



Fourth Session - Thirty-Sixth Legislature

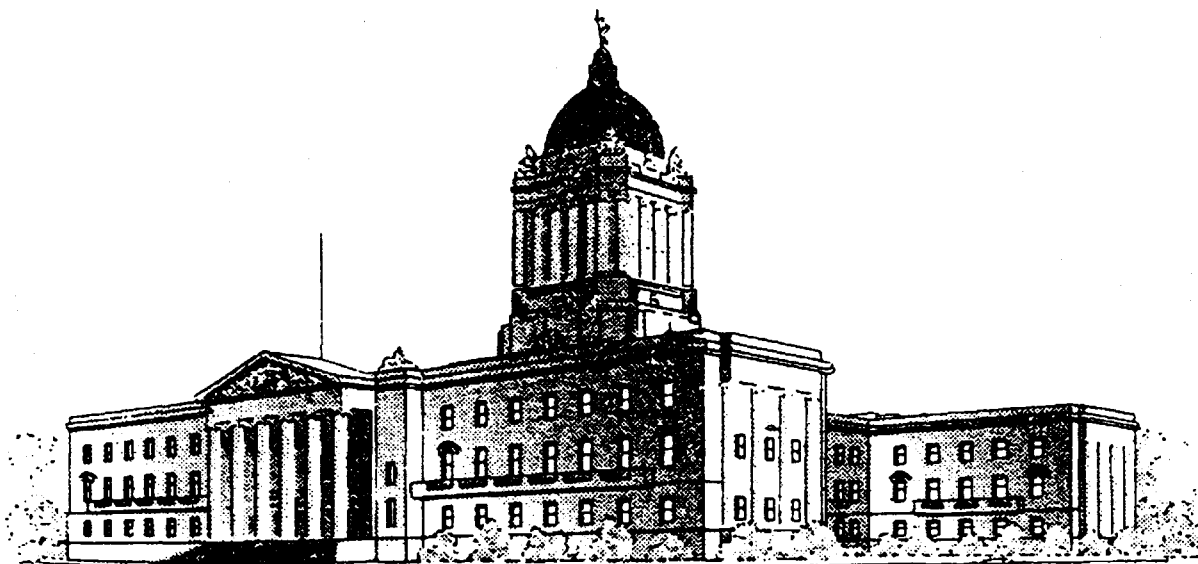
of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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Speaker*



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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Sixth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ASHTON, Steve	Thompson	N.D.P.
BARRETT, Becky	Wellington	N.D.P.
CERILLI, Marianne	Radisson	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CUMMINGS, Glen, Hon.	Ste. Rose	P.C.
DACQUAY, Louise, Hon.	Seine River	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard, Hon.	Roblin-Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary	Concordia	N.D.P.
DOWNEY, James, Hon.	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
DRIEDGER, Albert	Steinbach	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
ENNS, Harry, Hon.	Lakeside	P.C.
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EVANS, Leonard S.	Brandon East	N.D.P.
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FILMON, Gary, Hon.	Tuxedo	P.C.
FINDLAY, Glen, Hon.	Springfield	P.C.
FRIESEN, Jean	Wolseley	N.D.P.
GAUDRY, Neil	St. Boniface	Lib.
GILLESHAMMER, Harold, Hon.	Minnedosa	P.C.
HELWER, Edward	Gimli	P.C.
HICKES, George	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
KOWALSKI, Gary	The Maples	Lib.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LATHLIN, Oscar	The Pas	N.D.P.
LAURENDEAU, Marcel	St. Norbert	P.C.
MACKINTOSH, Gord	St. Johns	N.D.P.
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Vacant	Charleswood	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, March 10, 1998

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Winnipeg Hospitals Food Service—Privatization

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Madam Speaker, I beg to present the petition of Modesto Aguirre, Vivencia Aguirre, Stephan Boyechko and others praying that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba may be pleased to request the Minister of Health (Mr. Praznik) to consider immediately cancelling the hospital food proposal and concentrate on delivering quality health care instead of using health dollars to provide contracts for private firms.

Mr. George Hickes (Point Douglas): Madam Speaker, I beg to present the petition of Tracy Dunne, Ernie Raposo, Nila Martinez and others praying that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the Minister of Health to put an end to the centralization and privatization of Winnipeg hospital food services.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Winnipeg Hospitals Food Service—Privatization

Madam Speaker: I have reviewed the petition of the honourable member for Wellington (Ms. Barrett). It complies with the rules and practices of the House. Is it the will of the House to have the petition read?

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Madam Speaker: Dispense.

THAT the Urban Shared Services Corporation (USSC) has announced plans to privatize laundry, food services and purchasing for the Winnipeg hospitals; and

THAT it is estimated that more than 1,000 health care jobs will be lost over the next year as a result, with

many more privatized in the next two or three years; and

THAT under the terms of the contract, Ontario businesses will profit at the expense of Manitoba's health care system; and

THAT after construction of a food assembly warehouse in Winnipeg, chilled, prepared food will be shipped in from Ontario, then assembled and heated before being shipped to the hospitals; and

THAT people who are in the hospital require nutritious and appetizing food; and

THAT the announced savings as a result of the contract have been disputed, and one study by Wintemute Randle Kilimnik indicated that, "A considerable number of studies have compared costs of service delivery in health care between self-operation (public sector) and privatization. Invariably, privatization is more expensive."; and

THAT no one in Manitoba seems to benefit from this contract, especially patients.

WHEREFORE YOUR PETITIONERS HUMBLY PRAY that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the Minister of Health to put an end to the centralization and privatization of Winnipeg hospital food services.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Linda McIntosh (Minister of Education and Training): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to table the annual report for the year ending June 30, 1997, of the Public Schools Finance Board.

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to table the report for the Manitoba Hydro-Electric Board, the quarterly report, for the nine months ended December 31, 1997.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to

the public gallery where we have this afternoon forty-five Grade 9 students from Hastings School under the direction of Mr. Barry Wittenvrongel and Mrs. Roxanne McComber. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Energy and Mines (Mr. Newman).

We also have twenty-seven Grades 7 and 8 students from Darwin School under the direction of Mr. Harold Bell. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Energy and Mines (Mr. Newman).

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

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Health Care System Bed Availability

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): My question is to the First Minister. Today we learned that 11 patients are in the hallways of St. Boniface Hospital. Regrettably, Madam Speaker, some of those patients have been in the hallway for a number of days. This is a tragedy for those families in terms of dealing with their families and the privacy and dignity of those patients that are in those hallways. These people are waiting for rooms, rooms that this Premier (Mr. Filmon) has closed in previous budgets, rooms that they have paid for and he has closed.

I would like to ask the Premier: what impact on those 11 people has his broken promise made in terms of breaking his promise to put \$600 million in capital before the election and breaking his promise and freezing that capital after the election? How many of those patients are in the hallways directly as a result of his broken election promise?

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, we on this side of the House, along with other members, certainly feel for any patient in the system who has to wait for a bed in a particular facility. It is by far not the desirable situation I think of anyone administering a hospital or the Minister of Health or anyone on this particular side of the House.

What has been happening in health care systems right across the country—as the member well knows, as we have seen changes in technology we have seen shifts of services to long-term care, to home care, and Manitoba has probably one of the best, if not the best home care system in the country—has been a reduction in acute care beds. With the reduction of dollars we have received from Ottawa, we admit very clearly that our system has been running at its maximum. When you have a flu crisis as we had this year or you have a flood as we did last year, it puts additional strain on the system at the particular time, and that is what we have been experiencing. We hope that we can get through that as quickly as possible.

* (1335)

Mr. Doer: Madam Speaker, there is not one patient in those hallways today at St. Boniface that is suffering from the flu. It is this government and this Premier that closed the acute care beds. It is this Premier that has fired the nursing staff and health care staff, and it is this Premier that broke his word.

I would like to ask the Premier a further question. What impact on the backlog of patients in hallways has there been from the government's decision last year to close the Odd Fellows home, a home that had 43 patients in it, regrettably, some of whom have moved back into personal care homes? What impact has your decision on your facilities made on our line-ups at our crisis situation in our hallways?

Mr. Praznik: Madam Speaker, there is no doubt that the additional numbers of flu cases that have hit us this year have put strain on the entire system, and there is no doubt, indeed, that we have many patients in acute care beds who are waiting for placement in long-term care facilities. That is why this administration in this budget has committed a sizeable amount of dollars towards long-term care beds which should start to ease part of that.

With respect to the Odd Fellows, if I remember that issue correctly, we were dealing with a facility that was very old. It was time-dated. Surely, the member for Concordia is not asking us to refrain from replacing outdated facilities within our system. That will continue. In fact, some of the personal care home beds

approved in this budget on top of the 500 new ones are for replacements.

If we look across the system, from time to time beds will need to be replaced. If I remember, as well, from my briefings on the Odd Fellows situation, that organization was not interested in actually being the managers of a replacement facility.

Mr. Doer: Madam Speaker, this is just one example of the chaos and crisis in health care with this government and this Premier (Mr. Filmon). They fire the staff, close the beds before they have any other plan and any other resources, and then they break their election promises on capital.

We know from family members of the people who were in the Odd Fellows home before it was closed down completely that those people, many of whom have gone from that home to personal care homes, have blocked the beds from people who may be released from hospitals. Now we get it. You are supposed to build the transition beds before you close the other beds. We get it, and this Premier does not get it.

I would like to ask this Premier—and he was warned by Dr. Evelyn Shapiro: why is he not taking any advice from any health care experts? Why is he just running roughshod over the health care system here in Manitoba, and why has he created the crisis that has resulted in 11 patients sitting in the hallway at St. Boniface Hospital here this morning? Why has he taken these decisions to do this, and why will he not accept responsibility for his cutback after cutback after cutback in health care?

Mr. Praznik: Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition continues to describe the changes that are going on in the system in a manner that would suggest that the system should not undergo any change. His own member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) in this House and other members of the New Democratic Party have spoken for years about the need to change services. Manitoba has been a leader in developing, for example, the Home Care program. We have tripled, under the Filmon administration, the amount of dollars that go into home care. In fact, we are being hailed nationally even on the CBC news in the reports of the—Halifax used Manitoba as the example of having a

good home care system. We continue to build those services. This is getting the numbers exactly right in terms of acute care beds. We run the system very tightly. No one has denied it on this side of the House, and one of the reasons we have had to do that is because of the reduction of the financial support from the Government of Canada.

* (1340)

Health Care System Bed Availability

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): Je suis allé à l'Hôpital Saint-Boniface cet après-midi.

[Translation]

I went to St. Boniface Hospital this afternoon.

[English]

Is the Minister of Health aware that St. Boniface Hospital, of the 11 patients, all admitted patients, were lying in the hallway? I talked to a gentleman with double pneumonia who has waited since Sunday for a bed and may have to wait till the weekend, and I talked to an elderly gentleman who had had a heart attack and is lying in the hallway clutching his urinal in his hand as he spoke with me, and he is waiting for a bed. The residents who are in the hallway have to go into a separate room to have bowel movements, but that room is blocked by another patient, so they have nowhere to go, Madam Speaker, as we speak today. Is the Premier (Mr. Filmon) or the Minister of Health not surprised why we are demanding real dollars this budget, real new money into the health care system to deal with this crisis? There are options you could take today to deal with the bed crisis by putting some funding in to deal with it at least in the interim and help these people who are lying in the hallways.

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, we on this side of the House, certainly myself as Minister of Health and the Premier share that concern about those patients who are waiting for rooms in our hospitals. We have not liked the situation either. That is why when we were advised last, I believe it was December by the Winnipeg Hospital Authority that they

could see they would have an additional requirement for acute care beds, we asked them to identify—and I know members talk about people having paid for beds, but in the parlance of health care, a bed is more than just a bed in a room. It has to be staffed.

They identified, in working with the nine hospitals in our facility across our city of Winnipeg, 83 additional beds that they could bring into operation; that meant staff and operate. They had difficulty doing that because—[interjection] Well, the member says we fire—well, that would imply that people were unemployed and available to work. It was not the case because they have found other employment in a growing home care field and in other parts of health care. So we put into operation the dollars to maximize the acute care beds that the system could identify we could bring into operation. If we require to provide more, we will certainly look at that, but I tell you today, even if we were to identify dollars to be there, it would not necessarily solve the problem that the member is identifying.

Mr. Chomiak: Madam Speaker, is the Minister of Health saying that they are not in a position to do something about this crisis when they blamed it on the flu, and we know there is no flu outbreak that is causing this problem today, when they closed 43 beds at Odd Fellows last year, and we told them: keep those beds open until you have alternatives in place, but put those people from those beds into nursing homes? When they have not been able to open on a short-term basis beds, are they asking the Manitobans, the 11 lying in the hallway—and the nurse who said to me nine years ago they could not take blood in the hallway; today they are doing all the services in the hallway. Are they telling me that they are incapable of dealing with this crisis? Perhaps this has something to do with the fact that they are only putting in \$2 million new budget.

Mr. Praznik: Madam Speaker, throughout the last year, as we have seen different areas that required additional funding, the Treasury Board of this government has provided those dollars. The result has been that year over year on base versus base, apples to apples, we have added \$100 million additional dollars to our system.

An Honourable Member: Wrong.

* (1345)

Mr. Praznik: The members say “wrong.” They would prefer to compare apples to oranges. I think that is unfair, and if they want to judge our total spending they should judge it at the end of the year when we know exactly what we have spent, if they want to do a fair comparison.

Madam Speaker, let me tell the honourable member—he references the Odd Fellows. We replaced beds at Deer Lodge, for example, that have been built and opened, and we have not closed the beds that were to be replaced. We have kept them open during this particular time to help ease the system. They are not the best beds. They are not the best rooms. They are not desirable at all in our modern system of care. They are very old beds. I think there are three persons to a room, but we have kept them open during this period to help ease some of that pressure. Those beds have been replaced already, and those beds are in operation.

Mr. Chomiak: Madam Speaker, does not the Minister of Health recognize the fact when he was appointed as the new Health minister a year ago, he opened swing beds a year ago, and since then there have been diversions? Since then there has been a crisis in all of the emergency wards, and despite what the government has pitifully tried to do, through their incompetence and their relying only on the regional authority, they have not been able to deal with this crisis. What are we to tell the families, some of whom we spoke to today at St. Boniface Hospital, about their members who are in the hallway and will remain there for a week and perhaps week after week while the minister talks about planning at his regional health authority? That is not acceptable.

Mr. Praznik: Madam Speaker, we have moved well beyond the planning stage. As we are able, changes are being made in the way we deliver programs. We began in rural Manitoba with regionalization last year, and it has been very, very successful. We see the same kinds of changes happening in the Winnipeg system. Needless to say, when a system undergoes a great period of change there are going to be stresses upon it.

The member opposite talks about nine years. What I hear from the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Doer),

from the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) is that we should turn back the clock in some way and have a very old and antiquated system.

The other very key point is all of our provincial health care systems are under added stress because of the reduction of federal dollars. I have not yet heard from the provincial New Democratic Party any criticism of that fact. It totally makes it difficult for us, if what we need is a united front, to tell the federal government that they have to put additional dollars into our health care system.

Health Care System Funding

Mr. Leonard Evans (Brandon East): Yesterday we received a copy of the special warrant which formally modified the 1997-98 budget providing for an additional \$98.6 million to be spent on health for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1998. The Order-in-Council dated February 18 states clearly that the amount provided by the special warrant shall be added to and is deemed to be part of the appropriation specified in the warrant for the fiscal year for which the warrant is issued. In other words, \$98.6 million has been legally added to the '97-98 budget of the Department of Health so that the real increase in '98-99 is only \$1.35 million.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Leonard Evans: Will the Minister of Finance search his conscience and stop misleading Manitobans and admit openly and honestly that he is providing not an additional \$100 million in his budget but in reality a paltry \$1.35 million?

Point of Order

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member for Burrows, on a point of order.

Mr. Doug Martindale (Deputy Opposition House Leader): Madam Speaker, I believe the member for Brandon East's (Mr. Leonard Evans) microphone was not on. I wonder if you could give him the opportunity to just repeat his question. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Well, I am not sure if I just heard him audibly from his seat, but I thought I heard it through my sound system.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. On the point of order raised by the honourable member for Burrows, may I ask the honourable member to whom the question was addressed whether he heard the question—for clarification? Did the honourable minister hear the question posed?

* (1350)

An Honourable Member: Yes, sure.

An Honourable Member: Is it in public record?

An Honourable Member: Will Hansard hear it?

Madam Speaker: I will look into it, and I will assume responsibility for ensuring that the question is appropriately recorded in Hansard.

Order, please. At the conclusion of Question Period I will consult with the sound technician to ensure that the member's question does appear on the official record. I assume that there was no point of order, but I assume that satisfies the concerns raised by the honourable member for Burrows.

Point of Order

Mr. Gary Kowalski (The Maples): On a point of order. Just to clarify, I understand the way the new system works is that when someone asks a question the mikes around them are turned off and the speakers may be turned off so there is not feedback, so that may be why there are people on this side of the House—

An Honourable Member: You are not behind it.

Mr. Kowalski: Yes. So it might have something to do with the system.

Madam Speaker: I thank the honourable member for The Maples. He does not have a point of order, but I thank him for his clarification. I would request that all

members be a little patient. It is a brand-new system, and probably we will have the odd technical glitch until the system has been refined.

I know as of yesterday I had difficulty hearing the member for Rupertsland (Mr. Robinson), and his mike was on and my sound was full volume. I did address that situation with the sound technician.

* * *

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Finance): The members opposite do seem more than a little confused, and I would suggest the member for Brandon East talk to his Leader who just a few moments ago stands before us and says cuts, cuts, cuts and talks about cuts in health care funding. Then the member for Brandon East stands up and says that there is \$98 million more added to the system in 1997-98.

We have indicated all along the 1998 budget has \$100 million more than the 1997 budget, and that is not counting the additional \$10 million that has also been provided for additional equipment requirements in our health care system, totalling \$110 million more in 1998 for our budget than 1997.

As I told the member opposite yesterday, in 1997-98 if there has been a need in home care, we met that need; if there is a need in our hospital system, we meet that need. If there is a need in our personal care home system, we meet it, and we provide the resources when required at that particular point in time.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member for Brandon East, with a supplementary question.

Mr. Leonard Evans: I will table for members of the House copies of the Order-in-Council. Will the minister read the clear and unequivocal statement in the Order-in-Council which states that the special warrant is deemed to be part of the appropriation specified for the fiscal year for which the warrant is issued? In other words, the 1997-98 budget has been modified, so you cannot in all honesty tell the people of Manitoba that you have added a hundred million dollars. Will this

minister come clean and admit now that he has only got another \$1.35 million in new money for 1998-99? Let that be clear.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I would remind the honourable member for Brandon East to pick and choose his words carefully. The language has started to deteriorate in the Chamber of late, and all members are honourable members.

Mr. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, I certainly know what the Order-in-Council says because I was one of the signatories to it. This member for Brandon East has been in this Chamber long enough and has been around long enough—in fact, he was even in government for a period of time—that he should be able to understand budgets very clearly. I encourage him to look in the budget document on page 17 and see what the 1998 budget is providing for health care here in Manitoba and look at what was provided in the 1997 budget here in Manitoba, and he will see very clearly an increase of \$100 million of additional resources for our health care system, for our hospitals, for our personal care homes, for our home care system and for all of the needs that Manitobans have in terms of our health care system. As I told this member before, we spend almost 35 percent of our budget on health care, the second most of any province in all of Canada. On a per capita basis, we are spending the third most of any province in all of Canada. That is a substantial commitment to the health care needs of Manitobans.

* (1355)

Mr. Leonard Evans: I would like to know very straightforwardly from this minister: why did he hold up the release of this special warrant dated February 18, 1998, until yesterday? That is over two and a half weeks and after his Budget Address of last week. Why can this minister not be open, honest and straightforward with the people of Manitoba?

Mr. Stefanson: First of all, Madam Speaker, I do not release the Orders-in-Council and, secondly, I am not so certain I accept even what the honourable member said there. I will confirm when it was released because they have certainly been incorrect in the past in terms of providing that kind of information, but I encourage the member for Brandon East to do exactly what he just

indicated and to look at this budget document and look at page 17 of the budget document and to read the assessments done by organizations like the media, by organizations like the financial reviews that have been done of our budget to date, and he will see very clearly the strong commitment for health care here in Manitoba. We have increased spending in this budget by \$200 million, and of that \$200-million increase, 50 percent or \$100 million more has been allocated for the health care needs of Manitobans. That is a very significant commitment for health care in our province.

Health Care System Funding

Mr. Tim Sale (Crescentwood): Madam Speaker, Manitobans know when the Finance minister's credibility is being tested; he starts to shout and rant and rave just like others on that side.

Could the Minister of Finance explain why the special warrant says, and I quote, authorizing the further expenditure of \$178,478,800 for the purpose of paying expenses incurred or to be incurred in the fiscal year ending March 31, 1998, not in '99? He has provided \$1.3 million for the next year; he has provided all of this money to be spent by the end of this fiscal year. That is what his warrant says.

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, some things never change with the member for Crescentwood in terms of the nature of his questions and remaining at the bottom of the gutter. If he needs to talk about credibility—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I believe very similar terminology—I do not have the ruling in front of me—has been ruled unparliamentary previously. I would ask that the honourable Minister of Finance please pick and choose his words carefully so as not to provoke debate.

Mr. Stefanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. This is an interesting question being asked by members opposite, and one gets the appearance they do not want us to be adding more money to our health care system. They seem concerned about the fact that we have added in excess of \$90 million to our health care system in 1997-98 to meet the needs in our home care system, in our personal care homes, in our hospital

system, and the fact that we have now built into our base budgeting a hundred million dollars more for all of those important services so that that money is there from this day forward on an ongoing basis each and every year to support our hospitals, our personal care homes and our home care system. We believe that is in the best interests of Manitobans. That will serve us well in terms of our health care needs, and that is why we have built that additional \$100 million right into our base budgeting, right into our core budgeting, moving forward.

Mr. Sale: Madam Speaker, I would ask the Minister of Finance to confirm or refute the fact that last year his government spent \$1.87 billion in its health care system and its increase is nowhere near a hundred million, not even close. It is under half of that. Even if he went back two years, it is under half of a hundred million dollars. Will he finally confirm that he put \$1.3 million new money into this budget for this year? He put in approximately 43 last year, because two years ago he spent 1.870. It already was two years back, and you are saying a hundred million dollars more. Not even close. Not even in the ballpark.

Mr. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, as usual the member for Crescentwood's numbers are all wrong, and I encourage him to participate in the Estimates process when we get to the Department of Health and other departments because his numbers once again are wrong. I give him the same advice I gave the member for Brandon East (Mr. Leonard Evans): Talk to his Leader who just a few minutes ago stood before us and talked about cuts, cuts, cuts, and now we have these members standing before us talking about the fact that we have added over \$90 million to the system, and they seem concerned about that. They seem to think that is not the right thing to do. Well, we know it is the right thing to do. We put those resources in place for our health care system, and we are proud of that.

* (1400)

Gaming Control Commission VLT Regulations

Mr. Gary Kowalski (The Maples): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister responsible for The Gaming Control Act (Mr. Radcliffe). The Gaming

Commission established by this government has largely been silent about the serious issue of problem gamblers and, like the government, does not deny that a problem exists, rather, shrewdly acknowledges the problem, allowing it to be perceived as a defender of the public good, but offers few, if any, solutions. One proposed solution to help problem gamblers is changing VLTs that indicate exactly how much real money an individual has wagered rather than how many credits and slowing the machines down. Can the minister indicate if the commission is considering any such changes?

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Lotteries Corporation Act): Madam Speaker, I know the nature of play on machines, VLT machines, has been in the media somewhat of late, and there have been some comparisons with the province of Alberta. I do not have all of the details here before me today, and I will certainly undertake to provide them for the member for The Maples. I know Manitoba compares very well to other provinces in terms of how quickly you can play the machines, I guess is the simplest way to put it, that ours are at a slower pace than these other machines in other jurisdictions even in terms of accessing them to be putting more money in while you are playing. Again, ours is at a much slower pace so that on a comparative basis our machines are what I would describe as better in terms of precluding the kinds of things that the member for The Maples has talked about. I will certainly undertake to provide him the detailed comparisons and look forward to any other comments your might have.

Internet Gaming Regulations

Mr. Gary Kowalski (The Maples): A further question for the same minister: is the commission considering any attempts to regulate Internet gaming as is being done in some U.S. states?

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Lotteries Corporation Act): Madam Speaker, that is a challenge for all jurisdictions, because certainly my understanding is that it is illegal, something we are working with other jurisdictions, other provinces and with the federal government to address.

Addiction Reduction Strategy

Mr. Gary Kowalski (The Maples): My last question for the minister is: can the minister responsible for the Gaming Control Commission indicate to this House if this commission is actively examining any regulatory changes designed to help problem gamblers?

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Lotteries Corporation Act): Madam Speaker, I think a couple of things to point out, again, as the member for The Maples knows, just recently, in consultation with the Addictions Foundation, with the Manitoba Hotel Association, the Restaurant and Food Services, the Gaming Control Commission, Lotteries Corporation that they have put in place a problem-gambling customer assistance program which I am told is being very well received by people in the industry. They are recognizing the need to have that kind of a program. I think that will be a very beneficial program and again, if the member for the Maples gets an opportunity to look at our budget, he will see that this budget that we have just tabled provides an additional \$600,000 for the Addictions Foundation, bringing the total commitment now to up over \$1.5 million to provide the additional resources to the Addictions Foundation for the counsellors in the area primarily of providing additional education and counselling services as required.

So again, I know I have had questions like this in the past, and we have said if the Addictions Foundation comes forward with a request and a detailed plan to address a need, that we would provide the resources, and in this budget we are now providing an additional \$600,000 to them primarily to provide education, because I think we all can agree in this Chamber—we might have some areas we disagree on gaming; I think we can all agree about the importance of education for all of our citizens but particularly our young people.

Betel Place Personal Care Home Construction

Ms. Becky Barrett (Wellington): Madam Speaker, the current Minister of Finance who presides over a balanced budget for the fourth year in a row and—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Ms. Barrett: I have not finished my question yet. And also he presides over a slush fund of somewhere around half a billion dollars. He attended with me on June 2, 1994, almost four full years ago, the ground-breaking ceremonies for a 100-bed personal care home facility in Winnipeg which was to be called Betel Place. I would like to ask the Minister of Finance how he justifies almost four years of inaction on this project that would have alleviated fully one-third of the immediate shortage of personal care home beds in Manitoba, thereby reducing the abysmal situation of seniors and critically ill patients staying in the hallways of hospitals for a week or more. How does he justify that?

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): What the member has flagged is the freeze that we as an administration had to put on our capital program because the cost of financing that particular program, as we looked at our reductions and transfer payments and other things, at that particular time we would not have been able to bear it, so we had to put a freeze on that particular program. You know, again, members opposite seem to ignore the fact that we have had substantial reductions in support from Ottawa, and that has put a great pressure on our whole budgetary system. There is no doubt about that. I am pleased to tell her that the Betel project is one of those projects that has been approved. The Betel organization has had a change in their priority, and we are currently negotiating for another sponsor.

Ms. Barrett: Madam Speaker, as I table a letter from the previous Minister of Health dated February 21, 1995, over three years ago, after the federal cuts in transfer payments were announced, acknowledging, and I quote: the importance of this vital project, end quote, and pledging that construction would begin, quote: early this year in 1995, I would like to ask the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) to explain these four years of inaction on this particular personal care home and others that they had announced prior to the last provincial election with the Minister of Finance's own words in this House this afternoon, and I quote, if there is a need in the personal care home system, we will meet that need.

Mr. Praznik: Madam Speaker, there is no one on this side of the House who, if we had our druthers, would

not have wanted to be in the ground on those projects. We certainly would have wanted to proceed with them.

One of the difficulties all provincial governments, including provinces governed by New Democratic Party administrations, have faced has been significant reductions in support from the national government that continue to want to appear to promote a national medicare and health care system, but in reality continue to withdraw resources from it. Because of some very sound management, because of the efforts across this province where we have seen our economy pull ahead, it is now generating significantly more wealth for us as Manitobans, and we are now able to come back with our capital program and get into the ground in these much-needed projects.

* (1410)

Ms. Barrett: Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the Premier how he can possibly think Manitobans will believe his current promises on personal care home bed construction when his previous Health minister promised it would be in early 1995, his current Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) said it was a marvellous thing that was going to go ahead immediately, and when the Betel group was prepared as late as last year to go ahead with the construction of this personal care home. How can Manitobans possibly believe this government on their current promises?

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Madam Speaker, because Manitobans know that this government has constructed a thousand additional personal care beds since it has been in office this decade, and in addition to that has made commitments for more in this budget that will be carried out.

Correctional Facilities Risk Assessment Procedure

Mr. Gord Mackintosh (St. Johns): Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Justice. The government recently touted and bragged about a new risk assessment for inmates which the government claimed would, and I quote from the annual report, enhance the institution's ability to identify inmate risk factors and to respond with appropriate security.

My question to the minister: given that this government in the last week alone is the one that has closed the doors of a hospital and opened the doors of prisons, I ask is this new so-called state-of-the-art risk assessment procedure now in place.

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Madam Speaker, in our corrections facilities there is always a need to ensure public safety on the one hand, and to ensure that there is an appropriate reintegration of prisoners into society at the appropriate time. Milner Ridge is a medium- or low-security institution. A risk assessment is done in respect of each prisoner. I would indicate that the system is not perfect, and yet many other provinces look to our specific risk assessment system as one of the best in Canada and, indeed, are considering and have adopted aspects, if not all of it. So while I admit that no system in governing prisoners is perfect, we do have a very good system and good administrators who administer that assessment.

Mr. Mackintosh: I ask the minister: how can Manitobans have any confidence left in this kind of rhetoric? I feel sorry for the governments across Canada looking at this province. How can we have confidence when Milner Ridge escapee Kevin Shale, who was convicted of assaulting his former girlfriend and confining her and her five-year-old daughter, we are told, over the course of two hours, be classified by this government as a low risk, and get this, guilty of offences against property? Is this zero tolerance?

Mr. Toews: Madam Speaker, one of the benefits that we are seeing as a result of the implementation of a number of recommendations over the last year is that there are various levels of ensuring that the public is safe in various particular cases, even if one aspect is found wanting or a mistake is made. We now have a rapid deployment of resources to ensure public safety because of that communication of information. I think in respect of particularly the Lavoie recommendations we have seen an integration of communication that assists law enforcement officers in ensuring that people are in fact kept safe and that prisoners are returned as quickly as possible if an error is made.

Mr. Mackintosh: Can the minister then explain why Remand Centre escapee Wayne Taylor, who I

understand is still at large and who was facing three robbery charges and who I understand had a history of an escape, is given minimum-security status and let out into the middle of the city of Winnipeg to take out the garbage? During the last campaign when the Premier closed the prison doors, on which side of those bars were the prisoners?

Mr. Toews: Madam Speaker, this is the same member, the member for St. Johns, who has asked us to implement aspects of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry that in fact has asked us to turn the Brandon Correctional Institution and The Pas Correctional Institution into open-door prisons. This is what this member wants us to do, and I say that is the wrong thing to do. What the people of Manitoba need are secure facilities, and I am committed to giving them those secure facilities by the appropriate facilities being in place.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Time for Oral Questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Nagano Winter Olympics

Mr. Gerry McAlpine (Sturgeon Creek): The 1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano came to a close just last month, and I would like to take a moment to give Manitoba Olympians the recognition that they so richly deserve.

Madam Speaker, 1998 was Canada's best Winter Olympics showing ever. I congratulate all the athletes for achieving a fourth-place finish for Canada at these games. I would like to specifically single out the Manitobans who competed in these games, hockey players Jennifer Botterill, Sami Jo Small and Theoren Fleury and speed skaters Susan Auch and Mike Ireland. On behalf of the government of Manitoba and all members of the Legislature, I would like to offer our most heartfelt congratulations to these athletes who proudly represented Manitoba.

Although some of these athletes may work and train elsewhere, I know they consider Manitoba home, and in representing Canada they were also representing Manitoba. The efforts of our athletes met with unprecedented success garnering 15 medals: six gold,

five silver and four bronze. Susan Auch elicited pride from all Manitobans when she took the podium to receive her silver medal in speed skating. She is truly an inspiration to us all, Madam Speaker. All of their efforts, including the daily commitment, physical strength and mental endurance, represent the incredible sacrifice these athletes have given to being the very best they can be in their chosen field of competition. I think this level of dedication and simply the achievement of getting to the Winter Olympics is outstanding.

I wish them all the best in their future competitions and in their achievements in life beyond sport. They have done Manitoba proud, and I believe all members will join me in saying to them: thank you.

Health Care System—Funding

Mr. Leonard Evans (Brandon East): Madam Speaker, I rise to express the deep concern in the Brandon and Westman community over the cuts to the health care system in that area, and I want to read a portion of a Brandon Sun editorial from February 20. It says: Health care cash shortages clear. Brandon is not getting enough money for health care.

That statement is no secret to anyone who works in the medical profession or has needed access to treatment in this community. However, while the message has not changed, the messenger did. Just over a year ago, former Health minister Jim McCrae hand-picked Earl Backman to head up the Brandon Regional Health Authority. He was chosen for a number of reasons, but one is that he showed the ability to get blood out of a stone in his tenure as city manager of this community. Perhaps the province thought Mr. Backman could wave his magic wand and this community would be transformed into a health care nirvana. However, now that he has been on the job for enough time to get a read on things, it has become clear to him that there is not enough money in the RHA budget.

This is a quote from Mr. Backman: There has been about \$6 million cut to the Brandon General Hospital over the past five years. Mr. Backman said: My gut feeling is that it has gone \$2 million too far. This criticism cannot be written off as the stuff of partisan politics. This is not coming from opposition politicians

or their supporters. It is not coming from citizens whose demands are often written off as unrealistic given Manitoba's past fiscal problems.

It goes on, Madam Speaker, to explain how one person came in from Dauphin who was not provided with the proper care because of the lack of pediatric care in the community. I think this editorial speaks volumes in terms of the real problems of health care cuts in the Westman region and indeed the whole province of Manitoba.

* (1420)

Point of Order

Hon. James McCrae (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order, and it is not to direct my point of order specifically at the honourable member for Brandon East but at other honourable members as well. It has been brought to my attention that during the contribution just made by the honourable member for Brandon East, there was a reference to another member of this House and he used the member's name.

Now this is not directly at the honourable member for Brandon East, because there are other members, and I regret to say including members on this side of the House, who have been doing this of late. Your Honour brought to our attention the sort of deteriorating nature of certain things happening here.

One of the reasons I like being a member of the Legislature so much is that there are some traditions and some usages and some respect that we accord, or we talk about it at least, to the rules of the place and the customs and usages. I have noticed honourable members referring to other honourable members by their names. It is very clear in all of the rules and usages and traditions that that is not done. I do not do this to get after my honourable friend from Brandon East because he is my friend and so are a whole lot of other members around here, but I raise this because I think that I would like us to remind ourselves that we are very, very fortunate to be members of this place, that we are honoured to be able to participate in an institution's activities, an institution which has hundreds and hundreds of years of history behind it.

So, Madam Speaker, I wonder if honourable members would agree with me that this is one area of our activities where we might want to remind ourselves that members of this House are to be addressed through the Chair and by their title or their constituency but not by their names.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Brandon East, on the same point of order.

Mr. Leonard Evans (Brandon East): Yes, Madam Speaker, on the same point of order.

Well, I find myself in complete agreement with the honourable minister, the honourable member for Brandon West. I have no problem. As a matter of fact, I pride myself in 28, almost 29, years in this House of following the rules and not addressing any individual by his or her proper name. They should be addressed by their constituency, or indeed a member of the cabinet should be addressed by his or her ministerial title.

I only point out—maybe the minister did not follow me on this—I was simply quoting. This is a quotation from a newspaper, and I do not know, either I am going to quote it properly or it falls apart. That is the only reason I mentioned the honourable member's name; otherwise, I certainly would not have addressed him with his proper name. I would address him with his title or his constituency name. I appreciate his point of view.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I think, with the greatest respect, I have heard the case made. I recognized that technically the government House leader did indeed have a point of order, but I was cognizant of the fact that it was a quotation from a newspaper article. That is why I did not rise.

But it never hurts to remind all honourable members in the House that periodically we all do deviate from the rules on one occasion or another, and all members are to be referred to by their constituency, honourable member for such and such a constituency. But I do believe the honourable member for Brandon East did not violate our rule, because he was quoting from the newspaper.

The honourable Leader of the official opposition, on the same point of order.

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, you had the responsibility and duty during the budget to call to order the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) in his direct reference to Premier Gary Filmon throughout the address, and you failed to do so. The budget was presented in a very nonpartisan way, of course, but the Budget Address I would suggest you review it and, I think, the 10th anniversary of Gary Filmon's leadership and Premier Filmon's outstanding leadership, et cetera.

Perhaps the government House leader would want to stand on his feet when the Minister of Finance was presenting his budget last Friday afternoon. I think it would be a career-ending—[interjection] No, I am just saying that when you have a formal document like this as opposed to statements, it gets to be something we expect a Speaker to deal with.

Madam Speaker: The honourable government House leader, on the same point of order.

Mr. McCrae: Madam Speaker, two very quick points. The Leader of the Opposition might have noted I waited for the honourable member for Brandon East to finish his comments before I raised the point of order, out of a matter of courtesy, and I am not really pleased that the Leader of the Opposition would speak the way he has about me.

I also take note of the fact that the printed budget demonstrates the Minister of Finance actually did that thing that I was talking about, complaining about, and I have spoken to the Minister of Finance about it. I am not trying to be partisan about this. I was trying to make this a direction you might give to all of the honourable members of this House, because it is a tradition I think I respect and I think others do, too.

Madam Speaker: I thank all honourable members. I believe we have dealt with this thoroughly. I am sure we all have the same understanding of the rule.

Misericordia General Hospital

Ms. Jean Friesen (Wolseley): Madam Speaker, the Misericordia Hospital has been an important part of my community for 75 years. It has also played a significant role in the Catholic community across Winnipeg, and through its Villa Rosa home for single mothers and its

obstetrical services in northern communities, it has also served countless thousands of Manitobans. Since 1990 it has been under severe pressure from this government, and this has led to intense and I believe unconscionable pressure on the staff of this institution. For eight years the government has called into doubt the future of this hospital. It was widely speculated that Don Orchard and his successor, the present Minister of Environment (Mr. McCrae), would close the hospital down and they certainly tried. Emergency services and psychiatry were cut. Both were badly needed services in neighbourhoods where many people are in assisted-living communities or on their own in extremely difficult economic and social circumstances.

But, Madam Speaker, the community fought back, and although we lost psychiatry, we saved emergency for a time, until last year when the government again forced the hospital to close its 24-hour emergency service and that in the third busiest emergency room in the province where patients were more seriously ill and far more needed to be admitted to hospital.

Now the government at one stroke has taken away most of the hospital functions that were left to the Misericordia. There will be no surgery except ophthalmology. There will be no intensive care unit, taking out of the whole medical system an efficient and necessary unit. Removal of the ICU also leaves in question the long-term prospects for ophthalmology itself. What was a hospital will become a long-term care facility, and though those beds are certainly needed in our system, the government itself must bear responsibility for the crisis they have created in personal care homes by their refusal to make good on their election promises of 1995. Those who need those personal care beds need them today, Madam Speaker, not two years from now when the Misericordia beds may become available.

At no point during these last eight years has the government provided us with the health or demographic profile of the community the Misericordia serves. At no point have the government planners met with our community. At no point have there been health assessments of any of the neighbourhoods on both sides of the river which are served by the hospital. What we have seen from this government is a concerted undermining of the Misericordia Hospital and an apparent disdain for its community.

CFL All-Star Hockey Classic

Mr. David Faurichou (Portage la Prairie): I would like to take this opportunity to recognize and extend congratulations to all the members of the Canadian Football League who recently took part in the CFL All-Star Hockey Classic held in Portage la Prairie. Winnipeg Blue Bomber player Brendan Rogers and his wife Karyn founded this special event in 1997 in order to raise money for two Manitoba charities, those being the Portage Plain United Way and the Variety Club of Manitoba. These two charities will receive the proceeds from this now annual event.

Last weekend about 100 players from eight CFL clubs from all across Canada were in Manitoba last weekend for this two-day hockey tournament. As well, those players attended a Friday evening banquet here in Winnipeg and a Saturday evening social in Portage la Prairie. It is estimated that these two Manitoba charities will share in approximately \$10,000 in proceeds. I would like to applaud all the players who took part in this fun and festive event.

Along with raising money for both these charities, Brendan Rogers's goal for this event was to get players together and bring them closer to their fans. In my mind, this goal has been surpassed. It was certainly an inspiration to observe the CFL players with delighted young children as they signed autographs and spoke with them. In this era of extravagance and sometimes outrageous behaviour on the stage of North-American sport I would like to commend the hundred-plus Canadian Football League players for their commitment shown to our communities. This weekend these players demonstrated to those that keep the league going, their fans, a very high degree of professionalism. The Canadian Football League did us proud this weekend and in return gave something to the fans as well who have been supporting the league for years.

Madam Speaker, once again, on behalf of the members of this Assembly and myself, I would like to congratulate the CFL players. Thank you.

* (1430)

Nagano Winter Olympics

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): Madam Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to our Canadian Olympic Athletes

who participated at the Nagano, Japan, Winter Games. These games produced Canada's best overall showing of any Winter Olympics, resulting in six gold, five silver and four bronze medals for our athletes for a total of 15 Olympic medals. We are particularly proud of the accomplishment of our athletes, which include our very own Susan Auch, silver medalist in the women's 500 metre speed skating. Susan, once again, rose to the challenge, proving to the world that she is a true Olympian. Susan also challenged in the women's 1,000 metre speed skating, placing in the top half of all competing speed skating athletes.

While we are extremely proud of Susan's accomplishments, we are also proud of the women's speed skating gold medalist, Canadian Catriona Le May Doan. These two athletes rank one, two in the world 500 metre race and were a mere three-tenths of a second apart in their recorded times.

Susan Auch was raised and attended school in Transcona. From an early age she was encouraged by her proud family to practise speed skating at the Winnipeg Speed Skating Club. Susan is coached by her brother Derrick Auch who is also the national coach. Having spoken to Mr. and Mrs. Auch, I know that they are very, very proud of their children.

At a 1994 Transcona community event, my wife, Sheila, and I had the opportunity to join with our community in honouring Susan's accomplishments at the 1994 Lillehammer Winter Olympic Games. Susan won the silver medal in the women's 500 metre speed skating race at that time. We still have a picture of Susan and another Transcona Olympic bobsled athlete, Mr. Langford, proudly displayed in our home.

To the Auch family and to Susan in particular, we say: well done. May your spirit and determination inspire other local athletes to compete at the Olympic Games.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET DEBATE (Third Day of Debate)

Madam Speaker: To resume adjourned debate, on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance

(Mr. Stefanson) and the proposed motion of the honourable Leader of the official opposition (Mr. Doer) in amendment thereto, standing in the name of the honourable member for Crescentwood, who has 24 minutes remaining.

Mr. Tim Sale (Crescentwood): Madam Speaker, when I concluded my remarks yesterday I had noted that, in fact, the budget figure for Health which is quoted in the Minister of Finance's budget this year for 1997-98 is, in fact, incorrect and has been incorrect since he tabled Volume 1 of Public Accounts in September of last year. In other words, he has had seven months to recognize that by law, by the law of this province, by The Financial Administration Act, the budget for last year was amended. It was amended by a special warrant, and the special warrant raised that budget of \$1.825 million, which was noted then at that time, by some \$70 million.

According to Public Accounts, Volume 1, Section 4, pages 36-37, the spending in Health for last year was authorized to be \$1.81 billion. It was underspent by \$11 million. So the real spending was \$1.870 last year. That is the base. That is the bottom. That is where you start from for the new budget, not \$1.825, \$1.870, the actual spending for last year or if you want to even be more forthright you might say: what was the budget amended to? Now some members opposite may not bother to pay much attention to The Financial Administration Act, but it in fact underpins all legislative authority for spending.

Let me just quote from the special warrant language. The language says: whereas the appropriations were not sufficiently provided for by the Legislature or meeting the expenditures incurred or to be incurred for the year ending March 31, 1997. In other words, we did not vote enough money in the budget, according to the government, so they changed the budget. Now that is perfectly legal. You can do that. But once it is changed, it is changed. That is what The Financial Administration Act does. It changes the budget through a special warrant.

So the spending last year: budget \$1.81 billion; spending \$1.87 billion. What did they propose to spend this year? They proposed to spend 1.925. I know it is

all numbers, but that is only \$42 million more than they actually spent last year, or barely over 2 percent.

Madam Speaker, over two years this government is proposing to put in under \$45 million new money into its health care system, not \$100 million, not even close to \$100 million, not \$98 million that they claim in the special warrant, but \$43 million over two years. The Minister of Finance is so far out in fantasyland in regard to the figures he is trying to feed Manitobans that it is embarrassing to have to put it back together factually from his own documents, from Public Accounts, from the special warrants under The Financial Administration Act.

The budget is not a truthful document, because it is not based on the legal adjustments that were made to the budget in 1996-97 that were passed under The Financial Administration Act during that fiscal year, that were public in the summer of 1997, that the Finance minister knew and knew well when he stood up and said there was \$100 million new money for health care. That is not factually correct. The Finance minister plays fast and loose with reality when he says that.

That is not simply a political problem, Madam Speaker. That is a serious problem for Manitobans when they begin to understand that the basic numbers in this budget are not truthful numbers. They do not reflect the adjusted budget of this government last year. I think that is a shame. I think it is a shame that Manitobans cannot trust the numbers that are put forward by their Finance minister when he rises in his place in this Chamber where we are all supposed to be honourable and where we are never supposed to shade the truth. It is shameful when a minister of the Crown so clearly and so knowingly puts forward numbers that he himself has signed off differently when he signed off Public Accounts.

He cannot claim that these were late adjustments that could not be reflected. He is able to find tiny little footnotes smaller than PC Party of Manitoba on their election signs and put them in his financial statements, but he cannot find a little footnote to tell people the truth about what was spent on health care last year. That is a shame. That is just plain shameful.

* (1440)

Let me move on to another area where I think this government has a sorry record of shading reality. Madam Speaker, according to Statistics Canada, in January of 1997, a year and a month ago, there were 540,600 Manitobans at work, full and part time, seasonally adjusted. Now, the Finance minister has said that there were some 12,800 new jobs added last year. If that was the case one would expect employment in January of 1998 to have been 12,000 above 540,000, in other words 552,000. That is what one would expect; 12,000 plus 540,000–552,000.

What was January '98's employment? Madam Speaker, 542,400, just a tad short. A little over 10,000 short of the number the minister has repeated over and over and over again. In fact, from January to January there was a growth of 1,800 jobs, not 12,800, not 15,000, as the minister said in his prebudget announcements, not 17,000 private sector new jobs, as the Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism likes to trumpet. In total, there were 1,800 more Manitobans at work in January this year than last year.

Now there is a problem when you suggest to Manitobans that there are a whole lot more jobs out there than there really are, because people look at their children and they look at their neighbours and they look at themselves and they say, well, gosh, if there are that many more good jobs out there, how come none of the folks I know got one? How come my kids still cannot find work? They begin to think of themselves as failures because they like to believe their elected official and the Minister of Finance or the Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism or the Premier when those figures tell them that there are 15,000 new jobs. They say to themselves, gosh, you know, how come I did not get one of those jobs? I sure put in enough resumes. I went to enough places and applied. I really tried hard.

If there were 15,000 jobs out there, I think I might have gotten one of them. They feel pretty badly because they feel like they are failures. The truth is there were only 1,800 new jobs last year, January to January. The numbers are there for the members opposite to read, Statistics Canada, Manitoba Bureau of Statistics. On Friday of this week they will publish the numbers for February, and we will all look at them.

The Minister of Finance also talked about a growing labour force. Well, let us look at that one too. In January of 1997, there were 582,200 people in the labour force of Manitoba, seasonally adjusted in all cases. Now a growing labour force would suggest that today there ought to be more than 582,000, a couple more maybe. What is the real world? Well, the real world is there are 575,200. In other words, over this past year the labour force shrank by 7,000 people. Seven thousand Manitobans either gave up or moved away or withdrew in some form from the labour force.

So in fact the Minister of Finance is factually in error again. The labour force is not growing. In 1997, it shrank by 7,000 workers.

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Now, of course, if the labour force shrinks, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that makes the unemployment number look better. In fact, of course, and this may be the strategy being followed by the government now, if we could ship all of our unemployed people to another province, we would have a zero unemployment rate. We would not have created any more jobs, but all of the people who were looking for work had gone elsewhere. Boy, that would be a real solution to a problem, would it not?

It is almost like the Minister of Health's solution to hospitals, close a lot of beds and close a hospital. You know, hospitals are a lot more efficient without patients in them. They work a lot better, and I am sure that is the Minister of Health's understanding. If we just close enough beds in enough hospitals, those ones will work just fine.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the minister also takes great pride in announcing just how buoyant our unemployment picture is by comparison with other provinces. We are either second or third, depending on the month, Saskatchewan and Alberta being the other holders of those first or second places.

But, you know, this is one of the great tragedies that Manitoba hides. I would say in a quite nonpartisan way that this is something that all governments in Manitoba have some responsibility for because, in our province, our aboriginal our aboriginal brothers and sisters who

are Status aboriginal people are not counted in the unemployment numbers. They are not surveyed, they are not counted, they are not part of the sample, neither are members of the armed forces nor people in prison, for obvious reasons. Aboriginal people on reserve and Status aboriginal people do not count for unemployment numbers. Why is that a particular problem?

I think the Minister of Northern and Native Affairs (Mr. Newman) understands why it is a problem in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, to a somewhat lesser extent in Alberta, but particularly in Manitoba and Saskatchewan because Status aboriginal people comprise 60,000 or 70,000 potential members of the labour force, and they have an unemployment rate of 75 to 85 percent. So the real number of unemployed in Manitoba, the real social cost of unemployment, the burden for families, should include our aboriginal citizens who are not employed but would like to be and that number is over 40,000. In other words, it is twice what our official count is.

Now it would be not such a distortion if every province had the same proportion of aboriginal people. Then at least all the numbers would be understated by roughly the same proportion, assuming the same conditions applied in other provinces. But, of course, the Minister of Northern and Native Affairs would be the first to tell us that that is not the case, that Saskatchewan and Manitoba have by far the highest proportion of aboriginal people in their population, particularly Status aboriginal people, of any other province in Canada. Manitoba and Saskatchewan, in that sense, are unique.

So when we compare our unemployment rate to say Ontario's or Quebec's or to take the extreme case, Newfoundland, where white men exterminated the aboriginal population, the Beothuk, it is not a fair comparison. Our real unemployment rate, not counting underemployment, not counting discouraged workers, is over 12 percent. That is the burden our economy carries. That is the social cost our economy carries. That is the wasted opportunity our economy carries, because we have not had a strategy that was effective in reaching out into the Status aboriginal community and finding economic development opportunities, training opportunities. This government's answer—cut access

programs. This government's answer—cut Indian and Metis friendship centres, cut your grants to aboriginal organizations. That is their answer to the shame of unemployment and underemployment amongst Status aboriginal people in Manitoba.

So neither Saskatchewan nor Manitoba ought to be taking credit for having the second or third lowest unemployment numbers in the country, because when you count in Status aboriginal people in Quebec and Ontario and provinces west to British Columbia and actually begin to sample them, what you find is that Manitoba and Saskatchewan have an unemployment rate that looks suspiciously like the Maritimes and may, in fact, be slightly higher. That is the burden we are carrying.

* (1450)

So it is not just a problem of the Finance minister rising in his place and saying we had great job growth, that is not factually correct, is not borne out by Statistics Canada or by his own Bureau of Statistics numbers. It is not just him saying that we have had a rising labour force when in fact it fell by 7,000 last year, it is the fundamental error that is built into Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and all Canadian provinces but is particularly important for Manitoba and Saskatchewan, of not even counting our Status aboriginal citizens as in the labour market, interested in being in the labour market or unemployed. We do not count them and then we wonder why we have such a social burden.

We have the same structural unemployment in this province as does the Maritimes, and in fact it is higher than Nova Scotia. It is time we started being honest with ourselves about the real burden and the real scale of this problem, recognize the real economic cost, the real social cost imposed by our failure to take seriously this burden.

I want to conclude my remarks by focusing on some of the northern issues that I think are not addressed adequately in this budget at all. The province maintains or has responsibility for some 22 airports in northern Manitoba. We are all sadly familiar with what happened at Little Grand. That is not the first northern crash; it probably, unfortunately and sadly, will not be the last. We have a serious infrastructure problem with

our airports. It is a legacy of some federal problems and it is a legacy of inaction on a provincial level, a serious, serious problem for the Minister of Transportation (Mr. Findlay). I did not see resources directed at this problem in any clear way in this budget.

We put \$5 million more into highways but we also lost money from the infrastructure program, and the net result of this is a wash. There is really not more money for roads this year; there are just a few different ways of getting it into the budget.

Highways 373 and 391, Highway 6 to Cross Lake, Thompson to Lynn Lake, these roads are a disgrace, but they are more than a disgrace, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because they extract their own costs. They extract costs on vehicles, they extract costs on public safety, they extract accident costs, they extract economic costs. It is not just a question of the roads being in poor condition and those driving on them having to bump up and down a lot. There is also a serious economic, health and other kind of cost associated with the terrible conditions of those roads. I know they are difficult to maintain, but other provinces manage to maintain remote roads at a standard that is better than ours. I have driven on some of those roads. We can do better.

On health, there was a nod in the direction of diabetes, but I do not think the government has yet even begun to come to terms with the costs to our health system and to our families of the crisis in diabetes, particularly, although not exclusively, but particularly among our aboriginal populations. When you begin to require long-term care for serious diabetes the costs run into the tens of thousands of dollars a year. If you lose a kidney or two kidneys and wind up on dialysis the costs multiply by factors of 10. This province is still giving people taxi rides to Morden twice a week to get dialysis.

One of the doctors to whom I spoke in the kidney, nephrology area, I guess they call it, said to me, you know, if they had just given up \$2 million a year for the last five years, we would not have a crisis. Instead they now have to give us \$10 million and it is going to take us a couple of years to catch up on the crisis.

So when you do not plan and you do not budget and then you have to play crisis management, it not only

kills people, it kills any semblance of order in the health care system, and the diabetes epidemic is testimony to that mismanagement.

It is so sad when members opposite, instead of acknowledging this problem, get up and defend a phoney allocation to the health care budget which they know not to be true. That is sad when that happens.

We are also still medivacking patients out of the North for birth which, as far as I know, is a normal human event that does not require acute care treatment every time there is a birth. Why after all of the 10 and more years have we been still unable to put in place midwifery for northern deliveries? Why are we still behind other provinces in this regard? Why are we medivacking aboriginal people?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if we do not come to terms with some of these ongoing crises, we will never get the critical situation in our health care system addressed. It will certainly not be addressed by putting \$1.3 million more into the health care system and pretending that it is a hundred million. It will not be addressed by pretending there is a hundred million more this year over last year, when in fact the Health minister knows very well that it is \$43 million at best if they spend what they are talking about spending this year.

They did not spend what they were talking about spending last year. They underspent their budget by \$11 million last year after having passed a special warrant for \$70 million. There is no plan, there is no direction; there is chaos. I feel deeply as I would hope the Health minister would for that elderly man with a heart attack sitting on a stretcher in full view with his urinal in his hand wondering, I think, whatever happened to the promise of a universal health care system that treated Canadians with dignity and compassion when they needed it. Where was this Health minister for that man, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Hon. David Newman (Minister of Northern Affairs): Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise to speak to the budget and speak with very considerable support for the budget in relation to the departments for which I have a responsibility.

I want to start off with Energy and Mines. I want to indicate the sort of posture, the sort of position, the sort

of role that these departments are playing in government for the benefit of Manitobans. We are as a government in business for the people of Manitoba. We understand the ecosystem of entrepreneurship. Our focus is to encourage profitability and success through the encouragement of business and enterprise for the benefit of all Manitobans.

I like to tell the industry in mining that our government is like a silent partner operating within the context of a relationship in good faith, wherein we partner on the basis of consultation. We share in success as Manitobans through taxes, royalties and fees which we impose. We share in losses and risks through subjecting our natural resources and living things to development with no certainty about consequences that is absolute and through investing in infrastructure to support exploration and development.

As government we encourage success, and I would like to share with you the concerted consistent long-term effort that we have put forth over the course of the past 10 years to attain that success. We are driven by three guiding principles, I would suggest. Firstly, our fiscal or economic agenda culminating in the 1995 balanced budget legislation. In 1995 we tabled the first balanced budget in our province in 22 years. We introduced balanced budget legislation and consistent to that legislation the budgets of 1996 and 1997 were also balanced. Of course, as of this past Friday, we presented the fourth balanced budget in a row.

* (1500)

Secondly, the long-term investment in our social agenda is intended to decrease dependence on government and therefore taxpayers of Manitoba and also to improve the control over destinies and the spirits of the individuals who are dependent. You might say, as we have said before, the best form of social assistance is a job.

Thirdly, the commitment to the sustainable development of our economy through a balanced approach between environmental protection and economic development. We are committed to designating areas for environmental protection while at the same time celebrating economic opportunities, development opportunities to serve current needs

without jeopardizing the capacity to provide for the needs, aspirations and desires of future generations.

Those being the principles, I now want to take a look more specifically at some of the issues which directly relate to our budget. We have worked to make our province and our resources attractive to business development. In our time in government, we have held all major taxes steady without any increases. Our geographic position is a plus for Manitoba. Its central position in North America gives our province an unbeatable set of attractions for business. Of course, in addition, our costs of doing business are amongst the lowest in Canada. We have a highly developed infrastructure, low-cost electric power, a skilled multilingual workforce, including—and it is not often enough mentioned—seven aboriginal languages, good labour relations and low absenteeism. Manitoba has a diversified, sophisticated economy and one of the lowest unemployment rates in Canada.

It is important to note that all of these positive aspects are challenged because of the volatile international market conditions. Low prices for precious and base metals are making headlines throughout the world and are playing havoc with producing mines and exploration companies. Clearly current prices are on the downside of the price cycle. Although we cannot control these price cycles in Manitoba, we can influence the competitiveness of our province in attracting exploration and mining activity. We do appreciate that industry must continue to be competitive globally, and we in government must continue to do our part to offer a competitive business environment.

There are new challenges that government and industry must meet, and I am going to address four main areas where we are confronting such challenges. The first of the challenges I would like to outline is related to the cost of doing business in Manitoba. In the March 6 budget tabled, on the tax side, the following addressed this particular challenge. The budget extended Manitoba's overall tax freeze for an 11th consecutive year. It increases our debt payment to \$150 million, which is double the required amount. Manitoba's basic personal income tax rate, currently 52 percent of basic federal tax, will be reduced to 51 percent for the 1998 tax year, and further reduced to 50 percent on January 1, 1999.

The corporate capital tax exemption will be increased from \$3 million of taxable capital to \$5 million, effective for taxation years ending after January 1, 1999. An exemption from motive fuel tax will be allowed on propane fuel used in drying mineral ore concentrates and for heating processing plants and underground mines. This exemption represents an estimated savings to the mining industry of \$1.3 million on a full-year basis. The payroll tax rate will be reduced from 2.25 percent of taxable payroll to 2.15 percent of taxable payroll, effective January 1, 1999. This reduction represents an estimated \$250,000 savings to Manitoba's mining industry.

Custom-developed software and custom computer programming services became exempt from sales tax, effective midnight, March 6. That is regarded by the mining industry as a very positive kind of contribution to their ability to be competitive and creative in their exploration.

In terms of expenditures, \$3.6 million, or \$1 million more than last year, will be spent on capital projects related to infrastructure development in a number of northern communities. We are making a major contribution to develop the potential of Canada's only major arctic port at Churchill. Manitoba will contribute \$6 million to harbour dredging over the next two years. A commercially viable arctic port will further enhance Manitoba's position as the northern gateway to the mid-North American trade corridor. This has many positive potential benefits for mining. This budget continues the Mineral Exploration Assistance Program and the Prospectors Assistance Program which have been very successful in increasing the investment in exploration in the province of Manitoba to \$41.7 million, an increase of 4 percent for 1997, and this follows a 23 percent increase in 1996. This, of course, bodes well for the future of Manitoba's hope to find new mines and potentially create major presences in the North, like the Flin Flons and Thompsons, which exist because of mining and have for many decades, in the case of Flin Flon over 70 years, in the case of Thompson for over 40 years.

A second major challenge for mining is related to the work we are doing to collect and disseminate base-line information about Manitoba's geology. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I clearly understand from what I have heard

from people involved in the industry, the exploration business, is that the provision of geological data is one of the most important services our department can provide. Therefore, my department not only has continued without reduction our geological surveys services branch budget, but for 1998-99 fiscal year it increased the budget.

A third challenge relates to land access issues. Historically, land access and security of tenure have been major issues for mining and exploration companies operating in Manitoba, and on this issue we want to ensure the mining industry has a voice in relation to government on issues of land access, but we want to retain our ability to meet the needs of other interest groups in the province foremost, amongst which are the needs of our ecosystem and the needs of aboriginal people of the North.

The historic land access issues have been treaty land entitlement and the Northern Flood Agreement, both related to obligations to First Nations. Both of these are well on the way to implementation and indeed there is only one of the recognized claims that has yet to be resolved. The challenge of implementation is there still, but the certainty of having these deals made is now emerging for the benefit of mining in the province of Manitoba and for the benefit of the people of the North. The challenges for Manitoba are that many stakeholders have need for land access, but there is only so much land available. Therefore, the province has to balance needs relating to such interest as mining and exploration activities, aboriginal communities, hydroelectric development, forestry activities and protection of natural area.

The fourth challenge concerns our Manitoba permitting and regulatory system and our challenges to establish a system that will encourage continued and new development in the province while protecting the interests of all Manitobans. There have been many steps taken to streamline our legislation and our regulations, and we have been recognized by the mining industry for what we have done in this respect. In fact, the Manitoba Mining Association believes our regulations and administrative procedures are the most efficient and effective in the country, with delays unheard of, and that they should be considered a model for Canada. They appreciate the regular consultation

we give them on regulatory reform and they are impressed by the fact in about half a year we can complete permitting that takes some provinces years to finish.

* (1510)

I want to share with all honourable members the new culture that is emerging in the North in relation to the ecosystems and the people of the North. Just as we are a good-faith partner with the mining industry in trying to be successful for the benefit of all Manitobans, we are also a partner with my having responsibility for other portfolios, Northern Affairs and aboriginal people. We are also a partner in a good-faith relationship with the people and the ecosystems of northern Manitoba.

I dare say those people and those ecosystems expect the following from honourable members, civil servants and my departments and those explorationists given the privilege of entering their traditional territories and communities. Those values, those characteristics, those attitudes which are becoming part of the new culture are humility not arrogance, respect not intolerance or discourtesy, honesty and good faith not anything less, genuine ongoing communication, not just notice and expect and no surprises of course are expected. Maximum opportunities to participate in the jobs, training, education and wealth generation potential associated with mining exploration and development.

Does this sound a little like universal religious principle, do unto others as you would have them do unto you? I think so. Is this a new culture to adjust to, given the historic relationship of Hydro and the northern people and mining companies and explorations and the northern people? You bet it is. Those civil servants and all honourable members and all of those people involved with the northern communities who adjust first and best will be most successful for themselves and for the benefit of all Manitobans.

Now I would like to turn, if I may, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to Northern Affairs and some of the things that are happening in the Northern Affairs area. I will not deal with the oil industry. That part of the energy industry are much with Hydro in my remarks except

before moving to Northern Affairs I would like to indicate that the petroleum industry last year had a very good year reflected in the revenue that they have contributed to the bottom line to the benefit of taxpayers in this province. They too are going to be challenged in the year to come, and we are ready for that because we have, like for mining, a competitive system and are addressing all of the same challenges there the way we are in mining.

With respect to Manitoba Hydro, we just had through the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) tabled here today the third quarter report from Hydro, and it is apparent from that report that the record of sales last year growing 3.6 percent reaching over \$1.1 billion as described in the budget, most of the gain being attributable to exports sales which rose 12.5 percent to a record level of \$288.9 million, of this \$273.2 million being exports to the United States. But the third quarter this year indicates that already with \$69 million to the bottom line to the profit picture, it looks like even with the warm weather helped by the cold weather today, which also helps winter roads—I see the honourable Minister of Government Services and responsible for Emergency Measures (Mr. Pitura) behind me—also of benefit to winter roads in the North and hopefully cold enough that maybe we can get those huge hydro transformers into the Island Lake area so that the hydro project and north central powerline can be completed this year. Those hopes are there.

But Hydro is in good shape and continues to serve the interests of its shareholders and stakeholders, all of the citizens of the province of Manitoba.

Now moving to Northern Affairs, I am very pleased. I just came from, this morning, another one of the workshops, this time with my Northern Affairs staff as they change their capacities, develop their skills to fulfill a new vision and a new beginning for Northern Affairs communities, a beginning which is a steady movement and confident movement towards self-reliance and independence.

For the past 24 years our department has been in the business of developing community councils and training employees to provide municipal services and work toward eventual incorporation. And today, right

here in 1998, we are at a historic crossroads, and let me explain why.

If we continue on our present path, five or ten years from now Northern Affairs communities will simply be as they are today, still dependent on the Department of Northern Affairs and taxpayers of Manitoba as a whole. You know, when The Northern Affairs Act was created in 1974 the belief was that these communities would be independent in five years. Well, 24 years later none of them are, and we have made a commitment since I have become minister of this particular department to change that, and this has been embraced by all of the members of the department with a great deal of enthusiasm and excitement.

If the department were to continue to be responsible for community matters, this is detrimental to their health, self-reliance, ability to grow, solve community problems, take responsibility for the development and performance of their employees and so on. Self-growth and self-reliance come from having control, decision-making power, and responsibility for their own destiny. They come from experiencing learning and taking responsibility for their actions and for solving their problems themselves. We are giving the community back these freedoms and capacities.

Under the proposals we are developing, communities will be given the decision-making power and resources they need to be self-reliant. Eventually communities want to own their assets and will see a need to own their own land. This will make incorporation an effective tool, simply a tool for reaching self-reliance.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you recall the Speech from the Throne on November 27, 1997, the government is now on schedule to meet our commitment to help northern communities become self-reliant while providing an acceptable standard of living to their citizens. We are now working with communities on a plan, a plan developed by them to provide more autonomy and individual self-reliance in order to foster economic and environmental development through community action.

As minister, I was very pleased in Friday's budget speech that the government announced creation of a Creating Sustainable Communities initiative and

funding of \$500,000. This is what was needed to get this moving and moving faster than would have been possible without it. This funding will be earmarked for the process of transferring responsibility from municipal services from the province to northern communities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will be working to ensure that the self-reliance initiative produces a sustainable service structure for northern communities in consultation, in meaningful consultation with the people of those communities.

I was also very pleased to have announced in that same budget an additional \$1 million to tackle the infrastructure challenges of those communities, and there is quite a proud record of infrastructure development with limited resources in those communities, and it is superior on a comparison of other provinces in this country with their northern communities. We are in the lead and, in fact, given the budget we have compared to the federal budget, we do incredibly well through the staff of our department and through the decisions made by the mayors and councils of the northern communities.

* (1520)

The additional \$1 million will allow a total of \$3.6 million for capital infrastructure projects in northern communities, and this can lead to a water treatment plant at Cormorant, water and sewer services for Granville Lake, which the honourable member from Flin Flon will be very pleased with, because both the honourable member and myself have been to that community and we saw the need for it and we both came, I am sure, my colleague and I, my honourable friend and I, we both came to respect their motivation and their initiative to do something in cost-effective ways and creative ways to improve their community.

We are now in a position to help them fulfill their dream, get them started, and similarly a sewage lagoon at Dawson Bay is now a possibility.

Our proposal is to phase in the necessary changes towards self-reliance. Through phasing in, the communities will be given the resources to hire and retain qualified employees. There will be resources for

training staff. Adequate funding will be provided to meet unexpected expenditures or emergencies. There will be provision for vehicle replacement and enough support for maintenance to ensure that health and safety standards are met.

For this exercise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, funding will be fair and also sensitive to geographic and remoteness circumstances of individual communities. We will share responsibility for funding for municipal services. Accountability or performance standards will be developed and tied to the funding in line with earlier promises I made to mayors and councillors. The formulas to be used for maintenance will be simple and understandable.

Of course, when the changes take place in community government, the department will also have to do things differently. I am very pleased to say that the staff in the department is working very creatively as the day goes on and over the next three days in a workshop process.

The kinds of things that will happen is the staff will become consultants, advising and enabling communities to solve problems, resolve disputes, manage staff and maintain service standards. They will no longer be assigned to work with a list of specific communities. Instead they will work with one or more communities as the need arises. This work will also include assisting communities to form partnerships with other service providers between governments, within other departments and outside government, all to contribute to the development of healthy sustainable communities.

This is a very exciting initiative. I was over at the workshop and with a facilitator there I joined in jumping up and down three times to show how excited we were in a model kind of facilitator-generated enthusiasm. I do not know, it made me relax. Maybe we should do it in the Legislature from time to time and especially in front of the students. Maybe we could be a model for physical fitness in doing so, as well as show that we do have fun in our jobs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do want to move to a very important issue. I think I have enough time to do a fair amount of justice to the issue of aboriginal peoples in

this province who in the categories which I have chosen to relate to aboriginal people include the categories of the Metis people and very proudly Metis people. The people who are the descendants in some cases and sometimes newly created Metis people, but some of them are the descendants of Louis Riel the leader of the Metis people in 1869-1870, leading this province into Confederation indeed as recognized by this House, a Father of Confederation.

You know I have tried to emphasize, put myself in the shoes of the Metis people. I will never be able to do that fully, but I certainly can feel and sense the pride that they have for their contribution to this province which is continuing, but they had a setback for many, many years. It is the kind of setback that happens in using this kind of analogy. If a population comes in from outside the province and suddenly becomes the majority and assumes the responsibility to be the leaders in the Legislature, the leaders in the town and city councils and the leaders of business, the leaders of the professions and the leaders of the arts—that is what happened to the Metis people. They were in the majority and the leaders in those days, and then they became a minority group. It happened fast, and it did not happen with sensitivity. It did not happen with the depth of understanding that the visions of hindsight give us, but it did happen. It is helpful for us to understand that, and with their help I am increasingly gaining that understanding.

The other category of peoples for just the purpose of relationships, the First Nations people, the people represented by the AMCs and the MKOs of the province, the people who are clearly a responsibility by law, by Constitution, Indian people and Indian lands of the federal government. Now this does not preclude, of course, the involvement of the province. They are Manitoba citizens and proud Manitoba citizens, a people whose history, of course, goes back—artifacts will show in this area—as far back as perhaps 12,000 years. But certainly, as the glacier receded, they increasingly spread throughout the province and played a huge role in developing a civilization, which we gain, through oral history, an increasing understanding, of which survived in this very challenging continent to become a thriving civilization in their diverse tribes and their diverse circumstances and ways of living and in ways that were respectful of the needs for their future

survival to be environmental stewards. The consequence of all of this, of course, is that our original people when they made contact with the immigrants from other lands interacted with them, for the most part, in positive ways, and they thrived. They thrived in many ways along with the immigrants. They helped each other.

I heard a story just the other day of how the Icelanders benefited from learning how to ice fish and continue the harvest of the necessities of life, thanks to the teachings of aboriginal people, and that is the kind of story—I think of the contribution, of course, that the Metis and the First Nations people made to the fur trade.

Then there are the disenfranchised and the Inuit people, the disenfranchised aboriginals who are sort of the lost souls, the people that the federal government does not want to be—does not consider them to be legally responsible for. They are the ones who have often found their way into the cities and form a large part of the population of the city of Winnipeg. It is sometimes estimated to be maybe 70,000 people and growing and becoming an increasing part of our workforce.

So those are the kinds of categories, and we as a province have to pick up where the federal government leaves off. We have the responsibility for all of those peoples and, I might say, in increasing millions of dollars, because the federal government has chosen in their partnering relationship with the aboriginal peoples not to accept the treaty responsibilities to the degree that we and my aboriginal brothers and sisters believe is appropriate. So that is a challenge we have as a province, and we are working in a good-faith partnership with any aboriginal peoples, First Nation peoples, who are party to a treaty to discuss, negotiate, relate with the federal government in this respect.

* (1530)

The Health minister and I have just, for example, recently together made a communication with the federal Minister of Health Alan Rock and Jane Stewart, the minister of northern and native affairs federally. The federal minister, Jane Stewart, is an advocate within that government for First Nations people, just as

that is a role, a facilitator-advocate, that I see that I have within our government on behalf of the three categories of aboriginal people whom I have described. We are making progress. We have a good working relationship and issues are being discussed that have never been discussed before.

Now I wanted to talk about several strategies. We have an urban aboriginal strategy, which is emerging through a task force, which emerged out of our Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, and that particular strategy has been through the what-you-told-us process and is moving towards an action plan. That is going to have some exciting results.

Treaty land entitlement and Northern Flood Agreement, Mr. Deputy Speaker, huge transfers of land and dollars to the First Nations people in our province. The magnitude of this is measured in terms of land transfers and dollars. In terms of the treaty land entitlement, we will have up to 1,100,000 acres, Crown land being almost 986,000 acres and 115,000 acres approximately to be purchased by bands with funds provided by the Government of Canada, funds totalling \$76 million. This process, now in the land selection stage and implementation stage, is going to be a major contribution to the development, the socioeconomic development of the First Nations people in this province and for the benefit of all Manitobans.

The Northern Flood Agreements involve a huge transfer again, 178,000 acres in total so far, to the four bands that have decided—and I think very correctly—to resolve the injustices of the past perpetrated on them by Hydro, and they have accepted compensation, monies that will go to development and monies that will be put in trust funds. The minimum that goes in trust funds has to be \$125 million. These have to be used for the benefit of those communities. So \$215 million is transferred for four of those settlements and 178,000 acres of land.

Cross Lake has not yet concluded its settlement and has wanted to postpone negotiations at this time. But, you know, Cross Lake is sitting on a major mining opportunity, an industrial minerals opportunity, titanium, and they are a joint venture partner with Gossan Resources in that respect. So that is an excellent learning experience, and we are working on

a regular basis with that community in spite of their unwillingness at this time to accept the Northern Flood Agreement settlement, with a view to contributing to their maximized development and capacity to support their own people and contribute to the responsible development of this province, applying the aboriginal values and traditions, which we can learn a great deal from.

In terms of programs, we hear far too often from the other side a suggestion of things that are no longer done. We are going about supporting investing in the future of our aboriginal people because we have a long-term strategy, and that is how we look at it. But we are going about it in different ways than has been done in the past. What we are doing is we are maximizing the cost-shared programs, and we have a different philosophy with respect to grants funding. We have changed from core funding to a project-based approach to focus on building capacity—some people say social capital in the aboriginal community—and to have a community-based approach for funding. The projects have to be owned by the community. They have to be accepted, and they have to be, for the most part, run by the community. We encourage all departments of government and all honourable members of this House to recognize that and be guided by this policy direction, which is the one which has been asked for by our aboriginal people.

We have worked with the aboriginal partners to develop ambitious work plans in the tripartite processes and have accomplished some important new initiatives in this fiscal year. We have expectations for even greater accomplishments in '98-99 because we have support again through our budget for these initiatives.

In 1997-98, the urban aboriginal strategy, I have mentioned, will emerge, and the priorities flowing from this will be taken up in the tripartite process with the Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg and others.

I wanted to mention Partners for Careers. Partners for Careers is a \$200-million project. Human Resources Development Canada is involved, and I want to report that that investment has been good; 315 placements have been made as of March 10, 1998. It exceeds already the target of 300 per year with three weeks to go in '97-98.

Other kinds of investments, as I wrap up, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have invested in different ways in things like the Indian and Metis Friendship Centre. We contributed \$33,000 recently in celebration of their 40th anniversary. We contributed to the racism conference. We provide \$55,000 to SEED Winnipeg; \$22,000 to innovative child protection and justice restorative programs through AWASSIS. We are supporting the urban aboriginal strategy. We are supporting some housing programs. The Indigenous Games, hopefully we will have them in Manitoba in 2002. We are working in partnership with all the aboriginals to make that happen, and we are supporting that.

I would like to conclude by saying I respect the attention that this has been paid, and I look forward to working with all colleagues in advancing the interests of Manitobans through the departments for which I have the responsibility. Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Ms. Becky Barrett (Wellington): I am going to talk about just two elements that are of deep concern to my constituents and also in my role as the Urban Affairs critic. The first one is a sort of a continuation of the interchange that I had this afternoon in Question Period with both the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Health over the issue of a personal care home project in my constituency, the Betel Home.

I understand from the minister today that the Betel Home is not going to go ahead, that the hundred beds that were going to be in place will be allocated elsewhere, if the government is to be believed in its comments about personal care homes. We know from bitter experience how hard it is at times for Manitobans to really put their trust or their faith in the veracity of what is said, most particularly in health care, by this current government, which is this current government, the previous government, and the previous government to that.

In June of 1994, the current Minister of Finance and I attended the opening, the groundbreaking ceremony of this Betel personal care home, with a great deal of fanfare, and legitimately so. It was going to be a very state-of-the-art, locally supported, community-based personal care home. Land had been purchased,

architects had been hired, drawings had been rendered, work had been done with the Ministry of Health planners and the technical people in the Ministry of Health. All was a go, and on a lovely spring day we attended the groundbreaking ceremony of this personal care home. That was almost four years ago.

* (1540)

Then in December of 1994, oh, silly me, how naive I was, when I rose on December 19, 1994, to ask the Minister of Health what the status was of the Betel personal care home, it was six months and not a shovelfull of dirt had been taken from the site on Sargent and Erin. This was terrible. This was terrible. Oh, boy, I wish those were the days. Those were the good old days when it was just a six-month delay. So I asked the then Minister of Health what the delay was, why the government, who had been so pleased to participate in the groundbreaking ceremony just six months previous, was not following through. The minister said, and I quote: I would be happy to look into the present status of the situation for the honourable member and report to her, but there is no question but that this project will be going ahead.

December 19, 1994—current Minister of Health (Mr. Praznik), pay attention to this—your predecessor said this project will be going ahead, and then the Minister of Health says that I am sad to see the honourable members opposite who clearly support this sort of thing trying to make some mileage out of it by raising it in a negative sort of a way.

What we were saying was it has been six months, show us the construction. Here the then Minister of Health chastises me for not—

An Honourable Member: I did not chastise.

Ms. Barrett: The then Minister of Health chastises me for not having a positive view of the situation. Again quoting the then Minister of Health, we have a very popular and needed development going on here. The honourable Minister of Finance Mr. Stefanson and members of the Scandinavian community in Manitoba, I think, will be very pleased to see that development.

All well and good, so the members of the community and I take comfort from those words, oh, naive people

that we were, and we assumed that things were going ahead, slowly but they were going ahead. There were some concerns with a kitchen, whether it was going to be a local kitchen or a central kitchen. The Betel group was very unhappy with the government saying you have to have a central kitchen and now we know why. They were saying you have to have a central kitchen, because there is going to be a central kitchen headquartered somewhere in Ontario no doubt for all of the food that is going to come in for the health care system in the province of Manitoba. But naive people that we were then, we did not realize that was going to happen. We kept hoping and praying and planning.

In February of 1995, eight or nine months after the groundbreaking ceremony, the then Minister of Health did follow up on my question of December 19, 1994, and did provide me with a letter on the then current status of the Betel Personal Care Home for which I give him credit. He said I can assure you that this project has continued to proceed well through the normal review process. I am pleased to inform you this project is almost ready to go to construction. The architects are telling staff of Manitoba Health that the project can be advertised for open public tender in February. That is February 1995. I look forward to construction of this much-needed project early in 1995.

Well, this is excellent news for the community that had spent years and millions of dollars in architects' fees, in construction costs, preconstruction costs I must say, in buying the land, in doing everything in good faith to deal with this project coming to fruition. The government had said it is a good project. The government had said we are ready to go. The government had said you have done everything you need to do. Let us go.

What happened after February 1, 1995, Mr. Deputy Speaker? The provincial election campaign happened, that is what. What happened after the provincial election campaign? Oh, oh. All of a sudden the government, which is re-elected after their promises to save the Jets and that they would not sell the telephone system, and that they were going to have \$600 million in new capital construction in the health care system, what happens after the election in 1995? Well, the federal government has cut our transfer payments. Well, things are not going so well. Well, we have a

balanced budget legislation. We cannot do this. We cannot do that. Full stop to all capital construction projects. Every single capital construction project in the province of Manitoba was stopped.

What is the impact of that? Well, members on this side have been telling the government what has been the impact of those cuts. My colleague, the member for St. James (Ms. Mihychuk) acknowledges that I should be perhaps narrower in my definition of which construction projects were put a hold on. It was the health construction projects. Construction projects for the McPhillips Street Station and the Regent Street casinos went ahead full-bore, \$55 million more. No problem with putting parrots and tinned bands and canned music in the casinos. Oh, that is fine, we are not going to put a stop on that. We are going to put a stop to \$600 million of capital construction for health care projects though. We do not care if people have to lie in gurneys for weeks at a time in emergency rooms. That does not bother us.

Mr. Gerry McAlpine, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

Well, to end this sad saga, Mr. Acting Speaker, it now turns out—oh, back up just a bit. After the election in 1995 when they put a hold on it, then I believe it was last year the government said, well, fine, we will think about putting in place some capital projects for health care, but guess where it is going to have to happen? The communities are going to have to put up 20 percent of the costs in order for these projects to go ahead. The government's justification for this was, well, then the communities will not ask for more than they need if they have to have an extra financial cost in here. This is our health care system we are talking about.

In my particular situation, the situation in my constituency, the Betel Home, which is not unique, I might add, but it is the one I know most about, the organization did everything that was asked of it. It spent millions of dollars. It raised all that money from its own resources. The provincial government then comes back and says, we are not going to build it and then we only will build it if you put up 20 percent of the costs. This is a community that does not have unlimited resources, unlike the virtually unlimited resources of the provincial government. Did the provincial government ask private companies, like the

VLT—the people who construct the VLT machines? Did they say in order for your machines to go into our casinos, our gambling dens, you are going to have to put 20 percent up? No. No, they did not. They only asked the people whose health-care system is crumbling around us to put up 20 percent. Talk about privatization from the back door. This is unconscionable.

So obviously what has happened is that the people who were ready to go in 1994 for the personal care home have now said, we cannot do it. We need the personal care home beds, but we cannot afford this money. We cannot afford the extra burden that has been placed on us by a government that has a fiscal stabilization fund in excess of half a billion dollars, at least. Although with the shell game of this Minister of Finance we do not know what is in there, we know it is a lot of money.

Well, the government in general, and the Minister of Health in particular, has come under an increasing amount of pressure from the community throughout Manitoba because of the horror stories day after day, week after week, of which the Betel Personal Care Home is only one. What does the Minister of Health do? Well, No. 1, he, almost unheard of in modern Manitoba history except for the actions of the Premier, the Minister of Health, does not appear for weeks. He lets his assistant deputy ministers take the can, take the heat, talk to the media. The minister is nowhere to be found. Whether the minister is in the province or out of the province is not the question here. The question is the minister is responsible for the expenditures of those monies or the nonexpenditure of those monies, and what does he do? He sends his assistant deputy ministers to deal with the rising concerns expressed by the people of Manitoba.

* (1550)

Finally, the media catch up with the Minister of Health, and here I would just like to quote a couple of things that the Minister of Health stated in an article in the Winnipeg Sun, Saturday, February 21.

An Honourable Member: Do not always believe the newspaper. They do not always get it right.

Ms. Barrett: In talking about opening up the 83 hospital beds, just a few quotes, and they are all in quotes, Minister of Health, and I would like to suggest to the Minister of Health if these quotes are not accurate, he should check with Tom Brodbeck, the legislative reporter who wrote this article. I have not seen a retraction from Mr. Brodbeck of the Winnipeg Sun, so I am assuming that these are accurate assumptions.

An Honourable Member: Do not assume, that makes a something out of you and me.

Ms. Barrett: Well, it certainly does out of you, sir. He says: if you do not have the staff to look after the beds, does it matter if you can find the 83 beds or not, said an agitated Praznik. I mean, get realistic here, for God's sake.

That is exactly what the people of Manitoba are getting. They are getting realistic. The Minister of Health is getting thin-skinned.

Give me a break, he says, you know, I am just tired of this crap. The Minister of Health who has been hiding for months is tired of this crap. This crap is the fact that the health care system in the province of Manitoba is crumbling, and it is not crumbling because we live in a third-world country, although our brothers and sisters in northern Manitoba in general and particularly on the reserves do, but the province of Manitoba is awash in money, awash in money. What are they doing with it? Well, they are certainly not spending it on the health care system. So let us not talk—the Minister of Health has a fine row to hoe when he says, let us not talk about this crap. This is not crap. It is the future of the health care system in the province of Manitoba.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McAlpine): Order, please. The honourable member for Emerson, on a point of order.

Point of Order

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Mr. Acting Speaker, I am wondering whether it would be in order if I would ask the honourable member to repeat what she just did when she indicated that there was an area in this province that was awash with money, and I would like

her to explain that to the people in that area that she was referring to. First of all, I would like to know which area she was referring to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McAlpine): The honourable member for Emerson (Mr. Penner) does not have a point of order.

* * *

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McAlpine): The honourable member for Wellington (Ms. Barrett), to continue with your comments.

Ms. Barrett: The Minister of Health (Mr. Praznik) then goes on to say, and he is talking here about the hospitals in the province of Manitoba or in the city of Winnipeg—he might even be talking about the Winnipeg Hospital Authority, I am not sure. These guys get paid more money than I do to run their hospitals.

Again, talk about passing the buck or two or three. Who is responsible ultimately for the health care system in the province of Manitoba? The Minister of Health, his Premier, his Cabinet and his government, not the assistant deputy ministers whose skirts he hid behind for months, not the bureaucrats running the city hospitals, but the Premier and the Minister of Health.

Finally, he says: Be realistic. What do you expect out of us? Well, I think that is a very good question and I would like to answer it. What the people of Manitoba expect out of any government, of no matter what political stripe is honest, accurate, accountable and transparent government, and no more has that expectation on the part of the people of Manitoba of their elected government been less carried out than in the Department of Health. The minister has no business blaming anybody else but himself, his predecessor, his predecessor before that and the Premier, and the Premier before that and the Premier before that.

Ten years of this government has destroyed—[interjection] No, three governments, three Premiers, Premier Filmon—the last three elections, three governments. You are the current government, you are the previous government and the government before that. [interjection] Well you have not always been

minister; however, enough of that. Others will speak about the dreadful condition of our health care system.

It is just unbelievable, the arrogance of this government, particularly the Minister of Health (Mr. Praznik), who stands up day after day and blames others in the system, blames the victims, blames the flu, blames the flood, blames anybody but his government. He has to start taking responsibility. You know what, Mr. Acting Speaker, the answer to what do you expect out of us will be seen loud and clear in the next election campaign. The people of Manitoba have had it.

The second issue I would like to speak to quite briefly reflects directly on my critic area, which is Urban Affairs, the relationship between the provincial government and the City of Winnipeg, its government and citizens and, by extension, the residents of the Capital Region in the province of Manitoba.

I think a very indicative situation has arisen in the last little while, and it is over the potential sale of water to Headingley. I am not going to go into all the sordid details, because it really is quite an unattractive story.

The protagonist, or antagonist, in this story—I would say he is the antagonist—is the Minister of Rural Development (Mr. Derkach).

It is very interesting that the lead minister in dealing with the City of Winnipeg over an issue of this magnitude is not the Minister of Urban Affairs, it is the Minister of Rural Development, who, according to the city councillor for Charleswood, came into a meeting with the mayor, the deputy mayor and himself and said: you will sell water to Headingley. If you do not sell water to Headingley, we will build a sewage lagoon right to the west of the city of Winnipeg and stink you out.

Now, if that is not a threat, the city councillors who were there certainly took it as a threat. I must say that Bill Clement, the councillor from Charleswood, who was at that meeting, is usually quite friendly with the provincial government and, I would imagine, thinks along the same lines as the provincial government in many respects. But he was very open at a public meeting about the sale of water to Headingley that this was bullying. It was, you take it or leave it, and if you

do not take it, we are going to make the west side of the city of Winnipeg virtually unlivable.

What did the members of the Legislature who represent the west side of the city of Winnipeg do? They stood by and they took it, and they include the Acting Speaker, they include the Minister of Education (Mrs. McIntosh), and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson). They used to include the then Minister of Urban Affairs, but he was unceremoniously dumped from the cabinet by the Premier (Mr. Filmon) in a fit of petty pique and is no longer a member of this Assembly, but none of them said a word, certainly not in public. Only the Speaker, as a noncabinet member, was allowed to go to the meetings of the Urban Affairs Committee of Cabinet. No other government MLAs or opposition MLAs were allowed to attend that meeting, but the Speaker was, but that again is another story.

The Minister of Rural Development takes the lead in this, bullies the city. I am not going to say that the city, especially the leadership of the city, was sterling or shone in this whole issue because, frankly, I think that the Executive Policy Committee made the wrong decision when they said: we will agree to sell water to Headingley if the provincial government agrees to start talking about a Capital Region strategy, which is something that the Premier and the Minister of Urban Affairs are more than happy to agree to because all they have done is talk year after year after year and bully the City of Winnipeg.

Luckily, thank goodness for parliamentary procedure, which at least functions in the City Council chamber if it does not always function in the Legislative Building, they were unable to pass this motion through, and so the City of Winnipeg will not be forced to sell water to Headingley. Now, we do not know exactly what is going to happen, but this is an example—

An Honourable Member: Headingley will get water from St. Eustache.

Ms. Barrett: Yes, Headingley will get water from St. Eustache, which is on the west side of the development of the hamlet. Gee whiz, Mr. Minister of Agriculture, where are all those unserved lands that have been bought up by speculators, many of whom are very large contributors—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McAlpine): Order, please. I would remind the honourable member when she is addressing this Chamber that she make her remarks through the Chair, please, and not directly to any particular member. The honourable member, continue with your remarks.

Ms. Barrett: Thank you, Mr. Acting Speaker, and I apologize for my—

An Honourable Member: She stands chastened.

Ms. Barrett: Well, I would hardly say that I stand chastened, but I do apologize for not putting my remarks through the Chair.

The whole issue of the City of Winnipeg versus Headingley, the whole issue of urban sprawl, the Capital Region—and it is not just the City of Winnipeg that is having trouble with the provincial government. It is a bunch of rural municipalities including Steinbach who are having a big problem with the lack of planning, the lack of co-ordination, the lack of any leadership on the part of the provincial government in these major, very major issues, which include urban sprawl around Steinbach. They include hog barn locations in the southern part of the province, the use of water. Many, many major issues that will affect the people of this province of Manitoba for decades to come are being dealt with by—well, they are not being dealt with, and if they are being dealt with, they are being dealt with one issue at a time in an ad hoc way.

* (1600)

This government does not know how to plan or they choose not to plan. They do not know how to plan or they choose not to plan when they deal with their urban Capital Region, the hub and the heart of this province's economic well-being. They do not know how to plan or they choose not to plan in dealing with their education system, which I have not even touched on. They do not know how to plan or they choose not to plan in their health care system, which is, as we all know, in a critical, critical state, thanks totally to the inaction and the bad actions of this government in its last 10 years in office.

So with those few remarks, Mr. Acting Speaker, I will conclude my comments on the budget.

Mr. Mervin Tweed (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Acting Speaker, it is certainly a pleasure for me to rise and put a few comments on the record. One of the things that I have noticed in listening to the speeches to the budget in the last couple of days is I really detect a sense of—oh, I am not sure exactly what the exact word would be. I guess I would start with the words “bitterness,” “angry”—

An Honourable Member: Frustration.

Mr. Tweed: Perhaps “frustration,” but I think today, when the Speaker addressed the issue in the House, I certainly agree that in the short time that I have been here and listening to the members opposite and, I would suggest, all members of the House, some of the comments I think were starting to get maybe a little bit away from what we are really here to do on behalf of the people of Manitoba. I have heard a lot more comments about personalities. I have heard a lot more comments about individuals on particularly the government side of the House, and I really do not believe that is the purpose we are here for.

I think if members opposite have a complaint against the policy of the government—

An Honourable Member: It is the lack of vision.

Mr. Tweed: Then I would suggest to the honourable member that if you have a complaint about the lack of vision, you should discuss that vision and not the individual or personalize the issue that stands before us.

I read Hansard, from the Leader of the Opposition; and I read Hansard on the comments that were made yesterday, and I am starting to think that the question out in Manitoba might be are we acting responsibly in some of the comments and suggestions that we are making towards each other on a personal basis as opposed to the government or the opposition. I thought, just for the record, Mr. Acting Speaker, I would put that on there, because I think it is important that we all try and represent our constituencies and represent the province in the manner I think that they are accustomed to and expect from us all. I would certainly ask all honourable members to consider that and perhaps temper their comments towards each other,

not as individuals, but as the parties and the particular representation that we each make.

Madam Speaker in the Chair

In making some comments on the budget, I would like to comment that in the past weekend after the budget on Friday I had the opportunity to tour much of my constituency, and it was a real feeling of positive thinking in my communities particularly. I often think that, when I first started into this business and got the opportunity to meet a lot of the people in the communities that I represent, it was going to take time and a process to build the trust and the relationships that we have now. I think one of the things that I see as a real positive is when you go into communities—and I think we all share, particularly in rural Manitoba where we have communities that we represent that are difficult to get to or because of scheduling and things like that we perhaps do not get to often enough, and it is always important that we spend more time trying to do that and to talking to the people—and when I go into communities, particularly after a budget, and I would suggest after a budget that has been so positively received by the population of Manitoba—and I do not think just in the constituencies that the government represents, I think it is broad based. It includes many of the communities and many of the communities that the members of the opposition represent also. I think that the comments that I hear constantly coming across from the other side is the fact that you have waited too long, that you have done this—several reasons to oppose the budget that was presented.

I think in reality what we have done, like most families and like most communities, is that we have positioned ourselves to take advantage of the opportunities that are presenting us now by making tough, hard decisions in the past, and hard decisions that affected us all. We did not single out any certain group or area of the province of Manitoba. Everybody shared in the hurt, and I think everybody is going to share in the benefits of that. I think that reflects right from the business community to the working community to government employees, in education and in health, and right down to our base families. I certainly know that, since experiencing my work as the MLA for the constituency of Turtle Mountain, I have seen a different side of people; I think a very good side

of people, but I think I have had the opportunity to experience a lot more of the social concerns that a lot of my constituents represent. I do not think they are unique to my community or to yours. I think we are all trying to do the same things for our communities and for the province. Fortunately, because of the decisions that we have made and have taken in the past, we are able to share in the wonderful successes that we are able to announce in the budget as of Friday.

Particularly of interest to me and my constituency are the announcements we have made in health care. I think one of the things that prompted me to make my comments earlier in regard to discussion about individualizing and personalizing some of our remarks is that I have had the pleasure over the last year to work with the Minister of Health (Mr. Praznik) on a very close-contact basis. I salute him for the things that he is doing. He has shown a lot of understanding. He has met with so many groups. I often think that I am the busiest person I know in my communities that I serve, and I think that, as a Minister of Health particularly, the amount of commitment and time he has put into this job, as well as representing the people of his constituency, he is certainly serving the people of the province of Manitoba very well. I certainly want to put on the record in regard to some of the negative personal comments that were made, particularly by the Leader of the Opposition in the past, that I do not believe it, and I know it not to be true because of my working relationship with the minister. I think that has to be said. I have said it, and I feel good about saying it.

Some of the benefits I see in the health care field and, again, speaking as to how it is affecting rural Manitoba, for years in rural Manitoba and northern Manitoba particularly, we have suffered a shortage of doctors. I do not think that is something anybody would deny. I do not think this government has ever denied that. I do not think the governments of the opposition in the past have denied it. It has been a problem, and it is an ongoing problem. I think it is something that we have to try and deal with but also understand the complications that are involved.

* (1610)

One of the initiatives that the Department of Health has taken was a recruitment mission to try and fill some

of the positions that were vacant in rural Manitoba. In order to do that, working hand in hand with the local authorities, the RHAs, we developed a plan of recruitment. The RHAs took it to the next level in the sense of developing these plans with their communities that they represent. I think it is a very positive statement that we hear lots of discussions on how our RHAs function and work. In this particular instance I would say that the system is working very well. The RHAs have been very fortunate. I know that there is not a fixed number at this point, but it is my understanding that there are at least 20 and possibly more doctors coming into rural and northern Manitoba, and they will arrive over the next two to three months.

I think they will satisfy a lot of the anxieties that rural and northern Manitobans have in the fear of what is going on in our health care system. Again, I would compliment the department and the minister for initiating that particular task and also compliment the RHAs, because I think it brought them to the level where they, by choice, went out and met with the communities and discussed the concerns and the needs that they had. We are now starting to see those needs be filled.

Again, as I speak of my constituency, we are seeing some numbers come in and some doctors recruiting to our communities, and we are very pleased with that. I think one of the other things that we have tried to work with, in the RHAs particularly, in the recruitment side of the new doctors that we are bringing to our communities is the fact that communities have to get more involved when new doctors come, and I would suggest when any new family comes, to our communities. We sometimes recruit, get them to our communities, and after a month they have told us, and I think it to be true, that they feel somewhat left out. We have worked with the RHAs and the local communities to develop a bit of a plan to help these people integrate quickly and better into our communities.

In one of my communities particularly we have people from the school. We have people from the health side. We have the recreation side covered. We have the professional side. They are all people that are volunteering their time to make sure that these new people that come to our communities experience what

we have to offer and make their experience enjoyable in rural Manitoba and in northern Manitoba.

I think it is incumbent upon us as members of the Legislature to perhaps take a little more time and put in a little more effort to acknowledge that these are very professional people in our community. They are welcome. They are needed. They are required. We should do all that we can within our power to make them feel a part of our province and a part of our communities.

As I was preparing my speech, you look back and you kind of try to find out where we were and where we are going to, and I guess where we are today. It is certainly very promising coming from the business field and experiencing governments over the past few years as far as what they have tried to do for me in the name of good government or in the name of I am not sure what, but I can remember a period of time when all I did was complain about taxes going up, and today I stand before you after a fourth balanced budget in the province of Manitoba.

As a former businessman and talking to my business friends, they are pleased to see that now after reining in the ship and turning it around, we are now able to offer some real true tax discounts to the people and allow that. As the opposition has said several times in their comments, it is not enough. Well, all I can say to them is it is enough, it is in the right direction, and it is a promise to Manitobans that they will never have to worry about the kinds of things that we went through in the past, because we have had a responsible and stern administration in Manitoba for the last 10 years. I am very pleased to say I represent a part of that.

I think thanks should be given to the people that have come before me and to my colleagues who have been here for that period of time, who understand and know the types of things and decisions that had to be made by the government of the day—and not always popular, in fact, probably not ever real popular. When you are making hard decisions and you are making tough decisions, it is always harder for everyone involved. I would like to compliment them and thank them for showing me and my family and my friends and the communities that I represent that we do have good strong future in Manitoba. As long as we keep our nose

to the grindstone and continue to work hard, as all Manitobans I believe are, we can all succeed and prosper together.

In 1995, the province of Manitoba took what some would—and I would suggest history will represent it was a tremendous step in government to bring forward The Balanced Budget Debt Repayment and Tax Payer Protection Act into legislation. It is something, as a former municipal councillor, that I have experienced in the sense that we were always told that we had to live within the budgets of what we were able to collect and spend. It is something that I learned in my family as far as making budgets that you have to make your budgets based on what you earn, not what you would like to earn or what you think you should earn. I think the province recognized that and introduced the legislation that forces it to deal to live within its own means. It certainly restored the accountability and the responsibility of governments.

I looked back through some of the Hansards during the debate, and I know today the Financial Post—or at the time the Financial Post described the legislation as worth studying and adoption by other governments in Canada if they are serious about deficit and debt elimination. I think it truly is a piece of legislation that should be considered and copied by other jurisdictions, many of them who are now working on operating on balanced budgets. I think it is something that we can send a message to all our constituents and to all the people of Manitoba that the government of today and the government of the future will be bound to responsible and accountable actions on the behalf of the province.

In glancing through the Hansards, I did come across a few quotes from the opposition, and as I opened my comments with some suggestion that we should turn this not into a personalized debate with each other, because I think all my life growing up—and I tell my children that just because you can yell louder than the next person does not mean you are right. I sometimes think that I need to be reminded of that from time to time. I think we all do, but I also suggest that when people are weak on substance and argument they tend to call names. I think I had some in my comments, and I think what I might do is refer to the comments that were stated, but I will eliminate the names because I do

not want to personalize it. I think it is a suggestion that our party represents one thing and the opposition represents another, and the comments that I put forward will be based on the representation of each party.

It was said, and it is a quote, that it will not mean that the province will be more economically viable. It will have a deadening impact. It will not be helpful in trying to keep the engine of the economy and the people of the province on an even keel. That is a statement made by the opposition in regard to the balanced budget legislation. Yet today what do we have? We have low unemployment in the province of Manitoba. We have all-time investment levels being reached. It is not something that we can deny. If you go out and talk to the people, if you see what is actually happening around this, this is coming true. It is not something that anybody is manufacturing or making up; it is actually happening. I think that it is important that we remember and talk about how we see things and how we differ in the points of view and what the reality is.

* (1620)

Certainly the Canadian Conference Board summed up the performance of Manitoba in a comment that said the economy runs wild. The TD Bank forecast expects a total of 30,000 new jobs that will be created in the next two years. It is not a deadening impact. It is a real positive message for Manitobans, and I say that, I think and I hope, for all Manitobans. I am not talking about Winnipeg; I am not talking about rural Manitoba or northern Manitoba; I am talking about the entire province.

Another member of the opposition suggested that no government needs balanced budget legislation. Again, I would suggest that it has been that very type of legislation that has led us to the budget that we presented to the public and to the people of Manitoba on Friday, a budget that is fair and reasonable, that shows tax reductions to the people of the province, that shows increased spending in health care and increased spending in education and in our social services. That is what we have debated in this House for the past three years; it was more money and more investment. I would suggest that not only is it more money, but it will be a wise investment and a sound investment. It is not

just throwing money at the problem and hoping that we can resolve it.

Another member of the opposition has said, well, you have not paid off the debt yet. Just do not give me the rhetoric. You know, walk the walk; do not talk the talk, my friend. Well, again, as I travelled throughout my constituency on the weekend, I talked to a lot of people. For the first time I was very, very surprised at the number of people that came up to me and made a comment about the government or about the budget. It seems like it interested most, and many had paid particular attention as to the direction we were taking. One of the comments they made: What a wonderful idea to put an extra \$75 million against our debt, a total of \$150 million.

It may not seem like a lot when you are talking the large numbers that we are, and sometimes I think we all struggle to imagine or to put into reality what \$5.8 billion or what \$6 billion actually is. It is a lot of money, and I think that any time a government can make a concentrated effort to reduce that debt, we have an opportunity to show to the people of Manitoba, not only the ones today but the future Manitoba population, that this government was responsible and actually took to heart what they were telling us, that in order to be successful and to move ahead, we have to get our house in order and we have to start reducing debt.

I think that message was heard loud and clear as we travelled throughout the province on the budget consultations. I would almost question anybody opposite that could bring forward any disagreement from their constituents. I mean, every constituent in the province represents all facets of our economy from the unemployed to the business world to the government employed. I mean, it is all there, and I think everybody is feeling and saying the same thing, be reasonable, be fair, but let us work on working the debt down so that we can have a better future for the province and for the people of Manitoba. I think we heard that message loud and clear, and I think that Manitobans recognize and appreciate the efforts that have come forward from the government in that particular area. We know that if we do not, all we are doing is setting ourselves up for a future that our children are going to be burdened with—a debt that will put them in a very compromising position.

Some of the things that I also want to talk about today is some of the positive announcements. Before I do, as I look through the budget in brief, the presentation that goes out to, I guess, whoever wants to send it out—but you look at the spending and priorities of the Province of Manitoba and the government of Manitoba, major expenditure, major categories 1998-99, health, 34.6 percent of our total budget goes to health. I mean, you can talk in percentages, you can talk on per capita, no matter how you cut it, it is still an extremely large amount of money and the question will always be, is it enough? Some will argue yes, some will argue it is too much, some will argue it is not enough. But as a government, the priority is clear that the most money we will spend on any given program or department in the government's budget goes to health.

We can argue about the numbers today. I mean bottom line over bottom line, it is a \$100-million increase over the previous year, and if that is not going in the right direction, and, as I say and understand that as issues and concerns arise, they will continue to be addressed in a compassionate, considerate manner by this government. It is not something that we are going to close the door on. Again, I get back to my comments about the minister. I have seen him sit down with several groups in a day and discuss earnestly and seriously with the constituents, the concerns that they bring forward.

When you look at the pie of the budget, we look at 19.3 percent of our entire budget is spent on education and in training. I think the commitment that we have made in this past budget for increased funding in particular areas of education will only serve us well in the future. I think that standardized testing in my particular area and in the communities I represent have been accepted and are working well, and people are now starting to see that perhaps it has been the right direction to go in and are now starting to fall in behind it and support it. I think that is a very positive step.

When we look to support the families, family services, 12 percent of our entire budget, 12 percent goes into that department. It is, again, with the increases that we have seen this year, reflects government's feeling and position. We will continue to address those concerns that come up, and we are

always prepared to sit down and listen and decide what best serves the public and the people of Manitoba.

The next largest portion of government spending goes to economic and resource development at 11.1 percent. As a person from rural Manitoba and having had the opportunity in the last little while to do a little bit of travelling further north and far up north this past year, I think that there—[interjection] No, I have not got to Flin Flon yet, but I understand I am going up there in the near future, and I look forward to meeting the member up there and addressing some of the concerns that he has. But I do think that particularly rural Manitoba—I guess if you are from rural Manitoba, you tend to have a soft spot in your heart for rural Manitoba, and I think the things that I have seen happening, not in only my communities but in all the communities around me, have been extremely positive.

The announcement of the Maple Leaf plant in Brandon has generated a lot of interest and a lot of enthusiasm in the surrounding communities and not just on the hog production side, which I would suggest there is a tremendous amount of interest, but in community development, in housing, in so many other economic advantages that they are going to have by being close to that.

I talked to the mayor of Wawanesa last night on the phone, and we were discussing some things, and he said that the number of calls coming in from people looking at housing in that particular community, about 35 minutes south of Brandon, has been phenomenal. They have put their planning committee together to try and designate a new housing development to try to accommodate what they anticipate and what they expect. I see that in Souris. I see it in Boissevain. I see it in all the surrounding communities. They are not just fired up about the hog industry; they are fired up about all the economic benefits that follow it, and that is population increase in communities.

* (1630)

Again I guess if you had asked me 10 years ago—and people have been doing it for most of their working lives in some situations—that 35- or 40-minute drive is just not something that I would enjoy every day, but if you are accustomed to it and you want to live in a rural

environment and have a good quality of life, it is certainly an opportunity for people to do so. So these communities are excited about the opportunities. They are looking forward to the plant getting underway as far as the construction side and also looking forward very optimistically to the opening of the facility which will indicate that the population is there and is starting to grow and the opportunities will present themselves.

The issue surrounding hog barns—and I think one of the members from the opposition brought it up yesterday—is yes, there is an environmental concern, and I have certainly experienced it in the communities that I have representation in. Many of the people, because it is new to them and new to me, have to get an understanding of what it can mean, but also understand that what we have to do as a people, as a province, working together to resolve those situations. I have stated publicly that if a hog barn is going to create an environmental problem and people can show it to me, I am not going to support that. If they can show to me that it is going to be viable and it is going to be environmentally safe, I will support it. I think that is what we have to do. I think we certainly, as government, are working with the industry, we are working with the agricultural industry to try and put these safeguards in place so people have a comfort zone. They have to have that comfort zone. There is no question about it, but I do say to them that we are an agricultural community, our life, our economic impact is farming and this is another part of farming. We have to be constantly aware of that.

We have certain properties in the province of Manitoba that are dedicated to parks; we have certain that are dedicated to many other things, but we do have land in Manitoba that is dedicated to agriculture. We should work very hard and do everything we possibly can to make sure that agricultural opportunities present themselves and that we take advantage of each and every one as they present themselves. I think it is vital that we do that.

When I glance at the brochure that the province has put out, I look at—I presume it is the province; I am not sure—but the one thing that astounds me—and I do show it to the constituents that I represent—we have talked about health, we have talked about education, we have talked about support to families and economic

development—four departments. When you look at the fifth largest government department as far as spending is concerned, as far as appropriation of budget, it is public debt cost. I mean, the fifth largest department of government is debt servicing. I think we all have to recognize, as we do in our families, as we do in our R.M.s and in our town and all sorts of corporations, the key to being successful is to reduce the debt owing, the debt cost, the debt servicing cost. For every dollar that we free up out of public debt costs, we free up to put into other departments of government.

An Honourable Member: Without having to impose new taxes.

Mr. Tweed: As the honourable member the Minister for Agriculture suggests, without having to impose new taxes. I am sure that the members opposite as well as the government and as well as everybody in Manitoba, if you poll them and ask them, the first thing they will tell you is that we do not want our taxes to go up. So I think we have to become very, very diligent in reducing our public debt costs in order to free up the necessary money or the money that could be made available to many other important programs that Manitobans have deemed important to them and, indeed, important to their children.

With the announcement that was made with the budget on Friday, I would like to just briefly outline some of the things that are happening in my particular communities. I am very proud and pleased to speak to the communities that are receiving some of the benefits of the budget, and I think I say that on behalf of all the constituents of Turtle Mountain. I find that—and I am sure many members have gone through this, and if they have not, then I guess I will be unique—but when you grow up in one community all your life and then start representing several, as much as you want to, it is hard to break away from that one-community mentality and speak in a larger scale.

When I travel now, I make sure that the people in the constituency of Turtle Mountain recognize that when one community benefits they all benefit because we are not that far apart. I think that is a change that has really happened in rural Manitoba in the last probably three to four years. It was one thing that we detected on the rural task force, the working-for-value task force, that

we have to break down the barriers between communities in rural Manitoba and help them work together and co-operate together. A benefit for one community in my constituency is a benefit for all the people in my constituency. When I speak now to the communities on an individualized basis, I try and enlarge that circle so that they understand that their successes are successes for the entire constituency and, indeed, the province of Manitoba.

In the budget we had announced that there was an allocation of \$94 million to address some of the capital requirements of the provincial health care facilities. One of the facilities in Wawanesa will be replaced. They will be replacing the hospital with a community health centre. I think that in speaking with many of the people in the community there is some anxiety—there is no question about that—but they are also very excited about the opportunity to be on the ground level as far as determining some of the requirements and some of the things that the health centre will have and will be able to offer to the people of the community and the surrounding districts. I think that, through the personal needs assessment that we have circulated throughout the RHA, throughout the region, and responses back, we will be able to address a lot of the individual concerns that the community had with a new facility, certainly a smaller facility than they now have, but one that is more relevant to the needs that they have now. I think they are looking very forward to the future in the community and are willing to participate with government in the planning part of it to develop a centre that best suits the needs of those communities.

Another benefit or another thing that is happening is in the community of Souris. They will be adding 10 new personal care home beds to the existing facility. It had been in the plans for quite some time and because of some structural changes that they have had to make, this has allowed them at this time to bring their proposal forward. I think that it is a positive reform, that by increasing the number of beds by 10, we will, in effect, create a better efficiency in the facility on the operating side and on the management side. I think that is something that I like to see happen because again if there are efficiencies on management and on the actual physical operating costs, then there is perhaps more money available to provide better and more health care to the people that it serves.

Thirdly, is the relocation of our medical clinic in Killarney to the hospital itself, and it has been discussed in that community for several years that it would be a real benefit to the hospital and to the community to have this facility as part of the hospital. I see it as a real benefit in the sense that it is going to make the centre more busy because all of the traffic will be going in and out the door, but it also creates a customer service friendly situation.

In previous years the patient would visit the doctor uptown at his clinic and have to drive downtown to the hospital to access any of the services that they required. Now they will be able to walk 15 steps down the hall. I think again, through the personal needs assessment that was done in our communities, we recognized that that was something that one, an aging population would like, and also all the staffing felt that that should be done. [interjection] As was just said to me, it made practical sense, so it is now going to happen. So I am certainly pleased to discuss that, too.

* (1640)

I think in closing, as I have been indicated that my time is drawing to a near, that I just want to re-emphasize, I think, that the province is on the right track. We have certainly introduced some new proposals in this budget—and I think the increased spending that we are going to see in the Health and Education side, I think the economic development that we are seeing in the province—again, the more we have, the better it will be for all Manitobans, so it is certainly a pleasure for me to stand here. I have no problem and no hesitation in suggesting to the people of Turtle Mountain and to the people of the province of Manitoba that this is a good budget, it is a forward-looking, forward-thinking budget, and I look forward to the vote when we can all stand together and support it. Thank you.

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): Madam Speaker, I too want to take this opportunity to say a few words about the budget, and I want to say to the member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Tweed) I too represent people from rural constituencies, and I have to say that what I heard from my constituents is much different than what he is saying from his constituents. He talked about detecting bitterness and anger and

frustration in some people as they were speaking. Well, I have to say that I have detected bitterness, anger and frustration from my constituents when they hear this budget.

People in rural Manitoba, for example, the member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Tweed) indicates that his constituents are very happy with what this government is doing with health care. Well, I want to tell the member for Turtle Mountain that in fact people in rural Manitoba are not happy and are very frustrated with what is happening in health care. People in rural Manitoba get very upset and frustrated and angry when they have to come all the way to Winnipeg for surgery and then find out that there is no bed for them, and they have to pay the costs of that trip to Winnipeg, pay the cost of hotel bills at a time when these people are not able to work because of health conditions that they are suffering.

So, Madam Speaker, people are frustrated and angry with how this government is handling the health care system. People are also frustrated with this government's answers to the whole situation of shortages of doctors in rural Manitoba, because that problem has not been resolved and it is one that is very challenging. I agree it is very challenging, but the government has to take many more steps to look at ways to ensure that people like doctors want to come to rural Manitoba.

One of the things that people look at when they are considering rural Manitoba and small communities is the educational opportunities for their children, and the steps that this government has taken over the past several years with education has virtually destroyed our education system in many communities, and it will not be encouraging for people to want to come to smaller communities.

This morning, my colleague the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) and myself had a meeting with trustees from within the Parklands who were expressing some of their frustrations with the funding for education and very frustrated with the announcement that although the government says that they announced a 2.2 percent increase to education, in fact, there is a decrease in funding to many communities. In the Swan River area, the actual funding is going to be a reduction of over 3

percent. At that meeting, one of the trustees said to us, you know, how can we really trust this government? You know the government says in their budget speech, and I quote, "this budget extends Manitoba's overall tax rate freeze for an 11th consecutive year; and in fact, the 1998 budget cuts a number of taxes."

And this gentleman said to us, he said, how does this government expect the people of Manitoba to believe them when in actual fact they have offloaded an awful lot of tax onto the municipality? They have cut funding to schools, they are making us pay for more things like user fees in parks, our Pharmacare costs have gone up, and they want us to believe that things are better in rural Manitoba. Well, people in rural Manitoba do not believe that they are better off. In fact they believe that they are worse off under this government.

I want to talk a moment as well about the tax breaks that this government talks about and I want to talk about how it affects my constituents. The personal income tax reduction for a family of four earning \$20,000 is a saving of \$45. For a single person earning \$10,000, it is a saving of \$22. Madam Speaker, that is a saving but it is a very minimal saving.

But I want to talk about the many other people, and in my constituency there is a high unemployment rate. There are a high number of people on social assistance. There is a very aging population. This reduction in tax means nothing to them, and those are the people that I represent and that is their view on it.

The reduction in the payroll tax, a commitment that this government made I believe in 1990, said that they were going to eliminate the payroll tax. It is now nine years later. They have not eliminated the payroll tax, so that is a broken promise by this government, a change that they told Manitobans that they would make but they never did. But the reduction in payroll tax, is it going to help many people in my constituency? No, it will not.

The one that I find very interesting is the new home rebate program extension. This is a program that will allow a maximum rebate of \$2,500 to people buying their first home which is a new home. Well, I would like this government to do a reality check here. In actual fact, there are very few first time homeowners

that buy a new home. So this tax break is for a very select group of people that is able to buy their first home as a new home. Quite honestly, those who can afford to do that probably do not need the tax break as much as the many other people who are paying property tax and the many other people who need assistance in this province, people, for example, who need their homes repaired. Now I represent a lot of Northern Affairs communities, and people in that area have expressed real concern on the part of this government that there is absolutely nothing to repair homes.

Madam Speaker, I would encourage—the government talks about travelling the province. I would invite them—and many of them were in my constituency in Swan River just recently. Unfortunately they coincided their visit there at the same time that I was having another meeting, so I could not attend to hear what they were saying or what problems were brought to their attention. But if they would get into the outlying areas they would see that a real problem is the problem of housing and home repair. It is a very frustrating situation for people who are living in very poor conditions not to have the support of this government to offer some incentive to repair homes or to retrofit their homes in some way.

As I speak about Northern Affairs communities, I also want to say that in these communities people tell me—and I look at the Northern Affairs budget, and I understand that there is not an increase in there—but their concern is that the government makes the decisions on how much money should be going there, but they have not had an increase for years now to increase the salary of the people that they pay in these communities. These people are working for salaries way below the poverty line, and that is something again that this government has not addressed.

There are also concerns about the Employment First initiative that the government brought in to train people at working along with Northern Affairs. The government has changed the program that was in place last year. The government has changed the program now and is not topping up social assistance, and there is no money for the administration of these Northern Affairs communities to administer the program. So

they are offering some programs, but they are not really offering support with them.

The other program that has caused concern in some of the communities, I believe it is a training program where people on social assistance are required to take training. The Department of Family Services is requiring that these people go outside the community for their training. So they are ending up in Brandon or in Winnipeg without the family supports that they have in their own communities. At the same time, when the government moves these people to another centre, they are reducing the population, they are reducing the number of children that are attending schools in rural Manitoba and creating another problem.

* (1650)

The member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Tweed) talked about how much hope there is in rural Manitoba. Well, I have to say that in some of these communities there is not very much hope because the government, as I say, is encouraging people to leave rural Manitoba and at the same time causing another problem because these people move into a city where they do not nearly have the supports and in the end will be a much greater cost to society, and all of us will pay for that.

I want to take the time to make a few comments about agriculture. As I look at facts in this budget book, we see that close to 30 percent of our exports out of this province are derived from agriculture. That is a very high number. I think that that is an impressive number—it is all agriculture—but we do not see the growth in the Agriculture budget related to that. In fact, the Agriculture budget is quite stagnant. There have been increases for research, and I commend the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Enns) for that because that has been long overdue. With the changes that we are having in agriculture we have to do more research.

We will talk more about this in Estimates, but I would like to see very much more of the research that is done not tied to funds from the business community but more research on alternate agriculture that would perhaps help the farming community but not necessarily tie them to a chemical company, because when research is funded by a chemical company, they also want to have the benefit of that research and, if it

means you are doing research into a variety of grain that is going to then require the farmer to buy that certain kind of chemical, that does not put more money into the farmer's pockets. That is something that I am very, very concerned about.

The member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Tweed) talked about the expansion to the Maple Leaf and how excited the people in his communities are about the growth, and there will be some growth. I also want to say that I think that we are going to see a growth in the amount of hogs that we have in this province, but we have to do some very serious planning on this. I do not believe that the government has done that planning very well. In fact, Madam Speaker, we just did a series of meetings where we talked to people in many communities. People in those communities told us that the government and their staff in agriculture are very determined to see the hog industry expand, but they are not prepared to provide information for people who have concerns. I think you have to address both sides of it.

As the member for Turtle Mountain said, if there are environmental concerns, we should be addressing them. We do not want to create problems down the road. To address those environmental problems, you have to be open and be prepared to share information with the public and also listen to suggestions from the public that they have. When a community takes a leadership role in developing some by-laws, the government should be working along with them to ensure that there is sustainability in the rural communities. So I think that we will see growth in that industry, but we also have to be careful to plan.

I have to say that, when we were in Brandon as well, there were people in Brandon who, at one of the meetings that I attended, expressed concern about this being a low-wage economy. We have to be very careful that we do not drive down the wages and create a low-wage economy because that is not good for the community either. If you have a good wage being paid at a facility like that, then you have a stable community, you do not have transient community, and that is what we want to see. So I think that, along with getting places like Maple Leaf into the province, the government has a role to play to see that it is a safe workplace, that it is a healthy economy that is

developing around it, and that those people who do have the opportunity to work in those facilities will earn a fair wage so that they can be contributors to the tax roll that we so depend on for this province to grow.

We also have to ensure—and this is a challenge for the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Enns)—that there is a fair return for those farmers who choose to raise hogs, that they are not raising the hogs for a minimal amount. It is a challenge right now. With the price of hogs down where it is, it is a real challenge as to whether or not to invest in it. I know it is not a short-term investment. These are long-term investments that people make, but the low price of hogs will create challenges. Because no matter how low the prices are, somebody has to pay the bank because these barns are not built, and like everybody else, farmers have to borrow money too to build these facilities. So that is going to be a challenge.

I think we really have to look, Madam Speaker, and put in place the resources to study what happens in other countries where there has been a growth in the hog industry and ensure that we look at what other countries have done and not make the same kind of mistakes, that in fact the growth in the hog industry will mean growth for our rural communities, that a growth in the hog industry will mean that we have more people living in rural Manitoba, not less. If you look at some of the statistics from southern California and other places where there have been very large hog barns, there has been a negative effect of hog barns being built and we have not seen a growth in population. There has been a downward trend in population, and the larger barns have not led to a healthier community. It has meant an outdrain because, as the barns get bigger, they tend to buy their vet supplies and the other services that they need outside the small community. So those are the kinds of challenges that we are going to face with the growth of this industry and I hope that we will consider those very carefully.

One of the other challenges that we face in this province is our transportation system and that is not one that this government has addressed in this budget. We have changes because of deregulation changes because of privatization of railways, changes in transportation because of what has happened with the Crow. In other provinces they have put in place plans about how they are going to deal with these changes and look at

strategic planning. In this province that has not happened and I do not think that this government has put nearly enough money into the Highways budget to address those concerns. We are going to sadly fall behind in the state of our roads, and we have some very poor roads in Manitoba right now as a result of the increased traffic, but the government has not addressed that.

Nor have they addressed the serious challenge that we are facing in northern Manitoba where over the past years the roads have deteriorated and this government has not upheld any commitment to increase the ability of transportation into many northern communities. The North has been sadly neglected by this government.

* (1700)

I have to say, Madam Speaker, that in the area of transportation that I want to say that I am pleased that the government is now putting money into the Port of Churchill and into dredging the harbour, but I have to wonder, when it was in public hands, why the government did not recognize the importance of the port, and now that it is in private hands they think it is important to dredge the port. Just a question that I would ask them, but the Port of Churchill is very important to the economy of Manitoba.

Now if we can get some co-operation between the railways and the privately owned line, the OmniTRAX, and co-operation from CN and some of the other lines that are wanting to take over, maybe we can get proper use of that port. But it is going to be a very big challenge, and I do not see the government showing any leadership in this particular area with regard to transportation. I think without that we are going to face very, very serious challenges over the next few years as our roads become more and more dilapidated.

I want to just say that when we were anticipating this budget, we had thought that the government was going to be preparing for an election and this would be a pre-election budget that we would see much more spending, so in reality the government spent much less than we anticipated that they would, and the government had the ability to address much more than they have.

But the part that I find disappointing is how the government is playing a numbers game. They tell us that it is a balanced budget when in actual fact if they had not taken money out of the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, rather than a \$23-million surplus, we would have a deficit of \$37 million. So in actual fact they would have a deficit budget. If you look at the numbers that the government is trying to tell us that they put into health care in this budget, it is also misleading to the people of Manitoba because in actual fact they tell us that they have put 100—Madam Speaker, if you look at it the government tells us they have spent \$100 million, but in actual fact they are spending only \$7 million.

So I cannot understand the comments from the member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Tweed) who says people are very happy about this budget. In actual fact, when you get out and go out to rural Manitoba, go out to the Northern Affairs communities, listen to school boards and trustees, you will find that there is anger and there is frustration on the part of the people in Manitoba because if the government chose to, they could have done a lot more to help the people of Manitoba, but they have instead chosen to play games with the numbers and not really expose how much surplus they really have, and I can expect that when we come around a little closer to the election or somewhere over the next year, as the Minister of Health indicated, he said, oh, just wait, there is going to be more money in health.

So rather than putting out a true budget and telling us how much money, they are going to spend. They are going to play games as they go along and put money here and there as they see fit for their own benefit, and that is not a fair way to treat Manitobans. We should be dealing with the economy as it is and treating people fairly. If we did, we would not have people leaving the province as we do. The low unemployment rate that we see in this province is a result of close to 7,000 people leaving this province, because this is not a healthy place for them to live and they are seeking better opportunities in other provinces. We could do much better than this government has done, and this is not a budget worthy of support.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Edward Helwer (Gimli): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak on the

budget for 1998 for our fiscal year. Our government has lived up to its commitment to the people of Manitoba by maintaining an effective and responsible program while spending taxpayers' money wisely. As a result of our efforts to remain fiscally responsible, this is the fourth consecutive year that the Filmon government has balanced the budget.

Balanced budgets sustain and protect the vital social programs like health and education. Balanced budgets create jobs, and I am pleased that our efforts to achieve balanced budgets certainly are paying off. For the 11th straight budget, the Filmon government has held the line on major taxes, and this is a record that is unmatched anywhere in North America. So I want to congratulate our Minister of Finance and the Treasury Board and all the people involved who have been working on the budget because they have just done an excellent job. And all our ministers also, by controlling spending and by spending smarter, they have just done an excellent job and certainly deserve a great deal of credit.

Not only have we begun to see the promising future, we are living in very promising times. We have begun the process of retiring our provincial debt. As our interest payments are reduced as well, we will be able to direct more taxpayer dollars to our priorities. I am proud of these achievements, so I certainly want to congratulate all my colleagues, the present and the past, also the past Minister of Finance who have worked so diligently to ensure that we have controlled our spending while protecting and enhancing our vital social programs.

The people of Manitoba know that the Filmon government has worked very hard to make Manitoba strong, and now we are working towards making an even stronger Manitoba. The budget speech highlighted the Filmon government's commitment to building on the strength of the province to ensure that we are prepared to meet the new century. The 1998 Manitoba budget keeps this province competitive. It provides a perfect environment for future job creation. It increases our standard of living. It speaks volumes to our young people that good employment opportunities are available in this province, and there are lots of opportunities.

Our government's priorities continue to focus on the areas of importance to Manitobans, such as job creation, health, education, infrastructure, research, and freeing our children from the burden of debt. Manitobans told us to continue living within our means and to spend their tax dollars wisely. They told us that one of our main priorities should be to relieve future generations of our accumulated debt, and this budget highlights our commitment to these priorities. I am pleased to see numerous new initiatives that focus on these areas.

Our government also believes in investment in our children. An investment is an investment in the future, and our children are critical to the future of our province and to the economy. Investing in children and youth is one of the most important social investments that our government can make. So, to that end, our government is increasing spending on children, youth and their families by over \$20 million. This will come in the form of programs that will respond to the nutritional, learning and social needs of our young people. These initiatives include positive parenting programs, strategies to prevent fetal alcohol syndrome, childhood nutrition programs and early literacy programs.

We will also be investing in education and some renewal initiatives, such as spending \$1.8 million on information technology, grants to enhance access to information technology in the classroom. We are providing some \$30 million under the Aging Buildings Program to help school divisions upgrade and extend the life of structurally sound older schools and to ensure quality education in the classroom. We will continue to emphasize core subjects and to establish regular assessments to measure student performance.

I just want to talk about some of the education initiatives in my constituency. Just last December we opened the addition to Bobby Bend School whereby we have some new classrooms, new gym, to make learning and to make the students much more comfortable. Just recently in the announcement by the Minister of Education (Mrs. McIntosh), when they talked about the increase in the funding to schools, one of my schools, the Stonewall Collegiate, is certainly in need of an expansion and a renovation. Because the community of Stonewall is growing so fast, we need an addition to the

collegiate there. I am really pleased that this was one of the schools that were announced in that program. It will certainly be a benefit to the community of Stonewall.

* (1710)

Also, Winnipeg Beach just recently received approval from the Public Schools Finance Board that they will be getting an addition to their elementary school at Winnipeg Beach. This is certainly a welcome addition to Winnipeg Beach because a part of the old school there is really old and it is also very crowded. We will be adding some classrooms there to improve the quality of education in the Winnipeg Beach area. So these are important projects to me and to our constituency and will make our education system better.

Furthermore, our government remains committed to helping post-secondary education students and recent graduates as they pursue further educational opportunities. We want to ensure that our young people have continued access to training and post-secondary education so they can succeed in an increasingly competitive labour market. To that end, we are providing better targeted assistance. Our government is providing \$1.6 million towards the new Interest Rate Relief Program and Debt Reduction Program. Our government is increasing support of the scholarship and bursaries initiative by an additional \$4 million. Some \$15 million has been set aside for our province's unique Learning Tax Credit, and we are providing some \$3 million to expand the Apprenticeship Program. Students, like all other Manitobans, will benefit from the 2-point cut in the provincial personal income tax rate. We are responsive to the needs of Manitoba's young people as they chart their educational goals.

In the area of health care, our government has listened to Manitobans who have told us how much they value our health care system. In spite of significant federal reduction and the cutbacks and reduction in transfer payments for health care, this government has again increased funding for health care. This budget contains over \$100 million more for health care. Among other items, it includes \$10 million more for the purchase of medical equipment, \$11 million more for dialysis equipment, \$4.5 million more for care

in personal care homes, and another \$2.5 million to reduce waiting lists. So we are promoting preventative health care measures to programs such as the new diabetes initiative and increased support to the Breast Cancer Screening Program.

Each year, the Filmon government spends some \$1,700 per person on health care, and this is the second highest rate in Canada. That alone should silence a lot of our critics, especially the members opposite here, because our government has consistently made health care a priority. We have listened, and we have acted to ensure that all Manitobans, young and old alike, have access to our health care services.

Manitobans have told us that they want to live in safe, healthy communities. To enhance public safety, the government has increased resources for crime prevention and is taking measures to further strengthen our justice system. Our government has long had a zero tolerance policy when it comes to domestic violence, and we are spending an additional \$1.9 million in programs dealing with this very serious social problem. We are also providing funding towards improvement of the RCMP's telecommunication system which will help improve response times during emergencies. We are also spending \$10 million for capital projects to improve correctional and court facilities and to help victims of crime. We also have allocated more funding for the very important Victims Assistance Services program.

The budget speech put forward many initiatives that I am confident will help shape our province and encourage family growth and job creation. The Manitoba government's strong commitment to spending taxpayers' dollars wisely and to promoting job creation continues to be a priority this session. I would like to develop that theme a little. Together with Manitobans, we have built a province that stands as a symbol of success. Manitoba's growth rate has ranked in the top three of all the provinces in Canada for the last three years.

Manitoba's economy is a great success story, and no doubt the envy of many other provinces. There is a renewed sense of vigour and optimism and it is easy to see why. Our unemployment rate is one of the lowest since 1981. Retail sales are up 6.9 percent, which is

one of the largest increases in 12 years. Manufacturing shipments are up some 11.5 percent, and the value of mineral production increased 12.6 percent. Farm receipts have also increased at a rate 2.5 times the national increase. Manufacturing shipments are up 11.5 percent, reaching a record of \$10 billion. All this translates into increased economic opportunities for Manitobans.

I just want to say that our farmers in Manitoba I think are probably some of the most innovative in Canada. In spite of losing the Crow rate some years ago, the benefits of the Crow, our farmers in Manitoba have found other ways to diversify, grow different crops and to be able to find other ways to create wealth in their own areas. Because they are so innovative, our farmers, by changing the crops, they have been able to adapt to the reduction in all the government benefits. Although we do not have any programs for farmers, other than the crop insurance program now, we certainly hope that our farmers can produce an excellent crop this year so that they can continue to grow and prosper.

Manitoba has just marked its sixth straight year of double-digit growth in exports to the United States. More than 80 percent of that export growth has been in the value-added processing or manufactured goods. We continue to move away from a simple reliance on exporting our natural resources to encourage a climate—you know, these processors turn these goods into value-added products thus creating even further economic benefits. Manitoba-made clothes, food products, furniture, buses, building supplies and farm equipment are meeting the needs of consumers globally. We should be proud of our robust trade.

Our government has also helped promote a competitive tax environment which benefits both business and individuals. Major tax cuts have been frozen for more than 10 years, which is the longest tax freeze in Canada, and the personal income tax rate is now lower than it was in 1987. Our government has reduced the small business income tax rate. Our retail sales tax is the second lowest in Canada. So more than 90 percent of our Manitoba businesses are exempt from the payroll tax, and targeted tax incentives have created jobs in industries such as manufacturing, mining and film production.

Our government's efforts to remain fiscally responsible and to engage in long-term economic planning are widely recognized. For example, in February, the Toronto Dominion Bank's Quarterly Economic Report praised the Filmon government's fiscal responsibility. Said Teresa Courchene, a senior economist with the TD Bank: Manitoba has balanced budget legislation in place, but what is even more important than that is that there are a lot of measures in place to achieve it, and there is an eye on spending. That is why we rank Manitoba so high, because of the way it plans for the future. The bank rates our province's fiscal prospects as excellent. Alberta was the only other province in Canada to receive this kind of rating from the Toronto Dominion Bank.

* (1720)

So indeed, in all of our efforts, the Filmon government has continued to help Manitoba economy grow and prosper. No longer are we in Manitoba content to be hewers of wood and drawers of water. We have helped to create a diversified and progressive economy. An endless variety of companies have come here, including financial firms, the aerospace industry, medical research and product development firms. Agriculture and transportation, equipment manufacturers, the garment industry and a growing number of food processors, mining, forestry, tourism, are all billion-dollar industries. Thousands of Manitobans have highly skilled jobs in science, medical research and product development. The telecommunications industry has taken off in a huge way, and we are hopeful that Manitoba too can benefit from the burgeoning film production sector.

Also, when we talk about the tourism industry, that is very important to my area. Communities such as Winnipeg Beach and Gimli along Lake Winnipeg, communities such as Matlock, Dunnottar and all the cottage area along Lake Winnipeg is certainly a great tourist area. The businesses in these communities have really begun to flourish and taken advantage of the opportunities in tourism. I am really pleased to see that, because tourism is one of our major areas of growth and also a growth in employment. Tourism in our areas provides a lot of temporary employment for university students during the summer months. So tourism is very important in our area, and I want to

wish those involved in the tourist business to continue to work and create new jobs in that industry.

We will continue our efforts to make Manitoba a transportation hub for North America. The presence of the majority of Canada's largest trucking firms, the continued development of facilities at the Winnipeg Airport and ongoing work of the mid-continent trade corridor are just three of the factors that will help that goal to be achieved. Indeed, it has only been a short time since Winnport Logistics announced that it has won the contract to handle air cargo from China, which is another major boost to our local transportation industry. Winnport hopes to market Winnipeg International Airport as a less costly and less congested alternative to Chicago's O'Hare Airport.

This strategy could eventually mean up to 5,000 more jobs for Manitobans and a \$600-million boost to our local economy. This is very important to my constituency of Gimli which is north of Winnipeg, the area of Rosser, Rockwood, Stonewall, Teulon. They are all close to the airport, so this will create job opportunities for that area. Because of the four-lane road that we have now on Brookside Boulevard, because of the improvements this province has made to the highways, this does certainly make the improvements at the airport and the development at the Winnipeg International Airport good for our area and certainly a benefit.

An Honourable Member: Fine, decent road.

Mr. Helwer: That is right when you talk about that road. I know the member for Lakeside (Mr. Enns) and I drive on that road every day, so it is a very important the four-lane, but it certainly has improved the safety and made it much easier for the commuting public. That area, with the development at the airport, will certainly continue to grow and expand, and it is a great place to live.

As a member of the Legislative Assembly representing a rural constituency, I am also continually impressed with the development of our rural economy. The continued growth in the agricultural sector, be it the Maple Leaf announcement, McCain expansion, construction of Isobord and a flour mill at Elie, these are all things that ensure the agricultural producers of both livestock and grains living in our constituency and

throughout Manitoba will continue to expand their operations and provide employment opportunities to their fellow Manitobans.

Agriculture has been a strong point in the Manitoba economy since its creation, and the constituency of Gimli is similar to many other areas of the province to which the agricultural sector provides a substantial segment of economic activity and employment opportunities. This is not anything exceptional or exciting, but what is exciting however has been the millions of dollars recently invested into our economy, particularly into the agricultural value-added sector such as the multimillion dollar expansion to McCain Foods in Portage and Maple Leaf announcement in Brandon. These moves certainly enable our potato growers and hog producers in our area to expand production and to have access to greater markets for their produce.

When we talk about hog production and the market, even though the prices at this time are a little depressed, they have dropped some, there still is, I think, a margin of profit there. When we look at where we are going and how much we can expand, when we look at a country like China, all the production that we have in Canada would only make up for 8 percent of China's consumption so there is a lot of room for expansion. If we can only get 1 percent or 2 percent of that market, that would make our expansion here in Canada and in Manitoba—we have lots of room for expansion, and not only would it also expand the hog production and create more jobs in the hog production, it would also be a market for our farmers' feed grains such as barley and feed wheat and things of that nature. So there are many spinoffs to this kind of plant that Maple Leaf has planned there for Brandon, and hopefully our hog production will continue to expand.

All these announcements, and many of the other announcements that have been witnessed over the past several months, have been the result of a vision and leadership by our Premier (Mr. Filmon) and his cabinet in creating the environment policies and the procedures that allow industry to move quickly and with certainty when planning projects for rural Manitoba.

I would also like to address some of our other recent Manitoba success stories. Manitoba continues to be a

hot bed for call centres. Approximately 300 people will be able to gain employment at the new Royal Bank call centre in May of 1998; another 200 people will be hired once they are operating a higher capacity of incoming calls; and prior to the centre even being opened, it will require about 300 people to complete the construction of the centre. Other call centres doing business in Manitoba include: MCI Call Center Services, Gage teleservice and SR&J customer call centres. These are all important to creating jobs here in Manitoba.

Mind Computer Products of Winnipeg has just won a \$10-million contract to supply the federal government with some 3,800 computer workstations. This should result in five to 10 assembly jobs during peak production and several full-time, permanent technical jobs on the testing side.

Broadband Networks of Winnipeg is also busy. Company officials hope to hire at least another 200 high-tech workers by the end of 1998. This company designs and supplies space station equipment and transmission and receiver equipment for wireless telecommunications and multimedia networks.

Winnipeg's Royal Canadian Mint also is undergoing a \$30-million expansion to enable them to produce currency for other countries. This construction will create employment for approximately about 130 people, and the Mint will also be hiring about 30 additional permanent positions. This is also good news for Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, I have only touched on some of the companies that are expanding in our province. Manitobans continue to have the opportunity to live, work, invest and to raise a family in the best place in Canada, right here in Manitoba.

* (1730)

I would also like to address our government's financial record. Our government continues to remain committed to a policy of sound fiscal management. The government has undertaken its annual budget consultations to seek Manitobans' input on how taxpayers' dollars should be managed best to meet their needs. Heeding the wishes of all Manitobans, our government has frozen the major tax rates for a record

11 years and has introduced targeted tax reductions and incentives to create jobs. Hard work has eliminated the deficit, and our balanced budget act has assured Manitobans that we will continue to manage their tax dollars wisely.

This year our government is doubling our debt payments from \$75 million to \$150 million, which will provide untold benefits to our economy. We have reduced overlap and duplication, and Manitobans now have the lowest cost of government in Canada. If you will notice the benefits by reducing our debt even from since 1992, we have lowered our interest payments by about \$85 million. This is \$85 million that we can spend on other programs, such as health care, education, family services and highways, and improve the services to Manitobans.

So the rewards of this hard work and the careful planning are evident in Manitoba's robust economy. Manitoba leads the nation in job growth. Over 15,000 new jobs created in 1997 alone, driving our unemployment rate to its lowest in 16 years. The province's economic growth is the second best in Canada, with impressive gains in the private investment sector, manufacturing, retail sales. Sound fiscal management and targeted tax cuts to create jobs have been successful, and undoubtedly we will continue to enjoy strong job creation in 1998.

Manitoba's budgets are prepared in such a way as to help our province remain competitive. Our budgets consistently support more job creations, enhance our standard of living and show our young people that they can look forward to a prosperous life with good expectations for employment right here at home. For example, this budget saw the payroll tax rate cut to 2.15 percent. About 95 percent of all the Manitoba businesses are already exempt from this tax; however, the larger companies are still—but this reduction will certainly help the larger companies. The corporate capital tax exemption increased to \$5 million. Initiatives such as these show our ongoing commitment to encouraging economic growth in Manitoba and to create a climate where all Manitobans have opportunities to share in our renewed economy.

So, as our economy continues to grow at a strong and sustainable pace, our stable tax structure will provide

the resources needed for high quality services. As our government continues on a path of careful management and strong economic growth, our budget surpluses will allow us more financial flexibility to create more jobs and continue to protect our vital services, our vital social programs.

By repaying the accumulated debt, we are giving the leaders of tomorrow the opportunity to shape the destiny of Manitoba in the way that they choose. I think it is also important for me to take a few minutes to address but a few of the programs that our government uses to help encourage growth throughout the economy. For example, the Manitoba government has committed \$3.4 million to support the Agri-Food Research and Development Initiative, and this should make a substantial contribution to the long-term future of agriculture in this province.

One of the problems in agriculture that we have today is some of the diseases, such as fusarium. Hopefully, this extra money in the agri-food research budget can help universities and companies work together to try to come up with varieties that will improve the production capabilities, will make them resistant to some of the diseases that we have today, such as fusarium and sclerotinia in canola and things of that nature. This will not only help mainly the people in the Red River Valley or the farmers in the Red River Valley, who have suffered from this in the last number of years from the damage from diseases, but it has spread out from the Red River Valley and is a factor in all of Manitoba. So the new research certainly I hope will come up with new varieties to make the life of a farmer a lot easier.

In addition, our government remains strongly committed to our municipalities, and we have maintained funding at a time when most other provincial jurisdictions are reducing their transfer payments to municipalities. Our government continues to support programs such as the Rural Economic Development Initiative, REDI, the Community Works Program, and the Business Start Program. By continuing to develop ways for Manitoba businesses to tap into some of these local sources of capital, the government can help these business reach their full job creation potential and in turn encourage growth in rural Manitoba.

The Rural Economic Development Initiative, REDI, is a particularly valuable program for rural Manitoba. This program is designed to encourage rural economic development and diversification. The program is intended to provide a boost to the local and provincial economy while establishing a foundation for sustained growth and further development in rural Manitoba. It too has been a great success story for Manitoba.

Another program that has enjoyed continued success is the Community Works Loan Program. This is a community-driven initiative assisting economic development and job creation in rural Manitoba. The Community Works Loan Program provides the capital necessary to support some local business start-ups and expansions and gives the rural municipality a direct role in sustaining its future, based on the opportunities that it has identified.

Throughout the years the Manitoba Industrial Opportunities Program has also been a beneficial program. It provides loans and other financial incentives to businesses wishing to create new jobs by expanding or upgrading their Manitoba operations. This program continues to provide loans with terms conditional on firms meeting their job creation commitments.

The program has also been instrumental in helping Manitoba-based firms expand in Manitoba. As an example, Isobord Enterprises, which is in a construction of a \$142-million composite board plant in Elie is just one example of this program's success. Hundreds and hundreds of jobs have been created by business assisted through the Manitoba Industrial Opportunities Program.

Anyone that has driven west on the Trans-Canada Highway through the Elie area has seen the stacked straw there and can see that Isobord construction is going quite well and, hopefully, they will open for business this coming year. That will be a benefit to all farmers from a wide area, not only because of the benefits that we are going to have in the jobs and in the construction, but also they are using a renewable resource such as straw and helping our environment to making Manitoba a more environmentally friendly place to live. So it has got many benefits that we can

certainly see and hope they will—we want to wish them success there at Isobord.

* (1740)

Every dollar that the government spends generates more than \$3 in direct tax revenue that they spend in the Manitoba Industrial Opportunities Program. Through programs such as these the provincial government remains dedicated to helping businesses and communities strengthen the health of the Manitoba economy. Furthermore, our fiscal and structural reforms encourage firms to expand and to locate in this province, and we remain committed to making funding available for the economic development initiatives.

People in the Gimli constituency also have made it clear to me that they want a government that will direct this province on a steady and responsible course and promote a stronger economy. They want our government to create and implement responsible and sound fiscal policies. They want to see the prudent readjustment of our health care.

An Honourable Member: We have done so despite Becky's objections—

Mr. Helwer: That is right. Despite the strain from the federal cutbacks and one thing or another, they want a government that helps support our families which tend to the needs of our growing older population. They also want an educational system that will prepare our children for the next century and put them on an equal footing, equal to and better than most other provinces.

In all these areas our government has and continues to deliver. We will continue to listen to Manitobans and respond to their changing needs. The budget speech, which is a blueprint of our government's policy, restated our commitment to strong economic growth, job creation, an excellence in education, while protecting the vital and social services and the safe communities that we all want to enjoy, allow us to make Manitoba a better place to live, so I want to thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to add my comments to this budget.

I am sure this province can look forward to many, many more successful years and good budgets from our

Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson). Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Ms. MaryAnn Mihychuk (St. James): Madam Speaker, you know the budget is a very important document as we all know, that it lays out the financial framework for the government. It tells a tale of the government's priorities, its plans for the future and presumably its vision.

In fact in my opinion it is probably even more significant than the throne speech. The throne speech, especially the last one, was quite full of rhetoric and short of content. It talked about a commitment to aboriginal peoples. It talked about children. It talked about the need to invest in health care, stimulated economic activities.

Madam Speaker, the truth lies in the budget even though we have seen some manipulation of the money, how it is presented, what is a surplus, what is not, what is a deficit, whether there is new money or not new money, and these things we will debate, but the story that this budget presents to Manitobans is one of a government that has no plan. It had a clear direction in '95, in '96 when its intent was to reduce government.

There was a clear commitment on behalf of all members on the other side to reducing programming, to being rid of Crown corporations and to eliminating programs. Now we see a change in our financial situation that we are all proud of and we can all share in that accomplishment, but this budget does not, in my opinion, take into effect the new reality, a new vision for Manitobans. That is why I believe that this is a government that has come to its end, that has lacked steam and lacks vision and indeed has no vision for the future at all.

Madam Speaker, there is a reality that the Minister of Finance tries to present to Manitobans, but let us not be fooled, and they are not. Manitobans are not fooled. Today we had members of families concerned about the situation at St. Boniface Hospital. When we went there, was the situation relieved? Eleven people in gurneys on stretchers in the hallway. Is it possible to receive good care? I do not think so. The Minister of Health—I mean the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Enns) recently had an incident, a health crisis of his own. He

knows how important good care is, how important it is to have privacy. I am sure that he can understand how this is completely intolerable to have these individuals in the hallway lined up.

Now, the fact is that this government just this week, the day of the budget, announced the closure of a hospital, Madam Speaker. This is not a new life for the Misericordia Hospital; it is the closure of a city hospital—a first, the major hospital, an institution that served my riding, that served the member for Wellington (Ms. Barrett), that served the member for Wolseley (Ms. Friesen), the inner city, the whole core. The member for River Heights' (Mr. Radcliffe) hospital was shut down unilaterally, without consultation by this government, and they have the nerve to suggest they have a plan. Their plan is to go in a knee-jerk reactionary approach. They are going to curtail elective surgery. That will solve the problem. Wrong. It did not solve the problem. Why? Because there was no plan. You closed the Odd Fellows home without thinking of the future.

Are you going to need those beds? Could you phase it out so that you could move people and allow the space so that individuals are not in the hallways? Manitobans do not want that. Members on that side should realize that planning is necessary, and we have not seen it in the area of health for many, many years, so I think that the reality rings through to people. When they look at their families, they know what is coming; that your possibility of having decent care, with nursing staff, is probably unlikely under this government's rule. I mean, the nurses do a marvellous job. They are run off their feet, Madam Speaker, as we know. Why? Because this government has decided that we had too many—1,500 nursing staff gone. We did not need them, and here we had ambulances circling around, looking for a place to bring patients. This government decides it is going to close an emergency ward, close a whole hospital now when we have a crisis daily in health care—no vision, no planning.

What else is the reality that we people know and live on a daily basis? Aboriginal unemployment skyrocketing to approximately 90 percent; property values in the inner city—and this is particularly relevant in my riding—many property values are dropping dramatically because of a lack of vision for the city of

Winnipeg. There is no urban planning. There is no vision by this government to aid in the development of our Capital Region. In fact, there is the outright refusal by this government and actually taking measures to what would basically betray the city of Winnipeg, saying that Headingley will get expansion, certain business developers will be guaranteed development for what, and who is the loser? The city of Winnipeg residents. Property values dropping dramatically in the core, in the heart of our city, in the older parts of our city.

The member for Wolseley (Ms. Friesen) talks about a residence on Toronto Street—it actually separates our two ridings—that actually sold for \$10,000. That is unacceptable, I think, for a piece of property in the heart of our city, and that has dropped from the value of \$30,000 or \$40,000 over a very short period of time. That not only affects that individual family, but affects the assessment value that is applicable when school divisions, for instance, look at taxation, which they have had to rely on more and more because of the government's underfunding. But they have been seriously eroding property values in the heart of the city, and I think that it is clearly because of the lack of vision by this government.

* (1750)

Infrastructure in Winnipeg is probably one of the worst, in the worst condition of any city in Canada, at least one of the worst. The commitment by this government to looking at infrastructure has been quite minimal, Madam Speaker. I would even say pathetic.

In this budget they trumpet that they are putting \$10 million for infrastructure on roads, highways. Let us not be fooled. Ten million is being pulled out of the infrastructure program, so actually there is no difference. Your commitment to roads is zero.

Go into the classroom. Are children benefiting from this government's prosperity? They do not have textbooks. We have many examples where children are doing without proper services; they are perhaps learning handicapped; they need extra help; it is not available; those that are gifted are not provided with programming. Infrastructure in schools is deplorable, a crisis in our schools. We have an example where in

one school that the window actually fell into the classroom. It had rotted to the point where there was no frame.

The amount of money that this government has decided is appropriate for the so-called renewal of schools does not even come close to what has been invested on an annual basis in the past. So it is a very minimal attempt and will not come anywhere near meeting the needs of those children and meeting the needs of a public school system which has been left to neglect over the last nine years.

Madam Speaker, not only is the infrastructure of the buildings themselves crumbling and eroding and not receiving the proper care they should have, our children are being transported in school buses that are quite old in many cases. We have an older fleet that was the responsibility of this government which has turned over its responsibility—turned its back on its responsibility, in my opinion—and forced school divisions to do what? They are underfunded already, and now they are stuck with the additional burden of trying to replace these school buses.

Well, I think that more courage would have been needed. If the minister has the intention to say to Manitobans, we do not want to transport your children anymore, you find your own way to get your kids to school because we are not doing this anymore, that would have been a lot more honest than her program as it is now which is to underfund, underfund and force school divisions to look at other options which will in the long run ensure that our buses are older, require more maintenance, and if we go into leasing options, cost Manitobans much, much more money than an outright replacement of buses.

What other situations do we see as a reality? Property taxes, which are levied by the civic governments and school boards, going through the roof, increasing and increasing as school divisions are being forced to look to other alternatives because of underfunding by the government.

Now the 2 percent increase, 2.2 percent that the government did see to pass on to school divisions was very needed, and they must be commended for that. It is a small step forward. Years and years of

underfunding, however, does not come near the needs of public school divisions; and rural divisions, we are hearing, are extremely hard hit and are not being able to cope with the funding levels by this government.

What else? Manitobans will also see at the end of the day their tax bill rising again. This includes income tax, the PST and property taxes as well as increasing fees on just about anything that has to do with government are going up. Our public housing stock is deteriorating, and actually this is a department that saw a significant cut in this budget, another very unfortunate decision. Child poverty, unacceptably high. Many of our children, facing very unfortunate circumstances, are not being able to be fed properly, housed properly or clothed. Many schools are now food and clothing banks for children and families. That is not the social responsibility of a school. It should be of this government.

Food bank uses are at all-time highs. Gang membership has grown from 400 to 1,400 members in only three years. We now have home invasions and soaring car thefts, and all of this the government will, in their budget, suggest is good and a rosy picture for Manitobans. They know better, we know better, and that is an example of the lack of vision by this government and how they, indeed, try to fool Manitobans by presenting a one-sided picture.

There is a huge shell game as we present it in terms of how much money is being invested in health. This government, to its credit, did put more money in health. As far I am understand, \$97 million was invested in health care in a special warrant last year and it is obviously very needed. Is it sufficient? Well, apparently not with people lined up in the hallways or driving around in ambulances getting care. There is not new money. What you have done, in fact, is continued that investment. Is that enough? We do not believe so.

Capital costs, capital investment to schools, as I have said, has been woefully inadequate. We have seen many roofs, for example, that exceed 50 years, exceed the expected life expectancy of the roof, then have indeed collapsed causing damage not only to the roof, causing further administrative costs, which this government seems to be very fond of. In fact we just heard the health authorities are hiring 60 new

administrators. Perhaps it would be wiser spent providing care for those people that are in the hallway.

The priorities of this government are so out of wack, they have decided that spending \$55 million to double the size of the casinos is more important than finding beds, which seems to be a big problem for the Minister of Health (Mr. Praznik), finding beds for people who are ill, and Manitobans, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) says he listened to Manitobans. Health care was the No.1 issue. Well, find some beds, invest the money, maybe those people should go to the casino. They are a very nice place. In fact, it is so opulent, and after the expansion I am sure it will be even more grand and opulent and there will be vast space and valets to park to your cars, oh to park the ambulances. Indeed, perhaps this is the emergency vision for health care, \$55 million committed with not a blink.

The Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) is very quick to make fiscal decisions in terms of lotteries. He has decided that this expansion is warranted, that this is more important than expanding personal care home beds. No, we are going to have roulette tables. We are going to have more spacious casinos.

Well, we have seen over and over again that this government's priorities are not in sync with the people of Manitoba and, indeed, are not in sync with the vision that Manitoban's have.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for St. James (Ms. Mihychuk) will have 23 minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, March 10, 1998

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