



Third Session - Thirty-Sixth Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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Speaker*



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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Sixth Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 20, 1997

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Gang Action Plan

Mr. Gord Mackintosh (St. Johns): Madam Speaker, I beg to present the petition of Mohamed Alli, Sayid Alli, Norman Dell and others praying that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the Minister of Justice (Mr. Toews) to consider using this action plan, an 18-point plan to deal with gang crime as a basis for provincial policy on organized criminal gangs.

Mobile Screening Unit for Mammograms

Ms. Becky Barrett (Wellington): Madam Speaker, I beg to present the petition of Sandra Brading, Sharon Cocks, Lucille Bell and others requesting that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba request the Minister of Health (Mr. Praznik) to consider immediately establishing a mobile screening unit for mammograms to help women across the province detect breast cancer at the earliest possible opportunity.

Mr. Stan Struthers (Dauphin): I beg to present the petition of Virginia Jamieson, Ken McCartney, Betty Findlay and others requesting that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba request the Minister of Health to consider immediately establishing a mobile screening unit for mammograms to help women across the province detect breast cancer at the earliest possible opportunity.

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): I beg to present the petition of Ellen Pass, Kay Dee Graham, Kandice Sedgwick and others requesting that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba request the Minister of Health to consider immediately establishing a mobile screening unit for mammograms to help women across the province detect breast cancer at the earliest possible opportunity.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Bonnie Mitchelson (Minister of Family Services): Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to table the Third Annual Report of the Children's Advocate for the year ending March 31, 1996.

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Finance): I am pleased to table Volume 4 of the Public Accounts for 1995-96.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have this afternoon forty-four Grade 9 students from Linden Christian School under the direction of Mr. Darryl Rempel. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable First Minister (Mr. Filmon).

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

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Home Oxygen Supply Service Rimer Alco Contract

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, my question is to the First Minister. Yesterday, we tabled the final report of the steering committee, made up of health experts, which made one recommendation on the awarding of a contract. On 20 occasions yesterday the Minister of Health, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) and the Premier (Mr. Filmon) stated that there were, quote, two acceptable bids, two qualified bidders.

Madam Speaker, we have heard from representatives and experts on the health committee in the past, and today we have quoted in the Free Press that it is not a situation where either candidate is acceptable. It is unanimous that the one company is head and shoulders above the other company that was awarded the bid.

I would like to ask the Premier whom should we believe, the Premier or the members of the committee that are speaking out on behalf of the quality of this contract, Madam Speaker.

* (1335)

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, I think we should believe the committee which indicated that there were two bidders that were successful on quality. That was what the committee's mandate to do was, to identify the bidders who could meet the quality requirements.

Mr. Doer: Madam Speaker, yesterday in a CBC newscast, a committee member stated that Rimer Alco had access to confidential health reports prior to the other companies receiving same. Has the minister investigated this allegation, and can he report back to the people of Manitoba on this part of the process?

Mr. Praznik: Once again in checking allegations that members of the New Democratic Party have brought to this House, in checking with staff in my department, I have no reason to believe at all that the allegation is correct, Madam Speaker. It is not correct.

Mr. Doer: Madam Speaker, we have talked to a number of patients, and we have talked to Mrs. Tait who is the wife of an elderly patient that relies on this Oxygen Therapy Program. Many patients are telling us that they do not want to change the service that they are getting. They do not want this government to award contracts to people that they favour at the expense of their health care and the quality of their health care.

I would like to ask the First Minister (Mr. Filmon) has the government considered the care and quality of care for patients when it has awarded this contract to a company that the health care committee, the internal committee, has stated that this company has absolutely no experience in the field? Are you surprised that patients are worried about the quality of patient care on this very vital home care service?

Mr. Praznik: Madam Speaker, think about the implication of what the Leader of the Opposition is saying. He is saying that no one should ever change a

contract provider because that provider has provided the service in the past. It is absolutely ludicrous.

The process on many of these things in health care where we are contracting—and, by the way, we have contracted for oxygen in the past; it is not necessarily a new issue. But the fact of the matter is, to make sure that whatever standard of care is required, that the bidders are able to meet that standard and then we look at the monetary costs of that contract. If they cannot meet the standard, their envelope on the monetary side should not even be looked at. We have done that with respect to home care, in this case as well. The same arguments, by the way, were used against Rimer Alco when they came into Manitoba as a small company bringing an established United Kingdom technology here. The same arguments were used, and the fact is they have delivered in the hospitals and saved taxpayers 34 percent of the cost of oxygen.

Home Oxygen Supply Service Rimer Alco Contract

Mr. Tim Sale (Crescentwood): Madam Speaker, is the Minister of Health saying that he is prepared to risk the health of some 800 Manitobans on a company that has never ever in Canada or the United States delivered this service to vulnerable people in their homes, which is not simply hard equipment that is being plugged in? It is patient education, education of caregivers; it is technical advice. Is he saying he is prepared to risk that to a company that has absolutely no track record of delivering this service and has no staff with any track record?

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): If we adopted that philosophy, we would never get into using nurses to do more work in health care. We would not be looking at using—midwifery, we would never get into because it is something new and there may not be a track record in Manitoba. So, Madam Speaker, you would never have change or improvement in the system if you adopted that kind of philosophy in delivering service. Rimer Alco, the same arguments were used against them when they brought the oxygen concentrators into our province, and they have been extremely successful. Members opposite have never raised, to my knowledge, a complaint about that service. They have reduced the cost of oxygen.

This committee has indicated, and I know in the minutes in checking through this, that they clearly did meet the quality requirements. The member for Crescentwood also forgets that the sister company of Rimer Alco has done this same kind of work in the United Kingdom I understand for many years, so there is a track record.

* (1340)

Mr. Sale: Madam Speaker, I want to give the Minister of Health the opportunity to quote from this document.

I would like to ask him to quote from the final minutes of the Home Oxygen Therapy committee program meeting, the final report. I would like him to quote from it any reference to the equality of Rimer Alco or even its appropriateness for being considered as a contractor. Let him find one phrase, one recommendation, from his committee's report. Will he do that? Find a phrase.

Mr. Praznik: Madam Speaker, I think if you read the document, the committee may have indicated a preference, but it was a preference of two companies that they considered. The committee considered five companies. Three of them are not there because they did not meet the quality requirements. The prime task of that committee was to determine which of the proponents were able to meet the quality requirements and they eliminated three and included two. Their preference was a recommendation but on price on a two-year contract Rimer Alco was the lesser-cost bidder and was awarded the contract.

Mr. Sale: Madam Speaker, let the record show that he absolutely avoided the question or refused to—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I would remind the honourable member for Crescentwood that on a supplementary question it requires no preamble or no postamble.

Mr. Sale: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

A very simple question: Has the contract been signed or not?

Mr. Praznik: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Louisiana-Pacific Environmental Contamination

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): Madam Speaker, people in the Swan River Valley are very concerned that aspen bark and chips are being removed from the L-P yard and deposited in sensitive areas, which is in contravention of L-P's licence. Even though many people have called the department raising this concern, no action has been taken.

Can the Minister of Environment tell us why no action has been taken on this sensitive matter?

Hon. James McCrae (Minister of Environment): We will provide the honourable member with that information, Madam Speaker.

Ms. Wowchuk: Madam Speaker, can the minister tell this House whether he believes that it is acceptable to dump these wastes on riverbanks even though we have been told that this substance is harmful to aquatic life and these rivers will soon be overflowing into lakes? Is it acceptable to put this waste on riverbanks?

Mr. McCrae: If the company is in any way exceeding its licence, I would indeed be concerned and would take corrective action.

Ms. Wowchuk: Madam Speaker, I thank the minister for that answer, and I ask him if he will immediately send staff to the Swan River Valley to look into this matter and ensure that wastes that have been put in sensitive areas such as riverbanks are removed but not at the expense of taxpayers.

Mr. McCrae: The question is essentially the same as the first question and the answer is the same.

Eaton's Store Closures

Hon. James Downey (Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism): Madam Speaker, I am tabling a letter that I was asked to table yesterday for the member for Wellington (Ms. Barrett).

Personal Care Homes Public Inquiry

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): Madam Speaker, in the last week we have had another dozen individuals contact us regarding concerns regarding patient care at personal care homes. The minister's response was to say, write to me the minister, phone me the minister, talk to me the minister and that will solve your problems, but that has been done by many of these people. That was done by us in the fall regarding Holiday Haven, and there was no adequate follow-up on our complaints until someone had to get, unfortunately, killed in a nursing home.

My question for the minister is will the Minister of Health today do what the previous Minister of Health did in the home care crisis in 1993, and set up an independent panel or board that will hear complaints regarding personal care home service, so individuals will be assured that someone will be there to listen to them other than the minister's office?

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, first of all, with respect to the preamble of the member's question, there is an inquest being conducted by the Medical Examiner, and I think in fairness to everyone involved, before one judges the cause of the death, we should wait for that result.

With respect to the question, Madam Speaker, the particular point the member makes is an excellent one. In fact, I am already working with my department to consider options to do just that.

Holiday Haven Nursing Home Public Inquest

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): Madam Speaker, can the minister explain to this House why the instructions with respect to the inquest are so narrow, and in fact say—determine what measures could be taken to prevent a death occurring in similar circumstances?

In other words, they are so narrow they only deal with the particular incident of that death at Holiday Haven and will not deal with all of the other concerns regarding patient care at Holiday Haven and other personal care homes.

* (1345)

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): The member's question is probably more properly put to the Chief Medical Officer who ordered the inquest. I am not part, nor are ministers part of writing that particular framework, but from what I understand in the contact we have had with that office, that term of reference includes determining the circumstances surrounding the death of that individual, address concerns regarding safety of elderly persons in personal care homes, as well as to determine what measures could be taken to prevent a death in similar circumstances. So I think the member should put his one point in the context of the three.

Personal Care Homes Public Inquiry

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): Madam Speaker, my final supplementary to the minister: can the minister give assurances to this House today, since he has already indicated that he is considering some kind of framework, that every individual in Manitoba who is concerned about care in a personal care home both in the past and in the future, will have an opportunity to have their concerns heard by an independent body and have those issues dealt with by the government, so we do not have to go down the road of inquest after inquest?

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, I certainly want to be able to very shortly give a process to this House. I know one critical piece of that—that some work yet has to be done—is a process for dealing with complaints within facilities I think as a mandated part of their operation. We also have to have some means of dealing with complaints where there is not a satisfactory resolution of them.

I know the previous Minister of Health, in the area of home care, developed an excellent model that I think has worked well. Whether we use that particular board, whether we find another, or options that I am considering right now, but I think it is very evident and I agree with the member, to give Manitobans a sense of security we need to have some process for dealing with complaints and some independent way of sorting it out between complainants and the facility.

**Home Oxygen Supply Service
Rimer Alco Contract**

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Speaker, yesterday I asked the Minister of Health if the Rimer Alco deal was in fact signed. The day prior I was of the impression that the agreement was not signed by the minister.

My question specific to the minister is when was the deal between Rimer Alco and his department actually signed?

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): Yes, the final signature was yesterday.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Lamoureux: I would ask the Premier will he acknowledge that this is indeed the height of arrogance? How can the government, given the controversy over this issue, when it had the option to be able to review this legitimately—the Premier himself had the opportunity to look into this case, did not take the time to investigate the case. Instead they signed the agreement yesterday. How do you have the tenacity to see this agreement signed just yesterday? Why did this Premier not take action and look into the agreement itself?

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Speaking of tenacity, the reasons obviously should be clear to everyone that members opposite for three days have brought forward questions and allegations that required several ministers of the government to go back and review step by step every aspect of the decision that was made with respect to awarding of a contract to Rimer Alco. What we found in going back step by step was members opposite alleged that the bonding requirements had been changed, and examination found out they were wrong. They had not; they were exactly as they were in the tender process.

Members opposite alleged that Rimer Alco was found not to be a qualified bidder in terms of their ability to provide the service. We examined that very

carefully, found out they were wrong. The committee acknowledged that they were one of two qualified bidders who were capable of providing the service. Members opposite alleged that they were not the low bidder. We examined it carefully, found out they were the low bidder. They were wrong again, opposite.

So, under all those circumstances, having had several different ministers examine the process, we found out that every single allegation they made was wrong, Madam Speaker, and in fact the only correct way to respond to this tender process was to award the contract to the lowest qualified bidder who was able to be bonded for the process. Having examined and confirmed that that was the case, the contract was awarded.

* (1350)

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, did the Premier himself review this case before the actual document was signed, and if so, will the Premier tell this House who ultimately was responsible for overturning this particular decision, recommendation, from the committee? Which minister is going to have the courage to stand up and take responsibility for that overturning of that recommendation?

Mr. Filmon: Madam Speaker, there was no overturning done. There is a requirement in the actions of government for us to award contracts in keeping with a proper tender process. That means the lowest qualified bidder, and that is exactly what happened in this case. Now you can imagine what we would have gone through in this House if we had not awarded it to the lowest bidder, if we had in fact ignored a qualified bidder who was actually the low bidder, as well who happened to be also a Manitoba-based company. What would members opposite be doing? They would be going nuts in this House, saying to us, how on earth could you not give it to the lowest qualified bidder who is a Manitoba company; what is wrong with you? That would have been their tack.

Madam Speaker, we have taken it through the examination in accordance with the questions asked, and we have been satisfied that indeed it met all of the requirements.

Point of Order

Mr. Lamoureux: Beauchesne's is indeed quite clear in terms of that the Premier—and the honourable Premier knows that the answer should be somewhat brief and address the question posed. The question that was posed was: was the Premier aware prior to the agreement being signed and did he review it? That was the actual question: was he aware of it? I would appreciate he answer the question, not necessarily baffle around the question.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Inkster does not have a point of order. It is a dispute over the facts.

Home Oxygen Supply Service Rimer Alco Contract

Ms. Marianne Cerilli (Radisson): Madam Speaker, the Minister of Health has just confirmed that this government had the gall to sign this contract just yesterday. I want to ask the minister: can he confirm that his department Home Care Branch had released confidential records to Rimer Alco before they signed this contract on Tuesday?

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, I am not quite sure what point the member is making. In the process such as this, you know, obviously the parties were informed who would be receiving the contract. The bidders who were not successful have taken their efforts to attack the particular process. The department begins work with the successful bidder; the paperwork of completing the contract moves through the system. Is the member alleging that there has been some improper use of records, some improper use that they have been given to someone who was not to be the successful bidder?

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

Ms. Cerilli: Madam Speaker, I am asking the Minister of Health to confirm, as we have the information, that Rimer Alco had access to the Department of Health Home Care records on Tuesday prior to signing this contract yesterday, which was Wednesday. Can he confirm that to the House today?

Mr. Praznik: Madam Speaker, I am not going to confirm that statement. We have allegation upon allegation coming to this House that prove—not being looked at. I still fail to see the great issue that the member is attempting to raise here.

*(1355)

Ms. Cerilli: Madam Speaker, I believe that in due course that is the fact and it will be confirmed.

I want to ask a supplementary to the minister. Is it not true that the Minister of Health held off in signing this agreement until yesterday because of pressure put on him by the industry, from the community, and he has only signed this contract yesterday because he knows that his department has issued these confidential records from Home Care to this company?

Mr. Praznik: Madam Speaker, in the life of a Minister of Health in this province, with all of the work and paper that passes my desk, I can tell you in the last few days in dealing with issues related to personal care homes and some of the issues we talked about earlier in Question Period, with the work intendance in this Assembly, this particular document was walked over to my office yesterday for completion of that work because of the scheduling of when it could be signed. To have it in and signed so operation can take over on the expected date. None of the allegations, untoward comments or any of the other things the member tries to make to appear something ill has happened are just not true.

Home Oxygen Supply Service Patient Records Confidentiality

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): One of the fundamental difficulties the public has with the government's privatization role is that confidential patient records are becoming accessible to private companies. It is clear in this instance, before the contract was even entered into, before there was even protection for individuals regarding their confidentiality records, confidential information was provided to a company that the contract was not even signed for.

How does the minister explain this issue, in light of the fact that confidentiality is one of the crucial

problems with respect to contracting out by this government to their private friends?

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, the confidentiality of people's health records is very important to all of us. That is why this government will be introducing legislation to protect that information. It becomes all the more important as we get into the age of high technology.

I think members should appreciate, in any contracting process when you have entered into a bidding process and you have a successful bidder, you have the documents in which you are preparing. There is a transition period in which you are planning to gear them up. Documents are being signed and being put into place. They are the successful bidder. They are covered by the legal requirements of confidentiality. There is a transition going over in which to do it.

Somehow in their desire to make an issue, they are trying to imply that the Ministry of Health cannot get into a transition with a successful bidder to deliver a service to Manitobans. This is, quite frankly, silly.

Mr. Chomiak: Madam Speaker, is the minister not concerned that the patient records of 800 patients, including 30 children, were given to a private company that the minister had not even signed the contract for, on a contract that was controversial from the very start, on a contract the minister held off signing because he had concerns?

Is the minister not concerned that it, in fact, is not only wrong but may, in fact, be illegal?

* (1400)

Mr. Praznik: Madam Speaker, I would be very concerned if the Ministry of Health was giving out confidential information on patients to people for whom we were not in a contractual or entering into contractual relationship to deliver a service. That is not what has happened here.

Madam Speaker, as in many things with government, once the bid was accepted, certain legal obligations were imposed on the parties in putting that together. There is a transition. The normal administrative work

of completing and signing agreements takes time as we move it through the system.

What is important with Rimer Alco taking on that service is that the people receiving it, that the flow of information takes place so that we can have a successful implementation of this particular service. That is what it is about. Surely to goodness, members are not saying that the officials in the Department of Health were wrong because they got on with the job.

Some Honourable Members: Patients have rights.

Mr. Praznik: Well, members opposite say patients have rights. They do; they have a right to receive the service.

Immigration Policy Income Means Test

Mr. George Hickes (Point Douglas): Madam Speaker, my questions are for the Minister responsible for Culture, Heritage and Citizenship.

Once again the federal government has based recent changes to immigration laws on the Toronto experience. The new law will apply mostly to the sponsorship of parents and grandparents. In Manitoba, the cost of social assistance due to sponsorship breakdown is extremely small. By and large, parents and grandparents live with the sponsoring family and contribute economically to the family, to the community and to Manitoba as a whole. The new requirement to use an income means test for immigrants shows once again that a means test is simply meanspirited.

My question is will the minister, given that our immigration population contributes to our economy and to the social fabric of Manitoba, write to the federal minister to oppose these changes.

Hon. Rosemary Vodrey (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship): Madam Speaker, as the member knows, my colleague the former Minister of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship did in fact write to the federal minister very much opposed to any increase in the income-level requirement. As I understand it

now, the changes are stable income for over a 12-month period.

The member is quite right in saying that this is very much aimed at Ontario and particularly Toronto and that Manitoba has, I understand, a default rate of less than 1 percent. So I will want to very carefully look at any impact on Manitobans because we very, very much support family unification, and in fact, in the Canada-Manitoba immigration agreement signed by my colleague on behalf of our province, family reunification is noted. So I share the member's concern, that we would like no effect on immigration in Manitoba.

Mr. Hickes: I thank the minister for her response.

Will the minister, given that sponsorship of family members was already severely restricted in 1992, recommend that the federal minister drop any proposed changes that involve income means test on Manitoba immigrants?

Mrs. Vodrey: Madam Speaker, our signing of the Canada-Manitoba immigration agreement does allow us to have discussions with the federal minister to make our concerns well known to them. So I will be taking opportunities on behalf of our province, especially to again restate our commitment in the area of family reunification and that commitment noted within our agreement.

Manitoba Hydro Privatization

Ms. MaryAnn Mihychuk (St. James): My questions are to the Premier (Mr. Filmon). The president of Manitoba Hydro today confirmed in the committee dealing with Manitoba Hydro that upcoming changes will allow for competition for Manitoba Hydro's retail customers, exactly the condition the Premier referred to yesterday in this Chamber as a precondition for him to consider the sale of Manitoba Hydro.

When the Premier was wrong in regard to the time frame of deregulation and he was wrong again yesterday when he referred to retail competition, was he merely uninformed or was he deliberately misleading

Manitobans? Will he stop using those weasel words and tell Manitobans the straight facts?

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I would remind the honourable member for St. James that she used some very unparliamentary language. It has been ruled unparliamentary on several occasions—"deliberately misleading." I wonder if I might ask her to withdraw those words.

Ms. Mihychuk: I withdraw those words.

Madam Speaker: I thank the honourable member for St. James.

Hon. David Newman (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): Madam Speaker, the tone of the question is so different from what I thought was a very civilized meeting where reason prevailed that I find the transformation surprising. However, it is a mountain made out of a molehill.

In my initial remarks at the standing committee on Tuesday, March 18, I indicated the very kind of competition which she must be referring to here today that the president of Manitoba Hydro spoke about. He spoke about the theoretical kind of possibility of a thermal generating plant being created out of the supply of natural gas and then be hooked up to a major customer like Inco or Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting or a chemical plant in Brandon. Of course that is possible, and that kind of competition would be possible. That would be a kind of retail competition.

Ms. Mihychuk: Madam Speaker, my question to the Premier, since it is the Premier who has been making the comments about what are the conditions of privatization, will the Premier tell Manitobans today that he will take it to the people of Manitoba for a vote prior to any consideration of privatization?

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Madam Speaker, as I have said before, I believe that Manitoba Hydro is being very well managed, that it is operating very efficiently in public ownership and that I cannot see anything in the near future that would cause anybody to look at privatizing it. Maybe New Democrats would want to privatize it, but we certainly do not intend to,

and we do not see it as being something that we would want to look at. If there was the kind of retail competition that would see them being able to—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Filmon: Madam Speaker, the members opposite do not want to hear the answer.

Historical Documents Private Acquisition

Ms. Diane McGifford (Osborne): Yesterday the minister responsible for Land Titles told us that historical documents were not for sale and yet in Headnotes and Footnotes, a publication of the Manitoba Bar Association, the expression “willing to sell” appears and prospective readers are advised to contact the Registrar General of Property Rights in the Department of Consumer Affairs. I would like to table this page. Madam Speaker, we are left with a web of inaccuracies, another case of the right hand not knowing what the left hand is doing.

So I want to ask the Minister responsible for Consumer and Corporate Affairs to explain why the Registrar General of Property Rights is apparently privatizing historical documents while the minister says he—that is the minister—is not.

Hon. Mike Radcliffe (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Madam Speaker, I thought I had made myself very clear yesterday, but I will say again for the benefit of the honourable member for Osborne—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, to complete his response.

Mr. Radcliffe: Neither the Land Titles Office nor this government take responsibility for any comments that are made in Headnotes and Footnotes.

I can reassure my colleagues in this Chamber and the honourable member for Osborne that, as I stated yesterday, there are no public documents that are for sale, that in fact this was a solicitation from the

Winnipeg Land Titles Office to solicit contributions from the private bar to frame and matte important documents which were in fear of being destroyed through age and to be displayed in the public domain. Thank you.

Ms. McGifford: Then I am wondering, Madam Speaker, why that famous “s” word “sell”—and not “salacious”—appears in the journal along with the phone number and the name of the Registrar General of Property Rights in the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs.

Mr. Radcliffe: Madam Speaker, I will repeat some of the information that I have just put on the record, which is that Headnotes and Footnotes is a private publication put out by the members of the Manitoba Bar Association. It is not a government publication.

I would also point out to my honourable colleagues in this Chamber that when my honourable colleague and I discussed this matter yesterday, I invited her to phone the author of the information in the article to confirm what I had said in this Chamber, and I would suggest that if she has not done that, that she do her homework in an appropriate fashion before she puts this sort of information before this Chamber to confuse the people of Manitoba. Thank you.

* (1410)

Manitoba Economy Rate of Bankruptcies

Mr. Leonard Evans (Brandon East): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Finance. The Minister of Finance continues to boast about how great the Manitoba economy is doing, using carefully selected various statistics.

Can the Minister of Finance therefore explain to this House why business bankruptcies have increased in Manitoba in 1996 more than any other province? Why are we 10 out of 10? Why are we in the worst situation of any province in Canada with a 39.5 percent increase in bankruptcies?

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I would encourage the member for Brandon

East to read the reports of the Toronto Dominion Bank that have been out in the last few days, the reports of Wood Gundy, Nesbitt Burns, all of the organizations that are saying nothing but positive things about Manitoba's economy and nothing but positive things about our finances.

In fact, his own colleague the member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale), whom he should probably talk to, on CBC Radio the other day said in a period of record growth and jobs and employment, from his own colleague acknowledging the fine performance of Manitoba's economy—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Point of Order

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): On a point of order, I believe Beauchesne's indicates that the answers to questions should be brief and to the point raised. The specific question is why is Manitoba 10 out of 10 in terms of bankruptcies and has the greatest increase in bankruptcies of anywhere in the country? The minister is going on infocommercial that has no relation to the issue of bankruptcy as raised by the member for Brandon East.

Madam Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable member for Kildonan, I would remind the honourable Minister of Finance that indeed his response should be specific to the question asked.

* * *

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister of Finance, to respond to the question asked.

Mr. Stefanson: I want to remind the member for Brandon East that we have just had five straight years of decline in business bankruptcies in Manitoba, the best record in all of Canada.

Mr. Leonard Evans: Madam Speaker, my question was, and I asked the minister, will the minister undertake to analyze 1996 where Manitoba was 10 out of 10, the worst situation of any province in terms of

bankruptcies. What types of firms are especially involved? What are the causes of these bankruptcies? Why are we doing so poorly compared to the rest of the country?

Mr. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, I just told the member for Brandon East that we have now, up until that year, had five straight years of decline in business bankruptcies in Manitoba, the best record of any province in Canada when it comes to consumer bankruptcies. In 1996, we had the best performance in all of Canada, so our record in that whole area is outstanding in a relative sense within Canada.

Today Manitoba's economy, as we all know, including the member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale), is performing amongst the best in all of Canada when it comes to job growth, growth in retail sales, growth in exports, growth in manufacturing shipments, growth in private sector capital investment, five straight years of the best performance in Manitoba and on track for its sixth record year and so our economy—in spite of all of the rhetoric from the member for Brandon East.

I would encourage him to talk to people in his community. I was out there Tuesday morning talking about the '97 budget and nothing but compliments about our financial situation and our economic situation. In fact, his own chamber gave our budget a B-plus as an outstanding rating for the performance of this government.

Madam Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

NONPOLITICAL STATEMENTS

Internet Opportunities Workshop

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Madam Speaker, do I have leave to make a nonpolitical statement?

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

Mr. Dyck: Yesterday morning I, along with the Minister of Rural Development (Mr. Derkach), had the opportunity to participate in an Internet Opportunities

Workshop held in Winkler. This event, organized by the Rural Advisory Committee, the Pembina Valley Development Corporation and Manitoba Rural Development, led participants through the exciting world of the information highway.

The focus of the workshop was to show community members what a unique tool the Internet can be for the community. It also introduced participants to community round tables, the community access program and community Enterprise Development Centres on how the Internet can benefit these programs.

I want to thank all those community members who participated. I especially want to acknowledge the assistance of students from the Garden Valley Collegiate who served as experienced surfers and guided the small groups through the world of the Internet using a live computer connection.

Without the support of sponsors such as Power Corp and MTS, this event would never have been the success it was. Their commitment to the betterment of rural Manitoba is admirable.

I am confident that all participants found the workshop relevant and one more additional tool in discovering the potential that lies within each of us. Thank you very much.

Lyme Disease

Mr. Tim Sale (Crescentwood): Madam Speaker, do I have leave to make a nonpolitical statement?

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

Mr. Sale: Madam Speaker, I want to rise and pay tribute to an organization which has done a great deal of work over the last eight to 10 years to bring Manitobans' awareness of the severity and spread of Lyme disease in this province to public awareness. I have, with your permission, distributed a fact sheet which this group put together in consultation with Dr. Guilfoyle in the public health area. They have pointed out that we now have a certified case of Lyme disease

on a tick found on an animal in Winnipeg which was an animal that had not been outside of our city. So there is no question that the disease is present.

I hope all honourable members will take the opportunity through various means to let their constituents know that this is a very serious but very curable disease. If it is caught in its early stages, it is relatively easily cured with a course of antibiotics. If it is left to become a disease that becomes systemic, it is extremely hard to cure, but more importantly, it affects central nervous system organs and the heart and liver and can have very, very serious debilitating effects.

* (1420)

I want to pay particular tribute to Elizabeth Wood, who is a victim of Lyme disease, and while I am not attributing any blame here, the medical community in Manitoba was not up to speed on this disease because it was rare. She was not diagnosed. She passed the disease on to her unborn child. Her child then was born with Lyme disease, and the family has gone through an extremely difficult time in coping with this disease. They have also gone through a difficult time with the Lyme support group in getting agreement on the part of the medical community in Manitoba and the members of the public health field in Manitoba that this disease should be taken seriously and preventive measures should be taken. I am glad that the minister, I suppose through his Director of Public Health, Dr. Guilfoyle, has now made this a reportable disease. I commend him for that, but I am sorry that it took so long to persuade the department that this was a serious disease.

I would like to ask, Madam Speaker, if members opposite would consider, and I particularly ask the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro, Mr. Newman from Riel, if he would consider putting this information in the Hydrogram mailing so that all Manitobans could receive this information before the tick season begins this year. It will save families a lot of grief. It will save the Department of Health a great deal of expenditure because it is a very cheap disease to cure at its early stage and a devastatingly costly disease to cure when it becomes systemic. So I ask the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro to consider that request, and I hope he will agree to put this information in the Hydrogram.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET DEBATE (Fifth Day of Debate)

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

Hon. James Downey (Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism): Madam Speaker, as happy as I am about this budget, I have to say I am as sad for the member for Brandon East (Mr. Leonard Evans) and what he tries to represent in this Legislature. In the some almost 20 years that I have been here, for some reason he has not changed, and I guess one would not expect him to change. To come to the Question Period today—and I do want to spend just a minute on this—with one negative thing he has been able to find, but even that was on pretty shaky ground because I have heard him say time and time again that you cannot make any decisions or draw any conclusions from short-term indications and statistics, that you have to look at the longer term.

The Minister of Finance's (Mr. Stefanson) answer today clearly pointed out where we stood in bankruptcies. It is unfortunate that any bankruptcy takes place, but in the five years prior to this, we in fact were probably the best in the country.

Again, they are too cute by half when you get the member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) clearly stating on an open-line comment on a radio show that when our economy is performing so well—he was trying to be too cute by half. Again, Madam Speaker, they were caught in their own web of trying to be negative.

Point of Order

Mr. Tim Sale (Crescentwood): Point of order, Madam Speaker. The context of that quote is very important. I was commenting that in a time when the

Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) was claiming record growth and record employment, he was also claiming that his revenues were falling, which is not a very credible comment. That is the context in which that comment was made.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Crescentwood does not have a point of order. It is clearly a dispute over the facts.

* * *

Mr. Downey: Well, I think it is important. I will use a bit of my speech just to sort this out, because here is what he did say. This is a direct quote from the CBC Radio show. He said—this is a direct quote—this is to the Minister of Finance: he is trying to tell us that this year they are going to fall in a period of record growth and jobs and employment. Not credible.

That is exactly what he said on CBC Radio—that we are going to have record growth and jobs and employment. Can you believe it? It is the first time since I have heard him in many years that he has been accurate in anything that he said publicly.

So, Madam Speaker, again I have to make one quick comment about the member for Brandon East (Mr. Leonard Evans). You know, there is a story told many times about the young optimist who has dug through the bag of horse manure, hoping that there would be a pony in there someplace. Well, he has found the herd of horses, but he is looking through them to find the manure. That is really what the member for Brandon East—but it truly is. That is how negative he is that he just does not seem to be able to get the positives of life right.

In my comments yesterday—and I think it is important to repeat them because we are at an historic time in our history when this government and the members opposite have an opportunity to support this government and this budget for the young people of our country to start to pay back the debt that has been incurred on the backs of the people of Manitoba.

What does it mean when young people decide in their lives what they want to do? It means that they can become part of the workforce. They can get a job

where governments are taking less taxes out of their pockets. It means that if entrepreneurs want to start a business they are doing so in an environment that is less competitive than other areas because governments are less of a factor in their lives as it relates to pay.

What does it mean for the seniors of this country? Again, I think it is important to repeat that the engine that drives the income for this country will be able to generate the wealth that gives us the health care, the personal care homes and all of those needs for our seniors. It is the right thing to do. It covers a broad base of everyone in our society. It covers the people in the North; it covers the people in the south, in rural and in urban. I think it is important to point out that, as important as anything, it reinstills confidence in the people of Manitoba.

What do I see on this side of the House when members speak? I see a pride in what we have been able to do, a pride and a confidence that we are on the right track. What do you hear when you go to the coffee shops? What do you hear when you visit the communities? You hear people talking optimistically.

An Honourable Member: When is the next election?

Mr. Downey: The member for Concordia says: when is the next election? The next election will come in due course. However, we are sure that there will be a federal one before the next provincial one, and that will be a test, of course, of the philosophies of many people, many parties. Of course, I am not so sure—who is the Leader of the New Democratic Party? I kind of forget. [interjection] Oh, no. Stephen is old time now. Somebody else.

This budget, Madam Speaker, truly is about the future of this province and what we want it to be. We want the resources of this province to be responsibly used for the creation of wealth and jobs under a sustainable development principles. We want the health care to be preserved and protected and be able to make sure that we have the resources to fund those. What we do not need to do is continue to own things like the Manitoba when it is not in the public interest.

Madam Speaker, I want to make one particular point, as I heard the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Doer) and

the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) say it is like selling your furniture when we sold the Manitoba. What a terrible analogy. What it would be like doing would be selling your automobile if you needed to get to town. Well, the government does not need to own an automobile or does not have to buy automobiles for the people of Manitoba any longer. There are services available for us to communicate and do our work.

Madam Speaker, it is not like selling our furniture. What we are doing is in those areas where government should be, we are. Where we do not have to any longer be, we are not and that is where it is at. It is not a philosophical bent with this government that we have to own the Manitoba. I can assure you that members opposite can continue on as long as they like to—did nine minutes go that fast? I was just getting wound up again.

Madam Speaker, so I have to say that I stand in this Legislative Assembly with a lot of pride, because I have been here for a considerable number of years. I, honest to goodness, did not realize that at some point in my political career I would have the chance to stand and vote to pay back money that was borrowed on behalf of the young people. I will again tell the members of the opposition and the member particularly from Point Douglas (Mr. Hickes), who I know believes strongly in young people, who sees that there is a future for young people—it is his opportunity to stand and support those people, stand and support those young people so that they do not any longer have to see debt mounted on their backs, but he will not because he is blinded by the ideology of the members opposite.

So the bottom line is this budget is very well rounded. It touches all of the right bases. It does all of the right things and most importantly, and I say this most importantly, we have mastered—we are now on top of the debt that has been put on our backs by the governments of the past. We are going to be able to invest in health care facilities that we will be able to pay for with contributions from local communities. We will be able to put in place the tools that the business community needs to generate the wealth, and, again, it was spelled out. We will be able to develop another labour-sponsored capital pool of funds which are needed for this country to grow and expand, for people to access capital through.

So, Madam Speaker, I am extremely proud and I say that genuinely today; I am extremely proud to support this budget, and I invite those opposite to reconsider it on behalf of the young people of this country, to do likewise.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Ms. Diane McGifford (Osborne): Madam Speaker, I thank the Deputy Premier for his remarks. I enjoyed his humour at the beginning and wished for a little bit more substance later on, but he certainly has a sense of humour, which we appreciate.

* (1430)

I am pleased to rise today and respond to the Minister of Finance's (Mr. Stefanson) budget which he of course delivered in this House last Friday, the 14th of March. I understand that the throne speech delivered in early March really set the agenda for the budget, and the throne speech set forth the government's selling points: first of all, a surplus, which we predicted; secondly, a claim to no major tax increases, this I will address later; thirdly, a repayment of debts on the backs of the poor and the downtrodden in this province, I might add; fourthly, a lowering of the unemployment rate, and, of course, the unemployment rate has gone down, but we have far too many part-time and dead-end jobs in the province of Manitoba. So any economic prosperity is extremely modest and certainly not worthy of the crowing and carrying on that we have heard from members on the opposite side.

Now, Madam Speaker, this government claims full credit for this modest economic growth. They claim full credit for any prosperity and yet in that same throne speech, the throne speech that we heard at the beginning of March, this government evaded any responsibility for the inequities that characterize our province and evaded any responsibility for the growing poverty that characterizes life in Manitoba. All was blamed on the federal government, and the distinct impression from the throne speech was that the only possible source of relief for Manitoba's woes is the federal government to revert to an old partnership before the introduction of the CHST payments.

Now there is some truth in this picture, the picture as presented. I want to acknowledge that this government,

aided by natural economic cycles and swings, aided by falling interest rates and by a general recovery in North America, has achieved some modest gains. That is true. It is true as well that the federal government's cuts in transfer payments in the name of economic necessity is a blemish on our national state, Madam Speaker, a betrayal of our poorest citizens and our most vulnerable citizens and, arguably, another step down the path towards the breakup of Canada as a national state.

But the most important truth is not a federal truth. The most important truth is here in Manitoba. Let us be perfectly clear about this. The modest economic achievements are directly related to the deterioration of our health, education and social support systems. The terrible irony here, Madam Speaker, is that our Premier (Mr. Filmon) and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) argue and have argued that they must deplete the services and programs in health, education and social services. They must deplete them now in order to ensure the future of these programs. They do not heed what is plain to any ordinary Manitoban. You do not have to be a rocket scientist to understand this, and that is the fact is that ill-educated, poorly nourished children whose health has been ignored, whose education has been ignored do not have a sound future to protect.

So I wonder what has happened to preventative, proactive programs and services, the kind of pay now and save later, that particular attitude towards government and governing. I suppose the truth is that this government lives from election to election so that a dollar saved today is another dollar for the slush fund that is slowly accumulating in preparation for the next election. This argument of cutting now to protect future generations is simply at best nonsense and at worst doublespeak or, as I believe my colleague from Wolseley (Ms. Friesen) christened it the other night, the big lie. It is a smoke screen to hide the real agenda.

The real agenda in this province, Madam Speaker, is the creation of a two-tiered system, the creation—

Point of Order

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, on a point of order.

Hon. Rosemary Vodrey (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I believe our colleague across the floor, the member for Osborne speaking now, used the term “big lie” in reference within her speech, and I believe that is not permitted within this Chamber.

Madam Speaker: On the point of order raised by the Minister of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, I will take the point of order raised under advisement so that I can check the context within which the terminology was used.

* * *

Ms. McGifford: Madam Speaker, I would be quite willing to withdraw the phrase and substitute “large fallacy” if that would help.

Madam Speaker, I was speaking about the creation of two-tiered systems in Manitoba, especially with regard to health, education and social services. We are more and more becoming a province where there is one service for the haves and another service for the have-nots, sometimes known as the underclasses. These two-tiered systems and the class divisions which characterize these schisms are everywhere more apparent in our province.

It seems to me this is a betrayal of their Canadian dreams of equality. We dreamed, our ancestors dreamed of a country where if we were not necessarily born equal as far as wealth was concerned, at the very least we would take steps to create a level playing field. Years gone by this might take the form historically speaking of grants in land. In our more recent history we have tried to create a level playing field by implementing educational, health and social programs.

This level playing field began to get awfully lumpy of course with the Mulroney Tories in Ottawa. Chretien's Liberals, who promised renewal, have really delivered restraint and slashing, and of course the culmination of the end of the level playing field is here in Manitoba with the Filmon government, with the conception of a two-tiered system, the development and conception of two-tiered systems. The two-tiered system, Madam Speaker, is the death of the vision of a laying of a level

playing field and a sad day for us all since it marks the end of social justice for Manitobans.

I want to return, Madam Speaker, now to the Minister of Finance's explanation of “cutting now to protect the future,” which I suppose is starving your child in order to feed your grandchild. I was talking about this explanation as a smoke screen, which hides the two-tiered system. But even worse than its introduction of a two-tiered system, bad as that might be, is the arrogance and the cynicism that accompanies or that lurks behind this kind of statement.

This government—excuse me, I need to cough. It is the season for colds. This government is cutting our social services, our education and our health programs in order to generate a pre-election reserve. They are stashing the piggy bank and balancing the books on the backs of the most vulnerable and poor in Manitoba, balancing the books on the backs of our children's education. We know the history of -2, -2, 0, -2, 0 and then next year again 0. We know that there has been \$4 million cut from post-secondary education in Manitoba this year, and of course we know that the health of Manitobans, the health and well-being of Manitobans, has been put on the line. This is clear in cuts to eye care; Pharmacare, home care, personal care homes and hospital services all tell the same story, the story being, let us stack the political sock for the next election.

* (1440)

I want to turn my attention for a minute to the tax story. The Minister of Finance began his budget speech very proudly crowing about the fact that his budget introduces no new taxes and no tax increases and that it extends Manitoba's freeze of major new taxes to 10 years. I think he said 10 years.

Several of my colleagues, including the Leader of the Opposition, have addressed the myth of no tax cuts, pointing out that what we really have are a host of increases in costs, in user fees, and of course we have had out and out cuts and offloading from the province to property taxes. My colleagues in their speeches have been compiling a catalogue of these stealth taxes or taxes by the backdoor and I am going to continue and add a little to this list.

First of all, education. Our education cuts have meant property tax increases that outpace other jurisdictions. For example, the property tax portion of spending by school boards has risen from \$243 million in 1989-90 to \$355.5 million in 1996-97, and government funding for public schools will fall from 70 percent to 62 percent, and surely this year's and next year's zero percent increases will only exacerbate this situation. Incidentally, Madam Speaker, since when has news of stable funding, especially stable funding at zero and after years of slashing and cuts, since when has news of this kind of stability been a topic of self-congratulations? Well, since the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) got up last Friday. This government boasts about its zero percent increase for the next two years as though this were bounty and generosity rather than the stingy meanspiritedness that it is.

Now other stealth taxes include provincial cuts to our city. They have added pressure to our property taxes, already the highest per value in the country. Property taxes for years have been forced up because of offloading, contrary to what the Minister of Urban Affairs (Mr. Reimer) is saying. There have been user fees in health care. We mentioned eye examinations, the doubling of per diems in personal care homes, increased Pharmacare cuts, charges for ultrasound, the northern transportation fee, home care equipment like ostomy bags, and then there was the cancellation of the children's dental hospital but, of course, this is not a user fee. This is an out-and-out cut and harmful, I might add, to the children of Manitoba.

I will not continue with the health care cuts at this time. Many of my colleagues have listed health care cuts, and I am sure others will mention them. Here are a few more examples of zero percent increases or user fees: broadening sales taxes to include school supplies. I thought we were interested in learning in this province. A broadening sales tax to include children's clothing, even diapers, Madam Speaker. Then there are the increases in the telephone services only to be predicted, fishing licences for seniors, drivers' licences, camping fees, soil testing, Legal Aid—\$25 before you can get any help in Legal Aid which certainly penalizes the women of Manitoba, and there have been increases in Vital Statistics to obtain vital statistics information.

I am going to return now for a minute back to education. I have already spoken about this

government's bragging in regard to a zero percent increase for the next two years after, I might add again, years of cuts. We all know that the public school system in our province is scandalously underfunded. The results of this underfunding were the subject of debate last fall at the committee hearings when public presentations were made by parents, teachers, school trustees, students, superintendents. A full range of presenters attended those meetings and talked about the problems with cuts in education.

What are the results of these cuts?—a decline in teacher morale. Teachers in Manitoba are depressed, are overworked. Their morale is lower than it has been in years. What are some of the other results? Increases in classroom size because of layoffs, not good for learning, we all know that.

Ms. MaryAnn Mihychuk (St. James): Decaying buildings.

Ms. McGifford: Decaying buildings, my colleague from St. James (Ms. Mihychuk) tells me, probably some of them decayed to the point of not being safe for our students. There have been decreases in a host of resources including resource teachers, decreases in programs, and so limits are placed on our students getting a full education in Manitoba.

Teachers are faced with outdated equipment, aids and especially textbooks. We hear of students in 1996 trying to learn with geography textbooks—the face of the world has changed but students are expected to learn geography with a text published in 1976. I remember distinctly a teacher from St. Boniface lamenting this dreadful state of affairs.

Now we learn, Madam Speaker, that carefully hidden in the budget is some good educational news at least for one select body of Manitobans, and that is we learn that education grants to private schools are going to increase.

Private schools of course are the schools of choice for many members of this government and their political allies, so why are we not surprised to hear that these grants are going to increase? This is the kind of blatant pork barrelling which serves to expedite the growth of an education industry which is another term

for a two-tiered system and this two-tiered system in Manitoba and, of course, is perfectly in keeping with the underpinnings of current Tory ideology. The privatization of all public services is the aim of this government one gathers, even public education. Steal from the poor, give to the rich and so reverse the Robin Hood motif.

The inner city schools in Winnipeg will be required to reduce nursery school programs, to stew about breakfast for hungry kids and to worry about busing, but private schools this year we understand will get an increase.

Turning to post-secondary education for a minute, this government has bragged about extra money for post-secondary students by way of increases in tax credits and bursaries. I know that the favourite Tory student was on CBC praising these increases and lauding the importance of student choice.

But let us put beside this, side by side, the very important fact that a cut of \$4 million to post-secondary education will mean a shortfall at University of Manitoba of \$8 million, and that this university will be forced to increase tuition by at least 5 percent. Clearly an increase to the Manitoba learning tax credit and the added \$1 million for scholarships and bursaries will not offset the decreases and atone for the increases in tuition fees which over the last five years have risen somewhere between, depending on the university, 125 percent to 146 percent.

* (1450)

Universities and university education, which in the '60s and in the '70s was financially possible for just about everybody, are once again becoming exclusive, the privilege of the few who can afford them. This government is turning the clock backwards and showing its true reactionary colours.

Many university departments are suffering the effects of years of cutting by a government which has little respect for scholarships, for the world of ideas or for the learning of the humanities. Take, for example the English department at the University of Manitoba. I understand that in the past 10 years, because of retirements, staff numbers have fallen from 39 to 23,

and five of these 23 members teach in film and theatre, which leaves 18 members in the English department to run undergraduate and graduate programs, to participate in the full range of university life and of course to make scholarly contributions in their chosen fields.

I understand that this year there may be more retirements but no replacements because retirees are not replaced, rather, their salaries are clawed back in general revenues to pay for deficits created by this government's chronic underfunding of Manitoba's oldest and largest university.

I know that last year this government passed a bill on compulsory retirement at the University of Manitoba and there might be something to say about compulsory retirement, but the problem is, when somebody retires, there is never any replacement, and so of course why are we not surprised that departments want to hang on to their teachers as long as possible?

The new generation of scholars and teachers who traditionally continue the academic and scholarly work of an institution simply will not exist at the University of Manitoba. Now, this intellectual vacuum probably does not disturb a government which allows a Minister of Education to appoint a post-secondary education council which fails to include even a single academic. It probably does not disturb a government which generally adopts the philosophical vision of Jeremy Bentham, the utilitarian point of view, so members opposite probably are not terribly described but, really, Madam Speaker, they should know better.

One presumes that the autumn 1995 strike at the University of Manitoba accounts to some extent for this government's animosity and anti-intellectual bias. Those who contravene the Premier are sooner or later punished. But does this government not understand that by hamstringing the humanities at the University of Manitoba and other universities in this province that it, by its own reckoning, fails to prepare young people for their professional futures. They will not be ready for the complexities of the marketplace in the future.

I trust it is the same anti-intellectual bias that explains why Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, why this budget has been cut and particularly why monies to public library services have been cut. I suspect this is true.

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

After all, a government which does not value its Department of English at a major university probably has little respect for the printed word and does not much care whether great texts, let alone lesser texts, reach our communities, especially the people in the North, who do not vote Tory anyway. Let them watch TV. But it is extremely hypocritical for this government to cut library services, especially in view of the Premier's own Reading Recognition awards and apparently his reading to children at the Children's Museum. But of course for his recognition awards and for his stints at the Children's Museum our Premier gets public recognition, while I suppose the idea is, cut library services and hope that nobody really notices.

An Honourable Member: Kind of like packing hampers at the Cheer Board.

Ms. McGifford: It is kind of like packing hampers at the Cheer Board, a very good analogy, thanks to the member for Burrows.

I have many specific concerns about the budget which I had wanted to raise, but I have other colleagues who want the opportunity to speak today and of course we value co-operation and not competition, so I am soon going to end. But I want to have a few final words about the physical characteristics of this budget, just the physical characteristics of this document, for here is another example of that grand fallacy. I have not been able to use that other phrase that everyone knows, so I will call it a grand fallacy. This publication is glossy and slick. There are great blue vistas I suppose attempting to associate this government with expansiveness and honesty. There are athletes on the cover, both male and female on the smaller version, suggesting the Pan Am Games, suggesting that all Manitobans are athletic, healthy, strong, well fed, well clad, well cared for, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that all Manitobans are going to be happy, successful winners. This is, as I said, a grand fallacy.

The Finance minister forgot to include some other faces on the front of this publication. The Finance minister forgot to include the 1,800 health care workers, mostly nurses, who have been laid off in the

past years. He forgot to include the 700 teachers who have been laid off. Where are the 70 workers who just lost their jobs at Rice Sportswear? Where are the 87,500 women who work part time, one-third of whom want full-time jobs? Where are the 25 percent of Manitoba children who live in poverty and the welfare moms with children under six who are being harassed and forced onto the labour market without proper care for their children? Where are the sick and bewildered seniors who are prematurely being ejected from hospital and returned to the community without proper care, often to live in loneliness and isolation? Where are the homeless? There are homeless people in my constituency in Osborne Village. Where are the people who eat at food banks? Where are the latch-key kids whose parents cannot find accessible, affordable daycare? Where are the desperate parents with special needs children whose respite time has been cut? Where are the women waiting for counselling at government underfunded agencies? Where are the sidelined and where are the abandoned?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, my caucus has an alternate vision, one announced by our Leader just before this House convened in March. We would bring outsiders into the inside, and we would bring social justice to the marginalized people of Manitoba. We take responsibility for the quality of life in Manitoba, quality life for all Manitobans, not merely a select few, and our budget would reflect this alternative. Our budget would reflect this inclusive view. It would be a gift to all Manitobans, not a cynical, arrogant document designed to appease corporate bosses and by the lackeys, toadies and cronies and other various Tory hangers-on. As we have said before, Manitobans want an election, and with this in mind I endorse our Leader's motion of nonconfidence. Thank you

* (1500)

Hon. Jack Reimer (Minister of Urban Affairs): Mr. Deputy Speaker, today really is a special day if we are not aware of it. This morning when I was listening to the radio I was listening to a countdown just before eight o'clock; in fact, I think it was around 7:55. On the radio they were doing a countdown, and it twiggged my ears as to what they were counting down for. As it happened, at exactly 7:55 this morning the equinox came into being which is, as we know, the time when

the sun crosses the equator and we now go into what we call springtime.

I thought it is so apropos that today was a day that I was planning to speak on the budget, and it is the first day of spring, a new change, a new direction and a new feeling of optimism here in Manitoba, and it is so apropos that I am standing here today speaking about a budget that is also part of a celebration in the fact that it is the 10th budget in a row where there have been no tax increases.

As I mentioned, you know, the springtime gives us a chance to think of how we can plan for the new year, how we can plant the seeds of growth, how we can look back in a sense as to what has transpired over our endeavours over the last few years. If we look back to 10 years ago, at that time the vision of our Premier (Mr. Filmon) and the Minister of Finance at that time, the Honourable Clayton Manness, there was the vision and fortitude to say we are going to make things different in Manitoba. We are going to make things better; we are going to look to the future; we are going to do some planning as to how and where we are going with our money, the monies that we are spending and the monies that we are collecting.

So it is apropos today that when we look at the changing in the season, the fact that we are going into a spring mode of the year, that we are now talking about a budget that is bringing forth the same type of optimism and generating that same type of growth in our economy. It is the seeds of economic growth that our Premier and Finance ministers have planted over the years that now we as the citizens of Manitoba, our children, can benefit because of the strong visions that we have brought forth for Manitoba.

Speaking on the budget, there are quite a few areas that we should be concentrating our efforts on in recognizing how we have come about and the framework that was put up for the 1997 budget. It is balanced budget legislation in effect with this budget that has been brought forth as mentioned and is again reiterating the fact that it is the 10th year that we are now celebrating no major tax increases. It is showing a modest revenue growth. Our own source revenues are growing. It is also taking into fact that we are being forced and faced with reduced federal transfers and the

transfer of funding in the major areas of expenditures that this government has always held as a priority which is in health, education and social services.

The federal government continues to offload and download in these three particular areas. In one of my departments it is becoming even more apparent, in my Housing department, where the federal government has offloaded since 1993 with the capping of funding at that time, in 1994 of the withdrawal of funding for capital expenditures regarding funding. In 1995 there was the offloading across Canada of I believe it was around \$250 million with the funding cutback from public housing, and this year the request for a total withdrawal out of the public housing sector altogether and the total offloading onto the provinces.

Here in Manitoba that is an offload of a tremendous amount of units, almost 18,000 units. This also represents a mortgage portfolio of over \$650 million. These are some of the areas that we as a government have been forced to recognize because of the Liberal agenda of offloading down to the provinces. But in the meantime, because of the astute management of our revenues through our government actions and our programs taken through all departments of government, we are still able to come through with a balanced budget, have a surplus and still provide additional fundings to some of our main areas of expenditure that are required.

The federal government, as mentioned, we are looking at a total reduction in transferring of fundings to the provinces, here in Manitoba of almost \$1.1 billion by the year 2000 and 2001. So these are very significant amounts of monies that we as a province have to adjust to.

We are projecting a \$27-million surplus, and this is, as mentioned by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson), the third surplus in a row that we are able to generate through our astute management of our economy and the fact that we are making it available for industry to expand, for the growth in exports, for the growth of private manufacturing investments. Plant expansion and capital investments are at an all-time high here in Manitoba. We are able to finally start to pay off our debt, something that has been mentioned and bears repeating, the tremendous amount of debt

that was inherited by this government from the former NDP government when they were in office and where the only thing that they saw to generate growth was government expenditure, government borrowing and increase of debt to where now we are paying debt charges of over \$500 million a year. But this government has decided that, as with any type of astute management of funding and household account, in a sense, you have to start to pay off your debt. So we have set in motion a program of paying off this debt, and this will be the first year that we deposit \$75 million towards the total elimination of this debt somewhere down the line.

A lot of the members across get very nervous when we start to talk about the tremendous debt that we have accumulated because of the NDP. We can see this happening from various other aspects of NDP governments that are in power right now. We have to look at NDP governments that are in power to use as a comparison, and we look at the province of Ontario that had the former NDP government where they racked up in their first year of administration over \$12-billion worth of debt. I can recall then the Leader of the NDP party here in Manitoba, the member for Concordia (Mr. Doer), standing in this House and saying if you want to debate the Ontario budget, we will debate it and we will debate it with pride.

At that time, Ontario was going into the tank big time, big-time debt, in the tank to \$12 billion a year in debt that they accumulated. It took a change in government there; it took a realization by the people of Ontario that they could not continue with an NDP government of the tax-and-spend mentality so they booted them out. They now have a Conservative government in there that is turning that province around and is going to enjoy some record gains, just as we have done over our period of tenure here since 1988.

If we look further west to another NDP government, because we should use these people as a comparison because they are in power, we can look at the British Columbia government and see how when they went to the polls just a little while ago, how they had so-called brought in a balanced budget, a balanced budget that shortly after they were elected, there was a big oops and they said, oh, pardon me, we did not have a balanced budget but we got elected on this promise—after they

tabled a balanced budget. Then they found out that there were hundreds of millions of dollars the other way. They were not in a balanced position; they were in a red position. Their revenues were south, Mr. Deputy Speaker, not north. In fact, it is an interesting situation in British Columbia. I believe their government or their Finance minister is going to be taken to court, I understand, and they are challenging the validity of the provincial government in British Columbia because they so much falsified their budget.

An Honourable Member: Allegation of fraud.

Mr. Reimer: Allegation of fraud. That is the right terminology. These are the interesting things that we look at when we say the NDP on the other side have the alternatives. They stay there, they sit on that side of the House with the black cloud of doom and gloom hanging over them. Sometimes you cannot see to that side of the House because of the gloominess that sits over there. But this is their mantle in life, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that they are there as criticisms and opposition and that is their sole purpose. The constructive attitude and the constructive juices cannot flow anymore because it is totally stifled by this opposition to everything that this government has happened to do. So it would be very, very hard for a creativity and a new direction to come out of an opposition that has nothing but the doom and gloom and the down side on everything that comes about.

* (1510)

The people in Manitoba, the entrepreneurs, the people that are working, the people that are looking for the investment and the growth in this province are the people that are creating the optimism and the growth in Manitoba. It is these type of people that see Manitoba as the best place to work, to invest and create jobs in—

An Honourable Member: Raise a family.

Mr. Reimer: —and raise a family here in Manitoba. This is the type of attitude that is becoming more and more prevalent in this province of Manitoba, and I compliment the people for the astuteness of their recognition that a lot of the things that this government is doing is turning the corner for them in the sense of building the right atmosphere.

We have indicated, as I have mentioned before, there have been no new tax increases in this province. We have targeted some tax incentives to look at the stimulation of various sectors of the economy that can help further growth. One of them is the temporary manufacturing tax credit that has been extended to June 30, the year 2000. The payroll tax exemption has been increased to \$1 million, which is going to mean that there are an additional 600 employers that will be fully exempt from paying payroll tax this year.

An Honourable Member: That means more money for their staff, too.

Mr. Reimer: That means more money, exactly, as has been pointed out by one of my colleagues. This is more money that is going to go into the workers' pockets because of the deductions and that the company has to look at—can be reinvested or redistributed within the confines of their work.

These are some of the things that are recognized as positive initiatives for this province. Mr. Deputy Speaker, these are some of the things that people outside this Chamber recognize. People on the other side of this Chamber, they criticize that. They see that there is something wrong with that.

The introduction of a film and video production tax credit is going to increase tremendously the ability for this industry to grow. It is estimated that the film and video industry could be a \$200-million industry in the next few years here in Manitoba. It is a very important initiative here in Manitoba. In fact, I recall one of the studies that was done by the art institute here in Manitoba—was the fact that for every dollar that is spent in the arts community, it generates \$7 of revenue in the community. These are tremendous returns within the arts community here in Manitoba.

The arts community in Manitoba. We are very, very fortunate here in Winnipeg or in Manitoba that we have such a vast variety of entertainment that has a strong financial basis. One of the things that makes this a strong financial basis is the fact that the people get involved. It is the volunteerism. It is the cultural awareness. It is the cultural growth that we can partake in that we can be very proud of here in Manitoba, for this tremendous asset we have in our cultural ambience

of Manitoba. So I compliment our government on the initiatives of recognizing where there is growth for additional revenues and entrepreneurship, the fact that people will be involved with that.

We have increased the corporate capital tax exemption, increased it \$3 million, which is also going to have a tremendous effect on the investments into manufacturing which is related to jobs. You know, you get the criticism from across the way that it does not mean that the money is well spent. The biggest thing that can help the people, in a sense, is the fact that we have people working. That is the greatest incentive for people, to have jobs.

We have also reduced the gasoline tax on aviation fuel by one cent recognizing that here in Winnipeg, particularly Winnipeg with a 24-hour operation airport, that this has the ability to recognize more involvement with the airport. These are jobs that can be related to the terminaling and the handling of merchandise here in Winnipeg. It also means the availability of—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Can I have the honourable member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Tweed) and the member for St. James (Ms. Mihychuk) go to the loge and carry on their discussion so that we do not disrupt the rest of the House.

The honourable Minister of Urban Affairs, to continue.

Mr. Reimer: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You see, when you get a speech going a lot of times, things became animated here, because a lot of the things that I say, people become involved with this type of rhetoric. They want more of it. I actually feel that the member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Tweed) and the member for St. James (Ms. Mihychuk) were partaking in complimenting me on a lot of what I was saying. The hubbub may have been misinterpreted.

I always like to point out, one of the other initiatives that we have brought forth with the budget is that we have extended the sales tax rebate for first-time homebuyers, extended it another year. This is, as the Minister of Housing, always something that is of great

note. Encouraging any type of building or the expansion of building is something that I feel is a benefit to a lot of the residents here in Manitoba, not only just here in Winnipeg.

We have talked about the amount of money that has been dedicated to the essentials of our government, which have always been Health, Education, and Family Services. In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, over 65 percent of our total spending goes to just these three components within our government. This has always been a very high priority with our government. In fact, health care spending, per capita wise, we are the highest spenders per capita of any other province in Canada. That deserves repeating. We here in Manitoba spend more per capita on health care than any other province in Canada.

Now, if you listen to the other side, and heaven forbid you do, but if you listen to the other side, the only thing you hear about is cutbacks, we have cut back this, we have cut back this. But it is totally wrong. It is wrong, wrong, wrong. In fact, in regards to education, we are increasing \$1 million for funding for computers in classrooms. Our provincial support for community colleges has been maintained with \$1 million for new funding for bursaries and scholarships for university and community colleges; \$5.4 million to University of Manitoba and University of Winnipeg for urgent fire upgrades; \$1.4 million for federal-provincial Partners for Careers initiatives.

We have also, as has been pointed out by various other speakers on this side, the proceeds from \$150 million from the Health debt repayment financing of new priority Health capital projects has been also mentioned.

These are things that are going to help in the fulfilment of our obligations regarding the health priorities and health initiatives here in this province of Manitoba.

Our home care budget is up \$13 million, over \$100 million now. The opposition there says we are cutting home care. An up spending of \$13 million, that is an up. That means it is going north, not south. The signs are going up; \$13 million more in home care; \$17 million more for Pharmacare program, which is allotted

to help. As Minister of Seniors, I recognize that these are some of the things that we see as positives.

* (1520)

You hear the other side, you hear the opposition, we are cutting back. we are cutting back. We have increased more money; \$104 million for Child and Family Support agencies. The member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale). I know he recognizes that as a good initiative, and I agree with him on that.

We are increasing funding, in fact, over \$2 million additional support for personal care homes here in Manitoba. These are more monies. These are more; these are not less. We could say that more is more, but it does not seem to sink in over there. Does that make sense? No. How does more mean less? Some people recognize that.

We have announced funding for an Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre.

An Honourable Member: Where is that going to go?

Mr. Reimer: Into the Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre. there will be funding put into that. We have announced \$4.4 million for services to adults with disabilities. It is something, I believe, that is recognizing that there is a need in that area.

We are introducing \$8.9 million for Making Welfare Work programs. I think a lot of us are recognizing that the best person—not a handout; it is a hand up. What we are looking at is having people—the best security for a person is a job. Welfare is a program that is there to be used as a safety net and a trampoline really to get things going again.

We have announced, and we continue to announce, \$2 million for additional policing here for Winnipeg, a tremendous initiative on this government's initiatives. So it will mean 40 more police officers on the streets here in Winnipeg.

These are things that the other side of the House is aware of. but they criticize it—[interjection] There is a cut. I have to take very much exception to the member who spoke just before me. the member for Osborne

(Ms. McGifford), who was talking about a cut to the City of Winnipeg. My goodness, Mr. Deputy Speaker, where have they been? Since 1990 our funding to the City of Winnipeg has gone up 24 percent—I would like to also just to put on the record—over this same period that other provinces have reduced their grants.

An Honourable Member: Reduced. That means less.

Mr. Reimer: Reduced. In Alberta, down by 41.6 percent; in Ontario, down by 23 percent; in Newfoundland, down by 17.9; 8.3 in New Brunswick; 7.3 in Nova Scotia; 6.8 in Quebec. These are all down figures. Our funding to the City of Winnipeg has been consistent and in fact has increased year over year over year.

For the member for Osborne to stand up and say that we are cutting funding to the City of Winnipeg is totally, totally out of context. We as a province fund more to the City of Winnipeg than any other province. There was only one other province that did not reduce it, and that was at zero. We have increased over 3.2 percent last year more than we did before.

I find that I just cannot speak. I cannot believe these things that the opposition keeps saying about all these down things.

I could speak about the Winnipeg Development Agreement, a tremendous initiative by this province to be in partnership with the other two levels of government, the feds and the City of Winnipeg. We have committed \$25 million through the Winnipeg Development Agreement for various initiatives.

One of the most significant initiatives has been the Urban Safety program through the Winnipeg Development Agreement, which has generated a tremendous uptake by various groups. In fact, one of the criteria of the Urban Safety program is that it is a good-faith partnership with other nonprofit organizations for the continuation of Urban Safety programs. What it does is draw upon the assets of a community to enhance and make the programs better.

Funding through the Winnipeg Development Agreement is used as a catalyst to promote longevity of programs. What we look for are various components to

add to the safety of Winnipeg in all sectors of Winnipeg, not only in certain areas of Winnipeg, but it applies to all areas, whether it be St. James, whether it be out in Brooklands or in Fort Garry. It is a broad-based area for wherever there is a need for urban safety.

As mentioned, one of the ideas is to form partnerships, good-faith partnerships, with the various nonprofit groups and organizations. To date—this is maybe about a month old when I say “to date” but the figures that I have before me—we have expended just over \$980,000. What this has generated in good-faith partnerships with other groups is a total investment of just over \$3.6 million.

So this gives you an idea of the amount of seed money that can bring into fold other areas of development within the Urban Safety program. This represents initiatives with, I believe it is eight or nine different types of organizations, groups like Rossbrook House, City of Winnipeg Police department, the Winnipeg Boys and Girls Club, the Downtown BIZ, the North Main BIZ.

Downtown BIZ. I think we are all aware of the Neighbourhood Watch program down there that patrols downtown with their red uniforms on. They have proven to be very, very successful in how they have made the downtown area a little bit safer. They have added to the tourists' safety. Their information—they are hooked up by two-way radio not only to their base but also to the City of Winnipeg so that in case of an emergency they have instant access to a response team.

These are some of the things that are strong positives that we can build upon through the Winnipeg Development Agreement. We are very optimistic that there are other components of the Winnipeg Development Agreement that we feel should be explored. We are still in the process of taking applications under various other sectors. I think these are the type of expenditures that we can expect that will have positive benefits for Winnipeg as we go into the new century.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have talked about a lot of things that have happened within the provincial budget that was just down, the 1997 budget, and we have to recognize that a lot of the things that have been pointed

out, the fact that we are trying to set in motion a series of repayments on our debt. We are looking at trying to make sure that our balanced budget stays in effect so that we can do the long-term planning so that when we go into the new year and into the years ahead, we can look at a growth record and a confidence in our economy that is something that our children can be proud of, that we have been part of this new direction that has happened here in Manitoba.

* (1530)

Some of our winning economic initiatives, if you want to call them that, are that some of the forecasts for Manitoba are that we are looking at a growth rate by the Conference Board of around 2.9 percent in 1997. As mentioned by some of my colleagues, we are looking at a growth rate of almost 21,000 new jobs here in Manitoba, mostly full time, but more importantly, all in the private sector. The private sector is the engine of what makes Manitoba strong, not only here in Winnipeg but also in the rural area.

The rural area, with all the economic growth that is happening in the rural area through the agrifood business, the expansion of the various components—these are all initiatives where we are going to see tremendous satisfaction and the ability to improve the living conditions here in Manitoba, because as people are working, they are going to be paying taxes. We as a province benefit by those.

The taxes that we do get we are able to reinvest back into our sectors where there is the greatest need and growth and requirements. It has always been and will continue to be the three areas of health, education and social services. In education we will now be spending, I believe, just over \$1 billion. In fact, I believe the figure that I have is \$1.03 billion for education. Here again, this is \$12 million more than was budgeted last year. That is more; I said \$12 million more than last year.

Now if you hear the other side of the opposition, all you hear about is we are cutting education. The schools are, you know, everything is—but when the budget line shows one figure, you compare it to the next year, and it has gone up by an amount and it has gone up by \$12 million where it is now over \$1 billion

that we spend in public education. Where is the rational reasoning from our opposition saying that we have cut? We are spending over \$1.8 billion now in health care. \$1.8 billion a year in health care. We have committed \$22.3 million for educational renewal initiatives. These are expenditures. As much as we talk about the balanced budget and holding the line, we are still able to recognize that where there is a need, as in health care, as in education, the funding has gone up.

Now let it not be said that this government does not see its priorities in the light of trying to help those who are in need. Through health care, through education, through family services, these are the areas that we have always concentrated on. They take up 65 percent of our budget. I believe it is even more than that. Someone said it was up to 67, but I would have to check. These are the types of initiatives, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that will show that just as this government is balancing the economic gains and the economic initiatives and the so-called economic agenda, we are still keeping in primary focus the three most critical areas of our budget which are health care, education and social services.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you could go on and on talking about this budget because it has so many good and positive initiatives involved with it. We could talk about the manufacturing shipments. They are up 8 percent in 1996, three times the national rate. Total foreign exports are up 9.7, more than twice the national rate. The federal Liberal government would love to have this budget. They would love to be able to sit in the position and mirror what Manitoba is doing. Their employment rate is well over 9 percent. They cannot budget. No matter how Mr. Chretien talks about jobs, jobs, jobs, they have none, none, none. Our employment rate is nudging down to almost the lowest in Canada. Mr. Chretien keeps it up there. He keeps talking about the jobs but nothing is happening.

Retail sales here in Manitoba are up 6.1 percent, and this is more than twice the national average. Manitoba's farm cash receipts are up 1.3 percent. This is the highest they have been since 1979. We are the only province to record increased private to capital investment for five consecutive years, five consecutive years that private investment has increased year over year. That is almost four times more than the national

average. The federal government is green with envy with what has happened here in Manitoba. In fact, we are so close to St. Patrick's Day, they are still walking around with green underwear.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is an exciting time to be in this Legislature and to be part of this government, to be part of the decision, to be part of the direction that our Finance minister (Mr. Stefanson) and our Premier (Mr. Filmon) have embarked on since 1988. I was not here in 1988. I was fortunate enough to be elected in 1990 to be part of the team that was being formed at that time to take Manitoba into the turn of the century, and I find it a privilege to have the personal pride and the personal satisfaction of dealing with the people in my caucus and in my government and the vision that they have for Manitoba.

Springtime is a year to be optimistic; it is a time to look for the new growth; it is a time to look for new beginnings, if you want. I throw out the gauntlet and the challenge to the opposition to do the right thing. Recognize that now is the time to work together. We can have one big group hug in this room. Know the right thing to do. Let us get that feeling of kumbaya in here. We can vote for this. You can vote for this budget. This is a budget that you can vote for. I know that there is a willingness over there to do it. Do not be caught by the naysayers and the bopping nabobs of nepotism over there and negativism. Now is the time to come forth in this time of spring in this great province of Manitoba and make things happen, a new vigour, a new optimism and a new vision. I ask the opposition to join with us in voting for this budget.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I cannot say any more. That is it. Thank you.

Ms. Marianne Cerilli (Radisson): The Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs can rest assured that we still have a few things to say about the budget, and we will not be supporting their budget.

I want to begin my fairly brief debate on this budget by drawing your attention to something that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) said at the very beginning of his Budget Address. This to me sort of sums up where this government is coming from. It

sums up their attitude towards the 58 percent of the population that did not vote for them in the last election and how that attitude is reflected in this budget.

* (1540)

The Minister of Finance said that this budget was dedicated to all those who share our vision. That is a quote. Now I can assure you that those of us on this side of the House that represent those 58 percent of Manitobans that did not vote for this government do not share their vision. We saw very clearly by those invited guests who were here on hand for the government, invited guests by the government from the Chamber of Commerce and their constituencies, associations, that those are the few in Manitoba that do share their vision. They might as well have come out and said that this budget is dedicated to their business buddies that are benefiting from those \$12.5 more million in tax breaks that are in this budget. That is their vision.

That is their vision which is to continue on this track which is tearing Manitoba in two. In my Throne Speech Debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I talked about the statistics in this country and in Manitoba that show that the income gap is growing, and that is a direct result of the kind of budgets that this government has been bringing in. Even though in their throne speech they made references, finally, to aboriginal people in Manitoba—finally they said the word “poverty”—this budget does not reflect that agenda, and this budget will continue to have the gap in income among Manitobans, the haves and those that have not continue to grow. That is one of the key problems that I have with this budget.

A number of members on our side of the House have gone through the litany of taxes and user fees that have been levied by this no tax Filmon government. I am going to focus first of all a little bit on the revenue side because I found some interesting things as I was doing a little comparison. I mean, the other thing that this government has tried to do in this budget is compare 1997 to 1987, 10 years before, which was the last NDP year in this province, and in doing that they have tried to create the impression that they have bundles more money, bundles more revenue coming in and going to health and education and other government services.

And they have tried to suggest in their Budget Address that there are hundreds of millions of more dollars going into education and health care now than when we were in office, and that is the kind of impression they want Manitobans to come away with. But what they do not tell you is that when you compare the amount of money that has gone into health and education in this budget as compared to last budget, when you account for the overrun from the last year's budget, there are actually cuts.

I want to focus a little bit on the revenue side because there are a number of interesting things when you start looking at the revenue picture in Manitoba. I took the liberty to go back and dig up some of the budget books from even 1987 and '88. Thanks to my good friend the member for Brandon East (Mr. Leonard Evans), we have quite a resource library downstairs. I first of all want to draw some attention to some of the inequities that are in the revenue side of this budget—when you look at the fact that the revenue picture in Manitoba shows that 26.5 percent of this government's revenue is coming from individual income tax and only 3.5 percent of this government's revenue is coming from corporate income tax.

(Mr. Ben Sveinson, Acting Speaker, in the Chair)

Yet what did they do in this budget? They have reduced the health and education levy and reduced a tax on business. Now that is one of the ways that you can show the unfairness in this budget. When you do a comparison to 1987, the revenue picture there, you would see that personal income taxes in 1987-'88 in the NDP budget were 23.3 percent of the total revenue coming into the government. So, in effect, over 10 years, this government is taking more than 3 percent, 3.2 percent more of their revenue from families and individuals from their income tax, and yet they are trying to say that they are the tax freeze, no tax Filmon government.

One of the other things that is kind of interesting when you look at what this government is doing with its budget books is when you look at the money that is coming from Crown corporations and from Lotteries. Now, in years gone by, the budget books actually showed a separate section of the pie, if you would, for Lotteries. What have they done in this book, in this

budget year? They have lumped Lotteries in with all the Crown corporations; 6.9 percent of all the revenue is coming from there. But we know that the Lotteries increase under this government has been over \$200 million, \$300 million, and one of the things that they do not want the public to see very clearly is that we do collect more revenues from gambling into the coffers of the government than we do from corporate income tax and, when you go into the detail of the budget books, you can see that. So that is another thing that they have done with these budget books that shows that they have a little bit to hide.

When you compare some other numbers related to personal income tax and corporate income tax this year over last year, you can see that they are anticipating to get \$4 million less yet again this year from corporate income tax as revenue to the government. Yet, again, there is going to be a \$35-million increase in the revenue that they receive from personal income tax. So let Manitobans not be fooled from this government that tries to suggest they are being fair about the way that they are dealing with taxes in this province and that they are keeping taxes down for families.

We know that the cost for families in these budgets from this government have increased dramatically, have increased over \$340 per family when you start looking at the taxes that they have levied, whether it is fees for camping, whether it is having to pay for eye examinations, whether it is having your water tested, getting your drivers' licence, all the other ways with user fees in health care, the increases in education tuition fees, parents now having to pay for everything from school buses to increased costs for laboratory use for students even in our public school system. Plus there has been all the increases with cuts to some of the tax credit programs.

One of the issues I still get phone calls about is how this government is now even including property tax credits when they calculate the revenue, rent geared to income for public housing and social housing in Manitoba, and people say to me, it is a tax credit. How can they turn around and take that back as income when I have already paid taxes and this money has come back to me as a tax credit? That is what this government has done, the no-tax Filmon government, to seniors and other low-income families. They have

found innumerable ways to hide increases in revenue for the government calling them all sorts of other names, but a tax by some other name is still a tax.

* (1550)

I have said already that one of the problems with this budget is that it does not match the throne speech. In the throne speech this government suggested that they were going to address the discrepancy and they were recognizing that there are a number of Manitobans that have been left out. Then what do they do? Well, we have a \$500,000 ChildrenFirst program. Now, that is going to address—I guess we could figure out the number of children in Manitoba, the number of low-income Manitobans right now.

I think that there are some 198,000 people living in poverty in this province, 18.4 percent. We know that when you look at just children, it is well over 25 percent, approaching even 29 percent of children. How far is that \$500,000 going to go?

But the real question we have to ask when we look at some of these programs for children and youth is, we know that it is not new money. We know that this government has not allocated new resources into the Children and Youth Secretariat. So the question will become, where is this money coming from? I know that in the Budget Address there were also references made there was going to be more savings in social allowance, and when you also look at what this government has done to people who are on social allowance, where they have taken a lot of joy in—it is just like the kind of joy they take in announcing that they have reduced the civil service by some 2,500 jobs. Those are 2,500 people in Manitoba that are out of a job. They also are looking at forcing women, single parents, women mostly, but some men who may be single parents as well, into the workforce without having the adequate support of child care, without having necessarily taken into account the requirement that they have for caring for their children. Now what they are saying is they are going to start these little programs, they are going to have a few programs through this \$500,000 fund to address those concerns, the concerns of these parents.

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

One of the other things that this budget does not seem to address, and as this government now is recognizing that there are people in Manitoba who are low income, at least that is what they claim to be recognizing, is the impact of the last number of years of their cuts. All those children who have suffered because the education system has lost almost \$50 million since 1993, those children that were between kindergarten and Grade 8 under the years of cuts from this government will never be in Grade 2 again, they will never be in Grade 3 again. What they lost because of the cuts that this government afforded to education and other programs for families over those years in health care will never be regained.

Others have been critical of their analogy that they are trying to paint this budget as some great beacon of hope for the youth of Manitoba just does not match with the way that young people in this province have been hit very hard by the years of cuts and how they will never regain those lost years whether it is in education, whether it is the lost recreation opportunities, whether it is lost health care and the increased dollars that families have had to spend on Pharmacare or on other Health programs. We talk to families daily, for example, with diabetic children who are now having to pay increased costs for insulin and other medication for their children.

While I am on this vein, I want to draw attention to some of the repetition that we have heard from this government when addressing these kind of programs for youth, and they keep announcing this Urban Sports Camp Program. They reannounce it and they reannounce it, and last year the end report for Urban Affairs there was all of \$25,000 spent under that program. Now, that may have gone to one agency. So, especially at this time when we have seen this government make the commitment of \$200,000 to the high-performance centre for our national and provincial calibre athletes, we would like to have some consideration for those children and youth that this government has said have been left out of the picture. They are not going to bring economic development to the province like the Pan Am Games will or having the national volleyball centre here. They just want to have a bat and a ball to play with and somewhere to go at night after school so that they can have an alternative to getting into trouble. But I can tell you, Mr. Deputy

Speaker, and I can tell the Minister for Urban Affairs (Mr. Reimer) that \$25,000 is not going to go very far at all when you are dealing with Urban Sports Camps. We have seen the announcement yet again. We will have to wait and see if this year they actually are going to get their act together and if we are going to see some alternative youth programs in this province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the other things that I wanted to draw attention to when we are dealing with this budget is the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. Now, when I was looking at the budget book at the revenue scheme for the government, there is mention there of the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. It is 1.8 percent of the provincial revenue. Now, this, as we know, is going to be a provincial government political re-election fund, and what is interesting here, though, is that they are showing it as revenue.

But when we go back to 1987 and 1988 when they had a surplus of about \$57 million from the NDP government, they tried to deal with that as an expense. They set up the Fiscal Stabilization Fund and tried to allocate money that was surplus and put it into this fund as if it were an expense. But here, they are actually showing it as income, as revenue, as surplus revenue.

It is going to be interesting to see, when we look at this government that has historically, year after year been incapable of estimating the surplus of their government. In 1995, Mr. Stefanson predicted there would be a \$48-million surplus, and he wound up with what? Mr. Deputy Speaker, \$157 million. Oops, oops, we missed. We want to say that the economy is booming, but we do not want to consider that we are going to then get more revenue from tax. This year again they said it was going to be \$22 million and, oops, it is more like \$140 million.

How can we have any faith in this government when they can be so far off? Of course we know they are doing this kind of prediction of their surplus only for their own political advantage, but we also know that when you go and talk to people, as I did last night in Transcona, and you ask them, what do you think the government should be doing with \$140 million of surplus, it is certainly not putting it in their political sock. It is investing it into their kids and into health care, into education, into recreation, social programs or

back into some of the other services that this government has been bent on eliminating.

As I said, Mr Deputy Speaker, they take glee in eliminating the social services and public sector that have been so important in Manitoba in closing that gap that I was talking about earlier, that gap that continues to grow in our province between those that are struggling on low income and those that are the friends of this government and share their vision, which are doing fine, thank you very much, and perhaps do not need the support of public services in government.

* (1600)

In concluding, I just want to say again that there are two things that do not go together with this government. The budget that they have introduced does not match, the numbers do not match up with the rhetoric that was in their Throne Speech Debate. They have tried to paint one picture with their words, but when you look at the detail, the numbers and the way that they are taxing people and the way that they are allocating expenses, you see a very different picture.

I was listening earlier to the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs talk about how cuts, what are you talking about cuts?—on the other side all we hear about is cuts. And then I looked at the summary of the Estimates, and 15 departments that are listed there show that they are going to have a reduction in their budget. That is what we are talking about. You can read it. It is on page 5. That is simply on the operating side; five departments on the capital side. I did not mention that all the promises this government made, particularly in health care, capital expenditures are on hold. All the personal care homes that were promised the last election, where are they? Where are they reflected in this budget? Where is the money reflected in this budget needed for implementing regionalization of health care? Oops, it seems to not be there.

I know that in my own constituency there is a school that is slated to have capital improvement. They may actually have to build entirely their own school. I am not sure if that is going to happen under this government, because the Education and Training capital budget has been reduced 10.3 percent from last year.

An Honourable Member: What school is that, Marianne?

Ms. Cerilli: Transcona Collegiate, that is the school that I was referring to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was drawing the House's attention to those cuts in a summary to show, as I was saying, that the rhetoric in the throne speech does not match the numbers in this budget. They said they were going to do something to close that gap, to help those people that have been left out, to try and deal with the many middle-income earning families that are feeling squeezed. But what have they done? They have given more tax breaks to their business friends. They have given more breaks to their friends, more contracts like we have seen with this home care oxygen supply contract. It is going to cost the public money to make this transfer to a private company. They continue to interfere with these type of contracts. They continue to find new ways to funnel public money into their businesses, their friends, whether it is through programs like Workforce 2000 or whether it is privatizing health care and home care.

What happens, the many families in Manitoba finally admitted by this government, admitted when they said that there had been people left out, admitted when they said this budget is dedicated to those that share that vision. They have not addressed the needs and disparity faced by those families. With that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to conclude my remarks.

Mr. Edward Helwer (Gimli): I am proud to have this opportunity to speak on the Manitoba budget for the 1997-98 fiscal year. Our government has lived up to its commitment to the people of this province by maintaining an effective and responsible program, while spending taxpayers' money wisely. As a result of these efforts to remain fiscally responsible, Mr. Deputy Speaker, not only have we had a balanced budget for three years in a row, but this is the third year running in which we have a surplus. This is certainly giving our children the reassurance that the future is full of prosperity and free from the threat of debt in the near future.

I certainly want to congratulate our Minister of Finance, the Honourable Eric Stefanson, and his staff

for all the work that they have done and Treasury Board actually for all the work they have done to get to where we are today. Also I want to thank our former Minister of Finance, the Honourable Clayton Manness, for the work that he also did starting way back in 1988. He laid the groundwork for what is taking place today, that we can bear the fruits of the prior budgets, what is happening today.

The 1997 budget keeps this province competitive, provides a perfect environment for job creation. It increases our standard of living, and it speaks volumes to our young people that good employment opportunities are available in this province. We want to maintain two fiscal objectives that are at the centre of our economic strategy, and those are to keep Manitoba's taxes competitive and to balance our books and reduce the burden of debt.

Also, it is the first year since sometime in the '50s that we are going to make a payment on the debt of some \$75 million, and this is terrific, that we are going to be making our first payment towards the total elimination of Manitoba's general purpose debt. The Balanced Budget, Debt Repayment and Taxpayer Protection Act requires a first debt repayment instalment of some \$75 million in this particular year, and this budget provides for that payment. This budget also provides or extends Manitoba's freeze on taxes for a full decade, a full 10 years, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and this provides the strategic, targeted tax reductions so we can invest in Manitoba's hospitals, schools, highways and continue to spend for Manitoba's taxpayers wisely. I think it is certainly a step in the right direction.

Also, private capital grew more than double the national rate in 1996 and is expected to exceed the national average again in 1997. Manitoba is the only province in Canada able to sustain five years of continuous, rising private investment, and the total increase, some 33 percent, is almost four times the national increase. Statistics Canada expects Manitoba's record to extend to six consecutive years in the investment in Manitoba, and the exemptions that we provide for small businesses under Manitoba's corporation capital tax will be increased from \$2 million to \$3 million. This will certainly encourage small firms to embark on new investments and create more new jobs in Manitoba.

Also the retail sales in Manitoba continue to grow by more than double the national rate for a second year in a row, and this speaks well for our businesses in Manitoba, for the small and large businesses that are growing and continue to provide employment to the people and the young people in Manitoba.

I just want to talk a minute about the housing starts and the growth in the housing starts. They have surpassed the national average in four of the past five years, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In 1996 again housing starts are up by some 18 percent, or 50 percent above the nation increase. To further ensure Manitoba's favourable condition for new home construction, we have extended the sales tax rebate for first-time buyers of new homes in the province for another 12 months. This measure, introduced some three years ago, has helped young families to buy their first home, and this tax relief has helped about 900 Manitoba families.

* (1610)

In my own constituency of Gimli, the town of Stonewall is still the fastest growing community in Manitoba. It has been for about three years now. Also the area around Stonewall, the Rural Municipality of Rockwood, has grown tremendously. We have seen the South Interlake Planning District report some of the highest growth records and have set records in the past number of years. Just one example of that is the White Star Developments in Teulon, where he built eight residences for the 55-plus age group whereby they were the life-lease programs. He has done well on those, sold those original eight and has already started on the next phase of his development and has sold, I think, about six of the eight that he is planning to build this coming year.

That is just how the growth in the Interlake and in the communities of Stonewall and Rockwood and Teulon has gone and also in the northern part of the Interlake, the R.M. of Gimli and the town of Gimli. In the town of Gimli, the Rotary Club there is going to build, I think, a 55-suite, 55-plus housing for seniors, and Gimli, the town of Gimli, is just a great place for people to retire and to live. There certainly is a demand for seniors housing in that area. [interjection] Well, that is right, the fish and quality of life is great there. I can tell you, Mr. Reimer, it is terrific. That is right. Also, the

R.M. of Gimli saw real increases in the significant growth this past year in housing starts with some \$12.5 million in new home, cottage development and also in the commercial construction. [interjection] No, I cannot afford that. The small- and medium-sized businesses though are among the most important in Manitoba because they generate the business, the jobs, especially for young people. Almost two-thirds of Manitoba's small businesses employ Manitoba youth between the ages of 15 and 24.

The payroll tax deductions encourage job creation, and since 1988 our government has raised the payroll tax exemptions from \$1 million to \$750,000 and today, Mr. Deputy Speaker—[interjection] That is right, to \$1 million now. More than 90 percent of the employers no longer pay this tax, so that gives them an opportunity to expand and increase their employers for anyone with payrolls up to \$1 million. This was something that we first promised back in 1988 and we have been moving up the exemption each year.

An Honourable Member: Is that the only promise you have kept?

Mr. Helwer: No.

An Honourable Member: How about that guy down East that said he is going to rip up the red book? What about that guy?

Mr. Helwer: That is right.

We have been able to do this in light of the federal Liberal cutbacks too whereby they have cut the transfer payments to Manitoba. Also, employers with payrolls of up to \$2 million have a reduction in the payroll tax. So this will also help the larger businesses such as Faroex in Gimli, Seagram and some of the larger employers who have quite a number of employees. Also, the manufacturing sector has been very strong. There is a high level of investment in manufacturing. In recent years this has increased some 94 percent in the province between 1991 and '96 as opposed to the nation's 5 percent increase during that same period. So Manitoba has done very well with the increase.

The Manitoba Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit, which has played a large role in the province's success,

the tax credit is being extended for another three years to June 30, the year 2000. So this will continue to get business to expand and to invest in their businesses and to create jobs in Manitoba especially for our young people.

But 1996 proved to be a successful year for Manitoba farmers, and the farm-cash receipts grew in 1996 by some 13 percent, which is the largest increase in the country and the biggest increase in Manitoba since 1979. Over the past five years, actually, farm-cash receipts have achieved record levels. Also, total foreign exports for Manitoba rose 10 percent or more than twice the national average, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and this was the seventh year in a row in which Manitoba's exports have increased.

I want to say that in spite of the cutbacks by our federal Liberal government, especially with the Grain Transportation Act, with the elimination of the Crow benefits. Manitoba farmers have really taken hold and expanded the value-added production and are doing very well. [interjection] Well, no, it was not a good thing for us to lose the \$800 million in western Canada that the federal Liberal government took away from western Canada.

An Honourable Member: Those bad Liberals.

Mr. Helwer: That is right. They did more than that actually, because the Western Grain Transportation Act also provided the management of the movement of grain. If you noticed this past winter what our Manitoba farmers have gone through to try and ship their grain to the west coast, Mr. Goodale, the federal minister, blames the railways. Someone else blames the Wheat Board. There is nobody there to mind the store. The Western Grain Transportation Act was discontinued.

An Honourable Member: The Tories in Manitoba I think we should blame.

Mr. Helwer: That is right. The Manitoba farmers have been able to withstand the onslaught and the cutbacks by the federal Liberals. I also feel the farm groups such as the Farmers Union have not represented the farmers well and not defended the farmers in Manitoba and allowed these cutbacks to happen.

If a federal Conservative government in Ottawa would have ever done what the Liberals have done, they would have been strung up. Because we are in the position where we are located in the country, Manitoba feels the crunch of the Western Grain Transportation Act more than any other province. We have more difficulty with the transportation sector, more things to deal with. It makes it very difficult for our farmers to move their products to market. We certainly hope that they will get their act together and solve the problems so that the Manitoba farmers can ship their grain and we do not have to continue to pay demurrage on the ships waiting in Vancouver in the near future.

An Honourable Member: I think we should send you there to negotiate this.

Mr. Helwer: I would be glad to go to negotiate, sure.

From 1990 to 1996, Manitoba's exports to the United States have more than doubled. Manitoba companies are competing better than ever in today's fast-paced and rapidly expanding economy. We have a company in Gimli, Faroex, which is just going to break 100 employees, and they have just been—

An Honourable Member: Is that the National Enquirer?

Mr. Helwer: No, this is not the National Enquirer. As a matter of fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is a paper that has been put out just last week by the Stonewall Argus and Interlake Publishing. This is called Agri-Views. It outlines in this particular paper the inventions and the innovations and recognizes the people of the Interlake and of Manitoba for their hard work that they have been doing and the innovations that they have been coming up with to create jobs and the investments in Manitoba.

* (1620)

One of the things that Faroex in Gimli has been doing is, they say, hog floors and much more. Well, Faroex has expanded their operations from fabricating flooring for hog barns into other new products. They established first in Gimli in 1981 and are Gimli's largest private employer, providing 100-plus jobs when their production of fibreglass reinforced plastic products is

at its peak. Since then again they have bought some newer equipment and have continued to expand. They have been there in the industrial park over 16 years. They have continued to build new buildings, continued to employ new technology and continue to grow.

The owner of this particular plant is Ken Church, who is originally from the Stony Mountain area. This past year he was recognized for being the Entrepreneur of the Year for small- and medium-sized businesses. This is just one example of some of the things that are going on in the Interlake. Also in Teulon we have Northern Goose Processors who employed a new technology for processing goose feathers, the down that they get from the geese. They have brought in the new technology from Germany, invested a large investment of money and employ some 30 people, just in this one part of their business alone. This is just another example of the good things that are happening in the Interlake area and the innovative people, and things that are going on.

I also want to recognize another company from the Interlake who received an award last night, the Sustainable Development Award; Prairie Habitats from Argyle, Manitoba, were in the small-business category for the project to restore Manitoba's Endangered Native Prairie Wildflowers and Grasses. In this same paper, Agri-Views, it outlines what John Morgan and his company have done in the grasses.

They were one of the first companies to start, what do they call it, the Prairie Habitats, which is a seed company that cultivates and supplies native tall grass prairie seed for niche markets across Canada and the United States. Tall grass prairie, which once dominated the landscape of the midwest here between United States and Canada and the prairie provinces, right across Canada, it was some of the first forage land for the millions of buffalo that roamed across the landscape.

An Honourable Member: We had buffalo steak last night.

Mr. Helwer: That is right. It was terrific, although I do not think that was prepared from the prairie grass that we have. Anyway, the Morgans cultivate some 400 acres of tall grass prairie on this farm near Argyle,

Manitoba, and they have really established a niche market for government, businesses and private citizens interested in restoring the natural prairie and small plots of land throughout North America.

Besides being ecologically friendly, tall grass prairie is an attractive and low-maintenance cover for landscaping and, once established, once the primary root has been established, it keeps the weeds down and requires no fertilizers or pesticides and never needs mowing. It also only needs to be burnt off once every four to five years to help the perennial species regenerate.

But what the Morgans did and why they got their Sustainable Development Award last night is because they introduced a new harvester, which they call a Blast from the Past. What they did is took the technology from an old stripper harvester and incorporated it into a new machine, and they have made a new kind of a stripper harvester to harvest this tall grass prairie that they sell the seeds to other areas of Canada.

It was their idea. plus a fellow from Argyle, or from Warren actually, they put together their ideas and took their ideas from the older strippers and made it into a new technology. Today they have a harvester that does the job that is one of the best in the country and will be certainly doing its job there.

Also, in the same paper, it outlines many of the innovative people that we have in the Interlake. and it is just some examples of how innovative our Manitoba farmers can be to devise new methods to make things easier for them and also make the production of more feedstuffs such as Harvey Bergen in the area of—he made the fibre bale grab which hooks the bale so you do not have to handle each bale of hay individually. With a front-end loader, you can take a layer of bales and put it on the truck or whatever. He designed the system for that, and it works very well. This is just another idea of what farmers can do when they put their minds to it.

Another one in the Interlake area is up in the northern Interlake in the Vidor and the Okno areas of Manitoba, just north of Arborg. This area is home to five manufacturing plants which employ about a hundred people actually and produce millions of dollars of

goods to be shipped worldwide. A leader in the manufacturing sector there, in the industrial mecca there, is Vidir Machine, which was named one of the top five fastest growing businesses in Manitoba. This is owned and operated by the Dueck family. This company, Vidir Machines, is known internationally for its carpet and vinyl storage and cutting systems, shipping to some 18 countries around the world. This company employs some 40 people at this time.

At the other end of the spectrum is the Okno Manufacturing, which is owned by Abe Penner and sons Norman and Marvin. They have five people working for them. This company has produced tables, sinks, and other stainless steel items, some that they have included for some of the health facilities we have in the Interlake, such as I.V. stands for the Arborg and district hospital. They also made hog feeders for Faroex in Gimli. They are doing very well.

This is an area that is really expanding. This is farmers using their innovative ideas and technology to come up with new ideas to create jobs in the Interlake. It is just tremendous what some of these people are doing. I certainly want to congratulate those people. I certainly hope they will continue to grow and continue to create jobs.

While we are on the jobs topic, during the first two months of 1997, some 20,800 more jobs were created in comparison with last year at this time. To date, all of Manitoba's job growth this year has been in the private sector, and the majority of these new positions are full time. This increase in job creation for 1997 equates to a 4 percent growth rate, which is the highest of any province and five times that of the nation's 0.8 percent growth rate during the same period.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the most significant and most exciting stats that we have so far this year is the province's unemployment rate, which is 6.7 percent in February. This is in stark contrast to the nation's average of 9.7 percent. As well our youth unemployment rate is nearly five percentage points below the national rate.

I just want to say, another sector of the economy that is strong is the agricultural area. Any graduates coming out of the University of Manitoba or any university

with an Ag degree or a diploma in agriculture, there is no problem finding jobs.

An Honourable Member: That is right. They are all employed before they graduate.

Mr. Helwer: That is right. They are all employed before they graduate. This is an industry that is growing so fast, they need more people involved in the industry—terrific things that are happening in agriculture.

* (1630)

Last month alone some 541,400 people were working in Manitoba. This is a record, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Job growth is still flourishing at the same time as welfare rolls continue to shrink. The number of people out-migrating from the province is at a seven-year low. As a matter of fact, our population has grown the past year. I would be particularly interested in hearing the census results from the '96 census when the numbers come out to see the growth, especially in the south Interlake area and the Stonewall-Rockwood area. I am sure that we will see the numbers have exceeded even the most optimistic forecasts.

Our government has put into place many apprenticeship training and internship programs, and one in particular is the transport driver training program. Trucking is such an important industry and it is an important sector in the Manitoba economy. There is a shortage of truckdrivers for these firms which are growing rapidly. So some \$500,000 will be put into this program to train approximately 225 Manitobans to step into the unfilled jobs in this industry alone.

One half of the participants we hope will be from the social assistance recipients. We will also invest some \$9 million, \$1.5 million more than last year, to making the welfare program work. As well, we are extending the Business Start program for another two years, and this started in 1990 and it helped many small businesses to grow and come into operation by providing a loan guarantee of up to \$10,000, especially successful for women and rural entrepreneurs to start businesses.

I heard my colleague the other day talk about the new entrepreneurs, the new people who were starting

businesses. The number of women starting businesses has increased phenomenally, and today more than 50 percent of the new business starts are women, and it is just great to see that.

As capital is the engine of business and employment growth, the labour-sponsored capital venture corporations were first initiated in 1991 to help create and preserve jobs in the small- and the medium-sized businesses, and this session we will be introducing legislation to allow for the formation also of other provincial labour-sponsored venture capital corporations. Manitobans are becoming more confident with this province's economy and with its future, and Manitoba businesses are prospering unlike anything we have seen in many years

(Mr. Gerry McAlpine, Acting Speaker, in the Chair)

I think the formation of the new venture capital corporations will probably help some of our value-added production, maybe some of our—in the food processing, possibly in such things as potato processing, large hog operations. All of these new operations take a large amount of capital, and if we can get some of these venture capital corporations to invest in these kind of projects, I think it would be just a great thing for Manitoba, especially for rural Manitoba.

Health care, I want to say, is one of the most important issues to Manitobans, and more demands are being placed on our system with the cuts and the transfer payments from Ottawa. Our population is getting older and the costs of services and supplies continue to increase. Our government believes that the Home Care program can provide some of the services that high-cost institutions are providing in a more relaxed environment, which is why the Manitoba budget provides \$103 million more for the Home Care program. This was two and a half times resources provided for this program back in '87-88.

I just want to relate to you a story which a constituent of mine phoned in yesterday. This couple was in their '70s and they were looking after their mother, who was 93 years old, looking after her in their own home. They were really pleased that they were able to get home care, respite care, so that they could go out for an evening or take a trip to Winnipeg or whatever, that

they could get someone in to help to look after their 93-year-old mother. I think this is what home care is all about, to assist people like that, to keep people in their own homes where they are comfortable. This lady who is 93 years old does not want to go to a personal care home. She is happy in her own home. So let us try to keep her there and offer some assistance to these people and try to help them to look after her. So these are just some of the success stories with the Home Care program of what really can happen and some of the things that have been going on, and it is just great to see this.

As well, our government is committed to the new \$1.3-million Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre that is to be opened later this year, and this will provide services to promote wellness, illness and disability prevention and treatment. This centre will use a service delivery model to reflect the aboriginal culture.

Also, I am really pleased to see that \$150 million from the sale of MTS will be used to pay down the debts of hospitals and personal care homes, because \$1.8 billion out of \$6 billion has been allocated for the 1997-98 budget for Health in Manitoba. This is 37 percent or \$500 million more than what was in the '87 budget. Some 34 cents of every dollar that we take in in this budget is directed to health care. Mr. Acting Speaker, 34 cents of every dollar is more than any other province.

An Honourable Member: And certainly more than the New Democrats ever put into health.

Mr. Helwer: That is right.

I am really pleased that my colleague the member for Lakeside (Mr. Enns) and also the Minister of Health (Mr. Praznik) and I tomorrow will be at Stonewall for the opening of the new Rosewood Lodge. I am really pleased to see this development, this construction, finally get completed. This will be a great addition to the former Rosewood Lodge. We have built on an addition of 20 beds. We will have a personal care home of 50 beds there, which is in addition to the Stonewood Place which is a senior citizens' home. This makes just a tremendous facility there in Stonewall, and we are really pleased to be able to be at the opening there tomorrow. Also, this is in conjunction with the

new hospital that we opened there in 1995 where we have a new 15-bed acute care hospital.

An Honourable Member: Then they say we are not doing anything in health.

Mr. Helwer: That is right.

Here is an area that is growing although the population is getting older, but we are providing the services, more personal care beds, more senior citizens' beds. We really believe that the seniors of our province are very important, and we are trying to look after them. [interjection] I will probably get there some day too, that is right. So our government has shown every indication that health care is a priority.

Education also, Mr. Acting Speaker, as well as concentrating on health care, our government is committed to education and preparing our children for the difficulties that they face in a rapidly changing world. This budget provides an addition of \$4.5 million to education for renewed initiatives in 1997-98. This brings the total to \$22.3 million, and our government believes that education renewal should emphasize reading, writing, computing and high-level problem solving.

In order to provide Distance Education in coalition with some of the things the federal government has done, we have provided some \$10.7 million through the infrastructure program to aid Distance Education programs right from kindergarten to the post-secondary levels. So along with some of the funding we are already providing for these education programs, Mr. Acting Speaker, we will provide another \$1 million for a new program titled Technology Learning Resources for Schools, and this will put more computers into the classrooms across the province.

Just looking at what the federal Conservative government has—Mr. Charest in outlining his election platform yesterday, in his outline he outlines computer literacy, and he says they will be offering similar loan guarantees to provide laptop computers to every university and college student who does not already have one. This is just an indication of what technology has done with computers, laptop computers and what is coming. I think it is beyond me to understand all the

new technology. These young people that we have today certainly understand computers, and it is important that we give them the proper tools to work with. I am glad to see Mr. Charest has recognized this and will use that as a plank in his next campaign to defeat the federal Liberals.

* (1640)

Our government's record, Mr. Acting Speaker, on post-secondary education is equally as solid. Some \$57 million will be going towards community colleges, \$214 million to universities, total operating grants for universities increased some 5 percent per student since the 1993-94 budget. Another new initiative our government has taken has been to implement the Partners for Careers program, which was put in place in order to help the aboriginal, the high school, college and university graduates into positions in the private and public sectors; \$1.4 million will be allocated to this program. I am really pleased to see that.

Also in the line of education, great news for the community of Winnipeg Beach, which takes in the Matlock and Sandy Hook areas in my constituency in terms of school construction program. The planning authority has been recommended for a partial replacement and a major renovation to the Winnipeg Beach School. Provincial funding for the school construction project may allow the school to go through with a much needed facelift, which it has been waiting for for a long time.

The public school system will benefit from funding in the amount of \$23.9 million for the construction program in this budget. This project certainly demonstrates how committed this government is to maintaining the quality education in this province. It provides Manitoba students with much improved facilities. It will help to generate some 400 jobs in this province.

So we are building an education system that all Manitobans can be proud of. Other provinces will look towards this as a role model.

I see my time is going very quickly.

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

I just want to mention the highways and transportation, something about that. Winnipeg is a North American transportation hub in terms of its location and facility. Mr. Deputy Speaker, our government has remained committed to Manitoba's highway construction program by allocating another \$1.3 million to maintain and improve our roads, highways, and bridges. Due to the federal cuts of the strategic highways program, funding has decreased. Last month, six highway projects in my constituency were announced, to spend some over \$9 million. I am really pleased to see this. Also in my constituency, one other thing, the Brookside Boulevard infrastructure program, I am really pleased to see that go ahead. I am really pleased to be able to give my comments on the good things that are in this budget this afternoon. Thank you.

Ms. Mihychuk: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will take this opportunity to put on the record some of my comments on the budget. I wish I could say it was a good-news budget for Manitobans, but I cannot.

I think the most significant part of this in the long term is that the budget actually feeds into the cynicism that people have about the political realm and about politicians. Unfortunately the decision by the government to use electoral budgeting casts a shadow on all of us as representatives of the people. We see here a typical cycle where governments cut in the early parts, hold the line so-called as we see in this budget, and then we will see a good-news budget coming up next year in preparation for election day. The problem with that is that people then cast the same brush for all of us and that is extremely unfortunate.

In fact, the good news in this budget is basically for the business community in Manitoba, and it is not all that significant, \$16 million to our business sector. There are probably more small announcements of programs which really do not add up to a great deal, but \$16 million in tax breaks for business is better than what health and education got, which was actually reductions and more cuts. We do see \$3.6 million for individual taxpayers and \$4.5 million in business subsidies. However, as I said, we see significant cuts to health, education and family supports.

This is a budget of deception and manipulation, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The surplus is based on the sale of our publicly owned telephone company, a very unfortunate way to finance as senior members of this government hopefully try to articulate and explain to the Finance minister when you sell off capital goods to balance a budget, it is very shortsighted and poor economics and poor budgeting. The \$100 million from the Fiscal Stabilization Fund was taken out to create a \$22-million surplus, and it is part of the juggling the numbers, as the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) is so well known for. Manitobans are not fooled. You sold off a capital asset that Manitoba had in the form of the Manitoba telephone company, actually at garage sale prices, and then used it to claim a surplus. Most of the rainy day fund from the sale of MTS is actually from the sale, \$410 million in total.

I just want to again illustrate how I feel that this budget was one of deception and manipulation and that is possible when you are working with any budget, and having had the opportunity, maybe on a smaller scale, drastically smaller, with a budget of only \$200 million, I was not working with the amounts that the government is. It is possible to move numbers as we have seen the Minister of Finance do and in particular if we look at the health care budget. We all know that the health care budget was overrun, overexpended by \$81 million, that a special warrant had to be passed to provide sufficient funding for the Department of Health to the tune of \$81 million. That money was not incorporated in the budget. Therefore, once you take the special warrant, plus the budget of the Health department, you actually find that this budget decreases the Health budget by \$66 million.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what we see here is a government trying to hoodwink Manitobans into believing that we are seeing an increase. In reality what we saw is that the overall budget is actually reduced to health care of Manitobans by \$66 million. They are not going to buy the hocus-pocus budget news that you are putting forward, like they do not believe that this government has not increased taxes. I am looking forward to putting on the record how Manitobans view that type of rhetoric as no tax increases, when people's pockets are becoming less and less—[interjection] More and more holes in the pockets and less and less change in those pockets.

* (1650)

Let us look at Family Support. What we see in the budget is \$1 million more for Making Welfare Work—a program that was cut last year by \$2.6 million—again, trying to trumpet something as an improvement when in reality, it is actually another cut. Eight million dollars in tax credits were taken away from social assistance recipients. Are those what we consider those that can afford to give to the government? Eight million dollars in tax credits taken away, and we do not see that restored.

Half a million dollars, half a million of new money, is not something that I would consider in a size of this budget, something to trumpet, but this government sees this as something to brag about—half a million dollars. This will fall short, drastically short, of the \$10 million that the government promised to the Children and Youth Secretariat. Mr. Deputy Speaker, \$10 million versus \$500,000 is a very sorry sight. In addition we have seen earlier cuts to the Children's Dental Program. In 1993, \$11 million cut from children's programs, the Children's Dental Health Program and foster parents. Foster parents have been cut; we do not see that money restored to those families either.

In addition, I would like to discuss some of the items for First Nations people that have, in my opinion, been particularly patient with this government and look hopefully in the long term for a better life for themselves and their children. This government has the audacity to trumpet programs for our First Nations people, a pittance to what is needed. A commitment that has been betrayed year after year after year.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is \$1.3 million spread over three years for the Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre. A commendable program, but horribly underfunded, \$1.3 million is not sufficient to deal with the health concerns of First Nations people. This money comes out of cuts to existing community health clinics. Is there a commitment by this government to support community health clinics? Hardly. Actually, what they are doing is taking the money out of community health clinics and putting it into the private sector where they are seeing a significant increase in supports.

There are also \$200,000 for new Partners for Careers program, financed by a \$200,000 cut to Aboriginal Development Programs. All we are doing is juggling money from one hand to the other, and you are using propaganda probably by a PR wizard. Perhaps Barbara Biggar had some doing in presenting this so-called good news budget. I am not shy to say that this government is a wizard in PR and a master in presenting their picture, but in reality when you look at the actual numbers, the truth will come true. The people of Manitoba know that what this budget is about is trumpeting their agenda and trying to, basically, hoodwink Manitobans.

In addition, we have seen this government—and I just want to point out how this government has actually portrayed First Nations people, aboriginal people in Manitoba. They have eliminated the Northern Youth Jobs Corps where in 1989, 500 people were employed each summer, eliminated New Careers, ended funding for friendship centres, \$1.2 million cut from a program that was preventative and community-based, ended grants to MKO of \$78,000 and AMC to the tune of \$325,000, cut Access programs by \$2 million in 1994, a further cut of \$1.4 million in 1995. They have never spent the \$1 million set aside for the AJI initiatives for many consecutive years.

Not only that, let us look at the budget itself. In the Ministry of Education, the department has actually cut, cut once again the Native Ed branch. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is shameful, moving from 17 staff members to 3, and that department is now taking an additional cut of \$50,000.

Hydro costs, let us look at the ability of First Nations people. Are their programs to provide reasonable hydro service for northern Manitoba? Hardly. We learned today, for instance, or this week, that hydro on average or very commonly costs families \$400 a month for hydro in northern Manitoba. My hydro bill is approximately \$100 a month. Is that equity? Is that fair? I say no. For the people who are actually providing the service and providing the benefit for southern Manitoba, they are being penalized by an unfair rate structure, and I urge this government to look at the rates which penalize northern communities and rural communities, rural individuals who are in sparsely populated areas.

The way it works is that the rates are lower for larger urban centres. Then there are smaller communities, then sparsely populated areas carry the burden, have the highest hydro rates, over double than what urban residents pay. For those people who are farmers, I think that they should lobby with us, moving toward a more just and fair hydro rate structure.

In fact, we learned today that there is a significant problem in northern Manitoba where the communities are seeing intense poverty. They are not able to opt into programs like Power Smart which encourages insulation, upgrading, refitting their homes, because they do not have the ability to finance that type of upgrade. We urge the government to look at programs that will allow northern Manitobans to access the programs which we here in the south are able to do.

In terms of this budget, I would like to move on to the area of education. The minister in January had, I think, the gall to be proud of presenting a budget which basically froze funding for public education. It is a budget that actually froze the level of funding for the areas of responsibility of education. What that means to my school division, what that means to all of our public schools, is basically we see another cut to public education consistent with every year that this government has been elected.

They have betrayed and underfunded public schools in Manitoba since they got elected, and we have seen huge cuts to our public education system. We have seen over 700 teachers eliminated from our public education system. We have seen programs cut in Winnipeg, in rural Manitoba. Home economics, physical, other technical programs, music, instrumental programs, enhancement programs for gifted children, supports for special needs children, field trips, lunch programs, transportation options have all been reduced or eliminated in many cases affecting the individual students.

In this year, we see that there is a major initiative in terms of the standardized exam program that the government is promoting to Manitobans. We estimate, as do the trustees of Manitoba, that each exam is costing Manitobans approximately \$1 million. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have seen three exams, three

exams have been administered by the Department of Education. The Grade 3 exam, condemned by educators, condemned by parents, and proven to actually have social negative influences, to be unfair, and not only that but pulls out classroom teachers which is an additional concern of parents, so instead of enhancing learning what they are actually doing is removing the classroom teacher and we see very little benefit. In fact, we see the negatives occurring in the Grade 3 program. The Grade 3 exam was a disaster. We know it. We urge the minister to listen to trustees, parents, parent councils and educators to immediately review the Grade 3 examination. It is inappropriate in my opinion.

* (1700)

In this year we see there has been a significant change for the costing of that exam. The significant cost, the administration of that program has now been downloaded to school divisions that will be required to, I understand, pay for the difference between the substitute, the classroom teacher as well as the compensation for the marking, a significant burden to the school divisions, and they are required to release one out of three classroom teachers in Grade 3. That means every third classroom will have to do without their home room teacher, something that parents do not support, something that we know does not enhance learning and it causes further disruption, and that is not what Manitobans want. That is not what our children need. So we have serious concerns about the Grade 3 exam.

Let us look at the English exam that was administered by the department. We know that that was, again there were—this is actually an exam of endurance. If members know, this is an exam that I believe spans five days. That is an incredible length to have to participate in an exam. I am sure that the bar exam and when I did my dissertation for my master's degree in geology, indeed it did not take me five days to prove my ability and my competence in my dedicated field. I urge the government to reconsider five days in language arts. That is unfair to students who have English as a second language, also unfair to those with significantly different cultural backgrounds. This is an exam of endurance and not one that is going to enhance learning at all for students in Manitoba.

Let us look at the disaster of the math exam that was recently administered. Please. We have the Minister of Education (Mrs. McIntosh) who is responding to a school division that has said that they will not consider the math exam marks because they consider the exam unfair. The minister then comes and stands before the trustees of Manitoba and says, well, we believe it is a fair exam but you do not so what we will do is let you pick the highest mark, so if you had the opportunity to write both the exam and you have of course your term grade, you get to pick the highest mark. Well, most students would appreciate that, except for the students who did not have the opportunity to write the exam. Is it fair? I say no. Her solution is what is skewing the grades. It is totally unfair. If the minister believes it is a fair exam then stay with it. You have a board that is challenging you and you are what? I mean, if you believe the exam is fair have the strength to stand up and prove it.

Is it a fair exam? Many at the trustees meeting felt it was not, and so the minister should evaluate was it fair. I talked to members of the math curriculum advisory committee who suggested that indeed the math exam was unfair, but it is hard for me to tell if it was fair or unfair, since I do not sit on the committee. But I would suggest that if the minister has reviewed the exam, is convinced it was fair, then what she should have done was stood by it and ensured that Manitobans were treated fairly. What she has done now is only made a farce of the exam. It is a million dollars to construct the exam and administer it. It basically has no meaning. What are the students going to do in June? Are they going to expect to have the option of two marks? You can pick either your term mark or your exam mark, whichever is higher. Is that the way that we are going to administer marking? Is that how the minister feels that this is improving accountability? I would say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is totally, totally unacceptable. If the province is going to administer standardized exams, the minimum that they should do is have a backup exam as is done in other jurisdictions.

Is it a surprise that we have blizzards in Manitoba? The minister seems to say that this is an unforeseen event. I would suggest that we do have blizzards in Manitoba, and in fact that we could expect students to perhaps not be able to write. If this minister is administering a systematic program of standardized

exams, a backup exam should have been prepared. [interjection] It was not, it was a disaster. It was a waste of another million dollars and does not improve our education system. In fact, it is another million dollars flushed down the tube. In fact, we understand and will be looking forward to the minister's comments. It is our understanding that the Brandon School Division was summoned to the minister today, and we look forward to the conclusion or the consequences of that meeting. Indeed, I am sure that it was a very interesting time when the minister was meeting with the Brandon School Division today.

Not only that, so we have seen three exams administered, all of them poorly administered, not improving learning and at a cost of a million dollars each. The department is expanding its exam program to another I believe eight exams. They have not done it right in the three that they have done, I suggest they review the whole program and try and get it right because Manitobans cannot afford to waste money on a program that is poor thought out, poorly administered and wasting money. In fact, I would suggest that this government has actually cut public education and cut it drastically, over \$43 million since 1992, and in my school division alone 57 teachers were cut this year. There is less transportation programs available for families, and we see programs cut.

The teachers, as I said, we estimate approximately 700 teachers cut from Manitoba. The textbook situation is deplorable. We have heard cases where students have to share. Two or three students are sharing one textbook, many of them outdated. So much for the ability to do homework because the textbooks are not allowed out of the schools because of their scarcity and the textbook grant is pitiful. Mr. Deputy Speaker, \$40 for a textbook when a textbook as members should know costs \$90, sometimes \$100 for a textbook, you give \$40 per student per year. Is this government aware that students have more than one course? They may need up to eight textbooks and you give \$40 per student per year, about \$40. Is that anywhere near what is required in the terms of resources per student, \$40 per student per year? Woefully inadequate.

What do we see from this budget? This is inevitable. It raises taxes. It increases fees for parents. It also is

going to force parents into selling even more chocolates to do fundraising because there is not enough funding from the provincial government. Our buildings in our public school system are falling apart. There is not enough support in the capital public Schools Finance Program, \$24 million. This government stands up and trumpets: We are giving \$24 million to public schools. Is that something to be proud of? Hardly.

In the 1980s, the budget for the public Schools Finance Program was over \$40 million, \$40 million. It is now just over \$20 million. Our schools are aging; we know that we need significant investment in terms of replacement. We have many, many roofs that exceed their life expectancy; we have windows that are single pane, are completely nonenergy efficient.

* (1710)

Painting. The Legislature is getting a paint job. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the audacity. We are getting a paint job when schools defer their painting schedules for some over seven years, and that is where you have actually a lot of people there who are busy and children like to touch walls. There is paint for the Legislature and no paint for our schools, for our children, to make it a bright and lively place for our children to be educated. No. I say no to that.

In addition, we have seen last year—this example, I think, illustrates how school divisions have attempted to put whatever money they have into programs and teachers and try and defer what they could in terms of other resources. We remember the grass growing on many schoolyards to excessive heights. Why? Because they could not afford to cut the grass on many fields, a deplorable condition. We want our children outside to be enjoying the park-like setting. Not only that, I mean, many of the school grounds in the inner city are the only park space, the only green space that is available. It is my understanding that the lawn mowing equipment was sitting in garages because there was not enough staff to operate it and cut the lawns so that children could enjoy the outdoors.

Whom do we see benefiting from this program? Who benefits from this budget? Private schools. Again, it is absolutely unacceptable that private schools which represent a tiny, tiny elite group of people get \$4

million while public schools get \$1 million. It is absolutely unfair, unjust and unacceptable.

Computers. Let me talk about the computers this government is proud of. They are committing \$1 million to computers. How many computers—this is a math question—can you buy for the million dollars? It works out to half a computer per school, \$1,200 for a school. That is going to buy what?—maybe a used computer. I tell you that this is such a poorly funded program, poorly funded that it is embarrassing, half a computer per school and they have the nerve to stand up and say they are proud of it. It is absolutely unacceptable.

The bus capital program is pathetic. I have calculated that with the Winnipeg school division, \$99,000 per year, some of those school buses may be on the road for 37 years. Perhaps it is the government's wish that they have antique plates on school buses so they will get a subsidy in their insurance rates because those buses will be so old by the time they can replace them that they will be indeed antiques. It is really not something that we want to joke about because I am worried about the standards: I am worried about safety and I am worried about the commitment of this government to public education.

Universities cut by another 2 percent. What has that meant over the years? It has meant tuitions have doubled, over doubled. It has meant enrollments have decreased, and it has meant an abandonment of our infrastructure, libraries, labs and equipment.

In addition, I would just like to conclude that the seniors that I talked to a week ago know that this government has increased taxes in the form of levies, fees and downloading. They do not accept the argument. They know that what has cost them is Pharmacare, user fees in medical services, tax credits that have been pulled away and taxes on baby clothes, diapers. We see it everywhere from charges to getting a certificate that have gone from \$2 to \$25. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we do not accept the premise that taxes have not gone up. We know and our constituents know that they have less, and that this government is trying to again pull the wool over their eyes with this phoney budget which they call good news, which for average Manitobans means bad news.

I thank you for the opportunity to put that on the record.

Hon. Mike Radcliffe (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise today with some degree of indignation. I do not want my colleagues in this Chamber to be inveigled by the subterfuge that has been cast about this Chamber by the honourable member opposite from the speech that I have just had the distinction to listen to.

An Honourable Member: From St. James.

Mr. Radcliffe: The honourable member for St. James, that is correct.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am reminded from listening to the remarks that the honourable member across has put on the record of that old axiom that has been bandied about this Chamber in years gone by, that our honourable colleagues across, the NDP party never met a tax they did not like and never met a tax they did not raise.

(Mr. Gerry McAlpine, Acting Speaker, in the Chair)

An Honourable Member: Hike.

Mr. Radcliffe: Did not hike, I am sorry, I misquoted them. The difficulty is of course that they are living in an ethereal world where they think that there is an unlimited supply of cash, that there is unlimited supply of revenue and they will tax and grind our population right into the dirt for the ultimate esoteric ends of their lofty ideology. But the problem is, it is not based on a scintilla of reality, a scintilla of reality, and that is the problem that our honourable colleagues have across the way.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I applaud the good intentions of our honourable friends across the way.

An Honourable Member: Misguided though they be.

Mr. Radcliffe: Misguided though they be, says my honourable colleague to my left. But they are functioning in an illusionary world, a fictional world. They are not coping with the reality of day to day, and although I would hesitate to indulge in what we euphemistically refer to as federal bashing, the reality

that our Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) has coped with over these last few years is a \$1.178 billion diminution in revenue from—

An Honourable Member: Diminution. That would be more serious than cutbacks.

Mr. Radcliffe: Yes, indeed from those Liberals on the federal transfer cuts. Now, I think what we have to look at are the priorities of this budget, and what we look at when I would suggest with the greatest of respect, Mr. Acting Speaker, and honourable colleagues in this Chamber is that when you want to identify priorities of spending in this Chamber from this budget from this government, you have to look at the percentages of where we devote the available revenue that we have, and I can tell my honourable colleague that we spend 34 percent of the available revenue to the Province of Manitoba on health care alone. This is the No. 1 per capita spending across the nation.

I would move on to the allocation of funding for education and it is 19 percent for Education and Training of our budget. Our budget and our government has also sustained the social programs and support for our marginalized and less fortunate citizens in our province. Family Services consumes 12 percent of the budget of Manitoba.

An Honourable Member: What is the fourth largest department?

Mr. Radcliffe: The fourth largest department, Mr. Acting Speaker and honourable colleagues, is public debt. That is the cost of the money, and that arises from the profligacy that arose from those members across the way. They were profligate spenders.

I would suggest, with the greatest of respect, that we are facing a crisis in credibility in the years to come, and the crisis in credibility is that our generation, and there has been a significant amount of material written on this, the Boom, Bust & Echo and After the Boom by Garth Turner that has pointed out that our children—

* (1720)

An Honourable Member: And their children.

Mr. Radcliffe: —and their children, yes, and the children of the members opposite are coming very

quickly to the realization that they are being saddled with an insurmountable level of debt and that we will gain the benefit from it, and they will be expected to pay it off.

Do you know what is happening? If our honourable colleagues across the way would go out into the community and listen to the young people who are our future—they are our future taxpayers and our future citizens and our future leaders—they are becoming disillusioned. They are becoming embittered. They are becoming ruthless because they see that the demographics are weighted against them.

There are fewer of them. There are going to be more of my honourable colleagues' age group who are going to be looking forward to a nirvana of their pension on the verandah of the old folks home, and our honourable colleagues opposite are expecting in some sort of mindless leap of logic that the future generation is just going to sidle up and pay without any intellectual component going into it for our spending.

Our Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) has been perspicacious enough to see that this will not wash, this will not happen. We are making a commitment to our future generation, we are making a commitment to our youth, the people of tomorrow that we are going to pay our own bills. We are going to be self sustaining. We are going to be responsible. We are going to be responsible. We are going to be accountable so that when we pass the torch to our children coming up that it will be in fact a better place.

We have for example of what was left to us some of the murals and some of the sayings and some of the names left about this Chamber; Alfred, Manu, Justinianus, Lycurgus. Did they victimize their children? Did they saddle their children and their succeeding generations with the evil of debt, with the evil of relentless interest, of being prey to the sharks, of being a victim to the moneylenders? That is what our honourable colleagues across the way would advocate.

An Honourable Member: Nationalize the banks.

Mr. Radcliffe: Absolutely. I hear some witless burbling coming across from the benches opposite

saying that they want to nationalize the banks. Well, you know what, Mr. Acting Speaker, that just displays the facile and empty logic of our honourable colleagues because, do you know what they overlook? Who are the banks? The banks are you and me and all of us together. That is our deposits, our savings and the savings of our seniors and the pennies coming in from the Free Press carrier who assiduously walks up and down the block delivering the paper.

That is all of us. This is a community, Mr. Acting Speaker, and the job of government, the job of a reasoned, caring, sensitive government is to live within our means, to prioritize, to motivate people to prioritize spending, so that spending will be the most efficacious that can be done to realize the goals and objectives which we want to attain.

Now, I would suggest, Mr. Acting Speaker, that we look at what the goals and objectives of this budget are. We have said, we have declared, we have gone on record, and we have taken upon ourselves the burden that if there is an increase, an increase in a significant tax to result in an unbalanced budget, that there will be an imposition of a penalty on us individually. Now, I would challenge the honourable colleagues opposite if they have the courage and the intestinal fortitude to make such a public declaration to the people of Manitoba as my honourable colleagues have on this side of the House.

There has been a freeze on tax, and, Mr. Acting Speaker, not only are we having the immediate effect of curtailing excessive and profligate spending, but we are making a declaration which has—

Hon. Harry Enns (Minister of Agriculture): And the rapacious grasp.

Mr. Radcliffe: —the rapacious grasp of government indeed, says the honourable Minister of Agriculture. I am pleased to echo his sentiments that we are setting a new standard, a new standard of governance, a new standard of people in the public place, of saying that this will be reasonable, this will be accountable and this will be moderate. [interjection] That is correct. I mean, the Pharaohs of Egypt were not so mindless and thoughtless as our honourable friends—[interjection] I will not respond to my honourable colleague on that.

On one hand then, one of the aims and goals, Mr. Acting Speaker, is to curtail the spending and on the other hand is to support the vital social programs. If I were to be inveigled by the honourable member for St. James (Ms. Mihychuk) to believe what she was disseminating in this Chamber a few minutes ago, I think I would become so despondent that I do not think I could face another sunrise. So I would suggest with the greatest of respect to the honourable colleague that, in fact, this was posturing on her part. Those deprecating remarks, those fining lamentations really were not sincere.

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to be responsive to my honourable friend for a moment because she was addressing some issues on education. I think it is very important to put on the record some of the goals and standards and objectives that our honourable Minister of Education (Mrs. McIntosh) has led the way with, and one of those is objective accountability from the methods of education in our public school system. We have consulted with the people of Manitoba, and one of the crucial issues, one of the primary issues that people are telling us out there is that they were concerned about the unaccountability of our public school system, that it was a runaway express train and that the results were not objective, there was no benchmarking and they laud the restraints, the testing, that we are putting on the system.

Now, I am not for a moment being deprecating of our schoolteachers. Our individual schoolteachers are a group of motivated, sincere, concerned individuals out there who are doing their best, but the job of government is to create the environment within which these good schoolteachers should be functioning and the role of government, the role of our minister, as evidenced by this budget, is to say there shall be harmonization across this country. There shall be accountability.

An Honourable Member: That is a strong word.

Mr. Radcliffe: That is right. One thing that was puzzling me, and I pose this hypothetical that my honourable colleague was raising. She said that this

diminutive amount of money for textbooks per child and we in the law, when I was in the law we had the saying *reductio ad absurdum*. That means you take an argument, you take a phrase and you whittle it away and you whittle it away until the result is absurd, and I would suggest that her proposition was reducing this issue to the absurd.

When I went to school, and maybe things have changed, because I know the honourable colleague across the way is much younger than I and has probably had a much different educational experience, but I was an attendee at the public school system, and you know what I used to do? We used to turn our textbooks in at the end of the year so that they were used by pupils for the following year. Mr. Deputy Speaker, maybe that has not been the experience of our honourable colleagues across the way.

* (1730)

I would also like to put on the record that the school that I attended was built in 1910, and it was a significant number of years after 1910 that I attended at that school. And you know what? I am proud of the public school education that I received from Kelvin High School, and they were first-rate teachers then and I would suggest with the greatest of respect that they are first-rate teachers today, but it matters not that this was the biggest and the shiniest school in town, because I would suggest that it is far more important the program delivery you get rather than the cost of bricks and mortar that are put around you.

In fact, I can recount to my honourable colleagues here that in the mid-'30s some young student had turned on the fire hoses in Kelvin and had flooded the school, which had caused all the hardwood floors on the second floor of the school to be warped and they rolled, and this was just the distinctive characteristic of a rich heritage building which we were proud to attend. So when I hear allegations that we are not spending enough and, if you analyze the speeches that come from benches opposite, the whole tenor and the whole theme is, spend more, and their criticism levelled at us is that we are not spending enough.

They are not saying that we are not taxing enough, because I do not think they have the courage to say that,

but they are saying that we should exercise some sort of wizardry and produce something out of nothing and maybe go and put some printing presses to produce more money so we can spend at the levels that they are alleging would be appropriate. It is spend, spend, spend.

I would like to turn, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to in fact some of the specifics that are contained in this budget, because this budget is an exemplary document, and I believe it is important that the people of Manitoba know exactly what is going on and not listen to the political cant that comes from across the way. This budget has created an environment where Manitobans have the opportunity to have a job, to support themselves, to make their own choices, to be empowered instead of having some paternalistic state dictating their every move.

The model which our friends across the way are advocating went out of fashion in Eastern Europe and that fell. It collapsed upon itself, and that is when we saw the Berlin Wall collapse. That is when we saw the Solidarity movement challenge the imperial might of the Russian army in Poland. That is when we saw refugees streaming across from Eastern Europe. They were escaping a totalitarian mentality, which is what my honourable friends are advocating and admiring. They overlook the fact that the average individual in the streets of Manitoba have the common sense to make the best decisions for themselves that anybody can, and it is paternalistic and it is wrong for a superior government to dictate, to patronize our citizens. The best thing we can do for our people, for our citizens, is to give them the opportunity, and as my honourable colleague the Minister of Child and Family Services says, the form of support that I can offer is a job. Do you know what the result of that has been? We have more people at work in Manitoba today than ever before in our history. That is monumental.

I want to point for a moment to some of the health care allocations that have been made. We have paid down the debt of our institutions in order that there will be enough money so that there will be a redevelopment at our Winnipeg Health Sciences Centre which is one of the essential centres for health in all our province. There will be a redevelopment in the Brandon General

Hospital, and I am proud to say to my honourable colleague across the way here that the Boundary Trails Regional Health Centre is going to be built. It is going to be a reality, and we are going to be able to refurbish and expand seniors homes. The ones that have been targeted are the Lions Manor, the Betel Home and the Sharon Home.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, last year we spent \$60 million more in home care than was budgeted for. Now to listen to my honourable friends opposite you would say, oh, we were profligate. [interjection] I stand corrected. The honourable member across the way says \$80 million more, \$81 million more. Do you know why we did that? Because that program was so successful, the uptake was so successful that we met the needs of our frail and elderly and sick population. You know what, the reason we were able to do that, the reason there was that \$81 million in the Consolidated Fund was because of the wisdom and the forethought of our Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) that he had created the rainy day fund so that we could resort to that, so that there was an overage. If you live for today with no thought to tomorrow, that is the slippery slope to perdition and that is where our honourable colleagues across would take us.

The 1997 budget is dedicating \$1.826 billion to Manitoba Health for the 1997-98 year. That is 37 percent more, more—I want to emphasize that and say it again, Mr. Deputy Speaker—more than was spent and budgeted in the 1987-88 year. That is astounding. That is remarkable and that comes from the wisdom, from the care, from the forethought of our Minister of Finance.

An Honourable Member: But not from Paul Martin.

Mr. Radcliffe: No. This budget provides \$1.3 million over three years for an Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre. Now I heard our honourable member turn up her nose at \$500,000, and she said this was insignificant. I am sorry, but the home I came out of, \$500,000 was a king's ransom. That was an amount that was almost unimaginable, and when we get in here and we bandy these figures about, I shake my head when I hear that these members opposite are disdainful of this sort of participation. This budget is prepared to invest in people and prepare children for a successful

future. We are committing \$1.03 billion for education, and that is \$12 million more. I want to repeat it again. That is more money than we spent last year on education. We are continuing to set world-class standards. We have province-wide testing. We have parental involvement. We have emphasis on language arts, mathematics and science.

Now, I heard some deprecating remarks from benches opposite about the independent school system, and I would like to perhaps try to inveigh upon my honourable colleagues across there that when they allege that we are supporting the private school system, the appropriate wording today is the independent school system, because it is not just the private schools. There are parochial schools. There are faith-based schools. There is a plethora of community out there who are involved in the nonpublic stream.

One of the signature marks of this government, the signature marks of this budget, the signature marks of the standards and goals that are emanating from this side of this House is that we want to be in partnership with our communities. We do not want to patronizingly dump buckets of money to be wasted on people who do not have the motivation or the care to spend it wisely. We want to partner with our communities, with our citizens because, when everything is said and done, the citizens of Manitoba know best how to wisely control their own finances. We do this on an individual basis, we do this in our homes, we do this on every level of society.

I would only point to the independent school system—and I emphasize it is the independent school system which came out of a long, rich, historical growth, the background of our multiculturalism in this province. We can only look to the example of the Leader of the official opposition (Mr. Doer) opposite, who is a product of the independent school system, and a fine product he is. We can look to the honourable member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale), who is a graduate of one of the finest schools in this country, of Upper Canada College. I say, God bless them. That is wonderful education. That is excellence.

What we should be trying to achieve in our school system is the pursuit of excellence for our young people. This goes back again to the theme that I was

talking about earlier of the trust that we are relaying to the next generation.

I remember growing up and receiving advice from my parents. This was a couple who had lived through two World Wars, a couple who had lived through a depression. This was a couple who had been born to one station in life and through the vagaries of misfortune had assumed another status in life.

* (1740)

I can remember my parents saying to me, Michael, make sure you get yourself an education in this life and a good one, because the money comes and the money goes, but if you have an education you will always have the ability to survive. This was coming from a woman who had gone to school with cousins of the Czar. They had seen such a revolution in life, and that is the message that I think we must pass on to our young people, that they must get an education so that they can be equipped to carry on and to make Canada the pre-eminent place that the United Nations even indicates is No. 1 and No. 2 in the whole world, in the whole civilized world.

This budget is committing \$22.3 million for educational renewal initiatives. We are putting more computers and more software in classrooms across Manitoba, and I am happy to tell my honourable colleagues in this Chamber that I have been very eager to facilitate the placement of computers in schools in Winnipeg. I have had the opportunity to go out and see young children with an insatiable quest for learning, for erudition.

What they have done in one of the schools in my constituency is that they are allowed to take home a computer for a short length of time. They do their homework on the Internet. They e-mail to their masters, and most of the learning takes place not in the traditional, hidebound, old-fashioned way in a classroom with lectures and dictation, not so.

It is interactive. It comes from the students questing and searching for information and knowledge and skill, and I have heard our Premier (Mr. Filmon) say, and I think this bears repetition, that education is a lifelong experience, and if we can inculcate that experience in

our youth from the time they enter school at the age of five or six, then we have satisfied the obligation that has been put upon us to the next generation. That is probably one of the most primary things, one of the most important, essential things we look upon as government that we must inculcate to our young.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government, this budget, is allocating \$57 million for community colleges in '97-98, \$214.6 million for support of universities, and we have had a concern that the money we allocate to educational institutions go where there is a need, where there is a practical application and where people will gain the skills and the abilities to look after themselves in the future, and is that wrong?

Is that wrong, Mr. Deputy Speaker? I would hazard, not. [interjection] The honourable Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Enns) has just indicated that in the world in which he was trained that the fundamentals of two plus two, the reality is that it is four, and that is some of the focus that we are trying to reinculcate into our educational system. We are putting \$1 million more into new funding for scholarships and bursaries for universities and community colleges. Now, what is the reaction we get from across the way? Ah, you did not do enough. You should do more. Spend more.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is no end to the rapacious grasp that we see across the way. We are allocating \$8.9 million to the program Making Welfare Work. You know what the object of that is? It is to get people back into the workplace, because you know what I have found when I have been going door to door about the city of Winnipeg? Behind the door is a citizen of Manitoba, and you know what those citizens want? They want the opportunity to work. They want to be able to go and have the respect, the self-respect of a job. They want to be able to support themselves. They do not want the feckless hand of government giving them a handout. They want a job.

To further this end, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are going to introduce legislation to ensure that the Manitoba learning tax credit reflects changes to our income tax, so that tuition fees, educational credit—

An Honourable Member: In spite of federal downloading. Put it on the record.

Mr. Radcliffe: That is correct. That is right. I want to say on the record that we will provide \$17.3 million; that is \$5.3 million more for this program. I have heard and I do not know whether my honourable friends across the way have heard, but I have heard that there are firms in Manitoba that are desperate right now for truck drivers. We are going to be a transportation hub. We are going to assume our rightful place in the heart of the continent as a communication centre, and—

An Honourable Member: Do not forget our Route 90.

Mr. Radcliffe: That is right, Route 90, but to this end we are going to put \$500,000 into a transport driving training program, so that 225 more people can step into these jobs that are there and waiting.

Now, I want to tell the honourable member for St. Johns (Mr. Mackintosh) and St. James (Ms. Mihychuk) that when I was in school back in the '60s, I remember come graduation time that all the employers and all the firms would come out to the University of Manitoba, and they would set up booths. Remember that? Yes, a number of my honourable colleagues across the way are nodding in affirmation to that, and we looked on those as the good old days.

I can remember going into UMSU and sitting down at the lunch table and saying, well, I got two bids from the Bank of Commerce and the Bank of Montreal, and somebody else said, well, I am going to another firm, and, well, I will trade you one of these for one of those.

An Honourable Member: So what did you do?

Mr. Radcliffe: Well, I went on to law, which may have been a mistake. But do you know what is happening now? The pendulum has swung around, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and today we are told that there are not enough skilled workers out there to fill the demand, the overwhelming demand to fuel our industries, to fuel our factories, to fuel our farms, and we need more people. We need more workers. I say that I think the good old days for our youth are coming back. We can only look to the statistics and see that right now our youth unemployment is lower than the national average. Our unemployment figures are lower than the national average.

An Honourable Member: Considerably.

Mr. Radcliffe: Considerably lower, three points lower. Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, having grown up as a westerner, as a son of Manitoba, I have learned the whole grim reality of being a branch-office town. That head office was always in Toronto, head office was always in Montreal, and that is where the decisions were made. Now the pendulum is swinging, the tables are turned. Now the tables are turned. The heart of the nation, the engine of enterprise in Canada is going to be emanating from Manitoba. That is attributable to the good work of members like the member for Arthur-Virden, our Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism (Mr. Downey), our Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson), the leadership of our honourable Premier (Mr. Filmon), not from the witless maunderings that we hear across the way that there is not enough, that we should be doing more, that the sky is falling in.

* (1750)

I can remember our Premier saying that he wants to be remembered—and he feels that his legacy to the people of Manitoba will be he wants to change the way people see themselves. He does not want to see people see themselves as losers. He does not want people thinking themselves inadequate, marginalized, poverty-struck. No. He says Manitobans are winners. Manitobans can work. Manitobans—[interjection] Not so, and I hear the honourable member across the way, again, she is obsessed by the fact that you have to have money.

You must have motivation. You must have a will to learn. You must have a good attitude in life. I am sure that the honourable colleague across the way has this attitude to achieve the thresholds that she has by arriving in this Chamber to join us here. I want to impart and I want to share with our honourable colleague that, in fact, she has got to now make another step across another threshold to achieve a positive outlook on life and to come across to this side of the House. On this side of the House, our motto is we can do, we will do.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to go back to some of the details of our budget right now. As I have indicated already, we are also continuing to complete our

commitment to our youth, because we are beginning to pay down that debt that was so thoughtlessly and mindlessly run up by our colleagues opposite. This is the first time that there has been a reversal in our province's fortunes by way of paying this back. Although we sometimes exchange levity and facetious remarks in this Chamber, I say with all sincerity that we have a real and major commitment to pass on to our young people, the youth of tomorrow, the citizens and the voters and the workers of tomorrow a better place than we got, not worse.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to make something on the record, I want to make a remark on the record, and I think that this shows this is again a signature item for this government. This Filmon government, this Progressive Conservative government, right now is delivering service, delivering support to the people of Manitoba at the lowest cost of any government in Canada, in our whole nation. We are willing to say to the people of Manitoba we are prepared to live as frugally and carefully as we are asking you to. So I could go on for another hour about the evils of those terrible Liberals Down East, of our well-meaning, but witless, socialists across the way, but this budget deserves nothing but the highest of praise. I know that when our honourable friends across the way take the time to read it and reflect upon it that they will spring to their feet when our Speaker asks for a canvass of opinion and a vote in this Chamber.

With that I would like to conclude my remarks and thank my colleagues for this opportunity of putting these few humble remarks on the record.

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I listen to the comments from the member for River Heights (Mr. Radcliffe), I have to say that he must be out of touch with reality or he has not been talking to the people who are really affected by this budget. I would like to share with the members just a few comments that I heard over the weekend with respect to this budget, and I have to say, from what people have said, they do not agree with the government at all and that this budget hurts Manitobans.

I tell you on Sunday I met some people in my constituency. There was a storm, it was blowing quite

hard and roads were in very poor condition. But one person, who had happened to be at the store at the same time as I was, said what is happening to this government? You know, what is happening? Look at what they are doing, they are cutting back on services so much that we cannot even get our roads graded. It is just unsafe to be out there; in fact, it was unsafe to be out there because there was an accident very shortly after. But what this gentleman said was how can this government be putting money into their rainy day fund and at the same time shutting down highway yards and reducing services to people? That is the message that is out there from people in rural Manitoba, and I invite people to go out there.

I see the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) sitting here, and he says that he has listened to rural Manitobans when he brought this budget forward. I have to believe, when I look at this budget, that he listened to only a certain segment of the people and that was the business people. That is the people who he gave the breaks to, tax breaks for business but cuts to services for people, and that is quite disappointing.

There are a couple of things that I want to address as well that are real contradictions in this budget. In the budget it says that this budget launches the first attack on the province's debt since 1950. Well, that is not quite true, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because although they did not attack it sooner, they had the opportunity because this government inherited a surplus budget in 1988. At that time they could have used that money to pay down the debt, but they chose not to. Instead, they added to the debt that year by borrowing more money and putting the surplus into their slush fund that they drew on later in the following years. This Conservative government racked up the highest deficits in the history of this province. But this government seems to ignore those facts and wants to reach back and say that they are the ones who know how to manage the debt. In

fact, that is not true, because they are the ones that racked up the highest deficit in the recent history of this province.

Another fact, a comment from the budget, it says, this budget continues our government's commitment to the protection and enhancement of health care, education and supporting children and families. Well, in actual fact, let us look at what this budget does. This budget cuts health care spending because, when you look at what really happened, when you look into the extra funds or the extra \$81 million that was brought in through special warrants, this government has failed to restore the previous year's cuts to education, children's programs and families.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am very concerned with the cuts that we have seen over the years by this government to programs, services to children and single mothers. We have more single mothers living in this country in poverty than any other province in Canada. That is a disgraceful record. Our income support programs have been cut by 10 percent. The largest cut was to babies under one year of age, all under the guise of standardization.

Now, let us think about this. Where is the future of our country? Where is the future of this province if it is not in our children? If we do not invest in our children now, what will we have in the future?

We hear members talking about the importance of education. I agree, education is very important—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hour being 6 p.m., when this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Swan River will have 35 minutes remaining. This House is now adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow (Friday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 20, 1997

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