the most for our food dollars and the best ways to extract the most nutrition from our fruits and vegetables.

Our provincial government has long recognized that the foods we consume have a great effect on our physical and mental well-being. Just in September of last year, the government enacted legislation supporting healthier food choices in Manitoba schools. Amendments to The Public Schools Act now require all schools to annually review their food and nutrition policies and to report on their implementation. This legislation also greatly limits the use of trans fats in food products sold to our students.

Manitoba is on the right track, encouraging our children and adults to make smart choices when it comes to their food. Across Canada, Nutrition Month celebrates the local bounties in the provinces, while reminding everyone that healthy foods also taste great.

I encourage all members of the House to promote the principles of Nutrition Month in their constituency.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, on House business.

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Government House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker, just before we return to Interim Supply, I would like to announce that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts will meet at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, April the 14th, to consider the Auditor General's Report-Follow-Up of Previously Issued Recommendations-A Review, dated March 2009.

The honourable Minister of Housing and Community Development (Ms. Irvin-Ross) and Ms. Joy Cramer, Deputy Minister of Housing and Community Development, will be called as witnesses during the consideration of sections 17, 20, 21 and 23 of this report. And the honourable Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) and Mr. Hugh Eliasson, Deputy Minister of Finance, will be called as witnesses during the consideration of section 24 of this report.

Mr. Speaker: It has been announced that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts will meet at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, April 14th, to consider the Auditor General's Report-Follow-Up of Previously Issued Recommendations-A Review, dated March 2009.

The honourable Minister of Housing and Community Development and Ms. Joy Cramer, Deputy Minister of Housing and Community Development, will be called as witnesses during the consideration of sections 17, 20, 21, 23 of this report. The honourable Minister of Finance and Mr. Hugh Eliasson, Deputy Minister of Finance, will be called as witnesses during the consideration of section 24 of this report.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: And as previously agreed, we will now move on to Interim Supply. The House will now resolve into Committee of the Whole to consider a report on Bill 11, The Interim Appropriation Act, for concurrence and third reading.

Madam Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill 11—The Interim Appropriation Act, 2010

Madam Chairperson (Marilyn Brick): Will the Committee of the Whole please come to order. We will now be continuing consideration of Bill 11, The Interim Appropriation Act, 2010. The floor is open for questions.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Madam Chair, and my question is—my questions will be to the Minister of Education (Ms. Allan).

This week, Monday, March 22nd, there was a very interesting announcement greeted with a lot of enthusiasm in the city about the RTC/NTC soccer program that's supposed to be going into Glenlawn Collegiate, and I want to take this opportunity to congratulate Sean Drain, the president of the Manitoba Soccer Association along with Héctor Vergara, who is executive director and Robert Gale, technical director of the Manitoba Soccer Association, for really trying something very new and innovative in the whole area of combining sports and education. I know all of us have read the news clippings and the press releases that have come out.

My question to the minister is: Was she part of this process? Was the Department of Education part of the whole process of getting this program up and running?

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Education): As far as I know, that was an initiative that was spearheaded by the school division directly with the stakeholders involved. And I agree with the member opposite—very, very exciting initiative and an opportunity to create a centre of excellence. I certainly am pleased, obviously, that it's in my riding. I'm sorry I didn't have anything to do with it personally myself, but I really congratulate the stakeholders in regard to that exciting initiative.

* (14:50)

Mr. Schuler: And, of course, Glenlawn Collegiate is a good place to start. I mean, much better would have been one of the high schools in my community, but it had to go somewhere, and I understand it had to be close to the University of Manitoba. So I understand that probably Springfield Collegiate or River East Collegiate probably weren't in the running this round.

My question to the minister is, has she been briefed on the project?

Ms. Allan: No, I haven't.

Mr. Schuler: And, again, the questions that I ask are more for information. I can tell the minister, being a parent of three children actively involved in soccer—and I know this House would love to hear about the fact that, you know, all my children are excelling in soccer and that the two girls, actually, their teams made it to the city championships, but that's not what this is all about. So I'll stay on—once in a while we do sort of get off and start talking about how good our children are doing in their school and extracurricular activities and, insofar as sports is concerned.

The question I have is—and I appreciate the minister may not have all these answers, and perhaps later on she could even send them. There's a lot of interest out in the community, and as I go to soccer pitches—and I can assure this House that when I'm not spending a lot of time doing my duties as MLA, I'm doing a lot of duties as a father in soccer pitches and community clubs, and travelling the city and the province watching young people play.

My question to the minister is: Is there room at Glenlawn Collegiate for the 48-some players that would be transferred to Glenlawn Collegiate?

Ms. Allan: Well, I'd like to thank the member opposite for updating me on the success of his three children. I know he's very, very proud of them. And we've had an opportunity to work together in the Department of Labour and he always looked for an opportunity to talk about how well they were doing.

And I'd just like to let him know that, seeing as we're on the topic of Glenlawn Collegiate, I'd like him to know that both of my children graduated from there. So, you know, I'm glad that he—*[interjection]* Yes—oh, no, unfortunately.

But, you know, my understanding is, you know, this is really a school of excellence. You know, they have an incredible arts program, music program, sports program. I have been there several times, you know, when they've been winning the basketball championships, and I know they really are innovative and, you know, I really don't want to give him any misinformation on this at all. You know, I can't confirm because I haven't been briefed on this, but I can tell you that if they think they've got the space they'll make it happen.

Mr. Schuler: The next question I have for the minister: Is there an open-boundaries agreement to transfer student fees from other school divisions to the school division that Glenlawn Collegiate is

currently part of? Will the money follow the students into that school division?

Ms. Allan: That would be an agreement between the school division and the program participants, and I don't have the details on that. I apologize. But we can certainly get that information for the member.

Mr. Schuler: And I have been the minister's critic for many years and, you know, for those who read *Hansard*, that's a legislative term. When the minister was the newly appointed Minister of Labour I was her critic and, I've said often in this House that the reason why she did as well as she did in the Department of Labour is because of my blood, sweat and tears, and we had many, many interesting times in the Department of Labour. And she was always forthcoming when she committed to providing information to this committee, and she was always very forthcoming in providing that information and I appreciate that.

The other question that I have is: If students are transferring—I'll step back for a moment. The way the program is going to work is that if you wish to be part of the RTC/NTC program and go to Glenlawn Collegiate, you also—to be part of the soccer program, you must be a student at Glenlawn Collegiate. So if you're currently going to another school, you have to transfer over. That's the way it works.

And the question is: Will there be the same kind of program offered to students at Glenlawn Collegiate, for instance, French instruction, those kinds of things, IB or AP programming? Will that then be offered as well at that school so that there isn't a disruption on the academic side, seeing as they are going to then train in the morning and then they must go to Glenlawn Collegiate? Will they be offering the same kind of bouquet of programming that they would get in the high school that they're coming from?

Ms. Allan: Well, school programming is up to the individual school divisions. And those are autonomous decisions that are made by individual school divisions. And I don't know if there's any particular special arrangements in regards to this particular program coming in. And I don't really have the details specifically around that particular question but I can certainly get them for the MLA.

Mr. Schuler: Yeah, and one of the reasons given for doing this program is that, the way it works currently, the players are actually practising late in

the evening. And that's not really conducive to getting teenagers up early the next morning.

For those of us who have either had teenagers or currently have teenagers, mornings are usually not the optimal time. So if they're playing late into the evening, it does make it very difficult to get them up in the morning. And so, what they're doing now is they want to put the practice times in the morning and then the students do the regular activities. Thus they won't be practising late in the evening.

So there has to be some kind of an agreement signed. Is the minister aware, is this a one-year agreement? Is this a five-year agreement that was signed? Does the minister have any information or if not, could she get that for us?

Ms. Allan: As I said to the MLA, I have not been briefed on this issue but—and I'm not even sure if we have a requirement under the act to have those kinds of details. But I can certainly talk to my officials about it.

Mr. Schuler: And to the minister—I mean, one of the things that the federal government and provincial governments did very successfully leading up to this Winter Olympics that we just saw in Vancouver was Own the Podium.

And I know there were people who were critics of it. I am not one of those. In fact, I have said that if we took that \$110 million and we would have paid for more politicians, I doubt we would have gotten the unifying effect that we did by putting 110 million into sports so that our athletes could go to the Olympics. In fact, I suspect if we'd have bought a \$110-million more politicians, we would be less unified than we are with those wonderful athletes especially that final gold round game that the boys played. What a magnificent moment.

And to get that kind of success, we have to put money in. We've got to give young people the opportunity not just to play at four and five and six and seven but all the way up. And we have to start looking at getting our young people into these kinds of schools of excellence, if you will.

So my next question to the minister is: Is there any other discussion currently with any other sport to start a school of excellence, perhaps in their designated sport?

Ms. Allan: Not that I'm aware of.

Mr. Schuler: Again, I would ask the minister if she, you know, is in that discussion?

I suspect these aren't confidential or anything. I mean that it—I think these are great and I think we should brag about them and the fact that—you know, I give Sean Drain, the president of the Manitoba Soccer Association, a lot of credit when he stepped through a door that nobody has gone through before. And I'm sure there are critics out there who are going to give him a lot of grief.

* (15:00)

This is new territory. And this is something, you know, new and innovative. And frankly, if we want to deal with the generation of young people, the greatest generation of obesity facing us in humankind—never before have we seen such a large group of obese young children and diabetic. And you know, the way we're going to deal with this is going to be proactive by getting young people interested and excited about getting in sport, whatever the sport is, whether it's hockey or soccer or basketball, volleyball, or whatever it is, but we've got to get young people involved. And it's this kind of stuff where you say, listen, there's a lot of opportunity. You know, you could be the next Ronaldo. You could be the next Beleck. You know, there's a lot of opportunity out there, and we've got to make it exciting for the four- and five-year-olds because that's where we've got to capture them.

So, you know, I give the Manitoba Soccer Association a lot of credit. And Héctor Vergara and Rob Gale—you know, they're putting a lot of their time into this, way beyond the call of duty to do this kind of thing. So, you know, if others are looking at this as a model, they might be saying, perhaps this is a way to go, and I congratulate them.

I thank the minister for her answers and, again, if there are others that are looking at this, I think certainly this committee would be interested in knowing about that, certainly the House would. And that concludes my questions. I don't know if the minister wants to comment on that. And then I understand the member for River Heights has some further questions. I thank the committee for this time.

Ms. Allan: Well, I'd just like to thank the member opposite for her—his questions around this exciting new initiative at Glenlawn Collegiate.

I—you know, it really is in keeping with, you know, the Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures task force which implemented the mandatory phys ed program here in Manitoba. And we've had some very exciting statistics that have just come out that show that

students that are in physical fitness—and they show an emphasis in physical fitness in schools—that that produces smarter, healthier children.

This is the associate professor of pediatrics at West Virginia University and that article was in the *Globe and Mail* on the 4th of March. And, you know, I think that we would be totally open, as the Department of Education, in encouraging these kinds of initiatives. And, just once again, I'd like to thank the member for his questions and I look forward to the questions from the Leader of the Liberal Party.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): My first question for the minister concerns the situation which has been reported a fair bit in Manitoba of schools which have so called no-fail policies. And I would ask the minister whether she can tell us how many schools, and what proportion of the primary and secondary schools in Manitoba, have no-fail policies?

Ms. Allan: Yes, I'm pleased that we have an opportunity to discuss no-fail policies here in the Legislature.

I would like to inform the member that there is no provincial policy in regards to no fail. This is an issue that has—that came up in the media shortly after I became minister. And it was actually an issue that was on CJOB radio, I believe, for a couple of days. And, you know, I think it's really important that we understand that, you know, it really is the testing and the promotion of students from grades 1 to 12.

It's definitely a decision that is made at the local level, particularly made from school to school, and it's actually the responsibility of the principal to make those kinds of decisions in regards to whether a student progresses. And I know a lot of a decision—or a lot of things go into that decision. And that's why it's very, very important that those individuals, those professionals that are the closest to that student and know that student and those—and parent family members closely that they make those decisions.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, thank you, and if—does the minister know what the number of schools around the province would be and what proportion have no-fail policies?

Ms. Allan: No we don't. I don't believe we have those kinds of statistics in the Department of Education because those kinds of decisions are made at the local level. I don't believe that those are large numbers, though. I can tell you that anecdotally, and, you know, we continue to work with the stakeholders

in regards to this particular issue. A decision to hold a student back, we believe, has to be made where it should be made, at the local level by the professionals and in co-operation with the parents.

Mr. Gerrard: I would ask the minister whether she has any evidence, given the fact that Manitoba, compared to other provinces, has a higher drop-out rate than other provinces, is there any evidence whether the no-fail policy improves or decreases the drop-out rate?

Ms. Allan: No, I don't believe that there is any correlation between those two issues. Or—that we don't have any evidence-based material or documentation around those two issues.

Mr. Gerrard: Has the minister and her department looked at this question of whether there's any relationship between no-fail policies and whether students stay or don't stay in school?

Ms. Allan: No, we're actually very comfortable with the policy the way it is. It's a regulation, and we believe that, you know, we're more interested, quite frankly, in not worrying about, you know, like the member opposite seems to be worrying about, you know, kids failing.

What we're concerned about is kids succeeding, and that's why we have made historical investments in our public education system. We think that's the answer to having kids succeed and not having, you know, kids getting lost in the system.

I do want to speak to the graduation rate, though. We believe that, you know, investing in our public education system and having a public education system that sees a lot of money flow to the school divisions that has a high level of teachers. We have consistently, over the last 10 years, increased funding to special needs students. We believe that that is what's going to have our students succeed, and we have had some success in increasing our graduation rate. Our graduation rate has increased to about 79 percent since 2002. It was at 71 percent.

We are tracking that graduation rate, and we're actually having a look at those lost students and those students that we believe might, you know, give up on the education system. We know that it's around the middle years and we're actually looking at some initiatives around that so that we can keep children in school, because that's really the issue, is keeping children in school and capturing them and having them complete school.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, let me correct something right off. I mean, I am very interested in having children succeed and, in fact, that's my goal in being here is to make sure we've got children succeeding and doing well. I mean, that's the reason for asking about policies like the no-fail policy to understand whether it is good or bad in terms of the children succeeding, and to what extent the minister has, you know, actually been looking at that.

And it's also one of the reasons why I'm very concerned about the dropout rate that we had, which is higher than the other provinces and, you know, the factors that go into that. I'm hearing some concerns, for example, with some schools, particularly schools which have got new immigrants from diverse areas who are not as able to speak English, who are at varied levels when they enter into the school system, and these are challenges, clearly, which are important to face as we have—as we want—a considerable increase in immigration.

* (15:10)

But it's important, not only for the students who speak English well and are doing well, but it's important for these students that we have an optimum environment, and I just wondered, particularly given that the minister, I know, came from a portfolio dealing with immigration, that to what extent the minister is looking at ways of addressing the situation of having diverse populations in some school at varied levels and at various abilities of speaking English.

Ms. Allan: Well, I just want to make a comment and recognize the previous minister of Education who actually did a report on the EAL supports. It was a document that was released by him when he was minister, and there were recommendations in that report in how we could improve language training for our young students in schools that are seeing high populations of newcomers, and there's no question we've got huge pockets of that, not just in urban Winnipeg but, as many members across the way know, in rural Manitoba as well.

There were 11 recommendations in that report that were implemented and, a couple of them, just a couple of them, were before that report was received and implemented. There was only three-year funding for students that required EAL funding, and now we have implemented four-year funding, and we also have, as part of our funding model, an intensive newcomer support grant which can help some of those schools that are receiving a high proportion of

newcomers to their schools, to their communities. So we have looked at that and feel that we're responding.

We also have—the deputy minister has implemented as the learning and assessment part of our strategy in our department, we have officials from our department that are going out and meeting with superintendents in all of the school divisions to open up a dialogue with them about what is happening in their school divisions, and we think that's very, very important that there is an opportunity, because to dialogue with the superintendents in the school divisions because each and every one of those school divisions are so different and all across our country—or all across our province. So it's an opportunity for them to figure out exactly what's going on in their school divisions, what their needs are, what's working, what isn't working, and how we can support those school divisions in regards to learning and assessment and outcomes, and having kids succeed all across the province.

Mr. Gerrard: I can tell that the minister, from what I'm hearing in talking with people in different parts of the province, and not just Winnipeg and Brandon and other areas, that this continues to be a significant issue and needs to be addressed.

I'm interested in what the minister said in terms of the situation of children in different age levels and the concerns that some of the loss of kids to the schools, the drop-outs, is earlier on. Does the minister have statistics, grade by grade, from grade 1 to 12, to provide us with information as to what the drop-out is as you go up the grade levels?

Ms. Allan: Well, I mean, it's quite obvious that drop-out rates occur around the middle years because you don't see kids in grade 1, 2, or 3 dropping out of school. I mean, it's just kind of—some of it is just kind of common sense. So, in regards to looking at this issue, we know that the majority of drop-outs, you know, happen in the senior years in school, and we believe that if we can capture them before that happens, in the middle years, that that will be a benefit to us in regards to keeping them in school.

Mr. Gerrard: Just one final question before I pass on. Is there—does the minister actually have numbers in terms of being able to document the loss of children in the middle years and going on to show which years are the critical years for this starting to happen?

Ms. Allan: I don't know if the department has actual specific numbers of schools or if the information that they have is just because they have looked at other studies in other jurisdictions, but I can certainly get back to the member on that and answer that more fully.

Mr. Gerrard: Thank you.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I'm just going to move over to the Minister of Finance actually at this point in time. So my question for the Minister of Finance has to do with interest rates and, obviously, we're looking at the Governor of the Bank of Canada has issued some warning signals that rates could be increasing perhaps sooner than he maybe initially thought, and I'm wondering what the government's plan is in the event of an increase in interest rates.

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Finance): Madam Chairperson, the—there are projections that interest rates could go up, but those are issues that we, the Finance Department, deals with on a regular basis.

I was—I'm very impressed with the people that we have in the Department of Finance and they way they manage our borrowings and there are borrowings that are set up for a long terms, and I'm quite confident that the staff has put in place funds. And there was just a story in the news a couple of days ago about how Manitoba's borrowing rate was at a lower rate than what Ontario was borrowing.

And we have people who work at it on a regular basis. There is borrowing that's been set in place at a low rate for long periods of time, and certainly when the time comes if there is a huge interest increase in rates, then we'll have to deal with it. But it's always being planned, and there is people—there are people there that work on this on a regular basis.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, thank you very much, and I guess if I am to look at the government budget books, the Estimate of Expenditures and Revenues, in there it's under debt servicing on page 9, it talks about an increase to the debt servicing over last year of 10.7 percent.

Is that based on today's rates and is that increase just as a result of the increase in the overall debt that the Province is anticipating?

Ms. Wowchuk: There is additional borrowing. We are spending a tremendous amount of money on stimulus, \$1.8 billion on stimulus. There are borrowings that have to take place to meet our

pension responsibilities, responsibilities that weren't met in previous times and now we have to put additional money. So that's covering the cost of additional borrowing.

Mrs. Stefanson: But the additional costs of borrowing—yes, I understand the debt is going up over \$2 billion between this year and next year. But my concern is that we are looking and your projections are based on today's rates, and I'm just wondering how that works internally within your department. Are there—do they predict, sort of, do we budget per se for a projected increase in interest rates to try and prepare for that because I think we know that it's coming, and I'm just wondering how your department goes about preparing for that.

Ms. Wowchuk: As I indicated in my previous answer, Madam Chairperson, we have staff in the Department of Finance that monitors this on a daily basis, and they have all the projections of where the anticipated changes of rates will be. They borrow money from many different places and they borrow it for different lengths of time. And when there is—interests are lower, they borrow for longer periods of time.

One of the places where we are saving a lot of money on interest is when we, under the previous Minister's of Finance administration, brought a lot of our borrowing back into Canada and fixed it at some very low, low rates.

* (15:20)

Mrs. Stefanson: But I guess what I'm wondering about—and it's a little bit different from what the minister is talking about in her answer, and I'll try and be maybe a little bit more clear in my question. We know that interest rates are looking to rise over the next little while. We know that there are some—I mean, I'm assuming there is some short-term government bonds that will be coming due over the course of the next little while, where we will have to refinance at a higher rate once those rates are there.

How does—like, are those projections here in the budget, or would that then be something else that would be over and above the numbers that we see in the budget? Because what we see in the budget is already a 10.7 percent increase, just in the core operating budget for the monies that are being further borrowed, and just on the debt servicing and so the interest that's being paid on the debt. So, you know, if there's any increase in rates, that number will rise significantly and with the size of the debt

burden out there, my concern is that any increase is going result in a significant increase where perhaps, you know, I mean—and is the government just going to sort of say, well, we couldn't predict, you know, an increase in interest rates?

Well, we've already sort of been told that that's going to happen, so I am wondering how we, you know—is it already in these books? Have you projected increases and is that included in this 10.7 percent, or is this based on today's rates?

Ms. Wowchuk: I want to put on the record, Madam Chairperson, that our government has done a good job at bringing down our debt to GDP. In the 1990s, when we—'99, when we took office, our debt to GDP was over 30 percent. We brought that down to a little around—just around 24 percent. It's come up to 26 percent. So our—and we have had six credit rate increases since we've taken office. So we—there have been—there is very good management. There is very good projections of what our costs will be.

And, as I said just the other day, there was a news story about Manitoba's credit rating and how cheap—how much cheaper we could borrow money than Ontario was able to borrow money. So the market out there has confidence in the—Manitoba's economy, and I'm confident that the finance people that I have in the Department of Finance, and our government has, look at all of the things. They look at where the interest rates are now, where they're projected to go and they build all of that into the budget.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I have no question in the—about the integrity and the expertise of people in the Department of Finance, to be able to manage the debt that they have to manage, but it's not their decision about what—whether or not a government chooses to go more into debt or not. That's a Treasury Board and a Cabinet decision, as to whether or not a government chooses to.

Those employees in the Department of Finance have to deal with what—the hand that they're dealt by this government. That's a political decision, to take on more debt. It has nothing to do with the expertise and integrity of those people in the department. So, I have no question that they are working very hard to ensure, on behalf of taxpayers in Manitoba, that they try and refinance the debt at the lowest rates they possibly can. There is no question about that.

But my question for the minister is, you know, when they sit around in Treasury Board and Cabinet,

and they look at where we're at, in terms of the debt servicing, you know, it—it's alarming when it increases some 10.7 percent. I mean, health-care spending increase is at 5 percent. Like, that's double what you're going to increase in health-care expenditures. It's alarming and I think, you know, in order to reduce those you should be paying off debt over the years, rather than adding on to the debt burden.

And I guess the problem that I have is when you came to office in 1999, the overall debt has increased, and the consolidated debt has increased almost \$10 billion over that period of time, a period of time where, if there—if the government was undergoing prudent fiscal management and being responsible with taxpayer dollars, they would have chosen to pay down some of that debt to reduce the interest payments being paid by Manitoba taxpayers.

What we're seeing now is that the government, you know, you're—quite frankly, this government's just lucky that interest rates have been where they've been, that they've been the lowest in the history. And I—they're very lucky, and they've been able to get by with being lucky so far. But that luck will run out, and I'm wondering when that luck does run out—we've already been given indications by the governor of the Bank of Canada that—the warnings that rates will go up. I mean, they're only at 25 basis points now. We have no idea where they may go, but even if they're up half a point or a point, you know, those are significant dollars, and those could be significant increases to just the servicing of the debt that will have to be put in the core operating budget of this province.

And, you know, so what I am concerned about is that—what I'm hearing from this minister, is that, yes, she's talking about her staff who is very capable of managing the hand that they're dealt, but that this government, quite frankly, in Treasury Board and Cabinet, has made a decision to take on more debt rather than pay down debt during the past decade. And now we're in a situation where we've got the lowest interest rates that we've seen, certainly, in a long time, if not ever, and we're in a—you know, they're lucky. They're in a very lucky position, but that luck is about to run out.

And I'm wondering, is this government just making decisions based on luck, or are they making decisions based on what, you know, the facts, and what we will see when the governor of the Bank of

Canada has already given us warning signs that we may have to increase rates sooner than later.

Where in this budget is this government projecting for those increases in interest rates, and what kind of an impact will that have on the servicing of the debt?

Ms. Wowchuk: You know, Madam Chairperson, the member opposite has to look at the whole picture instead of just trying to paint a doom and gloom picture.

Something drastic is going to happen here, and I can assure her that we, whether at Treasury Board or in Finance, look into all of those things very carefully, and all of those things are balanced out as we put the budget together.

The member opposite talks about the debt. She forgets that the debt-to-GDP has dropped dramatically since the time when the Conservatives were in office. And, in fact, in—when we took office, the debt-to-GDP was just under 34 percent. We went down to around 22 percent. We have risen slightly to about 26 percent right now, Madam Chairperson, but during that time—and the member talks about consolidated debt. She should also think about some of the sound fiscal management decisions that we made, and that was addressing the unfunded pension liability, funding the employees' share of current service pension entitlements that hasn't been done since 1961. And we have made a dramatic investment in capital.

And what I find really interesting, Madam Chairperson, on Tuesday, when there was no media here in the House, the members opposite, I think, asked 14 questions where they were asking us to spend more money. Each of them were raising the things that they want, where they want us to spend more money, and now they are saying we are spending too much money. We're spending too much money and that we are—but I won't apologize for spending on infrastructure, on stimulus, to keep people working, because that's what I think you should do in a downturn in an economy. And I have a pretty good sense of where the opposition would go, just from comments that have been made, that they wouldn't make this kind of investment.

I say to the member that there—all of these things are taken into consideration as we put the budgets together as to how much we are—we will have to pay and, in fact, we have made—the member opposite says we're not paying down the debt. In fact, we're

paying debt—the debt down at a greater rate. We've made significant—paid dollars and, in fact, the debt—under the debt retirement account will be used immediately to pay \$145 million down on the debt. We are paying \$96 million down on the debt, and there is—all of those things that the member talks about, about the potential of interest rates going up, are all built in and we have a staff that works on that, making sure that we have long-term borrowing, taking—making new borrowings at low interest rates that, should the interest rates go higher, that is accounted for in this budget as well.

*(15:30)

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, the minister has talked about so many things there that I will have to sort of put some real facts on the record with respect to some of the things that she said. And, certainly when she talks about us, out fighting for our constituencies and various things of that nature, in our first question period this week, that's what our job is to do. And, quite frankly, you know, the minister should know quite well, as the Minister of Finance, that government makes a decision to spend money in various ways.

It's—the problem is, is how they are managing that money and that's the serious problem here: when decisions are made like an unnecessarily—an unnecessary decision to force the City of Winnipeg to remove nitrogen from the waste-water treatment facilities, spending some—in excess of \$350 million unnecessarily; when the government makes decisions like the west bipole line, some 640-plus million to put a bipole line down the west side of the province, Madam Chair; when the government makes decisions like to spend \$14 million on graduated driver's licensing and the ID cards. You know, the list goes on and on and on.

We've got bloating bureaucracies in the Department of Health. We've seen massive increases in administrative costs in the Department of Health and in other areas. The fact of the matter is, they have so badly mismanaged the funds that our—and they need to be reminded that these are not—this is not their money. This is Manitobans' money and Manitobans expect to have value for the money that they pay for the services that are provided in this province. And the problem that they have right now is that the government, for all of these reasons, has just, quite frankly, mismanaged that money.

And so, when we talk about things that—you know, getting people into care, when they deserve to

be—to get into care, whether it's in the health-care system or the child welfare system or whatever it may be, we believe that those should be the priorities of the government, not bloated bureaucracies, not wasting 640 million on a west bipole line, not wasting 350 million on the unnecessary removal of nitrogen from the waste-water treatment facilities, not wasting money on the driver's licence ID cards or whatever they are, the enhanced ID cards. You know, these are just some of the areas of the waste and mismanagement of this government. And so, what people want is, they want to be able to have access to the services that they need in this province.

But you know what I find interesting, Madam Chair, is—and the problem that I have—is that, whenever this government wants to go out and talk about all the things they're doing for health care and education, et cetera—these are their priority areas—they talk about how much money they are spending rather than what we are getting, what kind of services we are getting for the money that they are spending.

Not once did they talk about the decrease in wait lists, if there are any. Because, I'll tell you right now, Manitobans don't believe that they are doubly better off today than they were 10 years ago in our health-care system, even though the size of government has almost doubled since this NDP government came into power. I don't believe that Manitobans believe that they have double the services in health care, double the services in education.

Or, you know, we look at our child welfare system, which is—you know, children continue to fall through the cracks but the focus is not ever on those that need it. It's not on the outcomes. It's not on how many people are we saving out there, how many people are we helping, how many more people are we helping and saving today than we did 10 years ago? Are these programs really working? How can we create efficiencies within this system to ensure that those outcomes are improving? That's not the focus of this government. The focus of this government is, oh, well, you know what, if we just throw more money at it, that'll look good because then I can go out and I can do a ribbon-cutting ceremony in front of a women's hospital or I can go out and do whatever I—you know, then it looks good, and it's all about what we can get in the media. It's not about what the services are that people really need in this province, and I think that's the unfortunate thing here.

So, when I ask about things like why, in this budget, is the government projecting a 10.7 percent increase in just the servicing of the debt, I want to know does that include a projected increase in interest payments or does it not. Is that just based on today's rates or is it based on some sort of an increased schedule and a projected increase in schedule and, if so, what is that projected increase? So that we can know when we're asking questions in this House, because if this 10.7 percent is based on today's rates, and it's just because of the increase in the actual debt and that's what's increasing the servicing of the debt, and if it's just based on today's rates, this 10.7 percent could be 30 percent before, you know, no time, and that's my concern. That's why I'm here and asking the questions, because this is a number that is hundreds of millions of dollars and could be increased hundreds of millions of dollars overnight as a result of a rate increase, and that will be a significant problem for this government if they're moving forward and trying to seriously balance budgets.

But what my problem is, I don't think they really care about balancing budgets, you know. But we do care about it because all this government is doing is adding further debt for future generations to have to pay that off, and so I guess my question for the minister is, in this projection does it include any projections in increased interest rates and, if so, what are those projected increases?

Ms. Wowchuk: I'm not sure if the member isn't listening or doesn't understand. I said that we have a Finance Department that does projections. They do borrowing. They do long-term borrowing and they do projections for us on what the interest rates are and where the interest rates will be and those projections are built into the budget.

Madam Chairperson, you know, the member says we don't know very much about financing. I would say to her she should look at our record. We have had six credit rate increases since our time of office. We have addressed some very serious issues that the previous administration has refused to address. We have addressed pension issues that were completely neglected. Our debt-to-GDP ratio has improved from 32.6 percent to 26 percent. It was down to 24 percent, but it's changed because of the situation that we're in. I know that the member knows full well that there has been an improvement. If she understands—and she has some experience in the finance industry, I understand, so she would know that if somebody is getting six credit rating

increases they are not doing a bad job. In fact, they're improving the situation in this province.

* (15:40)

Now, I also want to talk about the member being inaccurate when she says that this budget could be balanced if we didn't build the Bipole III. The member opposite is wrong about that, Madam Chairperson. We have heard this from the opposition that we are wasting money on Bipole III. When Bipole III is built, Hydro will build Bipole III. When Hydro builds Bipole III, it will be Hydro, and, you know, the member opposite—I saw a pamphlet from the members opposite circulating that said if you didn't build Bipole III you could build 10 hospitals and 30 schools. Well, you know, that would mean we would be taking money from Hydro. That means we would take Hydro money and build hospitals and schools. And then they would say you can't take from Crown corporations, although they support what Saskatchewan's doing, that they are taking money out of their Crown corporations. We don't do that.

When Manitoba Hydro builds the lines—*[interjection]* they would—they will build the lines. But, you know, I know the members opposite in the '90s sold the Crown corporation so they could put money away. And we know that the members opposite would sell Manitoba Hydro. They would be selling it immediately. They mothballed the dams. They would not—they killed the deal on Conawapa. They never sold a bit of Hydro. They never increased anything and they cannot believe that under our administration that they could do that. And they don't like it because they'd much rather sell it.

So, again, I'll say to the member, all of these things are taken into consideration by the Finance Department. As we look at—and, you know, it's no different that it was in the '90s. When the Finance Minister put a budget together he or she went to their Finance Department and said, give me the projections of where interest rates will be and we will build the interest rates into the budget. The budgets—so—*[interjection]* Madam Chairperson, I respect—I have full respect for the skilled people that we have in Finance who help us determine how much money and make projections on what interest rates will be.

Although the member opposite made a long statement, she doesn't want to hear the answer. And the reason she doesn't want to hear the answer is because she doesn't want to—she has no respect for

the people in our department. She admits—she talked about health care and how important health care is and—well, if she was interested in health care, she'd support our plan. She would support the plan, the plan that says, in this time of economic downturn, we are going to invest in vital front-line services.

We are going to invest in innovation, in technology and the health-care field to reduce wait lists, to have the tests and X-rays get more quickly in between hospitals. All of those things are happening—*[interjection]* Look at the debt-to-GDP. Look at the credit ratings we've got, debt-to-GDP.

Madam Chairperson: Okay, honourable member for Tuxedo, did you want to—

Mrs. Stefanson: I'm done.

Madam Chairperson: You're done. Okay.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Chair, I do have a couple—

Madam Chairperson: I'm sorry, I'm having trouble hearing what your question is. So I'm just going to ask members if they do have questions and they would like to have discussions, if they could take those discussions to the loge.

Mr. Lamoureux: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's interesting in listening to the answers that the Minister of Finance provides. And, you know, I think for the first time I've heard a different strategy in terms of why they want to build the hydro line along the west side.

Ultimately it's going to cost a great deal more money and it'll probably put Manitoba Hydro in a greater debt-servicing situation than building on the east side, which would make it that much more difficult to sell, no doubt. And that's maybe one of the reasons why they don't want to see it built on the east side. They want to make Manitoba Hydro less attractive, possibly, based on her comments.

Madam Chair, let's see if the minister can kind of stay on topic and deal with the questions that are being answered—*[interjection]* Well, it's because, in part, the answers that she provides when a question is put, and she goes and talks about the Manitoba Hydro—*[interjection]*

Well, no, I've been known to deviate at times too. I'm all for that, you know, but I think, in this case, with the Minister of Finance, she would probably do better if she was to remain a little bit

more focussed and maybe not get into as much trouble.

The question that I do have for the Minister of Finance is actually fairly straightforward. The current balanced budget legislation—is there not a requirement, or what is the requirement in the current law of Manitoba in regards to having balanced budgets?

Ms. Wowchuk: The current law says that you have to table a balanced budget, and this balanced budget is a balanced budget under summary budget, the laws that we follow.

Mr. Lamoureux: Is there any requirements within the current law that say that you have to have a balanced budget in any sort of time frame?

Ms. Wowchuk: I don't have the act before me, but I believe what the act says is that you have to balance—you have to table a balanced budget, is what it says.

Mr. Lamoureux: So, the minister is not sure whether or not there is an obligation that the balanced budget—there has to be a balanced budget reported from within her department within any four-year time period.

Ms. Wowchuk: The legislation says that a budget—you must table a balanced budget under summary budget and this budget is balanced under summary budget.

Mr. Lamoureux: Is there any time restrictions or number of budgets in which the minister has to provide a balanced summary budget within a four-year time frame or four consecutive—in any four-year period, that one of those budgets has to be balanced? Is that not a requirement?

Ms. Wowchuk: The budget—balanced budget legislation says that under—you must table a budget that's balanced under the four-year rolling average, and this budget is balanced under the four-year rolling average.

Mr. Lamoureux: So, if I understand your interpretation of the law correctly, it means that every four years you have to provide a balanced—at least one balanced budget. Is that not correct?

Ms. Wowchuk: That's not accurate, Madam Chairperson. The act says you have to table a—in order to table the budget, you have to table a balanced budget under the four-year rolling average.

Mr. Lamoureux: Explain what an under the four-year rolling average is.

Ms. Wowchuk: Madam Chairperson, I don't—we are under summary budget and under summary budget, you come to a summary budget and under that—under the law that we have right now that's balanced budget legislation, you have to table a balanced budget that's balanced under the law on a four-year rolling average.

So you take the four years and you balance it. Then you drop—when you get into the next year, you drop one year off and you take the four—other next four years and you balance. So last year, we had one number in, that drops off, and now you work on the—on four more years. And that's how you come to the number.

Mr. Lamoureux: Okay. So that means then at any given point in time in a four-year period of budgeting from the government, you are required to have a balanced budget. Correct?

Ms. Wowchuk: The budget that you table must be balanced under the four-year rolling average when you table it.

Mr. Lamoureux: Okay. Now, three years from now or four years from now, based on the budget that the minister has provided us today, will that apply to today's law?

Ms. Wowchuk: Madam Chairperson, in the budget speech, we had indicated that we would be amending balanced budget legislation so that it would, under our five-year plan, we will be making changes to the balanced budget legislation law that will require the budget shortfall to be eliminated over four years and return to surplus in the fifth year.

* (15:50)

So that's the change that we're making that will allow us to—instead of have all the pain and all the cuts to come to balance next year under the rolling average, we are spreading out that pain over five years and putting in place a system whereby we will have shortfalls for four years and come to a balance in the fifth year.

If we were not to do that, that means to come to balance under existing law, we would have to cut out about \$550 million, and that would mean we could not do stimulus. We would have to cut health care. We would have to increase taxes, just like happened in the '90s. It happened in the '90s. We don't want to do that. That's why we have put this five-year plan in place, just as every other—many other jurisdictions. In fact, Ontario today said—I believe they're going to

take eight years to come out of this situation. The federal government, a Conservative government, is taking six years.

We have said our plan will continue to stimulate, continue to provide—protect services and bring us back into balance in five years.

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Chair, the Minister of Finance has said that if the law does not change—or she's indicated to the House, indirectly, that if the law does not change, then her budget would—her current budget would be against the law if the law is not changed.

Ms. Wowchuk: No, you're misinterpreting what I said. I said this year is balanced. This year we—this budget that's tabled is balanced under balanced budget legislation. If we were to bring in a balanced budget next year we would have to make significant cuts. That's why we've put in place a five-year plan that will allow us to continue to make investments, make aggressive payments on the debt and keep in place other parts of the balanced budget legislation which would require balanced budgets into the future, which would keep the prohibition of increasing major taxes without a referendum. Those things will stay.

We're looking at a way to maintain our services without making significant increases and significant cuts, and that's why we're bringing in our plan and making the changes to the legislation.

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Chair, the—what the government has actually done is they've manipulated the books in order to be able to say that—and when we say manipulating the books by using fiscal stabilization and so forth, you've been able to ultimately say that, based on the previous three years, using this year in the rolling average, even though every budget you overspend, every budget the NDP have introduced they have overspent—by doing that, you're saying, well, technically we are within the law.

But the budget that you tabled clearly indicates that we are going to be in a deficit situation for years to come, and that goes against what—the current balanced budget legislation in which you have amended in order to try to accommodate government, your government in the past, that you're forced to make that amendment today or to bring that amendment to the Legislature.

If I'm wrong, then why does the government need to bring in the legislation? Why do they need to

amend it if they're not fearful of breaking it into the future?

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, Madam Chairperson, you know, I've spent a lot of time talking to Manitobans over the—this past period of time since I've become Finance Minister, and the—what I heard from Manitobans right across the province was that they wanted us to ensure that we maintained important front-line services.

We went right—*[interjection]* Madam Chairperson, the members opposite—*[interjection]* We listened to people. They said they want front-line services. They want us to continue spending on stimulus.

You know, Madam Chairperson, they said—the members—the public understands that this balance—the way balanced budget legislation is written was never intended for the kind of downturn in the economy that we are feeling right now. That's why we put a place a five-year plan.

And I'll share that five-year plan with the members opposite if they'd like to see it because it really does reflect what Manitobans are saying. It said—Manitobans have said they want to see continued improvements to health care, they want to see education. Manitobans said the most important thing that they could have is training, training so that they could get their apprenticeship, so that when the jobs come open, as the economy turns around, they have the skills they need. They want policing; they want supports for families. Madam Chairperson, that's what we've done and we are continuing. And we proudly spend \$1.8 billion on infrastructure to create jobs for innovation so that 29,000 people can benefit and we can keep the economy going.

And that's what we're doing. And we will, Madam Chairperson, ride through this and we will restore balance.

Madam Chairperson: Just prior to recognizing the honourable member for Steinbach, I just wanted, first of all, to commend the House how it was very easy to be in the Chair earlier. It was that people were very attentive to each other and were listening to each other with a lot of respect. It's becoming more challenging to be in the Chair, as I am sitting here. So I'm just asking the members, if they do wish to have questions from each other, if they could take their questions to the loge. That would be much appreciated.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Madam Chair, I'm sure that all members will endeavour to make your job as easy as possible as we go through this process.

In terms of a question to the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald). She will know that the former premier, the now ambassador for Canada to the United States, made a commitment to the residents of the community of Steinbach, but also to all residents in southeastern Manitoba who rely on the Bethesda emergency room, that it would be expanded. That is a commitment that he made to the residents and to the medical professionals at the Bethesda Hospital, I think about two years ago. And I know, subsequent to his commitment, the Minister of Health also came to the community and made an announcement there. It was well attended and well received. I was there, and I thank the minister for the invitation.

It's been a couple of years. The community, I think, is perhaps running short of a little patience in the sense that it continues to grow, and we're happy for the growth that the city continues to see, but with that growth, there is continued pressure on the emergency room, for one. There's a lot of other pressures in terms of the emergency room facilities and operational facilities, and a whole lot of other areas in health care and in mental health.

But, on that particular project, specifically, I know it was announced at least in one Throne Speech, maybe one budget, maybe even two Throne Speeches. It appeared in a lot of different documents and there isn't a shovel in the ground yet.

I wonder if the minister can indicate what the intended time frame is for the beginning of construction for the expanded ER at Bethesda, and whether or not anything in this budget changes that time frame.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I thank the member for the question.

Yes, we were very pleased to make the commitment to the people of Steinbach and the surrounding region to do a redevelopment of the emergency room. And the member is quite right. It is a growing population in the area. The staff at Bethesda Hospital supporting the great work that the nurses and the doctors are doing are to be commended.

As I said, the member was inquiring about this a few minutes ago today. I did commit to him that I

would investigate, specifically, the status of the capital project. I want to assure him that, indeed, the project will go ahead. And I said to him earlier today, I will investigate the details and the status, and report back to him as swiftly as possible.

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the minister for that response. Just out of an abundance of caution, I just want certainty and clarity that there's nothing in this budget that would prevent the time line for the expansion of the ER at Bethesda Hospital in Steinbach.

* (16:00)

Ms. Oswald: Madam Chair, yes, the member can feel confident that we, you know, despite difficult economic times where reprioritization, you know, careful planning, is taking place across all sectors, that we know what an important project this is for the reasons that the member has stated and many other reasons. And this project will go ahead. He need not have concerns that it has, in any way, been put off track.

I would, you know, loosely, and again, I'll commit to the member to get more specific details to him, but look for construction to be well under way later on this year, 2010, to be specific, and occupancy 2011. And I'll be more specific with the member as swiftly as I can, but he need not have concerns that the project has been derailed. We made that commitment and we're going forward.

Mr. Goertzen: At the risk of pushing my luck perhaps, I would ask the minister regarding, she knows that there's been a good deal of discussion about the need for new surgical rooms at Bethesda Hospital and which might be part of a larger redevelopment, but that the rooms are decades old and not only don't meet, in many ways, the modern and required standards of today but certainly don't meet the needs of the growing population, quite apart from the physical standards of the operating rooms. Can she indicate whether or not there's a potential to have an announcement on new operating rooms for Bethesda? And again, this isn't a new request. I think it's been something that's been brought to her attention by the foundation and by the medical professionals in the area over the last couple of years.

Ms. Oswald: We have had this discussion before, the member for Steinbach and I, and indeed the South Eastman Regional Health Authority does continue to advocate for a very active discussion on

the surgical suites. We know that the foundation at Bethesda Hospital, arguably one of the best in the province, they do very, very good work—very active, compassionate, caring, forward-thinking group of people. We've seen what they have been able to do, you know, looking at the obstetrical unit, you know, together with the regional health authority and Manitoba Health, so we take their requests, the requests of the members—member opposite—very seriously.

These upgrades are under active discussion. We want to, you know, take one step at a time, make sure we get that ER finished and a number of capital projects that we've committed to in other regions but this is something that is, as I say, under active discussion between my department and the regional health authority. It is an important initiative and we are looking at it. I can tell the member that. Can't tell him when I'm making an announcement today, though.

I wouldn't call it pushing his luck but, you know, one step at a time.

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): I'd like to ask the Minister of Agriculture about the 2 percent tax on the quota. Could he explain what that is?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): What the member is referring to is something that we have looked at, something that our department has been speaking with the supply management groups about fairly recently. It's not anything that is, where the details are written in stone as of today. It's something that we will be sitting with each of the supply management groups on talking about quotas and talking about how this sort of a thing can be implemented in such a way that some revenues are realized but also we can do it in a fair way and include the advice of supply managed groups towards that end.

Mr. Graydon: Which commodity groups have you been in discussion with?

Mr. Struthers: Well, over the months since the beginning of November, I've met with, I think all of the groups, all of the main groups. It's been quite a challenge getting the amount of time necessary to meet with all of the commodity groups. In relation to the question that the member has posed, I have in the past met with the groups that would be affected by this. We—my commitment has been that on this particular item in the budget, there'll be further

meetings with my officials and the groups along—and also meetings with me and the groups that would be impacted by this measure.

Mr. Graydon: If I understood the answer correctly, that you could tell me who the groups are that are going to be affected, that it won't be all supply management. Is that so?

Mr. Struthers: What we're looking for is meetings with those who transfer quota, so we will be meeting with the dairy farmers, chicken producers, egg. Any that this measure will impact, we will be meeting with.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Minister, is there not quotas involved in other marketing boards?

Mr. Struthers: Yep, we use quotas. We work with the federal government on a national basis to determine such things as turkey quotas. We want to make sure that Manitoba farmers get their fair share of the national turkey quota, the national quota for eggs, for chickens, right across the board.

Now, my goal is to make sure that the Manitoba farmer gets his or her fair share of the country's ability to produce. So we work very closely, and I really need to take my hat off, as I know he will too, to the folks in the Department of Agriculture who work on a day-to-day basis with those commodity groups, with those supply-manage groups, to get as much quota for our province as we can.

My commitment is to continue with those meetings. I've enjoyed those meetings. I've learned a lot in those meetings. I have a great deal of respect for the farmers that work within the supply-managed area. I am and this government is a big fan of supply management. We think it works really well. We think you can make improvements to the supply-managed sector. For example, the dairy farmers have instituted a young entrants program, which I think is a very good step. Other supply-manage groups have done the same. Whether you're a dairy farmer or whether you're a beef producer, whether you're into grains and oilseeds, one of the big challenges we're going to face over the next little while is getting younger farmers involved in farming, so anytime there's a good step forward from any of these groups, I make sure that I let them know.

As a matter of fact, I noticed in the—as I was reading the newspaper one day that the egg farmers had taken on in a very real way—put in place a new entrants scheme, and we're following through on that as tendered in the paper. So I thought I'm going to

put pen to paper and I'm going to write a note and say what a good idea that was and what a good job they were doing. So I think we need to give farmers and their organizations credit when they do good things like that. But, as I've said, on this particular measure, there will be further meetings with those who have quota that from time to time get transferred from one farmer to the next.

Mr. Graydon: When I talked about the quotas and other marketing boards in the province, you have named only the agricultural, cattle and the feather industry as the ones that you've approached; however, you haven't talked about the root crops and the potato marketing boards. They have quota too, do they not? Am I wrong in assuming that they have quota?

* (16:10)

Mr. Struthers: You're correct. There's quota involved there. We are—I have not spoken—you mentioned the potato growers, and I have not spoken to them about this in particular. There are still discussions with our officials and theirs having to do with this measure. It's not written in stone, so I'm open to the advice from any of those groups when we sit down with them.

Mr. Graydon: The purpose of the 2 percent tax: Could you explain what the purpose of that is?

Mr. Struthers: Well, first of all—well, there's—we want to make it so that it's fair across all of the different agricultural commodities. We want to make it fair.

There's—whenever there's a transfer, whether it's in terms of whatever kind of asset—which is what a quota is; quota is an asset—there are measures in place that do raise revenue from the transfer of assets, whether that be an asset that belongs to a grain farmer, or that be an asset that belongs to a cattle producer, or whether that be an asset, such as quota, which is transferred from one farmer to the next.

So, what we—what I'm trying to—what we're trying to do is make sure that there's a fair, level, playing field right across the board in the whole agricultural sector.

Mr. Graydon: Is there any benefit to any of the commodity groups from this 2 percent tax?

Mr. Struthers: Yes, Madam Chairperson, whenever the provincial government realizes revenue, we have an opportunity to work with those producer groups to

assign that money to different undertakings that we do.

You can look through our budget this year or last year or right back to 1999, our very first budget. And you can see the revenues raised by the province being ploughed back into agriculture. And this budget is no exception.

Mr. Graydon: Madam Chair, I have some difficulty following the train of thought of the current Agricultural Minister.

And I know that he's new in his portfolio. And he's made a wonderful speech just not too long ago saying how he appreciated how the different commodities have set up entries for young farmers to get into the—any one of these groups. And I applaud the dairy people and I applaud the—any of the other commodity groups that have looked at how they would bring people into the commodity.

But what is happening is the minister, with his 2 percent tax, is going to penalize these young people coming in. What it does is it effectively raises the price of the quota. There's no question that the price of quota will go up 2 percent.

If I have a quota that's worth \$27,000 a kg, and it's going to cost 2 percent when I sell it, I'm going to add that 2 percent. In fact, I'm going to add more than 2 percent because I'm already paying a tax on that. I'm paying a provincial tax and I'm paying a federal tax on the money that I receive for that quota.

I purchased the quota, initially, and now I'm being taxed twice and then taxed on top of tax which does raise the cost to any of the young producers coming into the business.

I didn't follow how this minister is encouraging young people to get into the industries.

Mr. Struthers: First of all, it's not just this minister that's encouraging young farmers to get into the industry, whether it's supply management or any of the agricultural sector.

First and foremost, it'll be hats off to the commodity groups themselves—the supply-managed groups themselves—who are taking the bull by the horns, so to speak, to make sure that they set their framework within the supply-managed sectors to encourage young farmers, to make it easier for young farmers to come forward, obtain, in this case, obtain quota, which is available to people as they get into the business or transfer within the business, within the sector.

The—what I think the member from Emerson needs to realize is that the supply-manage framework, as good as it is and as much as I support that, that supply manage still has to sell into a market and, more so than anything, I would hope that the free marketers across the way would understand that the market will dictate those prices. It's not the wild west that I know members opposite would like to see, in terms of a helter-skelter approach to any kind of framework.

But, you know, the—and I don't think farmers in supply management will gain very much out of the ideological kind of dogma that I hear from the member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik), but, Madam Chairperson, we have a good framework, a good supply-managed framework, where farmers who are part of that have a real say in their—thank you—have a real say in the future of their sites, the future of their farms. They have a real say in their part of the agricultural industry. That is important. That is what each of these groups have told me when I've met with them. They want to maintain that. They want to be able to have their supply-managed operations—they'll want that to be part of the discussion and part of the decision making when they, in turn, sell into the market.

I know that the member for Emerson understands that farmers sell into markets, whether they're supply managed or otherwise and that the—that has an impact on the price of the product they put forward. So that will be—that, when you think of the entire big picture, when you look at that, I think, eventually, the member opposite will come to understand that.

Mr. Graydon: Madam Chairperson, it was difficult to follow that rant but perhaps you can do a better job of explaining how you determine the value of quota. Can you explain how you determine the value of quota? Let's suggest, in a dairy business, how are you going to determine that value?

Mr. Struthers: Well, in the dairy business, in the supply-managed framework, the farmers who participate have a very real say in how that is determined. They are very protective of keeping that very real say. They understand that there are people out there, entities out there, who would want to take that very real say away from them, whether that be in the international scene with the World Trade Organization, or whether that be certain moves at other levels of government.

We, on this side of the House, are very committed to making sure that farmers have a say in that sector. We understand the advantage that a supply-managed system brings to the individual farmer. We understand that that means that that farmer has a say in his cost of production. That means that that farmer has a very real say in the inputs that are necessary on every dairy farm or other entities within supply management. That, along with the setting of quota at a national level—I referenced the turkeys earlier. We need to be able to support Manitoba farmers when they, at the national level, make their arguments to bring in more quota to the Manitoba level.

* (16:20)

So it's a very good system. My commitment, in the measure that's prompted these questions, is to make sure that we meet with each of these farms—farm groups within the supply-managed sector to work this out.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Minister, could you tell me how many commodity groups there are in the province of Manitoba that have quota systems?

Mr. Struthers: Well, we've—between the member and I, we've put just about all of them on the table. If I've forgotten any, I will get back to him, but I think we've covered the waterfront on that.

Mr. Graydon: Just for the record, Mr. Minister, can you reiterate what all of the commodities that have quotas, could you reiterate that for the record, please, what they are?

Mr. Struthers: Well, I appreciate the administration of this test of the Agriculture Minister. I'm going to promise the member for Emerson that instead of me going through the list and forgetting one, I going to take the safe route and I'm going to get that information for him. We have covered the waterfront between us, but before I start listing them off and I skip over one, I'm going to be very cautious on that.

Mr. Graydon: It really wasn't a trick question. I was just wanting to write down what you had told me but, at any rate, I appreciate that you will get back to me with the commodity groups.

The next question I have is: Why are you only looking at three of them? Why have you not discussed all the rest that have a quota system? Why haven't you approached them with your 2 percent tax?

Mr. Struthers: Well, I think it's a recognition that this could play out differently in different parts of the supply managed system, but I want to be—when I move forward with something, I want it to be solid, I want it to be—I want to know what the impacts are on every different part of this sector. So that—so what I'll be doing is making sure that I sit down with the groups that will be impacted to gain an understanding of that.

Mr. Graydon: Is it the minister's end commitment then to do this with all commodity groups? Is that his goal?

Mr. Struthers: Well, we're not introducing this to all commodity groups. I think maybe the member from Emerson didn't want to term it that way. It's not something that's going to be impacting the Canola growers, but my commitment is that within those who have quotas, within those we're—we think we can make this work fairly. We'll been meeting with those groups.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you for that, Mr. Minister. I'm quite aware that the Canola growers don't have quotas. However, I'm wondering if you will be charging that 2 percent on a wheat quota?

Mr. Struthers: I'm sorry. I didn't hear the end of that question.

Mr. Graydon: Will you be charging—excuse me. Sorry, Madam Chair.

Would you be charging that same 2 percent on a wheat quota?

An Honourable Member: We grow it in Manitoba. It's a—

Mr. Struthers: I want to thank the member for Brandon for that advice and his definition of wheat. I really appreciate that kind of information coming across from a party who couldn't care less about agriculture, according to the member for Carman (Mr. Pedersen) who seems to be advising him over there.

Mr.—sorry—Madam Chairperson, the—as I've said, the measure that was talked about in the budget yesterday will apply—will be applied in a fair way. It'll be applied once officials and myself sit and meet with the groups that are going to be affected and that's how we will proceed with this.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Minister, you—I see that you have—you've cut the budget by a considerable amount of money, and I think we've talked about that a little

bit, but the budget is \$13 million less than last year. Can you explain why, when you got a \$4-million increase from the federal government, that you actually left the farmers in AgriInvest exposed to more risk? It would appear that we on this side of the House care about what happens in rural Manitoba, and it would appear that the Minister of Agriculture wants to expose them to a lot more risk by cutting the support or the support stabilization money that would be there. Can you explain why you allowed that to happen in the budget?

Mr. Struthers: Well, the member from Emerson is dreaming. His almost-seatmate put it—put in black and white the facts. His seatmate put in for everybody to see that he doesn't think that the Conservative opposition is going to get elected if they—won't get elected if they pursue agricultural and rural issues, and I think they included Health in that, if I'm—if memory serves me correctly.

I mean, so I—we can have debates about who loves rural Manitoba more, if he wants, but he's got all the—he's got—and his leader wouldn't even step forward and deny or backtrack. He just—*[interjection]* I guess so, if that's what the member for Carman (Mr. Pedersen) says. That's what it is, I guess. That's what it is.

Madam Chairperson, you know, then the Finance critic gets on about Saskatchewan and, you know, how great it is in Saskatchewan. And it is a great province. You know, they got—their football team isn't going to be as good as ours in the fall, but, you know, it—it's a great province and they got a great minister. You know, Bob Bjornerud, he's a very good guy. He's a good minister; he works hard.

But, you know, when the province of Saskatchewan follows the advice of Tories opposite and they give big tax breaks that they can't pay for and then turn to their farm community to make up the difference—they turned to the farm community in their budget yesterday and they cut by \$97 million. That, you know, that's the logical outcome to the advice that the former Finance critic has given us. That's what happens when you go overboard one year and then have to try to pay for it the next. The farmers in Saskatchewan are paying the price. Is that what you want? I hope not. I mean—

An Honourable Member: We want the Grey Cup.

Mr. Struthers: Sure they want the Grey Cup, but, you know, that would be great. That's not going to put a lot of bread on the table in rural Saskatchewan.

That's not going to pay for a lot of things in rural Saskatchewan. Kicking the daylights out of crop insurance in Saskatchewan isn't going to do it either.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

So I'm not going to accept the premise of the member opposite. I'm not going to take his advice that leads us to the kind of decisions that had to be made in Saskatchewan yesterday. I'm not going to do that. What we're going to do is we're going to use the review of the business risk management programs that I think the very good federal minister has very honestly sat down and spoken with us on. He takes it seriously; so does the Saskatchewan Agriculture Minister. And we're going to sit and we're going to talk about these business risk management programs and make them work for farmers, make them work for farmers who are in need.

And I give the credit to the member for the Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) who sat with us in Arborg last week, I believe it was, and we talked to some farmers who are really in need. When the skies open up and a bunch of rain comes down and two years in a row they can't get their crops in, they're in need. And we're going to be there for them.

When hog producers—I was—when hog producers met with me and I was in the, I think, in the member's riding in—meeting in La Broquerie with some of the people at Hytek, some of the people in Hytek, we had very good discussions about what has to happen when the dollar's at 99 cents—when the dollar's at 99 cents and it's kicking the daylights out of the hog industry. And we talked about what we can do—what we can do together to help—what we can do together to help rather than playing little political games, something that'll really help farmers, something other than—something other than turning their back on them and saying that you're not going to win an election with it. You know, that might really help.

* (16:30)

So those are the kind of things I'm interested in, Mr. Acting Chairperson. And whether it's measures having to do with quota or measures having to do with AgriInvest or AgriInsurance or all the payments we made through AgriStability, we have to remember that we have to support the farmer and we have to support the farmer who supports little communities. And, unlike the members opposite, we're not going to turn our backs on them simply

because we don't think we can win an election on that basis.

Thank you, Mr. Acting Chairperson.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Acting Chairperson, can the Minister of Health tell us what the budget for the cardiac surgery project at St. Boniface Hospital is?

Ms. Oswald: Thank you, madam—or, not madam, Mr. Acting Chairperson. I don't have the specific document in front of me, but I'll endeavour to get details to the member concerning the project that she's asking for. The capital construction project or the ongoing operating of current cardiac, could she just clarify?

Mrs. Driedger: I was specifically asking about the capital project for the cardiac surgery renovations that are going on at St. Boniface Hospital.

Can the minister indicate if those renovations have already started and what the progress might be to date?

Ms. Oswald: I can let the member opposite know that there is capital construction, of course, going on, which is obvious at St. Boniface Hospital. And, of course, as we discussed last year, the programs, you know, that will move and, you know, find their new locations on the campus will have, in some respects, a domino effect.

So, in some respects, yes, functional programming, an ongoing discussion about the shape that the cardiac program is going to take now and into the future are ongoing. So there is an enormous amount of work going on concerning the cardiac, you know, capital and ongoing program. And, if there are some specific questions about, you know, parts of the footprint or whatever that she has, I don't have the functional or capital plan in front of me, but, you know, we'll commit to get specific details for the member, yes.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate if any of the renovations have started in the Asper Centre? I believe there was an announcement that she made over there. I'm not sure if it was last year or the year before, of—and the announcement took place at St. Boniface Hospital, and it was about moving, you know, a specific part of the cardiac program into that Asper building, which I understand has been empty up until now. And so my question is specifically, you know, what is the progress to date in terms of

starting the renovations of that cardiac surgery component in the Asper building?

Ms. Oswald: Again, work has been done in—physical work has been done in a few areas on the campus, and I will provide the member with specific details of what's happening to date in the Asper building, and, indeed, other capital renovations that are occurring on the campus itself in order to go forward with the expansion and the programs.

You know, I don't have the specific details of which particular bricks and mortar have been moved to date in the Chamber with me today.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us then, because it was—I know there was the announcement that was made there, and part of the program that was going to be set up in the Asper building, I understand, was the cardiac intensive care unit.

I understood that the actual operating rooms would still remain in the main hospital and that it was going to be the cardiac ICU that was moved over to the Asper Centre. Now, I'm not sure if my information is correct or not and so I'm seeking clarification from the minister if that is what's moved—moving over there, and at what stage those renovations are over there.

Ms. Oswald: Mr. Acting Chairperson, again, I will assure the member that I will provide her with an update of specifics on the footprint of the capital development, be as precise as possible about the location of the cardiac ICU, you know, the specialized beds for that in relation—you know, to broad—you know, the 32-bed cardiac in-patient unit. There's also a new six-bed chest pain evaluation unit that will happen within the emergency department that is evolving as well, and also a pharmacy.

So I will endeavour, as I say, I don't have the capital plan details at my fingertips in the Chamber today, but would be very happy to provide the member with as many details as possible on where the construction is, and I would presume what would be of most, great interest to her, projected time lines for completion as well. I'll make sure that I get an update for her on that.

Mrs. Driedger: Will the minister and I think I, hopefully I heard her correctly that she will also provide the estimated costs of what is going on with the changes to the cardiac program, the construction of the new capital aspect of it.

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

Ms. Oswald: Yes, when the project was announced in May of '09, it was announced to be just over a \$40-million project to, you know, further enhance St. Boniface Hospital as a centre of excellence for heart surgery and cardiac care. And, you know, as I say, there are a number of capital improvements. There will be HHR, health human resource considerations, as well as this expansion takes place. And so I will endeavour to provide with member with as many updates as possible on where construction is, as best estimates as we can on estimated times of completion, and costing is appropriate.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us what is currently in place in this Asper centre, this building that has been put up at St. Boniface Hospital. Can she indicate—like it's been there for years, I understand—can she indicate what type of activities take place in it over the last number of years?

Ms. Oswald: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair, the member is aware that there are components of the program that remain vacant to date. Part of the whole nature of the expansion was to ensure that space on the campus would be used in ways that would be informed by best practice.

Dr. Menkis and his team over at St. Boniface Hospital and, of course, with a very important partnership with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority Cardiac Sciences Program, have studied very closely and at times, of course, debated at what is the best possible proximity and location and layout for the centre of excellence for heart surgery and cardiac care.

So indeed there, you know, there has been vacant components to that building, but, as we go forward, you know, about 41,000 square feet of new and renovated space across the campus will provide, you know, for much more excellent care, more private rooms, natural light, you know, better washroom facilities, more room for visitors, other patient comforts and, of course, you know, very specifically, in terms of cardiac care, we're going to see enhancements in expanding the in-patient unit, the cardiac intensive care. So, again, I would ask the member to just let me provide her with a more specific capital update.

I mean if what she is getting at is have, has that building been empty over time? Yes, it has; that's not secret.

Mrs. Driedger: There's a lot of conversations going on, and can the minister just indicate, and did I hear correctly that that Asper building has been empty all this time?

* (16:40)

Ms. Oswald: Again, Madam Chairperson, work has been done on the building. There have been components of the building that have been vacant over time. The overall master planning with Dr. Menkis as the lead in partnership with St. Boniface Hospital was to make sure that the hospital itself became the cardiac centre of excellence for heart surgery, so the plan was announced last spring and is being developed to ensure that this space and the footprint on the campus is used in the best possible way. Again, the details of what exists on which floor and when and the developments of construction that have taken place to date, I don't have at my fingertips, but there have been components of that building that have been vacant, and, as we go forward, it's going to, in addition to other buildings on the campus, be part of Manitoba's centre for excellence for cardiac care.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate whether the total building has been empty or just parts of it have been empty?

Ms. Oswald: Yes, there has been work going on in the Asper building at St. Boniface Hospital. There have been floors of the building that have been vacant, I believe, throughout its duration. Would want to confirm that absolutely to make sure that there hasn't been a program that has gone in and gone out of which I might not be aware at my fingertips, but in terms of the work that's being done for the cardiac program, the work is still ongoing. There are not patients in there at this time.

Mrs. Driedger: Are there any offices in the building, in that Asper building?

Ms. Oswald: Madam Chair, did she say offices?

Madam Chairperson: I'm just going to once again remind members I'm having some concerns expressed to me by the people who are putting the questions forward and the ministers who are asking the questions in that they are having difficulty hearing the answers. So I'm just going to remind members that if you wish to have private conversations, please take those to the loge. So, the honourable member for Charleswood, if you could just repeat your—the honourable member for

Charleswood, if you could repeat your question please.

Mrs. Driedger: Just a question to the minister. Are there any offices that have currently inhabited the Asper building?

Ms. Oswald: I can let the member know that, of course, these renovations are under way. It's been my understanding that there may be some office space that has happened in the past. I do want to confirm that for the member but I know that, going forward, we want to ensure that the two levels of the centre will have the inpatient beds, the expansion that we spoke of, ICU beds. There are renovations going on currently on the main floor for a clinic, which is part of the master plan, and there will, going forward, as stated, be space for education and offices will be part of that as well. Yeah.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate who has been paying the costs of the heating and lighting and anything else for that building since it was built?

Ms. Oswald: Has St. Boniface Hospital been paying the costs, or the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority? Is that the question? Um, I'll confirm if it's a singular cost or a shared cost among the region. I don't know at the moment. I'll check.

Mrs. Driedger: And can the minister just indicate when that building was finished construction? How long has it been there ready for use?

Ms. Oswald: No, I can't give her the date but I'll find out when it was finished construction. Certainly, there are parts of it that, even today, you know, would not be ready for use. There would be other components I believe that, you know, certainly, office space could have been or currently will be, you know, used for office space. I know, you know, with a certainty, you know, for clinical space, you know, it's not ready yet, but, you know, I'll get the date of, you know, when the last nail was pounded in and how long the building's been there and some of the historical details about occupancy and function for the member opposite as we go forward. I don't have that history with me in the Chamber today.

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Chair, can the Minister of Health indicate in terms of what the Nor'West health access centre—if, in fact, we can anticipate that that will be going ahead this fiscal year?

Ms. Oswald: Yes, Madam Chairperson, I can let the member know that work is ongoing concerning the Nor'West Access Centre. I know that the member has

been very keenly interested and advocating for services since the time that the Westbrook medical clinic closed.

We are working with the Nor'West co-op also—who, I'm sure the member would agree, staff there and board members there are incredible partners—to work on a potential option for some bridging capacity between now and when the Nor'West Access Centre will be completed and ready to open. So I just wanted to let him know that as a potential possibility.

Also wanted to let him know that there are—well, honestly, I wouldn't call them, call it much stronger than rumours, but discussions that there is a doctor interested in the Westbrook clinic and Manitoba Health in moving into the Westbrook clinic. Manitoba Health is investigating this and offering to facilitate with a potential move in there. But the Nor'West clinic, you know, or Nor'West Access Centre, pardon me, to be clear, it is on track to be developed as we go forward within the context of the budget, yes.

Mr. Lamoureux: I understand even that doctor might have been the one that showed up at the public meeting, and I do want to express—I did appreciate the fact that the minister did have a representative there in her place. I think it was quite informative for her to be there.

The other question I had is in regards to the regional health building that's now on Logan and Keewatin. Is there an actual cost to what that building cost, total cost of the building? You know which one I'm referring to, Logan and Main Street.

Ms. Oswald: Yes, just to go back to the last—to go back to the last question, thank you for making mention of the member, Ms. Wasylofski from primary health, who's, may I say on the record, is a terrific resource. I think, actually, the discussion that you may have had with her that evening, or some of your constituents at your meeting about a potentially interested doctor, I think this is actually another one, the one that I'm raising today.

So we're very encouraged but, you know, don't want to, you know, create false hope. But, you know, we know that our primary health unit is very active on this file. We don't disagree with you that that area of Winnipeg could use more doctors, whether they are private fee-for-service doctors that are setting up, or for us to get moving on as quickly as we can on the access centre, or helping the people that are still

without a doctor make their way to the location where Drs. Henry and Krocak, I believe that's the pronunciation, are now at 2110 Main Street. They're very interested in retaining their patients. It's not close by necessarily, but we want to facilitate those people getting to those doctors if they wish to.

We also understand that there are, through the family doctor connection line, some doctors in the general area that are accepting new patients. Also, I want to assure the member that that continues to be an option. So, with all of these prongs that we're working on now, we agree we want to provide as fast access to physicians as we can for the area, and we'll continue to work with the member and work with interested parties to make this happen quickly.

On the second issue, I don't have the figure for the WRHA headquarters in front of me in the Chamber today. I think it is important for the member to realize the capital construction of that building. You know, it's a CentreVenture project, and the WRHA leases. So I think there was some false information put on the record some years ago that it was costing the government \$30 million. That's not correct.

*(16:50)

There is ongoing operating for the development of a primary care clinic for which, of course, government, through the WRHA, will pay, but let's be clear about the capital construction. It's a CentreVenture project they lease through there. So the notion bandied about that we spent \$30 million on that building is not factually correct, but I will endeavour to get some updated info about what specific government costs are involved in that entity on Main and Logan, and I'll get back to the member.

Mr. Goertzen: Questions for the Minister of Justice, the Attorney General. Back in March of 2008, almost to the day, two years ago, the federal government made an announcement, a federal initiative that impacted I think every province in Canada regarding funding for police officers.

Manitoba's share of that federal announcement was \$14.4 million. The minister's predecessor, the member for St. Johns, was minister at the time, and at that time he indicated that Manitoba's \$14.4 million would be used to hire 30 new police officers which were in addition to the 100 new officers that the government had already committed to, and the then-minister also indicated that the 30 officers would be split between the Winnipeg

Police Service, the RCMP, who are on a contract basis through other parts of Manitoba, and the Brandon Police Service, their municipal force.

Since that time, a number of the provinces have put out press releases indicating where they've used their allocation of the federal funding for the police officers. Can the minister indicate where the federal funding went in the province of Manitoba for police officers?

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I thank the member for the question, and the federal contribution came out of an election promise actually in an election before that in which the Conservative Party promised to give funding for 2,500 more police officers across the country. They then proposed this fund which would be a fixed amount of time. So, in effect, you're right. There was a share of \$14.4 million for Manitoba. The money's appreciated, but obviously it's created some challenges for us in the way that we've been funding for police in Winnipeg, in Brandon, and, of course, for the RCMP.

A five-year commitment, while helpful and perhaps helpful in recruiting, doesn't actually help after that five-year period is up. The funding that we have added since 1999 has not been on a temporary basis. It's been permanent funding and, in fact, those additions have been considerable. Since 1999, our government is now providing funding for 93 more police officers for the Winnipeg Police Service as well as 126 more police officers outside of the city of Winnipeg, which means 219 funded officers across the province. So the money has certainly been helpful. Our goal has been to continue to provide ongoing funding for police services and not just something that would expire at the end of five years.

So, to be more specific with the question my friend has asked, since the date of that announcement, there have been three budgets that have been brought in, all including more resources for policing. In the 2008 budget, there was funding for 10 more police officers with the Winnipeg Police Service, two more officers with the Brandon Police Service, funding for 12 more RCMP officers, and funding for another First Nations policing position. In 2009, the result was 10 more funded officers for the Winnipeg Police Service, one more for the Brandon Police Service, 12 for the RCMP, and two for First Nations policing, and as the member is aware, our most recent budget, which we are now debating, includes 13 more officers for the Winnipeg

Police Service, 10 regular officers, three as part of the helicopter unit, and one for the Brandon Police Service.

So the cost of those officers alone, 50 in 2008-2009, is between 4.5 to 5 million dollars per year. That will continue on indefinitely because these are permanent positions, and we're hoping the budget will be passed and we can add those additional 14 positions.

So, to summarize, the money from the federal government is appreciated. It wasn't quite what we were expecting in that it's a short-term solution. It's not reasonable to assume that you can recruit and retain officers for only a period of five years, but, certainly, we've gone ahead and we've continued to increase policing in the city of Winnipeg and outside on a permanent basis.

Mr. Goertzen: For clarity, from the minister, I want to get him to specifically respond to the question about the commitment from the former Attorney General which was representing his government. I know that it's a different minister, but it's still agreement from the government.

I believe that, in 2007, as part of the, probably it's part of the election campaign, New Democratic Party promised 100 new police officers, and then the minister, when the federal government came forward with the 14.4 million, said that this would be in addition to those 100 officers. There'd be 30 new officers, so that would make it 130 officers and that the additional 30 would be split between Brandon and the RCMP in Winnipeg.

So is the minister indicating that the, that Mr., the member for St. Johns was incorrect and that that \$14.4 million is being used to fund the promise of the 100 officers—or is the 30 in addition?

Mr. Swan: I think the reason there was confusion might be, again, that there has been a—some funding which has been allocated for a short-term basis, and the Province of Manitoba has repeatedly made investments in policing on a permanent basis. So, as I've said, we added funding for officers in the 2008 budget, the 2009 budget and now in the 2010 budget.

We've also responded to other requests, by the city of Winnipeg in particular, with respect to the helicopter, with respect to coming forward with funding for police cadets, as well as the ongoing commitment that we've made to funding positions in Winnipeg, Brandon, for First Nations and for the RCMP.

So I can tell the member that our commitment to policing is still a work in progress, and not only is the \$14.4 million going to be spent by the government, we're actually investing that amount of money time and time again. In fact, if I look at the additional funding that we, or the funding we provide to the Winnipeg Police Service, that amount will be over 10 million—\$10.4 million alone in 2010-2011, for one year, not, not in total, but just for one year. So each year that goes by, we're investing a great deal of money in policing across the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Goertzen: I can provide for the minister press releases from other provinces who received obviously different allocations from the federal government based on the formula the federal government established, but they released publicly where the federal funds were being used and where the police officers that were attached to that funding were located.

This minister seems to be indicating that Manitoba is somehow in a unique position from the other provinces and can't do that, and that it's more complex because of the term of the funding. Is the minister unable to do what his colleagues in other parts of Canada are able to do? He's not able to provide a breakdown of which officers are being funded from the federal commitment of \$14.4 million?

Mr. Swan: As my friend looks at the press releases that some provinces have issued, he'll note that every province has taken their own route in terms of the use of this funding. Some provinces have chosen to relate it that way. Other provinces have made investment in things other than officers, in some cases in terms of technology, in terms of other investments in their systems.

Manitoba is actually, I believe, the most generous province in terms of providing ongoing, permanent funding for police resources, not just in our capital city, but elsewhere. So, again, as I've indicated, we have short-term money, which is appreciated, and we do thank the federal government for that money. At the same time, I think the member needs to realize that we've taken that short-term commitment and we worked it into our long-term commitment to policing that, I think, is again the best program in the entire country in terms of how the provincial government assists with policing.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I recognize that there may be different allocations for the funding between

different provinces. What is clear that the other provinces who are able to clearly identify where they've spent their federal contribution. Why can't this minister clearly identify it and attach it to either people or projects?

* (17:00)

Madam Chairperson: Very briefly, the honourable Minister for Justice.

Mr. Swan: I could try and answer the member's question again, because in Manitoba, we support ongoing funding. We don't support paying for a police officer for five years, and, at the end of that five-year period, yanking the rug out from under the Winnipeg Police Service or the Brandon Police Service or the RCMP, which provides a service across the province, as saying that, well, the money's

run out; we can't help you any more. It's because of the long-term, permanent positions that have been created each year since this government has been in power through the budget process.

Madam Chairperson: Order, please. The hour being 5 p.m., when this matter is again before the House tomorrow, the honourable Minister for Justice—the honourable member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) will have the floor.

The time being 5 p.m., committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Speaker: The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 25, 2010

CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS		Oral Questions	
Introduction of Bills		Balanced Budget Legislation	
Bill 13–The Civil Remedies Against Organized Crime Amendment Act		McFadyen; Selinger	467
Swan	463	Stefanson; Wowchuk	470
Petitions		Saskatchewan	
Mount Agassiz Ski Area		Stefanson; Wowchuk	471
Briese	463	Agriculture	
Long-Term Care Facilities–Morden and Winkler		Graydon; Struthers	472
Dyck	464	Manitoba Hydro	
PTH 15–Twinning		Borotsik; Wowchuk	474
Schuler	464	Health-Care Services	
Ophthalmology Services–Swan River		Lamoureux; Oswald	475
Driedger	464	Members' Statements	
MPI–Independent Claim Representative		Midwinter's Night Dream–A Winter Festival	
Graydon	465	Brick	476
Medical Clinic in Weston and Brooklands Area		Hartney School Communication to Soldiers	
Lamoureux	465	Maguire	476
Bipole III		Southdale Community Centre Expansion	
Pedersen	465	Selby	477
Tabling of Reports		Manufacturing Week	
Auditor General's Report: Follow-up of Previously Issued Recommendations		Borotsik	477
Hickes	466	National Nutrition Month	
Ministerial Statements		Braun	478
Provincial Parks 50th Anniversary		ORDERS OF THE DAY	
Blaikie	466	GOVERNMENT BUSINESS	
Maguire	466	Committee of the Whole	
Gerrard	467	Bill 11–The Interim Appropriation Act,	
		2010	479

The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba Debates and Proceedings
are also available on the Internet at the following address:

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