

Second Session - Thirty-Eighth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

Official Report
(Hansard)

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

Vol. LV No. 26 - 10 a.m., Friday, April 23, 2004

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Eighth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
AGLUGUB, Cris	The Maples	N.D.P.
ALLAN, Nancy, Hon.	St. Vital	N.D.P.
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	N.D.P.
BRICK, Marilyn	St. Norbert	N.D.P.
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CUMMINGS, Glen	Ste. Rose	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard	Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary, Hon.	Concordia	N.D.P.
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	P.C.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	P.C.
HAWRANIK, Gerald	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
HICKES, George, Hon.	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LATHLIN, Oscar, Hon.	The Pas	N.D.P.
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	La Verendrye	N.D.P.
LOEWEN, John	Fort Whyte	P.C.
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MAGUIRE, Larry	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	N.D.P.
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McGIFFORD, Diane, Hon.	Lord Roberts	N.D.P.
MELNICK, Christine, Hon.	Riel	N.D.P.
MIHYCHUK, MaryAnn, Hon.	Minto	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	P.C.
MURRAY, Stuart	Kirkfield Park	P.C.
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	N.D.P.
OSWALD, Theresa	Seine River	N.D.P.
PENNER, Jack	Emerson	P.C.
REID, Daryl	Transcona	N.D.P.
REIMER, Jack	Southdale	P.C.
ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Rupertsland	N.D.P.
ROCAN, Denis	Carman	P.C.
RONDEAU, Jim, Hon.	Assiniboia	N.D.P.
ROWAT, Leanne	Minnedosa	P.C.
SALE, Tim, Hon.	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
SANTOS, Conrad	Wellington	N.D.P.
SCHELLENBERG, Harry	Rossmere	N.D.P.
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield	P.C.
SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	N.D.P.
SMITH, Scott, Hon.	Brandon West	N.D.P.
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	P.C.
STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon.	Dauphin-Roblin	N.D.P.
TAILLIEU, Mavis	Morris	P.C.
TWEED, Mervin	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, April 23, 2004

The House met at 10 a.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

Minimum Sitting Days for Legislative Assembly

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

The Manitoba Legislature sat for only 37 days in 2003.

Manitobans expect their Government to be accountable, and the number of sitting days has a direct impact on the issue of public accountability.

Manitobans expect their elected officials to be provided the opportunity to be able to hold the Government accountable.

The Legislative Assembly provides the best forum for all MLAs to debate and ask questions of the Government, and it is critical that all MLAs be provided the time needed in order for them to cover constituent and party duties.

Establishing a minimum number of sitting days could prevent the government of the day from limiting the rights of opposition members from being able to ask questions.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba to consider recognizing the need to sit for a minimum of 80 days in any given calendar year.

Signed by Angela Roach, Bob Roach and Anton Squeluk.

Mr. Speaker: In accordance with our Rule 132(6), when a petition is read it is deemed to be received by the House.

Highway 227

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

It is unacceptable for the residents of Manitoba to travel the unsafe gravel roads of Highway 227 in the constituencies of Lakeside and Portage la Prairie.

Inclement weather can make Highway 227 treacherous to all drivers.

Allowing better access to Highway 227 would ease the flow of traffic on the Trans-Canada Highway.

Residences along Highway 227 are not as accessible to emergency services due to the nature of the current condition of the roadway.

The condition of these gravel roads can cause serious damage to all vehicles which is unacceptable.

Residents of Manitoba deserve a better rural highway infrastructure.

We petition the Manitoba Legislative Assembly as follows:

To request that the Minister of Transportation and Government Services to consider having Highway 227 paved from the junction of highways 248 and 227 all the way to Highway 16, the Yellowhead route.

To request the Premier of Manitoba to consider supporting said initiatives to ensure the safety of Manitobans and all Canadians who travel along Manitoba highways.

Signed by Mark Fleury, Cathy Fleury, Dave Robertson and others.

Mr. Speaker: In accordance with our Rule 132(6), when a petition is read it is deemed to be received by the House.

Proposed PLA—Floodway

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba:

These are the reasons for this petition:

The Province of Manitoba has tabled legislation in the Legislature that may result in the \$660-million expansion of the Red River Floodway by the summer of 2005.

The Premier of Manitoba plans to subject all work related to the project to a Project Labour Agreement (PLA).

The proposed PLA would force all employees on the project to belong to a union.

Approximately 95 percent of heavy construction companies in Manitoba are currently non-unionized.

The Manitoba Heavy Construction Association has indicated that the forced unionization of all employees may increase the costs of the project by \$65 million.

* (10:05)

The chair of B.C.'s 2010 Construction Leaders Taskforce has stated, "Major industrial projects built under project labour agreements from the energy sector in Alberta to off-shore development on the East Coast have repeatedly incurred cost overruns, labour disruptions and delays."

Organizations including the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, the Manitoba Heavy Construction Association, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Merit Contractors Association of Manitoba, the Winnipeg Construction Association, the Construction Association of Rural Manitoba and the Canadian Construction Association have publicly opposed the Premier's plan to turn the floodway expansion project into a union-only worksite.

Manitobans deserve an open and fair competition that protects taxpayers from unnecessary costs and respect workers' democratic choice.

Manitobans support the right of any company, both union or non-union, to participate in the expansion of the Red River Floodway.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Premier of Manitoba to consider ending his Government's forced unionization plan of companies involved with the Red River Floodway expansion.

To request the Premier of Manitoba to consider entering into discussions with business, construction and labour groups to ensure any qualified company and worker, regardless of their union status, is afforded the opportunity to bid and work on the floodway expansion project.

Signed by Don Love, Jeanne Marion, Charles Tully and others.

Mr. Speaker: In accordance with our Rule 132(6), when a petition is read it is deemed to be received by the House.

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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The Premier of Manitoba plans to subject all work related to the project to a Project Labour Agreement, a PLA.

The proposed PLA would force all employees on the project to belong to a union.

Approximately 95 percent of heavy construction companies in Manitoba are currently non-unionized.

The Manitoba Heavy Construction Association has indicated that the forced unionization of all

employees may increase the cost of the project by \$65 million.

The chair of B.C.'s 2010 Construction Leaders Taskforce has stated, "Major industrial projects built under project labour agreements from the energy sector in Alberta to off-shore development on the East Coast have repeatedly incurred cost overruns, labour disruptions and delays."

Organizations including the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, the Manitoba Heavy Construction Association, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Merit Contractors Association of Manitoba, the Winnipeg Construction Association, the Construction Association of Rural Manitoba and the Canadian Construction Association have publicly opposed the Premier's plan to turn the floodway expansion project into a union-only worksite.

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To request the Premier of Manitoba to consider entering into discussions with business, construction and labour groups to ensure any qualified company and worker, regardless of their union status, is afforded the opportunity to bid and work on the floodway expansion project.

Signed by Gordon Kreutzer, Hagen Kosmolak, Doug Kreutzer and many others.

Mr. Speaker: In accordance with our Rule 132(6), when a petition is read it is deemed to be received by the House.

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

The Province of Manitoba has tabled legislation in the Legislature that may result in the \$660-million expansion of the Red River Floodway by the summer of 2005.

The Premier of Manitoba plans to subject all work related to the project to a Project Labour Agreement (PLA).

The proposed PLA would force all employees on the project to belong to a union.

Approximately 95 percent of the heavy construction companies in Manitoba are currently non-unionized.

The Manitoba Heavy Construction Association has indicated that the forced unionization of all employees may increase the costs of the project by \$65 million.

The chair of B.C.'s 2010 Construction Leaders Taskforce has stated, "Major industrial projects built under the project labour agreements from the energy sector in Alberta to off-shore development on the East Coast have repeatedly incurred cost overruns, labour disruptions and delays."

* (10:10)

Organizations including the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, the Manitoba Heavy Construction Association, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Merit Contractors Association of Manitoba, the Winnipeg Construction Association, the Construction Association of Rural Manitoba and the Canadian Construction Association have publicly opposed the Premier's plan to turn the floodway expansion project into a union-only worksite.

Manitobans deserve an open and fair competition that protects taxpayers from unnecessary costs and respects workers' democratic choice.

Manitobans support the right of any company, both union and non-union, to participate in the expansion of the Red River Floodway.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Premier of Manitoba to consider ending his Government's forced unionization plan of companies involved with the Red River Floodway expansion.

To request the Premier of Manitoba to consider entering into discussions with business, construction and labour groups to ensure any qualified company and worker, regardless of their union status, is afforded the opportunity to bid and work on the floodway expansion project.

Signed by D.L. Blight, G.J. Sloik and J.D. Vrooman and others, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: In accordance with our Rule 132(6), when a petition is read it is deemed to be received by the House.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Sports Emmy Awards

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism): Mr. Speaker, I have a statement for the House.

On Monday, April 19, 2004, the National Television Academy held its 25th Annual Sports Emmy Awards in New York City. The Sports Emmy Awards recognize outstanding achievement in sports television broadcasting.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to extend congratulations on behalf of all the honourable members to Mr. Dennis Tan, who has worked with Big Studios of Toronto as a member of their graphic team that won an Emmy for their work for ABC Sports on "Super Bowl XXXVII." In the world of television sports coverage, there is perhaps no greater stage than the Super Bowl. On this grand stage, only the finest technicians are given an opportunity to showcase their talent and ability.

Mr. Tan, the Winnipeg representative of the award-winning design team and his company, Systematic Design of Winnipeg, has produced design work for APTN, Global, TSN, ABC's "Monday Night Football" and the award-winning news magazine show "World News Tonight."

Mr. Tan began his career in broadcast design at Global here in Winnipeg in 1993. He started his own

business in 1999 and has garnered both gold and silver broadcast design awards for his design work.

Please join me in congratulating Mr. Tan for this achievement.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, I, too, would just like to put a few words on the record in regard to the National Television Academy and its 25th Annual Sports Emmy Awards in New York City, also to congratulate Mr. Tan for his work and to congratulate all of the fine technicians that we produce from here in Manitoba through Dennis Tan and his company, Systematic Design of Winnipeg.

* (10:15)

There are many fine people in the television and production industry and, having brought in the film credits in 1996-1997, we are certainly supportive of the broadcasting industry and again want to congratulate Mr. Tan for his achievement. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member have leave?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Speaker: No? Leave has been denied.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Victoria General Hospital Maternity Ward Closure

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the Premier is considering closing the maternity ward at the Victoria Hospital because the upgrades that are needed apparently are too costly. This, from a Premier who was going to spend some \$35 million on a hospital Laundromat and a hospital sandwich factory. He is choosing his ideology over choices and opportunities for moms and babies.

Prior to the election, this Premier promised that he would not close the Victoria maternity ward. He would not close that hospital maternity ward. That is what he said. Will he stand by his word that a

promise made is a promise kept, or is this going to be another, "Well, that is what I said, but this is really what I meant," Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): I know the members opposite believe in a soiled-sheet strategy and did not want to replace the almost hundred-year-old laundry machines at hospitals, Mr. Speaker. God knows who they were going to give contracts to.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, there is a report that recommends changes at Victoria Hospital maternity ward. There is a report that recommends against it. There is no decision made.

Mr. Murray: This Premier should be condemned for his actions, because what he is doing is limiting opportunities. He clearly has a long way to go before he understands and appreciates a true concept of providing opportunities and flexibilities for families and women.

If those words sound at all familiar, Mr. Speaker, it is because they were coming from the member from Minto. Prior to the election this Premier said that he would not close the maternity ward at the Victoria Hospital. His Health Minister said that no information that the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority could give him, no information would allow him to change his mind.

Would the Premier scrap his ridiculous plans to build a hospital Laundromat, to build a hospital sandwich factory, Mr. Speaker, and will he direct the funding to keep the hospital maternity ward at the Victoria Hospital open?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, we have an outside management report dealing with the Laundromat issue and proceeding in the most cost-effective way. Our option is not to leave the sheets soiled. Our option is not to ignore. The members opposite had a report in the early nineties on the laundry system, the hundred-year-old machines.

They put \$100 million into a SmartHealth system that was worth only \$3 million when he came into office. It is too bad they did not deal with the basics in health care: nurses, laundry, quality of services. There is no decision made on the Victoria Hospital.

Mr. Speaker, I know the member opposite reads off the second question before he hears the first answer. Last November he was running around saying oh, the NDP is not going to live under the balanced budget legislation. He is chasing these straw-person issues all the time, windmills. He is running around looking for these issues. There is no decision made.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, the Premier said before the election he would not close the maternity ward at Victoria Hospital. He said he would not close it. Now he is saying no decision has been made.

I would like to make a quote of what the Premier has said. He said, and I quote: Who is standing up for the babies? I cannot understand any political party that has as its philosophy that somebody under a year of age would be the hardest hit in a budget.

Those were the words of this Premier. His Budget is choosing a Laundromat and a hospital sandwich factory over moms and babies. We, on this side of the House, believe that moms and babies are important.

Why is it that this Premier will say one thing prior to an election campaign and then he will do exactly the opposite? This Premier cannot be trusted.

* (10:20)

Mr. Doer: As I said, we have two reports dealing with the maternity ward at Victoria Hospital. We have a responsibility to read the reports. There is no decision made to close the hospital maternity ward, as the member is alleging.

Mr. Speaker, we have chosen to rebuild our health care system. We have invested and we are investing money into the capital at Victoria Hospital. We want to make sure that the money is most cost effectively invested. We are not cutting the capital to Victoria Hospital. We are investing capital. Members opposite rejected the community-based capital proposal at Victoria Hospital. We have accepted the idea of the capital program. We have accepted a new capital investment at the Health Sciences Centre, something that was rejected for 11 straight years in a row by members opposite.

They put money into Connie Curran, not into the operating rooms of the Health Sciences Centre. Finally, Mr. Speaker, members opposite cut—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: Members opposite chose to cut money for the nutrition treatment of children and babies under social assistance. We chose to re-invest \$17 million into the child poverty clawback. They clawed back the benefits for babies and children. Shame on them, Mr. Speaker.

Victoria General Hospital Maternity Ward Closure

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): In October of 2002, this Minister of Health said that he would not close the maternity ward at the Victoria Hospital and that no amount of evidence produced by the WRHA would change his mind. How does this Minister of Health justify this flip-flop when, for the past few years, he has been absolutely adamant that he wanted a community option? Where is that a promise made is a promise kept?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, the WRHA commissioned a report on obstetrics that recommended that all obstetrics be combined at the St. Boniface and the Health Sciences Centre. At that time I said that we wanted a community option. If the member goes down to Victoria Hospital and looks now, there is a community option with respect to Victoria Hospital.

The second report was as a result of a baby death that occurred. I know no one died during member's term in office, but it was a baby death that occurred in 1997 or '96 at the Victoria Hospital. A baby died being delivered, and an inquest came out and made a recommendation. At the time, 1900 births were taking place at Victoria Hospital. Today, approximately 800.

Mrs. Driedger: In the past few years there have been occasions when the maternity beds at St. B and the Health Sciences Centre have been full. Also, now we hear the WRHA vice-president saying the maternity ward days are numbered at the Victoria Hospital.

* (10:25)

I would like to ask the Minister of Health: Where will the 900 moms who would normally deliver at the Victoria Hospital go if the maternity beds at the

Health Sciences Centre and St. B are full? How is the system going to safely accommodate those hundreds of moms?

Mr. Chomiak: One of the reasons there were 1900 births at Victoria Hospital during the time when the members were in office was that it was one of the few places that had LDRP suites. I do not know if the member is aware of it, but we put in LDRP suites at both Health Sciences Centre and St. Boniface Hospital to have the overall post- and pre-partum care to mothers, Mr. Speaker. I do not know if the member has been down to either Health Sciences Centre or St. Boniface Hospital lately, but we have put in LDRP units to provide that kind of care at both of those centres.

Mrs. Driedger: His answer to the question really does not solve any of this problem. There are occasions when the maternity beds at St. B and Health Sciences are full and the maternity ward at the Victoria Hospital has been a safety valve in the system.

I would like to ask the Minister of Health: Where is the safety valve now? Will he guarantee that moms and babies will not be put at risk when he closes the maternity ward at the Victoria Hospital?

Mr. Chomiak: Low-risk and medium-risk births take place at Victoria Hospital. Mr. Speaker, higher-risk births take place at Health Sciences and St. Boniface Hospital. We have put in place LDRPs at Health Sciences and St. Boniface Hospital.

An inquest report about a baby death that occurred at Victoria Hospital in 1996, Mr. Speaker, recommended a whole series of expansions to Victoria Hospital based on the fact that at that time there were 1900 births at Victoria Hospital. Presently, there are about 800 births per year at Victoria Hospital that have occurred since the time the inquest took place. Since that time, there are LDRP units at HSC and St. Boniface Hospital. I know they want to play politics with it, but we are looking at evidence. We are looking at science. We are looking at what is best for the entire health care system of Manitoba.

Victoria General Hospital Maternity Ward Closure

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Three months ago my son, Thomas, was born at St. Boniface

Hospital. At that time, Mr. Speaker, the maternity ward at St. Boniface Hospital was absolutely full. If one more woman had shown up who was in labour at that time, she would have been turned away.

My question for the Minister of Health is: Where will women in labour go when the St. Boniface and Health Sciences Centre hospital maternity wards are full if he is to close down the maternity ward at Victoria Hospital?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): First off, the member is raising a hypothetical. Secondly, Mr. Speaker,—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Chomiak: The last time that an obstetrics or maternity ward was closed in this province, I believe it was at Grace Hospital, and it was done by members opposite. Since then, LDRP units have been put at HSC and St. Boniface Hospital to provide for capacity in the system.

As I indicated earlier, there are conflicting reports. I wanted to indicate as well, Mr. Speaker, that the health care system is an ever-changing system that changes every single day. We are putting in additional resources at Victoria Hospital, something that was never done during the long 11 lean years of Tory misrule in this province.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, the Premier (Mr. Doer) said, and I quote: "A promise made is a promise kept." The Minister of Health said, and I quote: "It is not our policy to close obstetrics at Victoria." He went on to say that no amount of evidence produced by the WRHA will change his mind.

Will the Minister of Health stand by his words and ensure that women who are in labour will be able to continue to have services at the Victoria Hospital?

Mr. Chomiak: First off, I do not think I need to take advice from a political party that closed 1400 beds, which amounts to about four Victoria Hospitals, during the course of their tenure.

* (10:30)

Secondly, any mom that wants to go down to Victoria Hospital now to deliver in the post-partum

room can do so, can do so at HSC and St. Boniface Hospital. In addition, Mr. Speaker, we have introduced midwifery, where women have a choice for midwifery as well, in a variety of settings, something that never happened during the 11 lean years of cutbacks under the previous regime.

Mrs. Stefanson: This Minister of Health refuses to answer the question that is being asked. It is very, very simple, very clear. Where will women who are in labour be able to go to have their children if he closes the maternity ward at the Victoria Hospital?

Mr. Chomiak: If the Victoria obstetrics is closed, if the decision were made to close the Victoria obstetrics, if that decision were made, it would only be closed if there was a place and capacity in the system to provide the related services.

We will not do what happened during the 1990s. If a particular ward was to close, we will not close and just totally throw away the beds. I might add this is totally a hypothetical situation. The member opposite chose to have her baby at St. Boniface Hospital. She could have chosen, I suppose, to have it at Victoria, she could have chosen HSC. She did that several months ago, she could do that today, Mr. Speaker, or tomorrow if she so wishes.

Victoria General Hospital Maternity Ward Closure

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): Mr. Speaker, this is not a hypothetical situation. A promise made is a promise kept. We are simply asking the minister to stand up in the House today and live up to the promise he made before the election, not his waffling after the election.

This is the fastest-growing area in Winnipeg. There are young families flooding into that area having babies. They want community services. They want the services you promised. You promised before the election that you would keep the maternity ward open no matter what. Now, you stand up today and confirm your promise. A promise made is a promise kept.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Government House Leader, on a point of order.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Reluctantly, I rise on a point of order. There are concerns about decorum in this institution as much today as in the recent past. One of the concerns that I raise is when members opposite do not direct their questions through the Speaker. That is a time-honoured tradition, Mr. Speaker, in order to stop the personalities at work here in this House and denigrate the institution.

Would you please remind the members opposite that questions should be directed to the Speaker and words like "you" are not helpful for debate.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Fort Whyte, on the same point of order.

Mr. Loewen: Same point of order, Mr. Speaker. I do want to say, I mean, I realize sometimes in the House these issues get very, very emotional. This is a very emotional issue for the people in my constituency, the only constituency in Manitoba that does not have a high school, and now he is threatening to close the maternity ward.

So, Mr. Speaker, I will redirect the question through you, and I apologize if I did not follow decorum. I would ask the minister to confirm to you that he is going to live up to his promise to keep that maternity ward open.

Mr. Speaker: Order. When a point of order is raised, the Speaker has to deal with the point of order first. The question had already been put anyway.

The point of order raised by the honourable Government House Leader, he does have a point of order. All questions and debates should be put through the Speaker, so I would ask all honourable members for their co-operation in questions and answers, that they do it through the Chair.

* * *

Mr. Chomiak: As I indicated, the number of births at Victoria Hospital has declined in half since the time the inquest occurred, in terms of the particular circumstances in 1997. It also calls for enhanced capacity, enhanced staffing and an enhanced role at Victoria Hospital. That is what the inquest that investigated the situation concluded.

Mr. Speaker, if an inquest report came in and we did not look at the recommendations, members opposite would jump up and criticize us for not looking at the recommendations in the report. All we are simply saying is that we have an inquest report. We have a report from the WRHA, and as I indicated to the media the other day, I have asked the WRHA to look at the implications of an inquest report.

Mr. Loewen: We have heard from the minister of housing that they are going to build a city the size of Brandon in Waverley West, less than a mile from this hospital. It is going to be flooded with new families, and this minister is threatening to close the maternity ward. Before the election, he promised to keep it open. The member from Fort Garry promised to keep it open; the member from Seine River promised to keep it open; the member from Riel promised to keep it open.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Minister of Health: Did he seek any advice from these people before he decided to renege on his promise to keep that maternity ward open?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, we take advice [*interjection*]

I thought if members were concerned they would want to listen to the answer.

An Honourable Member: Is there one?

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Chomiak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We take advice from families, from pediatricians, from doctors, from experts, from clinical people in the system. We take advice from a review that was done by experts with regard to this. Most of all, we take advice from an inquest that was held in regard to a situation at Victoria Hospital, and we look at recommendations in that regard.

We will not do what members opposite did. Mr. Speaker, that is holus-bolus go out and shut down entire programs and systems, and do things like lay off over a thousand nurses. In fact, we have hired close to 879 nurses since we have been in office.

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, the minister is taking his advice from Deloitte & Touche. Why does he not take his advice from the constituents in Fort Garry, the constituents in Seine River, the constituents in St. Norbert, the constituents in Fort Whyte?

Why does this minister not live up to his promise that he made before the election, that these members ran on, that he would ensure that the maternity ward at the Victoria Hospital stayed open? We are simply asking him today to stand up in this House and reaffirm the promise he made before the election. I would remind him that a promise made is a promise kept. That comes from his leader. Will he stand up today and affirm that promise?

Mr. Chomiak: As that region has expanded in terms of population, the number of births at Victoria Hospital has fallen by 50 percent. Mr. Speaker, the region has expanded, but the number of births in that region at that hospital has fallen by 50 percent. Moms and families have moved to HSC and St. Boniface, I suspect because of the LDRP Program and the resources that are put in place.

I remind the member that people do make choices, situations do change. Having said that, we have reports and have asked the WRHA to look at the situation. All morning, as usual, the members have dealt with hypothetical situations. They have tried to play around with politics. We are interested in dealing with the health care system and improving the health care system and improving it for all Manitobans.

Victoria General Hospital Maternity Ward Closure

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): My question is for the Minister of Health. The Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and Jan Currie indicated before the election that births were declining at the Victoria Hospital. The Minister of Health at that time said, and he made his intentions very clear, "It is not our policy to close the obstetrics at Victoria Hospital."

He knew at the time births were decreasing, but he made a promise and a commitment.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier (Mr. Doer) has said on many occasions that a promise made is a promise kept. Why is he flip-flopping today?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I do not know. The member, I think, was a member of Cabinet when the inquest was commissioned by their Justice Minister into the baby death that occurred at Victoria Hospital during the time when she was Minister of Family Services. An

inquest was undertaken about a situation at Victoria Hospital. At that time, recommendations were made with respect to Victoria Hospital by the judge presiding at the inquest that dealt with 1900 births at Victoria Hospital. Today, there are 800 births at Victoria Hospital vis-à-vis the report of an inquest done during the time when the member was in office. I just want the member to realize that the facts and situations are evolving, and the member would be the first to criticize if we did not look at the inquest.

* (10:40)

Mrs. Mitchelson: My question for the Minister of Health is very simple. Given that his Premier has said time and time again that a promise made is a promise kept, Mr. Speaker, a very clear, simple question. The minister said, and I quote, "It is not our policy to close the obstetrics at Victoria." Has his policy changed?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, no.

Mrs. Mitchelson: My final supplementary to the Minister of Health is: Has he, Mr. Speaker, continued to support the Member for St. Norbert (Ms. Brick), the Member for Fort Garry (Ms. Irvin-Ross), the Member for Seine River (Ms. Oswald) and the Member for Riel (Ms. Melnick)? Has he articulated clearly to them that Victoria Hospital will remain open? Have they raised any concerns with him, and has he indicated to them clearly that the maternity ward of Victoria will stay open?

Mr. Chomiak: As I have indicated, Mr. Speaker, we want a community option for women with respect to maternity. We have an inquest report and we have an expansion.

Are members opposite questioning the fact that we are expanding services at Victoria Hospital, even though they did not approve it and had the same plans on their desk year after year after year after year? In fact, we are not closing Victoria Hospital. We are expanding and enhancing services at Victoria Hospital. That is going to continue in the interest of all Manitobans.

Victoria General Hospital Maternity Ward Closure

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, we have just heard the Minister

of Health, when asked by the member from River East if this minister's policy has changed; in other words will he live up to what he indicated; that is, that no information from the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority will change his mind and that the maternity ward at Victoria Hospital will not close?

The Premier (Mr. Doer) has said that he will not close the maternity ward at the Victoria General Hospital. The question is very clear. If that is the case, then stand today and send the signal to the Victoria General Hospital, to mothers and babies, that you are not going to close the maternity ward at the Victoria General Hospital in Winnipeg.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): A report came out to the WRHA that recommended, because there are LDRPs at St. Boniface and Health Sciences Centre, that the Victoria Hospital maternity ward, because of declining births and the fact that most parents were choosing to go to HSC and St. Boniface, that the ward should be closed, Mr. Speaker.

I indicated, and I still indicate, it is government policy that we would like and we want a community option for moms. Since that time, an inquest report has come out that assessed the situation at Victoria Hospital. An inquest report came out with recommendations that dealt with the Victoria Hospital birth situation of 1800 to 1900 births. There are now 800 births at Victoria Hospital. People are choosing, even though there is expanding population, to go to St. Boniface and Health Sciences Centre.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier of the province of Manitoba. The Premier has stated very clearly that he would not close the maternity ward at Victoria General Hospital. He stated that. That was his word. Now we ask the Minister of Health if his policy has somehow changed, because he, too, has said that no report that would be given to the Minister of Health would change his mind on closing the maternity ward of Victoria General Hospital.

My question to the Premier is very simple: Will he stand by his word and not close the maternity ward, or is he going to flip-flop as we have heard all week?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, as we re-invested and put LDRP rooms in at St. Boniface Hospital, as we

re-invested and put LDRP rooms at Health Sciences Centre, as we re-invested and have gone up now to provide midwifery as an option, as we have maintained and continued the existence of Victoria Hospital, the number of overall births in Manitoba has declined.

Despite the fact that there are a number of factors in place, Mr. Speaker, the overall births have declined. People have chosen to have births in different fashions and in different locations. It has been our goal to maintain the widest variety of choice for Manitobans while providing the most safe and appropriate services. I think it is a slippery slope if we do not look at the advice of experts like inquests, et cetera, with respect to how we make our decisions.

Mr. Murray: Well, I will again try to get the Premier of the province of Manitoba to answer a question. All week it has been a very interesting time in this Legislature. This Premier said back in '99: Elect me. I will end hallway medicine in six months and \$15 million. That is what he said, Mr. Speaker.

Recently we have heard from this First Minister: "I was not elected to raise taxes." He brought in a budget, and what did he do? He raised taxes and user fees by over \$90 million.

This Premier has said that we are going to expand the floodway. He has indicated through his Minister of Water Stewardship (Mr. Ashton) that there will be a master labour agreement and there will be forced unionization and force workers who do not pay union dues to pay union dues.

Then this Premier says: "Well, that is not exactly the way it is." This Premier stands up and says: "We are going to make this Government more efficient by driving down administrative costs."

Then, in this Budget, what happens? Administrative costs go up. We are simply asking this Premier to stand by and live by the words that he said.

Will he stand today and tell Manitobans he will not close the maternity ward at the Victoria General Hospital?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Well, in the member's rant there were about 19 different issues that he raised, Mr. Speaker. Given yesterday the deficit of

research we saw from members opposite dealing with the Department of Education and the AFM, I knew the administrative lines—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The administrative and financial costs across the Government in this Budget went up .8 percent, less than 1 percent. If we take the general salary increase, the overall decrease in administrative financial costs is down net 1.7 percent.

You will see in this Budget there is more money for capital, including the Victoria Hospital. There is more money for capital, Mr. Speaker, including an MRI in Brandon. There is more money for capital at the Health Sciences Centre to deal with the critical needs. There is more capital for community-based clinics in northeast Winnipeg. We have more money for nurses and less money for administration. There is a deficit of research over there and the people of Manitoba know that.

Sewage Spills Notification

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Water Stewardship: The minister has talked of the importance of notification when there are sewage spills. Yet Mr. Jim Mosher, a highly respected and competent journalist with the *Interlake Spectator*, says: "When there was massive dumping of virtually untreated sewage directly into Lake Winnipeg first in July and August, 2003, and then again in February and March of this year, there was no public notification."

I ask the minister, as Mr. Mosher did in a recent editorial: Where was the timely warning about the municipality dumping virtually untreated sewage directly into the lake—that is, Lake Winnipeg—first in July and August 2003, and then again in February and March of this year?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Water Stewardship): I am certainly aware of the article, the editorial that the member is talking about. Indeed, in terms of previous events, there has been notification, but, Mr. Speaker, I have always taken the position that when concerns are raised not to assume anything and to

look at indeed whether there can be improvements in terms of that.

I certainly take the concerns that were raised in this editorial very seriously. In fact, we have the department reviewing all the facts, working with Conservation as well, because this is not strictly a matter that is within the area of Water Stewardship.

* (10:50)

As has been the case with other spills in the province, Mr. Speaker, we have identified there need to be improved procedures. In many cases, the notification actually will go to various officials, but I can indicate that we will be making some announcements as early as next week that we think will improve this generally.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, the headlines speak volumes: "Tainted effluent pumped into lake." "Who is guarding the lake?" "Lake stewards missing in action." Mr. Mosher says, "Environment," the provincial government, "was not—and has not been—keeping close tabs on what was—what is—going on. There were no daily tests, as such alarming results would demand; not even weekly tests."

Mosher says there was no timely warning. There was no timely action. I ask the Government's minister who is responsible for environmental notification and testing of sewage effluents and water quality to tell this Legislature why the Government has performed so poorly on this file.

Mr. Ashton: I want to indicate again that, as has been the case with other situations in the past, Mr. Speaker, we have asked the department, in fact we are also asking the other departments involved, to review the matters involved.

I want to indicate that, in terms of Lake Winnipeg specifically, we will be making a number of announcements next week. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, one of the areas that we are going to be looking very much at is going beyond the existing systems that are in place and working very much at source protection. I would remind the member opposite that we already have acted on probably the most significant impact in the last number of years with the City of Winnipeg waste water treatment system.

We referred it to the CEC. That had not been done for 10 years. We have adopted the licensing recommendation, and we already put in place cost sharing with the federal government and the City of Winnipeg. That shows we are concerned, Mr. Speaker, and will apply the same concern to these concerns as well.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I have talked to a grandmother whose grandchild swam on a public beach in Lake Winnipeg not far from the effluent discharge last summer at a time when effluent was being discharged into the lake. The grandmother, whose child had a severe rash as a result of this swim, she and many others are wondering why the minister is, as Jim Mosher says, "such a toothless tiger." Why was there no notification? Mr. Mosher is blunt. He likens the Manitoba government's efforts to that of a toothless tiger.

Why was there no warning? Why was there no action? Why was there no fine with such a massive spill? Why did the minister try to brush off all the problems last summer in the Gimli area as due to the seagulls?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, there is no question there are numerous challenges dealing with water quality right across the watershed and water quality in Lake Winnipeg.

I know that the member opposite was involved in a government that cut all the support for water and water treatment, but I want to say that I am really pleased with the lead minister for Manitoba now. He has agreed for the first time ever to have Ottawa, Manitoba and Winnipeg involved directly in a sewage treatment plant that we have never had in place before. It would have been great if we had it 10 years ago when the member opposite was on the Treasury benches.

I want to give credit where credit is due. I want to give credit to Mr. Alcock for agreeing to this priority. There is no question we have a long way to go. It would have been great if we started in 1993, but I am glad we are started today, Mr. Speaker.

Diagnostic Testing Rural Manitoba

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health. Rural

Manitobans are concerned about quality and access to health care. Could the minister please update the House on efforts the Government has made to improve access to diagnostic tests in rural areas and to invest in health facilities?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): I was honoured to be at another rural hospital where another CT scan was announced yesterday. Together with the Member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faurichou), where the CT scan was put in at Portage la Prairie that added to the CT scans that are in Steinbach, Selkirk, Dauphin, Boundary Trails, in The Pas and, Mr. Speaker, to add to the first MRI in Manitoba history to not only be outside of the city of Winnipeg but to be in rural Manitoba; to add to the hospital rebuilding plans that we have had at places like Beausejour, places like Swan River, places like Gimli, places like Steinbach and Boundary Trails. We are re-investing, Mr. Speaker, after the lean 11 years of Tory misrule in this province, another up to 18 CAT scans now in Manitoba, which is a stark contrast.

Victoria General Hospital Maternity Ward Closure

Mr. Jack Reimer (Southdale): We are well aware that the provincial government is in partnership with private developers for home development, not only in my constituency of Southdale in the Royalwood area, but also in the proposed new development in south St. Vital.

This, Mr. Speaker, is new homes, new families, growing families, families that most likely will still have young children and births. I want to ask the Minister of Health (Mr. Chomiak), why, at a time in this area where there is growth, there is potential for new families in those areas, he is closing the maternity ward at the Victoria Hospital. The people in that area want this to stay open.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): It is interesting, Mr. Speaker, because part of what we are doing in health care is wellness. Part of what we are doing in wellness is to develop more walking areas and trails, and other things. The kind of—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have had to reverse the policies of the member opposite who did not allow for proper protection of the walkways and the parkways in the Seine River area. So, when he talks about the whole issue of the south Royalwood development and south of there, he was negligent in protecting those banks of the Seine River. This minister and this Government are going forward with wellness as well as other issues in health care.

Mr. Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

* (11:00)

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Frontier Games

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): Mr. Speaker, Frontier School Division is the world's largest division, with 43 schools across the province. Thirty years ago Frontier School Division initiated Frontier Games. Frontier Games are a time for students from many schools across the division to get together, compete and meet one another.

Frontier Games were first held in 1974. The games were the brainchild of Mr. Dan Reagan. Mr. Reagan, a well-known educator and a former superintendent of the Frontier School Division, Area 4, and later Flin Flon, was then living in Norway House. It was his idea to bring students from all over the enormous division together for annual athletic competitions and camaraderie. Incidentally, the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers), the Minister of Healthy Living (Mr. Rondeau) and I, at one time or another, were teachers working for Mr. Reagan.

Mr. Speaker, the first Frontier Games committee helped to develop the basic idea and to plan the travel and accommodations. The first Games in 1974 involved 160 students and were held in Cranberry Portage. This year the games took place March 3, 4 and 5 and again in Cranberry Portage. These games were hosted by the Frontier Collegiate Institute and Cranberry Portage Elementary School. Over 350 athletes participated. Students from ages 12 to 15 competed in many events such as badminton, floor hockey, basketball, cross-country skiing, snowshoe racing, table tennis and trap setting.

This year's games began on Wednesday evening with an opening ceremony led by fancy shawl dancer, Olivia Caribou, and hoop dancers, Monica Soulier and Deven Wood, all of Frontier Collegiate. Boxer, Kent Brown, spoke to the young people about achieving goals.

Friday evening's awards banquet celebrated the successes of the games' athletes. Mr. Speaker, the Cormorant Lake School cheerleaders and the Rod Martin School square dancers provided the entertainment.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to convey a special thanks to this year's planning committee, especially Brian McMillan, Audrey Neufeld, Darren Cable and Wayne Knight. Thanks to all volunteers, staff, teachers, coaches, bus drivers, kitchen staff, maintenance workers and custodians who put in many hours of work to make this year's games a huge success.

Mr. Speaker, the good idea started 30 years ago by Mr. Dan Reagan has evolved into a proud tradition for northern Manitoba.

Volunteer Awards

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to pay tribute to some volunteers who received awards at the 21st Annual Volunteer Awards Dinner held on Wednesday at the Canad Inns Polo Park in Winnipeg.

Four individuals were honoured the other night from my constituency, Mr. Neil McDonald of Hamiota, Ms. Betty Nykyforak, who lives in Roblin now, Dennis Kowal of Rosburn and Ms. Ashley Larson of Erickson.

As part of the Lieutenant-Governor's Make A Difference Award, Neil McDonald was awarded from the Westman region in recognition of his commitment and volunteer efforts over the past 35 years. He has volunteered with over 30 arts, sports and cultural organizations in the Hamiota community.

Betty Nykyforak, a councillor from Roblin, received the Lieutenant-Governor's nod for the Parkland region in recognition of her contribution and leadership as a volunteer with many organizations in Roblin and the surrounding community.

The Premier's Volunteer Service Awards were also presented the other evening and Dennis Kowal was awarded the individual category for his work, leadership and volunteer contributions at the Rossburn Elementary School.

Ashley Larson was also awarded the RBC Financial Group Local Hero Award in recognition of her exemplary community commitment. Through poetry and writing, Ashley has brought forth many issues regarding the predicament of the agricultural community, such as the BSE crisis in all of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, with leave, I would like to table and read her poem which is entitled *A Tear of Lost Pride*.

It's something you read in a horror story, / A
type of disbelief. / One cow in Alberta causes, /
Farmers struggle for financial relief.

We can't go without mentioning, / The grass-
hoppers and the drought. / The days passed with
sleepless nights, / Looking for a way out.

Small farms already struggling, / Drew their
final straw. / The elderly prolong retirement, /
There, pride is the law.

The shortage of hay is brutal, / The cost even
worse. / I don't know many farmers, / with
change in their purse.

What the government needs to understand, / Is
the effect to the whole family. / Marriage vows
are broken, / Along with dreams of university.

However through this whole ordeal, / The bills
don't disappear. / Farmers debt grows and grows,
/ Along with their fear.

We look up to Parliament Hill, / Political is their
talk. / What they will soon realize, / Many
farmers are ready to walk.

Young farmers in rural areas, / Will leave and
seek other jobs. / Communities will suffer, / The
youth are leaving in giant mobs.

Our farm has been passed down through gener-
ations, / with much sentimental pride. / I can see
the despair and disappointment, / of my 80-year
old grandfather inside.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Racism. Stop It! Video Competition

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Congratulations to Veronica Zastre-Rupert, Jason Jimenez, Tyler Regan, Rochelle Guiboche and Michelle Asante of Shaughnessy Park School in the constituency of Burrows. They were one of ten teams across Canada which were recently honoured in Ottawa with national awards for the *Racism. Stop It!* video competition.

The *Racism. Stop It!* National Video Competition is an annual competition that is part of Canada's commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racism. These students competed with thousands of other students across the country to attain this achievement. The winning videos are shown nationally on television.

These students rose to the challenge, produced a short video called *What's Wrong With This Picture?* The video shows pictures of young persons from various ethnic backgrounds in different job positions such as doctor, constable, city councillor and principal. It then shows the same job position with the adult who is doing this job, all of whom are people of colour or Aboriginal people. It asks, "What's wrong with this picture?" then answers, "Nothing." The video finally finishes by revealing to the audience that a person should set no limits and should live their dreams.

This video demonstrates how they have not been hindered by limitations and have lived their dreams to achieve their potential. Mr. Speaker, this video and Shaughnessy Park School demonstrate that they are committed to standing against racism and fostering respect, equality and diversity through their leadership.

On Wednesday this week, I attended the annual multicultural event at Shaughnessy Park School at which the video was shown. I can verify that it is a terrific video with an important anti-racism message. Once again I commend all the students involved and their teacher, Mr. Mitch Rygiel.

Sexual Assault Awareness Campaign

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): I would like to rise today to join with health workers across the

province and law enforcement officials who are this week raising awareness of sexual assault, one of the most underreported crimes in North America.

The purpose of the campaign is to teach people how to protect themselves from being victims of sexual assault, what medical services are available after sexual assault and the role of the police. Based on comments shared by Lorraine Parrington, in an article recently, she is the co-ordinator of the sexual assault crises program at Klinik, that most victims of sexual assault are extremely reluctant to report the crime and only 8 percent to 10 percent call police.

The key message is that people's instincts are good and that we need people to come forward if they have been assaulted. Sexual assault occurs in Canada every six minutes and sexual assault includes everything from unwanted touching to forcing sexual intercourse. It is non-consensual sexual conduct, and it is also a crime of violence.

The public is invited to get more information at a sexual assault session today at Health Sciences Centre. There is an information booth. I encourage everybody to be aware of this and I encourage people to attend. Thank you.

Northeast Perimeter Highway Twinning

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): This week I had the pleasure of joining the Member for Rossmere (Mr. Schellenberg), the Member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar), the Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Lemieux), the RCMP, Reeve Phil Rebeck and Bruce Schmidt from East St. Paul and Reeve John Holland from Springfield to announce the start of the twinning of the northeast Perimeter Highway. Mr. Speaker, this past winter there were, unfortunately, motor vehicle accidents and loss of life, some perhaps attributable to the fact that the northeast Perimeter Highway was not twinned during its construction in 1996.

The functional design study was completed for this highway in 1988 and the first section construction was not completed until 1996, eight years later. It was unfortunate that it was not twinned at that time. Perhaps it would have saved these lives.

With our Government's announcement this week commencing the \$65-million project, the first \$5 million is committed to grading and base installation

for the new lanes, including preparation of the CPR overpass embankment. Twinning of the northeast Perimeter Highway is a part of our Government's progress and initiative to expand projects on our provincial highways, including the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway to the Saskatchewan border and twinning of Provincial Highway 59 south to Ile des Chêne. Every dollar invested in our highways and our transportation system enhances safety for the travelling public and economic opportunities for all Manitobans.

I would like to thank the Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Lemieux), the Member for Rossmere (Mr. Schellenberg), the Member for Radisson (Mr. Jha) and the Member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar) for joining us, Mr. Speaker, in this announcement this week. We are proud of our accomplishments of our Government on this initiative. Thank you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

ADJOURNED DEBATE

(Fifth Day of Debate)

Mr. Speaker: Resumed debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), and the proposed motion of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Murray) in amendment thereto, and the debate remains open.

* (11:10)

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): It is certainly a pleasure for me to rise today and put some comments on the record regarding the 2004 Manitoba Budget. Certainly, members will know that as a new member of the Legislature this is my first opportunity to speak to a budget in this Legislature. I am proud to do that on behalf of all the residents of the Steinbach constituency.

Let me begin, Mr. Speaker, by wanting to thank our leader, the Leader of the Official Opposition, for the comments he put regarding the Budget. I thought they were very appropriate. I know the Minister of Water Stewardship (Mr. Ashton) had some derogatory things to say about the length of the speech that the Leader of the Official Opposition put forward, but I had the opportunity to listen to the Minister of

Water Stewardship speak. I do not know that I have ever heard somebody say less and take more time to do it than the Minister of Water Stewardship.

In direct contrast to that was the Leader of the Official Opposition, who touched on so many significant issues related to the Budget. He talked about the fact that you needed to grow an economy, talked about a vision for health care, talked about a vision for education, and talked about living within one's financial means. So certainly I think the Leader of the Official Opposition, our leader, has done a tremendous job over the last number of months putting forward a different vision for Manitoba, putting forward a different alternative, one that relies on growth, one that rewards people for doing a good job, one that would go forward and create jobs for the entire economy.

I want to commend the Leader of the Official Opposition for those comments. I think that I will refer back to the comments that he made during his reply to the Budget from time to time in my own comments.

As I mentioned, and I think it is traditional, I would like to thank the many constituents within my own riding who have given me some input. Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity a little bit earlier in this year to put forward a survey to businesses throughout the Steinbach constituency and received back some tremendous response, lots of creative and innovative ideas from businesses within my area and from individual residents who came up with different ways and ideas in terms of growing the economy and disappointed to see that none of them were reflected in the current Government's Budget. None of them seemed to find the light of day there, but perhaps that is not surprising.

I know when I think about my particular region, which entails the city of Steinbach, the town of Niverville and the Rural Municipality of Hanover, it is a region of growth. I am happy to say that. I am sorry to say that it is one of the few areas of the province that are actually growing. It is the entrepreneurial spirit and the determination, the work ethic and the fact that we have many people of faith within our region who go forward and bring forward ideas and rely on themselves to grow an economy.

I know that if they relied on the government of the day to do those things for them it would never

happen. So I give credit where credit is due, and that is to the constituents, the residents of the Steinbach constituency and all the communities for ensuring that their region remains strong, that their region continues to grow and that it continues to prosper.

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to see some of the ministers opposite in my region from time to time to cut ribbons. I often say that they must be very happy for the Steinbach constituency, even though they are not necessarily electorally favoured in the region or successful. It is one place in the region they can actually go and cut a ribbon, because there are not many other places they can go and do that. It is one place they can point to where there is growth, and it is one place they can point to where things are happening. Unfortunately, I do not think there are many other places within the province where they can do that.

Certainly, the values of the riding are important, and I think they are reflected in the communities I represent. They are reflected in growth of the area, but they have not been reflected in this particular Budget, and that I think is concerning.

It will come as no surprise to members opposite, although perhaps I will alleviate the uncertainty to say that I will not be voting and supporting this particular Budget. I know that will disappoint many members opposite and come as a tremendous shock to them that I will be doing that. I will certainly lay out my case to the members in terms of why that will be.

Unlike some of the members on the other side, unfortunately, who will feel that they need to support the Budget simply because of ideology, I would like to lay out exactly the difficulties we have, as Manitobans, with this particular Budget, and why we will not be able to support it, or at least I will not be able to support it on this side of the House.

Certainly, when we looked through the different departments we noted the Department of Water Stewardship. Here is a particular department that is new to government and that certainly the Government trumpeted and put forward and feels this is going to be something innovative and creative. Some of my comments related to the department were that we need to see how things develop. Mr. Speaker, it is difficult, I think, to be opposed to something called Water Stewardship. Do you oppose something that,

on its surface, is intended to look after water? But you need to see how it develops and how it works.

Now we have seen, of course, that the administrative costs for the department are significantly higher than one would expect. There has not been a decrease in administrative costs in other departments that have been relieved of some of the duties that Water Stewardship has taken up, and it leads us to wonder why that has happened.

There are, of course, a lot of other things that I had difficulty with in terms of the department itself. We have been raising questions in this House, and Manitobans across the province have been raising questions regarding the forced unionization of the floodway workers. That is a concern that crosses ideology. It is not a concern that is contained to one particular party or one particular group of individuals. It is really a concern for all residents of Manitoba.

I think there are probably many members on the opposite side who have been hearing from their own constituents regarding this issue. Clearly, I do not think they will stand up and admit it here in the House today. Mr. Speaker, I do not think they will be doing it, and perhaps if there are members, like the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale), who says he has not heard from anybody, it might be because he is not talking to anybody. That would certainly be one explanation in terms of why he does not get that kind of feedback.

I think if you do not ask the question, sometimes you do not get the answer. Perhaps the member is living under a "do not ask, do not tell" policy within his own particular constituency, but I would encourage him to go out, because certainly if I would canvass the petitions that I have received back I am almost certain that I would have some that would be members or be residents of the Member for Burrows' constituency. I would be happy to share them with him if he wants to be in touch with those constituents whom, clearly, he is not in touch with on his own on this particular issue.

It is important to look at how the forced unionization of the floodway workers, how that reflects on Manitoba overall. This certainly reflects in terms of the economy. I am concerned that the reputation of Manitoba is hurt by this particular plan by the Government to force all workers on the floodway to

become members of a union. It is also, Mr. Speaker, certainly not an ideological argument, it is a democratic argument. It is one, I think, that resonates with people because they look at it as an issue of democracy, as an issue of taking away the rights of individuals.

Mr. Conrad Santos, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

It is difficult, when we talk about the floodway issue, not to relate back to something like Bill 44. It is still shocking, I think, for many residents in Manitoba when you tell them there was legislation brought in a few years ago, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that removed the right for workers to have a secret ballot. Many, many Manitobans simply cannot believe that within our own province and within a parliamentary system that values that type of approach with a secret ballot, that we have taken it away from workers.

Now the Government has, of course, gone one step further. Not only have they taken a right away, the right for a secret ballot, they have taken away any right at all for any kind of a democratic dialogue on this issue for those who are going to be involved in working on the floodway expansion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I certainly know the fact that the heavy construction industry in Manitoba is 95 percent non-unionized, that clearly is a concern for members opposite. I guess they have looked at different ways to correct where there is a difficulty, where they see is a problem. This is one way, I suppose, that they can do it without having to even go to any kind of a system. We do not even have the card system on something like this. We do not have the secret ballot anymore. Now we have government forcing it down the throats of workers and saying, "Well, you know, you are going to have to be unionized. We are going to make you be unionized, irrespective of what your own individual decisions were in your own companies."

I think that is important, because we are talking about companies that, to some extent, vary in size, whether they are very large corporations or smaller ones. Many of them of course are very home-based or are family construction companies, and they have made those decisions. Workers have made those decisions. That has been lost, I think, in some of the discussion that has taken place. This is not a union versus non-union fight. It is an issue of democracy,

an issue of respecting a democratic choice of workers.

You know, I have listened in the past to members opposite who stood up and tried to claim that they are the party of the workers, and here they turn away from the workers. Here they will not listen to what the workers have already decided within their own workplaces. I find that interesting. I find it somewhat hypocritical that, on one hand, a party can stand up and say that they are representing workers, that they are going to represent the democratic choice. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not know the history of the New Democratic Party, nor do I necessarily want to, but I certainly wonder where the word "democratic" came from within the party. I wonder where the word "democratic" developed within the party, because it certainly is not applying to this particular issue when it relates to workers.

* (11:20)

When are you going to stand up for actual workers in these companies who have decided on their own that they do not want to stand up and join the union? They have made that decision already, but that is clearly an irritant for the members opposite. They need to find a way to change it. They need to find a way to go in on their own and unionize an industry that, of its own volition, did not want to be unionized. Mr. Deputy Speaker, they found a backdoor way to do it, or they think they have found a backdoor way to do it, and I suspect that many of them are surprised at the reaction that has come from Manitobans. They should not be surprised, because I think within this province people value their democratic choice on union or non-unionization issues, and I think they are going to continue to see that backlash until they make the right decision and back off of that issue.

I am not sure who they are taking advice from. I have read some of the comments in the paper with some of the union bosses, who I know are close friends of some of the members opposite. One in particular said that he had never met a worker who did not want to pay union dues. It seems strange to me. Clearly, I have not met that individual. I worked in an industry that had a high level of unionization. The particular company that I worked in was not unionized, so he obviously never met me, because I would have told him that I was happy to be non-unionized and I was happy to be in the environment

that I was in, that I did not want to pay union dues. I have not met this individual, obviously, that he had not met anybody else. I suspect that is the kind of statement somebody makes off the cuff and they say it trying to make some kind of over-the-top point, but certainly it went over the top and I do not think that those are the kinds of people who the members opposite should be associating with.

I know also, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we have legislation before this House that deals with water stewardship in relation to a compensation bill. Certainly I want to give credit to the Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu) who has done a great deal of work on this particular issue and who has met with her constituents on a very regular basis to ensure that they are aware of this bill and that they are aware of their own ramifications. In some ways she is doing the job that the Government is not on this particular piece of legislation, and that is disappointing.

I had the opportunity to be at a community hall meeting just a few days ago where the floodway authority was putting forward a number of different issues and one of the issues was related to this compensation bill that the Government has put forward. I found it interesting, because they were going through their presentation, I was watching it very closely, and they were laying out the fact that the Government was now going to regulate and scheme compensation into this particular bill, and I was waiting for the part where the person who was bringing the presentation would make mention of the fact that there would be no judicial recourse for people who were unhappy with the decision.

We are now talking about a scheme that is going to come in, a regulated scheme, where individuals are going to be put into a government system where the Government has artificially flooded them out, and they are not going to have a choice. They are going to be regulated in terms of what the compensation will be. They are going to be regulated in terms of is there compensation at all.

I find that interesting, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because some of the members have tried to relate this to other schemes, their worth in government, Manitoba Public Insurance or Workers Compensation. They do not see a very clear distinction in law. They do not see a very clear distinction on the separation of those who are causing harm and those who are

making the decision on the harm that has been caused.

You know with Manitoba Public Insurance or with no-fault Autopac insurance we talk about two private entities, two private individuals who are operating their motor vehicles who get into an accident, and you have the government as a third-party entity step in and determine that there is going to be this scheme, this Autopac scheme. So, at the very least, they are a third party to the issue that is coming in. Also with Workers Compensation, of course, you have a worker and you have the employer who are involved in the particular dispute and you have Workers Compensation come in as this third party.

Well, what the compensation bill is looking to do, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is not have a third party, that has caused the harm, make a decision. It will be the government itself. The Government itself will be making the decision. The Government is going to be artificially flooding people who are south or north of the floodway, and then it is the Government who regulates the scheme to determine what compensation they get, if they get compensation, if they are eligible, or whether or not it was even artificial flooding.

So, when residents raise concerns, and they certainly did at the meeting that I was at in Howden, I can see why they have those concerns. The Minister of Water Stewardship (Mr. Ashton) should listen to those concerns regarding compensation. To artificially flood people out and then step in and say, well, you know, we are not going to allow you any kind of judicial recourse if you are not happy with your compensation or if you are not happy with the fact that you did not qualify at all, I think, has raised a number of concerns for residents.

It is interesting, because when I was at the meeting, and I will go back to the point that I started on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I was at the meeting, they are going through the presentation, they are laying out the fact about the compensation. Of course, you do not get any numbers because that will come with regulation, and you are laying out the fact that there is going to be this scheme in place that the people will have to go into. I was waiting to see the reaction of people in that hall when it was announced that there would not be any kind of judicial recourse, that there would not be any kind of opportunity if

you did not like the compensation or if you did not like the fact that you were not allowed to get into the program, or if the artificial funding was in dispute, that you would not be allowed to go to a third party, an independent arbitrator or a judge.

You know what happened? Nothing happened, because it never came up in the presentation. It was never raised in the presentation that there was a clause in the legislation that prevents government from getting acted upon, that isolates government, that puts a shield over government for their own actions of flooding people out of their homes or out of their businesses. I could not believe it. I was stunned that the New Democratic Party, you know the Minister of Water Stewardship (Mr. Ashton), used to stand up in this House and scream and wax eloquently and talk about democracy and talk about things like referendums, and you would think he considered himself the prince of democracy.

Well, today he is now the prince of hypocrisy, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because he will not stand up and tell people what is really in the legislation. It was completely omitted from the presentation. I find that astounding. I do not think we or the citizens who were in the hall that evening would ever have heard about the fact that the Government has isolated themselves from that, if it was not for the Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu), who stood up in that hall and told the residents for their information what was really happening with this legislation, that they would not have that independent arbitrator, they would not have that option to go to someone who was apart from the claim, somebody who was not responsible for the flooding.

I find it astounding that members sit on that side and call themselves the democratic party. Not only do they isolate themselves from those claims, they will not even tell people that they are going to be under that particular kind of scheme.

So I give full credit to the Member for Morris who deserves the credit for bringing it to the attention of people at that hall. I know, because I have worked in the caucus with her, that she is going to continue day after day to ensure the residents of her area are informed about what is happening in the legislation and informed about what really could happen with the particular government scheme.

I appreciate the fact that the Member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar) is applauding the Member for Morris. I appreciate that. I think that is a good first step. I would ask, though, of the Member for Selkirk, whose constituents, I know, have many of the same concerns, if he would go to his Cabinet, if he would go to the caucus and bring these concerns forward, and not just to kind of quietly clap here in the Legislature when it is raised on a morning, on a Friday.

Surely his constituents deserve better than that. Surely when there is a presentation made by an organization with government appointees that it would not be hidden, that it would not be something that was not discussed, unless there was an MLA there who was standing up for their particular constituents and bringing those concerns there.

I do not understand exactly how the New Democratic caucus operates. I feel sorry sometimes for the Member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff), who is forced to come forward on a daily basis and bring questions to his Cabinet, his caucus, because I suppose he does not have access to them and is not able to ask those questions in the context of a normal caucus meeting.

That is unfortunate, but certainly I know there are others in the province who also cannot get meetings with ministers. There are others in the province who cannot get answers from members opposite. So the Member for Interlake is not alone, I guess, within his own caucus, except that it, I guess, shows that once again the democratic part of the New Democratic Party is not there.

I would certainly lobby on behalf of the Member for Interlake so that he would have greater access to his caucus and he would not be forced to bring those concerns here because there was no other forum to meet with ministers.

* (11:30)

I would like to also talk a bit about the justice system. We had the opportunity over the last number of months to see what is going on. *[interjection]* Well, I hear the Member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar) saying that the Member for Interlake has the right to ask the question, and I certainly agree.

He has that democratic right. I would suggest, though, that if the Member for Interlake would take

an opportunity to look back at Hansard over the 1990s he would see that it was rare, it was a rare occasion where a member of the Government had to stand up and ask a question because there was a democratic dialogue in caucus.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there was the opportunity to meet with ministers. There was an opportunity to ask questions for constituents who wanted those questions asked, but today we see the Member for Interlake shut out of his own caucus, shut out of his own government.

He cannot even represent his constituents in the Government that he is in. It is shameful and it certainly is not democratic. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I appreciate the fact that the Member for Selkirk has raised this issue. *[interjection]*

Well, I know the Minister of Water Stewardship is trying to shout me down in the House. I will not let it happen, but I am glad that he has finally raised his voice on an issue now. I wonder where he was.

Of course, he was not at the meeting in Howden so he would not know that when they are talking about the compensation legislation that they are not telling residents they cannot go forward to a third-party judicial party if they are not happy with their claim, if they are not happy with the fact they have been shut out of the claim, if they are not happy with the fact on the ruling of artificial flooding.

No, it was not mentioned at all, and so the Minister of Water Stewardship, the former prince of democracy, now the prince of hypocrisy, who stands in this House, will not talk about that kind of a democratic issue.

I understand that the minister is sensitive about this issue. I guess he figured that this would kind of go sliding by, that maybe there would be nobody at these meetings who would raise the issue, but again I commend the Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu), who was at the meeting, who raised an issue that the Minister of Water Stewardship tried to slide under the carpet.

He did not want Manitobans to know, did not want anybody to hear about this particular issue. Well, the Member for Morris will not allow that to be silenced, will not allow the Minister of Water Stewardship (Mr. Ashton) to slide by with something

that is going to affect hundreds and thousands of Manitobans. I applaud her and I say shame on the Minister of Water Stewardship.

I had started off talking a bit more about the justice issues. I want to return to justice issues. You know, I had the opportunity to—*[interjection]* Well, okay, the Member for Rossmere (Mr. Schellenberg) wants to talk about the courthouse the Government said they were going to sell that I understand still sits empty. It is still government property. I would challenge the Government. I would challenge them, instead of standing here and heckling, and the Member for Rossmere, instead of challenging things to happen, to sell it or to fill it up with criminals. Do something with it. They are sitting on an asset and they are doing nothing with it. It is shameful. It is another example of how they say one thing one day and then turn around and say another thing another day. I cannot believe that the Member for Rossmere would have the nerve to raise it.

I was almost as in shock as when he raised the issue of Pharmacare in his response to the Budget. I am sorry it seems that the Member for Rossmere seems shocked. Maybe he did not raise the issue of Pharmacare. Well, he should have. Apparently, he glanced by it. I am not surprised he did not raise it. I can imagine the seniors in Rossmere wondering why the Member for Rossmere did not stand up in his caucus when there was talk about raising the deductibles on Pharmacare; when there was talk about raising the fees on Pharmacare. I cannot believe that he would not say anything, all the seniors in his area, why he maybe did not tell them, but we are certainly going to try and tell them. We will get the message out that he cannot get out in his caucus, or that he refuses to talk about.

Back to the issue of justice, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have been trying to get back to this issue. It is an important issue and the members keep raising broader points and I keep hearing the members yell across different things. I will be happy to answer any of them.

The minister of highways wants me to talk about highways and I will talk about highways and how there has not been a grader, how there has not been provincial machinery in the constituency since we left government. It is a shame and I say shame on the minister of highways and transportation. I will come back to that issue before this speech is over.

I know the Minister of Justice (Mr. Mackintosh) is waiting for me to speak about justice and I do not want to disappoint him. I do not want to disappoint him like he has disappointed the rest of us waiting for his legal aid review. Do you remember the legal aid review? There was once supposed to be a legal aid review. We talked, you know, this House, and the Minister of Justice, he sent out a news release, of course, well, we are going to do this great review of legal aid and apparently it has been sitting on his desk. Maybe it is still in the wrapping, I do not know. It has been sitting on his desk for the last two months.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have been waiting for that report to come out. Manitobans have been wondering when the issue was raised and the minister's shame about the Hells Angels right beside his own constituency office, coming into Manitoba under his watch. It used to be that the minister used to raise a number of times about a particular book that was written about the Hells Angels. He used to raise it all the time and say, well, you know, in this particular book it says, and we pointed out to him that in fact the book says that the Hells Angels came under the watch of the NDP and it is all quiet on that side. We do not talk about that book anymore because it is the shame of the members opposite.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I certainly want to ask the Minister of Justice when he is going to bring forward that report. When is that legal aid report going to come forward? You know, we know that it did not have any public consultation. We know that it was some kind of a secret document put together in the dark office of the Minister of Justice. We know that there was not public consultation on it.

So I have asked him and I said it publicly, why does he not release the report? Why does he not show this report? I do not know, maybe it cannot be done now. The Government is talking about having 400 members of government go into attrition and yet they are going to try and bill the public defender's office. Maybe it cannot be done anymore. Maybe that is why the Minister of Justice will not release the report. Maybe that is why he will not show Manitobans why it is important for Manitobans to see what is going to happen with legal aid. I think he is scared to bring forward that report. I challenge him to do it because it is important to do that for all Manitobans.

I would then challenge him one further and ask him to go forward and bring forward reviews and to have hearings on that. I think there is input that could come forward from all Manitobans and that would be important. I do not know that the Minister of Justice will do that because he is very good at putting out news releases but not so good at putting out actual solutions to problems.

The Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) wants to quote the fact that I said the Minister of Justice is good at putting out news releases, and I wish that he would, because if there is one thing that I will give credit to this Minister of Justice for it is that he can put out news releases better than anybody can, but he cannot fix problems.

Well, I certainly did not get as far as I wanted to in my address, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but there is something very important that all members need to see before you close me off. I know that the members want to give me all the credit for my ideas that I brought forward here today, but I want to say it is not all my fault. My mother is in the gallery here today and the seed never falls far from the tree, so I will give thanks where thanks is due. Thank you very much.

Ms. Theresa Oswald (Seine River): I would like to go on record for saying I am thrilled and delighted to be speaking following the Member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), and I, too, would like to extend my, well, what can only be congratulations, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the member's mother in the gallery. We are glad she made the trip; it is worth the trip to Winnipeg as well.

I am really pleased to rise today to put a few words on the record about this balanced budget. It is indeed balanced under the terms of balanced budget legislation passed by the previous government, a government I will have some things to say about in a few moments. It is indeed balanced between the important goals of investing in our citizens, making investments in Manitoba and continuing our progress on affordability, public finances and for building a future for all Manitobans.

When it comes to the balanced budget law, that law brought in by the former government, it is really important that I think we should note that this Budget, of course, is the first budget since the law was introduced to do three really important things: to

balance operating expenditure—very important. It pays down debt, and it does not, in fact, make a draw on the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. That is something that we are really proud of, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

* (11:40)

This Budget also shows us about the solid planning, and how you can meet the challenges in what can undeniably be said was a very, very, difficult year for Manitobans. Certainly, BSE was a very significant concern for all Manitobans, in particular, our families in rural Manitoba. It was a year where we saw the second-worst forest fire season on record. We certainly saw the media tell us all about what was happening in B.C. and saw the feds send aid in that direction. But in Manitoba we faced a really significant season for forest fires and it was something we had to compensate for, of course.

Manitoba Hydro's ability to generate power was reduced because of low water levels. This was a real challenge, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Of course, our export industries were challenged by the fact that there was such an increase in a Canadian dollar. These were very, very challenging times and resulted in a tough Budget, but I am so proud of our Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) and what it is that he was able to do to work together with our Government to put forth a balanced budget. That is terrific.

Manitobans together have risen to meet these challenges, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as individual Manitobans and of course as communities. They have worked together to stick to long-term plans and this is very important, and of course they found savings where they could and kept priorities in focus. Something that during those lean years in the nineties we just could not see happen.

This Budget does indeed keep priorities focused. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Budget 2004 maintains really important investment in education. I listened the other day to comments from the member from Morris about treating our education system like a business and referring most frequently to stakeholders, and I was appalled actually that this was indeed the way that that side of the House views education. Not as an investment, not as dealing with human beings, with parents and teachers and administrators and perhaps most importantly, children, but like a cold-hearted business. It was depressing, to say the least.

Certainly, Budget 2004 directs—you know, we are tightening our belt as well—that 400 government positions are going to be eliminated. Of course, we are going to be eliminating these positions through attrition and retirement. We are not going to engage in layoffs like we are seeing happening elsewhere, which is really difficult.

This is not the kind of budget that we are trying to save money by laying people off like the Connie Curran debacle and 1000 nurses going down the tubes. That was a horrible time. We are going to tighten our belt and we are going to do it through retirement and attrition. I am very proud of that planning.

Budget 2004 is going to allocate \$96 million to paying down our debt and our pension liabilities. It is worth remembering that this is the Government that started to properly account for the public pension liability as part of the total debt picture. It is something we need to take a really close look at, and we have taken measures to address that.

There have been immediate rewards for taking that kind of long-term approach. We have reduced our debt costs. We have earned two credit upgrades. It is something that is making Manitoba strong nationally. It is something that the members opposite do not like to acknowledge, the fact that our record on fiscal responsibility makes them look a little dim.

One of the things that I would really like to speak to, of course, is that the largest increase in our Budget is our investment in health services and reflects the fact that this is a priority for our Government, maintaining and improving public health care. As I speak to the constituents of Seine River, I know that this maintains to be the No. 1 concern of my constituents. They will be relieved to know, of course, that there is no priority that is indeed greater for us and there is no priority that we are working on more strongly in this Budget.

When the NDP came into office in 1999, health care in this province was in a crisis. It can only be described as a crisis. Hospital improvements had been promised over and over. I speak to my colleagues from Brandon and hear the tales, of course, of seven times hearing that there would be a hospital and seven times no hospital, a disaster, a disaster indeed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, nursing education had been cut back, and the province was confronted with a really serious shortage of nurses, these front line workers that help Manitobans who are most in need. It was an unbridled disaster.

We have, of course, made good on the health capital promises of the past government and made more on top of that. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have expanded nursing education to the point where we will now be graduating three times as many nurses as when we came to office. We have invested in new diagnostic equipment, MRIs, CT scans. We hear about this every day. We have significantly increased the tests performed.

We saw, just the other day in fact, the excellence in health care and the excellence that is being drawn to this province in neuroscience, for example. We saw Doctor Krcek and the amazing work and innovation that is happening with the brain implants to help the suffering lives of patients with Parkinson's. It was an absolute miracle before our very eyes, seeing a patient transformed from trembling to the point where he was unable to eat his own meal, to having a life that was calm of tremors, a normal life and a life in which he could live peacefully with his family.

It is because of the excellence in health care in Manitoba that we have been able to draw neuroscientists to our province. We are going to continue to draw on that kind of excellence and make sure that Manitoba is the centre for research, development and health care for all Canadians.

Budget 2004 also supports Manitoba's new wait-time reduction plan and improvements in cardiac care. These investments and improvements to hospital and emergency room services are critical, critical for the constituents of Seine River, critical for all Manitobans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are funding a further expansion of nurse training and training of diagnostic technicians, because of course we know that the health care system needs to be supported in all ways. We need to be able to have people that can be at the bedside. We need to train people to work the innovative technology that is developing. We need to be able to shore up the health care deficit that existed from those dark days in the nineties.

Certainly, Budget 2004 also funds initiatives that are underway under our Ministry of Healthy Living, including a task force on youth, health and fitness, which is upcoming and of which I am really proud to be a part. Mr. Deputy Speaker, our Government is working hard to respond to issues that are emerging in our media and across our nation, indeed, in many respects, across our world, with children who are finding themselves in situations where they are unfit, unhealthy and obese. Our Government is going to work together to look at what we can do as a Province and work together as a country to make sure that Canadian youth are indeed the most fit across the world. It is really, really important.

This Budget, no question, reflects the fact that our Government is sticking to our priorities. We are about setting these priorities, and we are very proud of that. Well, we know what priorities were set by the members opposite during the nineties.

We know about the cuts to public schools, something I can discuss with you quite first-hand and intimately about, because these were horrible times. We know that during these nineties, the members opposite thought it was appropriate to cut funding at levels minus 2, even a year, minus 2.6. Then a boon, it was only 0, minus 2, 0, and then, perhaps coincidentally in the year of an election, maybe plus 2, and then back into the depths of disaster again.

I listened with interest and reflected with physical pain really at the Leader of the Opposition's (Mr. Murray) comments about his feelings about teachers. I quote from Hansard, "We value the tremendous contribution our teachers make and we must do more to help them."

I felt as though I could put my ear up to those comments and hear the sea. There was such an echo, such a hollow, horrible sound.

I lived as a professional, as a teacher during these nineties. I know what it was like. I know that the disharmony that existed between the government and between teachers of that time was disgusting. It was terrible. We know that this was the time that Bill 22 was introduced, that was really a portfolio piece for the Opposition in creating adversarial relationships with teachers. It was horrible. This was a time when the former Premier decided that it would be a great idea to introduce Bill 22 and enable school boards to force layoffs for up to 10 days. These

wretched days, affectionately, became known, of course, as Filmon Fridays, and they were ghastly.

* (11:50)

My personal odyssey during 1993 perhaps is worthy of note. I was a teacher at that time at Glenlawn Collegiate. On October 6 in 1993, Glenlawn was struck by a devastating fire. It was a horrible thing. Those of us who live in Winnipeg might remember that day. The plume of smoke that blew into the air was horrifying. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was indeed horrifying for the children in the school that belonged to the day care. Hearing the bells, seeing the smoke and seeing the flames was something that those children even now reflect upon with horror. It was a time when our teachers and staff were put to the test to see if our fire drill plans really did pan out in conjunction with so many special needs students in the school, in wheelchairs and not necessarily able to move as quickly as others. It was a very frightening day.

Indeed, that was also a year where I had 44 students in my Senior 4 English class, 44 students, because of the cuts that had occurred under the former government. I muse, perhaps, on that day. It was the day before presentation day. Many of my students were going to different areas of the school. Some of them were going to the drama room because they had performances to practise. Some of them were going to the art room because they had portraits to finish painting. Many were going to the computer lab, because heaven knows if it were not for the last minute nothing would get done at all. They were finishing documents and others were going to the graphic arts shop to finish their visuals for the presentation.

I remember I said to these students as we broke at the beginning of class around 11 o'clock, I said, "Okay, I am not going to be able to supervise you directly all at the same time, so, please, do not start any small fires." It was approximately 11 minutes later that indeed the fire alarm rang. I felt I had willed it. I have subsequently learned I do not wield that kind of power, but it was spooky. Out we went during the fire drill, only to learn that this would not be a 15-minute drill, it would indeed be a year in the making to restore that school.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

In the days following the fire at Glenlawn, certainly, the school was unable to house students because of the damage, the smoke and so forth, and so these students were required to take days away from school. The staff met in an alternate location where we immediately set about how we were going to get our 1100 students back to learning, which was a priority.

In the interim, people from the government and, certainly, people from our own school board engaged in conversations about what would happen. Would it not be simpler, they suggested, to close off the area of the school, build a new school somewhere else and, really, forget about Glenlawn? Of course, the parent outcry was significant. Glenlawn has a proud, long tradition and parents and students alike rallied together.

It was decided that year that school indeed would continue. Students had to take 10 days off of school and teachers agreed that we would simply forfeit our professional development and administrative days for that year so that students would not lose any actual instruction time. We would cram into the school and we would remain one unified, galvanized community. That is exactly what it was.

I am proud to say that that year, a team that I was coaching, the Senior 2 freshmen girls volleyball team, went on to become provincial champions and we did not even have a gym. I thought that that was really special on the part of those students. They were hardworking. But in the same year that, as a community of educators, we decided that it was the right thing to do for learning, it was the right thing to do for students, that we would forfeit professional development time—in a time, incidentally, when new curricula were coming at us like machine gun fire that was flattening us on the highway, no professional development to speak of, no support, but of course we did have to implement this new curriculum. We forfeited those days.

That was 1993, the same year that Bill 22 enabled the former Filmon government to force layoffs for 10 days in the year. So we ended up with 10 days left. Take your PD days. they said. That is just fine, you do not need them anyway. In the face of generosity of my colleagues at Glenlawn, that were giving up time already, we had to look at the response from that former government and just shake

our heads and say, "Is it possible to see a group of individuals that could be any less caring?" If there was, I was not able to find them anywhere on earth. It was a horrible, horrible time.

I also have to consider the fact that there has been some jousting in the House, even today, about campaigning and about what kind of platforms various candidates ran on, Mr. Speaker. I think that in all of this darkness and all of this despair it would only be fair for me to offer my thanks to at least one member across the House. That would be the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) because we remembered that, in the face of a billion-dollar boondoggle of a promise from the Opposition, the Member for Russell did suggest that, you know, maybe it would be a good idea to answer the burning question from constituents: How are they going to pay? How are they going to pay for this billion dollar cut?

It was suggested, well perhaps we might be able to revisit whether or not art was really that important in school, or maybe we should revisit music. Well, Mr. Speaker, what is the good of that and band programming because, really, why would we need that, and physical education, maybe that was not important either. Back to basics; perhaps this would be a great idea to pay for the billion-dollar promise.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, there was no greater day on the campaign trail than the day that the Member for Russell's words came out, the day that I campaigned my little tootsies off and watched constituents march down their own lawns and pluck the Conservative signs from their lawns and throw them in the recycling bin. The people of Seine River will never, never abide a cut in what the Opposition may view as a frill in education. They will never abide a cut in physical education, going back to the Stone Age where we have no art—well, I suppose there was art on the walls in the caves, technically—where we go back to a time where band is not considered important, fine arts, vocal jazz ensembles, all of the things that we know shore up and support the whole student.

This was a great day in Seine River, Mr. Speaker, the day that these horrible words were spoken. Indeed, the member from Burrows does announce that I had a terrific campaign manager that he found for me. Thanks again for that.

This was a great day, and so I would publicly like, once again, to thank the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) for offering me the opportunity to stand at doorsteps and simply listen to the constituents of Seine River rant in horror about that decision. These are ideas that represent antiquated thinking, that represent foolhardy planning fiscally, and really I was delighted that it happened, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I certainly would like to take an opportunity to address what our Government is doing in this Budget to support children and families in other ways, not just in education, but a holistic approach to supporting children and support families. Certainly, we have in this Budget a new children's initiative to improve access to services for speech and language therapy, critical, critical early childhood development. We are going to support that.

We are going to further our support for the United Way in the community, ensuring that every single dollar that we invest is going to be spent on services, Mr. Speaker. Manitoba is the only province, by the way, to cover the organization's administration costs. That is because, philosophically, we believe, of course, in supporting the whole child, the whole family and the whole community.

There is going to be \$4 million more for child care, and incidentally, it is worthy to note that child care and its funding has gone up 51 percent, Mr. Speaker, since 1999, with 3500 additional funded spaces. We want to do the best that we can to provide even more. This is a bold step; 51 percent supporting children, supporting women, supporting men, supporting families.

* (12:00)

I am really, really proud that this Government has worked hard to restore the national child benefit in 2004, fulfilling another promise made in 1999 and returning almost \$14 million annually to low income families, the families that need this the most, Mr. Speaker. I am thrilled to also mention that there has been an 11% increase for the Supported Living Program to help persons with mental disabilities live and thrive in the community. These are really important steps that are being taken to support all Manitobans.

We are also going to be continuing our support for Lighthouses, an after-hour program for youth in Manitoba. We want to be able to ensure that students have a safe place to go where they can forge relationships, where they can engage in positive activities, and we are making sure that these are things that we are investing in, Mr. Speaker.

As far as thinking about healthy communities, when you support children, support parents and support communities, you can work towards making them safe and making them healthy. Certainly we have offered in this Budget more resources for Turnabout. It is a program that assists offenders under the age of 12. We know that children are going to make mistakes, Mr. Speaker. We know that children do not necessarily always face the most positive of upbringings, and our Government is working hard to ensure that we have opportunities for them to indeed turn their lives around.

Neighbourhoods Alive! continues to revitalize Brandon, Thompson, Mr. Speaker, and of course, continues to revitalize Winnipeg. We are so proud of that program.

It is very worthy to note, Mr. Speaker, that the Affordable Housing Initiative, is investing \$50 million over five years to support communities since 1999. We are going to build, renovate, repair 2100 homes throughout Manitoba from our time now and 1999. So we are really proud of that investment as well.

I think it is really important that, as well as protecting our children, as well as protecting our families and as well as protecting and supporting our communities, we need to make sure that we point out what we are doing in this Budget to support water and the environment. Of course, we know that the creation of our Ministry of Water Stewardship is working hard to do that.

I know my constituents in Seine River, particularly a group like Save Our Seine, a very, very active volunteer water stewardship group, are watching this very closely and are very proud of what our Government is doing.

There is new support for the Lake Winnipeg Stewardship Board, Mr. Speaker, to work towards reducing harmful nutrients in the lake. We know that Lake Winnipeg is not just a concern for those living

around it, but a concern for all Manitobans. It is a jewel, and we are working hard to do what we can to improve and protect it.

We are looking at, of course, a new 10% tax credit to encourage business to invest in odour control in industry. This is really important. We are investing \$225,000 for more beach safety. I know the families of Seine River will be delighted to hear this and applaud this. Mr. Speaker, \$350,000 in this Budget for cottage lot and campsite development for this initiative, and it is, indeed, very important.

I wanted to take just a moment to acknowledge that we are working to improve health care; we are working to improve education; we are working to help the environment. It is really important that we note that in this Budget we can take a bit of an analysis and know the citizens in Manitoba are better off in 2003 than they were in 1999. Manitoba's purchasing power is increasing. Between '99 and '03, "Manitoba's personal disposable income per capita increased by 14.1 percent." This is really important. Manitobans working at a minimum wage saw a 12.5 wage increase from 1999 to 2003. These are issues that are important to all Manitobans and the constituents of Seine River.

Mr. Speaker, home values have increased dramatically since 1999. Look no further than the housing boom in the sunny constituency of Seine River and you will know that this is so important, up by 24.5 percent in Winnipeg alone. Over the same period, education property taxes were virtually flat. Disposable income has increased. All of the things that are going to make the quality of life in Manitoba more significant for Manitobans are evident in this Budget and evident in the actions of this Government.

I would like to close knowing, of course, that I could go on for days about how positive this Budget has been for Manitobans and the constituents of Seine River, but I will pause by saying that I am proud to stand in support of this Budget. I am delighted to do it. I look forward to receiving the support of the members opposite because life in Manitoba is improving day by day. I am sure that members opposite will want to vote in favour of the priorities that we have set because they are important priorities. I am happy to voice my support for Budget 2004.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that, as the member opposite for Seine River has so many reasons that she is going to vote for this Budget, I equally have as many, if not more, reasons not to support it, but I will get into that a little bit later.

I want, first of all, to just say that, for the record, I am a proud new mother of a bouncing baby boy, Thomas Hugh Stefanson, who was born at St. Boniface Hospital on January 15 of this year. He weighed in at a healthy 9 lbs. 7 oz. and is growing like a weed. I am very proud of that, proud to be here in Manitoba, proud to live in the community in Tuxedo. I want to take this opportunity to personally thank all of the nurses and doctors and the front-line health care workers for all of their help with my delivery. They were absolutely fantastic. It is just a credit to all of those front-line workers in health care out there who help to deliver children and so on, and to help those in need. I just want to personally thank them for all of their help.

It does bring me to talk about today. We, in Question Period, questioned the Minister of Health (Mr. Chomiak), we questioned the Premier (Mr. Doer) what the priorities are of this Government when it comes to health care. Certainly, they are toying with the idea right now of closing down the maternity ward at Victoria Hospital. I will tell you first-hand that when I was at the St. Boniface Hospital back in January of this year the maternity ward was absolutely full, to the point where the nurses, the doctors were saying, "I do not know what would happen if we had another woman in labour come in. I do not know what we would do. We would have to turn them away."

This is not the time to be closing down maternity wards. We need to ensure that health care is accessible for women when they are in labour, and if they cannot even be able to get into a hospital to have their child, then there is something seriously wrong. All we ask is that the Minister of Health take this idea that he is toying with, doing away with the maternity ward at the Victoria Hospital, take it off the table, Mr. Speaker, because I bet the Member for St. Norbert (Ms. Brick), the Member for Seine River (Ms. Oswald), the Member for Fort Garry (Ms. Irvin-Ross), all of these members would agree that they want to fight for the people in their communities. This is their community hospital. So I challenge the

Minister of Health to, perhaps, talk to some of his colleagues about the effect that a closing down of the maternity ward in those communities will have on them. So I challenge the Minister of Health. I challenge the Minister of Health on a number of issues but, certainly, that one seems to come to mind first and foremost.

Let us talk about a plan and a vision for Manitoba. I have seen nothing in this Budget that has any indication that there is a plan and that there is a vision for Manitoba. Well, maybe there is. Maybe there is a plan, Mr. Speaker, and, maybe, there is a vision, but it is not one that will be growing our economy to make it competitive and conducive to keeping young people here in Manitoba, to growing our economy, to all of these things, because every decision that this Government makes, they do it to drive people out of here. It is absolutely atrocious.

* (12:10)

So let us talk about the plan and the vision for health care. The health care budget now is, I believe, roughly around 41 percent of the overall expenditures in Manitoba right now. Yet, Mr. Speaker, and I am not saying that we should not be putting more money towards health care, absolutely. It is not a question of more money. Throwing more money at a system that does not work is not the answer. So more money increasing to health care, but what is it doing to our waiting lists? Waiting lists are on the rise. Is it getting people out of hallways? No, hallway medicine is alive and well in Manitoba. This is atrocious.

Mr. Speaker, let us talk about Pharmacare. Pharmacare deductibles will increase by 5 percent, or up to \$108 more each year effective, I guess, July 1. This is the third consecutive increase under the NDP for a total increase of 15 percent. This is a direct attack on low-income Manitobans. Why should Manitobans have to choose between milk and medicine? This is atrocious.

There are so many things to do with health care. Again, throwing more money at a system that is not working—we need to address the waiting list issues. We need to address people sitting in hallways. Those are the issues that need to be addressed in health care, Mr. Speaker.

So let us talk about our vision to grow our economy, Mr. Speaker. What does this Government do,

even though the Premier said, and I quote, "We did not get elected to raise taxes." Well, he did just that in this Budget. Taxes are up over \$90 million. That is absolutely atrocious. Even though he said, "We did not get elected to raise taxes," he did just that. I would question his word because "a promise made," as he says, "is a promise kept." Yet he does not seem to be able to stick to his promises.

So what else do we do here? We raised taxes. People in Manitoba pay the highest income taxes west of New Brunswick. Well, that is something to be incredibly proud of. That is going to attract people to Manitoba, Mr. Speaker. How do we expect to be competitive, to grow our economy, if we are taxing people? We are nickel-and-diming people to death. It is absolutely atrocious.

But the other thing, Mr. Speaker, is if you look at the PST, it is effectively up .5 percent. Okay, under balanced budget legislation, the Province cannot just increase taxes without going back to the people of Manitoba via a referendum, or so on. Rather than just being upfront, this Government likes to talk about transparency, open and honest. Well, there is nothing open and honest about extending a PST to other services like legal services, accounting services, engineering and architecture services. They extended the PST, so, basically, they tried to circumvent the system to get around the balanced budget legislation.

I would challenge the members opposite that rather than trying to circumvent the system and continue to try to circumvent the system, why do they not just be open, honest and transparent to Manitobans? Just tell them our mandate is to raise your taxes because that is essentially what they are doing. Rather than wasting his time trying to figure out how to maneuver around balanced budget legislation, Mr. Speaker, maybe this Premier should just stand up and tell Manitobans what his real vision is for Manitoba. That is to drive everyone out of here, because that is exactly what is going to happen. That is no vision that a premier should have for his province.

So what else are we doing, Mr. Speaker? We are talking about forcing unionization of workers on this floodway deal. Oh, that is another way to make Manitoba competitive and attract businesses here. We are going to force everyone to be members of unions. This is absolutely atrocious. When does it

stop? We are forcing hardworking Manitobans to be members of unions. We have asked the Premier, we have asked several members opposite, the Minister of Water Stewardship (Mr. Ashton), the Minister of Labour (Ms. Allan), we have asked them to just take that master labour agreement off the table. Let us not even talk about that. Take it off the table. Let us get a plan in place and let us build and expand the floodway.

Yet the Minister of Water Stewardship, the Minister of Labour, the Premier, you know, will not take this off the table so that hardworking Manitobans can get out there and work and start digging the floodway. Get on with the plan, Mr. Speaker. We are sitting here trying to force workers to join unions, wasting our time doing this, when we should just be out there with our shovels and digging the floodway. Forced unionization is absolutely atrocious. We are talking about it with the floodway now, but where does it stop? Where does it stop? It affects every single business in Manitoba.

I will tell you that we have petitions coming into our offices from members, people from all over Manitoba, people in the city of Winnipeg, people in our rural areas, people in the northern areas. We have petitions coming in from everywhere, Mr. Speaker, because people are adamantly opposed to this. Yet, once again, the Premier stands up and says, "Well, this is my vision for Manitoba," and he does nothing to foster competitiveness in our province. This is his atrocious, atrocious vision for our province.

I would like to get into talking about education because, certainly, I am the critic for Education, Citizenship and Youth, very proud to be. Mr. Speaker, I have young children, and I am very concerned about the direction that the education system is taking in our province under the current minister, under this Premier.

Mr. Speaker, in the last three, four years we have gone through three ministers of Education, and now I have been asking questions in this House of the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) and, for some reason—I know he wants to get up and answer the questions, I know he does, but for some reason the Premier (Mr. Doer) is a little concerned about having to change the Minister of Education again, so what he does is he just puts a muzzle on him. He does not allow him to answer any questions. And you know

what? I know he wants to answer the questions, and I know that he will have some answers to these questions, but, for some reason, the Premier thinks that he should get up and answer these questions.

Well, I am telling you, Mr. Speaker, I think the Minister of Education is paid to answer questions of people on this side of this House, on behalf of the Department of Education, and he should know about his own department. He is paid to know that. He should be getting up answering these questions. I am telling you he could probably answer the questions better than the Premier can.

The Premier gets up and he cannot even read in his own Estimates of Expenditure book. He cannot even understand the line. Now, yesterday, in Question Period, the Premier got up and said that there is actually a reduction in spending in the Department of Education, that we are talking specifically about the administration costs.

Well, I would like the Premier, perhaps, to refer to page 58 in his Estimates of Expenditure and refer to line 1 that says Administration and Finance up 9.9 percent. That is absolutely atrocious. Maybe when the Premier says a reduction in spending of the Department of Education, what line he is really referring to—and this is what is atrocious—is line 2 where it says School Programs down 4.1 percent.

So what is the vision for our youth in this province? Let us take money out of school programs and beef up our admin costs. Let us take money out of front-line education in our province and put it in the back office. Oh, that is a vision for Manitoba.

So I challenge the Premier. If he does not understand, Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to sit down with the Premier and explain these lines in his own book, in his Estimates of Expenditure.

* (12:20)

The Minister of Education, I think, probably could have gotten up and answered those questions fine, but, you know what, the Premier decided that he wanted to, and he bumbled and fumbled around and did not even know the answers to his own questions. So I would challenge the Premier on that basis.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education likes to talk about all this money that he is putting towards education in our province when all he is doing is cutting school programs and beefing up his own admin costs. It is atrocious. The provincial portion of funding has decreased from 60.9 percent to 56.7 percent in this province. Who is picking up the tab for the rest of health care? He is forcing it onto the backs of the taxpayers of the local communities. Absolutely atrocious. That is no vision for education in our province. Or, I guess, it is a vision, but I think it is the wrong one.

Let us talk, Mr. Speaker, about the botched amalgamation scheme of this Government. They promised that this amalgamation, the forced amalgamation of school divisions, would save \$10 million to the system. Well, I would like to know where in the budget books is this \$10 million. We have been asking this year after year. Where is the \$10 million? You know what? They cannot point.

I asked the previous Minister of Education if he could show me where in Estimates, where this \$10 million would come from, or where it was in the Estimates books, and he could not answer that. He could not answer it because it is not there; it does not exist. As a matter of fact, and the Manitoba Association of School Trustees has come out and published some numbers, I believe, that the cost of this forced amalgamation scheme, the cost, so it was not a savings, it may have to explain the difference between costs and savings and so on to the members opposite, but it cost almost \$20 million, just this amalgamation thing. This is absolutely atrocious. That is close to \$20 million that more money could have been put into the front-line education.

I would suggest that they, once again, have broken their promise as far as education is concerned. Let us talk about the quality of education, because we seem to tinker around and talk about numbers and all this sort of stuff. We talk about taxation, but nothing out of the members opposite ever, ever comes out talking about the quality of education, that we are really concerned about the quality of education in our province.

The minister, the member opposite, the Member for Gimli, the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) says that I never ask questions. Well, I do ask questions. I stand up almost every day in this House and ask questions on education. He never gets up to

answer them. Let us talk about the quality of education. Mr. Speaker, 63 percent of kids entering Grade 3 cannot subtract to 10, and yet this minister thinks that is something to be proud of.

Mr. Speaker, we need to strive towards excellence in our schools. We need to provide a top-quality education for our kids. Yet the Minister of Education thinks it is okay, 63 percent of kids in our schools. We do not know where the kids are, which schools they are in or anything like that, but 63 percent of them entering Grade 3 cannot subtract to 10. I will tell you that that is atrocious to me. We need to find out who those kids are and make sure that they are provided the tools that they deserve so that they can move forward in a good, quality education system. Yet the Minister of Education does not see this as a priority. What he does is he cuts school programs. How is cutting school programs and beefing up your administration costs a vision for education in our province? This is absolutely atrocious.

So I say that I am very concerned about the direction of education in our province. I think we all agree that we want to provide a top-quality education for our kids. I think that it is just a question of how we get there. We have differing opinions, perhaps, on how we should do that. I just do not believe that the vision that this Minister of Education has is what is best for our kids.

So let us talk, Mr. Speaker, about justice. Let us talk about the members opposite and their vision for justice in this province. They are opening a door not to protect victims. They are opening the door to Hells Angels and to gang members who are flooding, who are coming in in droves into our province. Those are the only people we are attracting to Manitoba, gang members. Those are the only ones that are coming. Everyone else is leaving.

Actually, that does bring me to another number. This is in the Government's own records here. Manitoba's recent economic performance, that we get, I believe, weekly or every couple of weeks. It says on page 2, that we have a net interprovincial out-migration of 2253 people and, primarily, people are going to British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario and even Québec. Mr. Speaker, people are leaving. It is a net interprovincial out-migration, 2253 people. That is absolutely atrocious.

So let us get back to justice though. Let us talk about this Government's vision for justice in our province. The Hells Angels are moving in, and it is absolutely atrocious. Mr. Speaker, our seniors, who are one of the most vulnerable groups in our society, are being beaten and robbed on a regular basis. Yet the Minister of Justice does not see that that is a problem at all and does not see this as a priority, a priority area for this province.

As a matter of fact, and I will digress just a little bit here, but last night we were out at one of our restaurants. It was close to my community and with a group of us, and all of our coats were stolen out the back door of this place. Yet you see, you know that is what is happening with our province. Yes, Mr. Speaker, absolutely all of our coats were stolen. This is what is happening in our province, that people can run in the back door of restaurants and steal coats. This is the kind of thing that is taking place. Yet the Minister of Justice (Mr. Mackintosh) refuses to do anything about what is going on here. It is absolutely atrocious, and is no vision for our province.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would like to just say in closing, the Premier said, "A promise made should be a promise kept." He also said, "We did not get elected to raise taxes." Yet he did just that, over \$90-

million increase in taxes. Absolutely atrocious, and no vision for our province.

The debt continues to rise in our province. Taxes are increasing. Middle-income Manitobans are the highest taxed west of New Brunswick. We continue to have that title, Mr. Speaker. Well, that is something to be proud of.

The Premier is taking money out of front line, like out of our schools, out of front line education and moving it into the back office, Mr. Speaker, beefing up administration costs. That is no vision for education. He is taking money away from our children's educations to pay for his increase in salaried staff. Absolutely atrocious.

Forcing unionization of workers on the floodway—

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable Member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson) will have seven minutes remaining.

The hour being 12:30 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, April 23, 2004

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