

Fourth Session - Thirty-Ninth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 25, 2010

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

**ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS
INTRODUCTION OF BILLS**

**Bill 224—The Crown Corporations Public Review
and Accountability Amendment Act**

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Emerson, that Bill 224, The Crown Corporations Public Review and Accountability Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable member for Morris, seconded by the honourable member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon), that Bill 224, The Crown Corporations Public Review and Accountability Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

Mrs. Taillieu: Mr. Speaker, this bill enhances the ability of the Public Utilities Board to gain access to information it requires and finds necessary in setting basic insurance rates. MPI is required to provide the Public Utilities Board with information on all of its financial activities, and the board is required to maintain confidentiality of the information.

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

**PETITIONS
Bipole III**

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

And this is the reason for this petition:

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

Since this will cost Manitoba ratepayers at least \$640 million more than an east-side route and given that the Province of Manitoba is facing its largest deficit on record, the burden of this extra cost could not come at a worse time.

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition's signed by J. Gobeil, H. Dixon, C. Ippiak and many, many others, Mr. Speaker.

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

Multiple Myeloma Treatments

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

Health Canada has approved the use of Revlimid for patients with multiple myeloma, a rare, progressive and fatal blood cancer.

Revlimid is a vital new treatment that must be accessible to all patients in Manitoba for this life-threatening cancer of the blood cells.

Multiple myeloma is treatable, and new, innovative therapies like Revlimid can extend survival and enhance quality of life for the estimated 2,100 Canadians diagnosed annually.

The provinces of Ontario, Québec, British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Alberta have

already listed this drug on their respective pharmacare formularies.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

That the provincial government consider immediately providing Revlimid as a choice to patients with multiple myeloma and their health-care providers in Manitoba through public funding.

This is signed by O. Christensen, K. Jakobson, N. Syzek and many, many others, Mr. Speaker.

Medical Clinic in Weston and Brooklands Area

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

Community-based medical clinics provide a valuable health-care service.

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by N. Goulet, D. Sousa and M. Melnick and many, many other fine Manitobans. Thank you.

Mount Agassiz Ski Area

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

In addition, a thriving rural economy generates tax revenue that helps pay for core provincial

government services and infrastructure which benefits all Manitobans.

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

This petition is signed by M. Shinton, V. Little, A. Grona and many, many other fine Manitobans.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs Third Report

Ms. Marilyn Brick (Vice-Chairperson): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the Third Report of the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs.

Madam Clerk (Patricia Chaychuk): Your Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense? Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs presents the following as its Third Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on the following occasions in the Legislative Building:

- December 22, 2004 (3rd Session – 38th Legislature)
- May 2, 2006 (4th Session – 38th Legislature)
- July 10, 2008 (2nd Session – 39th Legislature)
- May 25, 2009 (3rd Session – 39th Legislature)
- March 10, 2010 (4th Session – 39th Legislature)
- May 20, 2010 (4th Session – 39th Legislature)

Matters under Consideration

- *Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31, 2003 including the conduct of the 38th Provincial General Election June 3, 2003*
- *Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31, 2006*
- *Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31, 2007 including the conduct of the 39th Provincial General Election May 22, 2007*
- *Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31, 2008*

Committee Membership

Committee membership for the December 22, 2004 meeting:

- *Hon. Mr. ASHTON*
- *Hon. Mr. CHOMIAK*
- *Hon. Mr. DOER*
- *Mr. CUMMINGS*
- *Mr. DEWAR*
- *Ms. IRVIN-ROSS (Vice-Chairperson)*
- *Ms. KORZENIOWSKI (Chairperson)*
- *Mr. LOEWEN*
- *Mr. MURRAY*
- *Mr. PENNER*
- *Mr. SCHELLENBERG*

Substitution made during committee proceedings on December 22, 2004:

- *Hon. Mr. MACKINTOSH for Mr. SCHELLENBERG*

Committee membership for the May 2, 2006 meeting:

- *Mr. DERKACH*
- *Mr. DEWAR*
- *Hon. Mr. DOER*
- *Mr. HAWRANIK*
- *Hon. Mr. LEMIEUX*
- *Hon. Mr. MACKINTOSH*
- *Mr. MARTINDALE*
- *Mrs. MITCHELSON*
- *Mr. REID (Chairperson)*
- *Mr. ROCAN*
- *Mr. SCHELLENBERG (Vice-Chairperson)*

Committee membership for the July 10, 2008 meeting:

- *Hon. Mr. ASHTON*

- *Ms. BRICK (Chairperson)*
- *Mr. DEWAR*
- *Hon. Mr. DOER*
- *Mr. GOERTZEN*
- *Mr. HAWRANIK*
- *Ms. HOWARD (Vice-Chairperson)*
- *Mr. MCFADYEN*
- *Hon. Ms. MCGIFFORD*
- *Hon. Mr. SWAN*
- *Mrs. TAILLIEU*

Substitution made during committee proceedings on July 10, 2008:

- *Mr. FAURSCHOU for Mr. MCFADYEN*

Committee membership for the May 25, 2009 meeting:

- *Hon. Mr. CHOMIAK*
- *Mr. DERKACH*
- *Mr. DEWAR*
- *Hon. Mr. DOER*
- *Mr. FAURSCHOU*
- *Mr. GOERTZEN*
- *Ms. HOWARD (Chairperson)*
- *Mr. NEVAKSHONOFF (Vice-Chairperson)*
- *Mrs. TAILLIEU*
- *Hon. Mr. SWAN*
- *Hon. Ms. WOWCHUK*

Substitution made during committee proceedings on May 25, 2009:

- *Mr. MAGUIRE for Mr. FAURSCHOU*

Committee membership for the March 10, 2010 meeting:

- *Hon. Mr. BLAIKIE*
- *Ms. BRICK (Vice-Chairperson)*
- *Mr. DERKACH*
- *Mr. EICHLER*
- *Mr. GOERTZEN*
- *Hon. Ms. HOWARD*
- *Mr. MCFADYEN*
- *Mr. REID (Chairperson)*
- *Hon. Mr. SELINGER*
- *Hon. Mr. STRUTHERS*
- *Hon. Mr. SWAN*

Committee membership for the May 20, 2010 meeting:

- *Mr. ALTEMEYER*

- *Hon. Mr. BLAIKIE*
- *Ms. BRICK (Vice-Chairperson)*
- *Hon. Mr. CHOMIAK*
- *Mr. EICHLER*
- *Mr. GOERTZEN*
- *Hon. Ms. IRVIN-ROSS*
- *Mr. MCFADYEN*
- *Mr. PEDERSEN*
- *Hon. Mr. SELINGER*
- *Hon. Mr. STRUTHERS*

Your Committee elected Mr. ALTEMEYER as the Chairperson.

Officials Speaking on Record

- *Shipra Verma, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer*

Motions

Your Committee agreed to the following motion:

- *THAT the motion passed at January 21, 2010 meeting of the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs be rescinded and replaced with the following:*

THAT a subcommittee of the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs be struck to manage the process of hiring a new Chief Electoral Officer;

THAT the subcommittee may only report back to the committee with a recommendation that has received a general level of acceptance by all members;

THAT the subcommittee consist of four government members, two official opposition members and one independent member;

THAT the subcommittee have the authority to call their own meetings, the ability to meet in camera, and be able to undertake duties it deems necessary in order to fulfil its responsibilities in the hiring process;

THAT the subcommittee appoint an expert advisory panel of three members to assist in the hiring process and ultimately provide the subcommittee with a prioritized list of candidates;

THAT the subcommittee establish the terms of reference for the expert advisory panel, and that Legislative Assembly staff may be authorized by the Chair to attend all meetings of the subcommittee and the expert advisory panel;

THAT during this process the House Leaders will meet to discuss changes to The Elections Act with regards to future appointments to the role of Chief Electoral Officer.

Reports Considered and Passed

Your Committee considered and passed the following report as presented:

- *Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31, 2006*

Reports Considered but not Passed

Your Committee considered the following reports but did not pass them:

- *Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31, 2003 including the conduct of the 38th Provincial General Election June 3, 2003*
- *Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31, 2007 including the conduct of the 39th Provincial General Election May 22, 2007*
- *Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31, 2008*

Ms. Brick: I move, seconded by the honourable Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Struthers), that the report of the committee be received.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable member for St. Norbert, seconded by the honourable Minister of Agriculture and Food, that the report of the committee be received.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? [*Agreed*]

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I would like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us from Grandview School, we have 20 grade 9 students under the direction of Ms. Barbara Grexton. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mr. Struthers).

And also in the public gallery we have Manitoba Parents for Ukrainian Education, and we have 80 grade 5 and 6 students under the direction of Ms. Susan Zuk and Ms. Barb Thiessen. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk).

Also in the public gallery we have from Balmoral Hall, we have 45 grade 9 students under the direction of Ms. Lois McGill-Horn. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Wolseley (Mr. Altemeyer).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Bill 33

Government Intent

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): In deal after deal over the last 10 years under this NDP government, opposition, media and others have asked for more transparency, more disclosure to taxpayers about how their money is being spent. And now we see, Mr. Speaker, that after almost 11 years of secrecy and stonewalling, there's a sudden new interest in transparency on the part of this NDP government.

I want to ask the Premier: Why this sudden conversion to the cause of transparency at this late date in the mandate, Mr. Speaker?

* (13:40)

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the ongoing effort to increase transparency has been there for 11 years, and over several of those years, journalists across the country have given us very good scores for our willingness to provide information to people, and we have also revised the freedom of information legislation to increase transparency.

So based on what journalists have told us, where they've given us usually a score in the range of B, and one of the better ones in the country, we have continuously strived for better ways to make information available to the public, including things like waiting lists, including things like critical incidents, including access to information, and we will continue to find new ways to do that.

Mr. McFadyen: Well, Mr. Speaker, they—we know they got a B for getting their rejection letters out faster than ever, and now along with those rejection letters, we're getting massive bills and estimates for anybody who wants to get even the most basic information from this government.

And so, Mr. Speaker, after all of these years of secrecy around public-private partnerships at Hydro, around deals with Hecla Island, around other deals

where taxpayers' money has been put at risk or lost, suddenly we see Bill 33 on the Order Paper demonstrating, at least by way of announcement, a lip-service approach to more transparency in government. But we also see now the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) talking about delaying the introduction of this bill.

Can the Premier just confirm that this is one more insincere NDP attempt to pay lip-service to transparency in government?

Mr. Selinger: Again, Mr. Speaker, we've had an ongoing series of initiatives to increase transparency across a wide spectrum of government activities: including upgrading our accounting standards so there's only one set of books, and liabilities weren't left off the books as they were done in the members opposite; including things like making available the number of beds available in hospitals, which members opposite used to never disclose to the public; protections of persons in care legislation; including items like critical incident reporting.

All of these are measures to increase public transparency, and we will continue to look for ways to do that, including legislation on public-private partnerships as we go forward, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, they're shrouding the number of bureaucrats within the health authorities by cancelling phone books. They bring in new charges and bills for every request for information. We see secrecy in connection with the Hydro deal with Pattern Energy.

I want to just ask the Premier if he can confirm or indicate one way or another: Is this delay in the introduction and debate on Bill 33 related to the fact that he wants the Pattern Energy deal to be in the background so that it doesn't have to be opened up to public scrutiny in the way that hydro ratepayers are demanding as they pay more and more on their hydro bills every year?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I can confirm that any increases in hydro rates have been among the lowest in the country and the rates remain among the lowest in North America. So Manitobans get extremely good value for their—for the rates they pay on hydro bills.

The member opposite was the one that wanted to increase them to a market level by increasing them over 40 percent. And yes, it is true that we have been able to move forward on a new wind power project in Manitoba, a \$345-million investment,

130 megawatts of power, extremely good benefits for local farmers and local municipalities, additional resources for schools, all of those are the result of this form of economic development. And Hydro has said that it's one of the—probably the most cost-effective deal in North America.

The reality is that we will find ways to increase transparency while protecting commercial interests so that people can remain competitive and when those two interests clash with each other, we need to further find ways to reconcile those interests in the interests of the public.

Manitoba Hydro Wind Energy Contract Costs

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Well, Mr. Speaker, the only thing the Premier won't do is give us the financials of the deal and he won't give us the participation of that particular deal.

Proposed Bill 33, The Public-Private Partnership Transparency and Accountability Act speaks to everything Manitobans want, transparency and accountability in government. Wow. Wouldn't that be a dramatic change in direction for this NDP government? Let's see if the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro is prepared to walk the walk when it comes to P3 disclosure on Manitoba Hydro's recent \$260-million investment in Pattern Energy wind farm.

Prior to the tabling of Bill 33, will the minister be forthcoming with the details of the arrangement, the financials and the participation of Pattern and Manitoba Hydro?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, we know in North America last year that there were very few, if any, wind power projects done in North America because financing was extremely difficult to arrange during the great recession.

Manitoba found a way to move forward on building more clean energy in Manitoba, on developing rural—the rural economy, providing more resources to schools, more resources to municipalities. That is a good project. I know the members oppose it. They oppose everything that moves Manitoba forward economically. It'll generate over 230 person-years of employment. It will provide some long-term jobs to young people in that area on a new technology. We will bring forward curriculum in our schools which allows people to do more wind-project technology and apprenticeship learning, as well as geothermal.

We will build a green energy economy. We will do it cost-effectively, and we will keep hydro rates the lowest in North America.

Mr. Borotsik: Mr. Speaker, he says he found—the Premier says he found a way to move the project forward. He found a way by buying the project for \$260 million of taxpayers' money. Obviously, accountability and transparency are not words found in the NDP vocabulary.

Our caucus is a firm supporter of more transparency related to Manitoba Hydro. We've been calling for transparency. The Public Utilities Board has been calling for it and Manitobans have been calling for it.

We are hopeful that there will be more disclosure, but we want to know what will be done to enforce full disclosure. If an organization like Manitoba Hydro refuses, under this bill, to provide full, transparent information on the Pattern deal, how will those transgressions be enforced?

Mr. Selinger: I thank the member for the question.

Again, I just want to add, parenthetically, that I thought the Memorial Cup in Brandon was great and everybody did a good job out there. And I was happy to see the MLA for Brandon's West and East both participating. So it was a great event.

And in terms of transparency, Mr. Speaker, we've been very transparent on many dimensions of Hydro, one of them being energy efficiency. Under the members opposite, they were No. 10. They were dead last. Under this government, Hydro has moved to No. 1 position on efficiency for the last three years, as evaluated by independent third-party analysis. So we are quite comfortable on finding ways to report how we're reducing greenhouse gases, how we're increasing alternative energy in Manitoba—clean energy—how we're promoting geothermal installations, how we're going to move forward on wind power even though the federal support for that has been removed in the most recent budget.

All of these are practical things we can do to grow the Manitoba economy, and we know the members opposite consistently try to monkey wrench and oppose every one of those initiatives.

Mr. Borotsik: Mr. Speaker, the Premier talked about everything except what we want to hear: the transparency of the financials and the partnership

that they've entered into with Pattern Energy. That's what we want to hear.

The Premier has refused to provide information on his own P3s with Pattern Energy and Creswin Properties. The Finance Minister is quoted as saying the legislation may not even be introduced before the House rises because she is discussing the legislation with various people that could be affected by it.

A government spokeswoman did say that Manitoba Hydro would fall under this legislation. Is that why the minister is afraid to introduce Bill 33 now? Is she told—is she being told that Manitoba Hydro does not want to be held to accountability and transparency?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, we have put a priority on moving the economy forward in Manitoba. The members opposite have opposed that every step of the way.

We also have a bill to increase transparency. We will bring that bill forward after consultation is done. It will consult with hospitals and schools and municipalities, all of whom will be impacted by this bill, and we need their understanding and feedback on that to ensure that it does the job properly and doesn't produce unnecessary red tape.

The reality is that P3 arrangements are occurring across the country. This'll probably be the first province in the country that has any kind of legislation with respect to transparency in that regard.

In the meantime, we'll continue to grow the economy. We'll continue to find ways to develop rural Manitoba. We will continue to find ways to generate more clean energy inside of Manitoba. Those are all things the members opposite will continue to oppose.

Addictions Treatment Wait Lists

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): For months, we have been asking this government questions about its failure to provide timely treatment for Manitobans addicted to OxyContin.

Today we learned that at least 25 Manitobans died over the last two years from accidental overdoses of prescription painkillers. At least half of those people were on a wait list for treatment.

Can the minister explain why his government can find quick-fix money for football stadiums, but

has done absolutely nothing to increase the number of treatment spaces for Manitobans addicted to OxyContin?

* (13:50)

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Healthy Living, Youth and Seniors): I'd like to let the whole House know what we've done with OxyContin.

First, you have to worry about the supply. We've moved OxyContin from part 1 to part 3 to make sure that there's less OxyContin on the streets, so that there's less people who are affected by this drug.

No. 2, we brought the physicians and the AFM together to set up a working group to see how do we deal with this on the ongoing basis. We're working with doctors. We now have a training centre for doctors. On June 10th the doctors will come together. They will receive training about OxyContin, and then look at how we can dispense OxyContin-methadone treatment out in the community in the near future.

So, we've made the announcement. We moved it from part 1 to part 3. We've got a doctor-training program, and we're looking at expanding methadone treatment out in the community.

Mrs. Rowat: The minister can hide his head in the sand if he likes, but the truth is that the problem is getting worse and not better. Because of this government's inaction, the wait list for methadone treatment has grown from 150 to 180 people in the last three months, which means that it can take longer than the six months to a year before someone can get any help.

Mr. Speaker, restricting access to prescriptions is only part of the solution. This minister is fiddling with the—while the addictions community is burning.

Mr. Speaker, why is the minister allowing Manitobans to die on a wait list instead of responding to the desperate needs for treatment spaces?

Mr. Rondeau: Well, Mr. Speaker, I look at the facts and the figures. First, in 1998-99, the amount that the Addictions Foundation got was \$9.6 million under the Conservatives. Under us, this year, it's double at about \$18 million.

We are providing the services there. I look at establishing the methadone treatment program. I look at expanding—the people who are stabilized are looking at getting service out in the community.

We're looking at more prevention. We're looking at moving into dealing with the doctors so that prescriptions are more appropriate and that there are less prescription out there.

And, Mr. Speaker, this a problem that's across the country, and I'd like to let all members know that we are working with a solution that's been adopted by other provinces. That's a good step.

Mrs. Rowat: This minister is full of rhetoric. They want action in the community, and this government is not providing it.

Mr. Speaker, this minister doesn't have a leg to stand on. His rhetoric is cold comfort to the Manitobans who have died waiting for treatment. It's also cold comfort for the front-line health-care professionals who are struggling to keep up with the demand. The AFM says that they feel tremendous guilt every time they have to write deceased next to another name on the wait list.

Mr. Speaker, how many more Manitobans have to die on a wait list before this minister stops with the rhetoric and takes action to bring down the wait list? A simple question. We would like some action from this government.

Mr. Rondeau: And I'm pleased to be part of a government that's expanded day programming, expanded self-help and community organizations, expanded group counselling, expanded times so that when the groups or people come into the intake coordinator, what they do is they spend more time so that they can be referred to programs instantly, so that if people are of huge demand, they can be sent to different community resources.

And, Mr. Speaker, we are funding those community resources. Resources that did not exist under the Conservatives now exist under us. And I know that there is a lot of stress on the addictions services, but the difference is, between us and you, is we're providing more resources, more services, where you provided nothing.

Bill 224 Government Support

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, the Public Utilities Board has been forced to seek a court ruling on access to the total financial picture at MPI. The board said in its most recent order, and I quote, the board is "unable to assure itself that all costs incurred represent efficient and effective spending." Unquote.

Today, I introduced a private member's bill that would allow the Public Utilities Board respecting confidentiality to MPI's total financial status.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister support this bill or will he continue to foster secrecy rather than openness and accountability? What's his choice?

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Act): I haven't even seen the member's bill, so I'll certainly read it when it comes in.

But what I can tell the member, as I have told her at least three separate times in this House, the Public Utilities Board has the jurisdiction and has the right to set basic auto insurance rates in Manitoba. That is because basic auto insurance in Manitoba is a monopoly, something which I and members of this side of the House believe is appropriate.

MPI also carries on a competitive line of insurance. Extension insurance is the way we describe it. It competes against other insurers in the marketplace. The fact is MPI has the best service, has some of the best rates. That's why MPI is very successful at that extension insurance, but it is competition in the free market. MPI is already doing very well, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, Mr. Speaker, 90 percent of the people that take basic also go into the extensions at MPI, so there really is no private competition there.

Mr. Speaker, the Public Utilities Board also noted in the most recent order, and I quote: The corporation has ceased to make transfers of excess retained earnings in extensions and SRE to the retained earnings of basic. Unquote.

Manitobans are entitled to the assurance that their basic insurance premiums are not being subsidized by MPI's competitive lines of business.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister support Bill 224 and the Public Utilities Board's mandate to support the public interest, or will he continue to support secrecy and keep MPI's financial status hidden from the public? Which is it?

Mr. Swan: Well, indeed interesting, Mr. Speaker, because now the member for Morris is complaining that MPI is too competitive. Amazing.

Manitoba has experienced long-term auto insurance cost stability over the past 11 years. In the last 12 years, the corporation has held the line or has reduced auto insurance rates 11 times, 11 of

12 years. And as well, MPI pays out 89 cents of every premium dollar collected to Manitoba claimants. The industry average is 65 to 70 percent.

It's true, maybe MPI is too competitive because of the great service that they provide to Manitobans. And the member herself says it: When Manitobans have a choice, they insure with MPI. And that's something I think we should all be very proud of.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I'm complaining about is the secrecy of this government.

Mr. Speaker, the documents filed by the PUB with the court argues that MPI maintains one investment portfolio for all lines and there are significant staffing costs on a corporate-wide basis, including 102 consultants.

The PUB wants access to the total financial picture, something this minister disagrees with. I've introduced a private member's bill that would allow the PUB access, respecting confidentiality, to MPI's total financial picture, because I believe that Manitobans deserve to know that the PUB is setting rates with a clear understanding of MPI's finances.

Why doesn't the minister believe that, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Swan: Well, I can let the member for Morris in on a few secrets. They're not secrets to us, but they may be secrets to her.

And one of the things that she should know is that in 2010 over 480,000 Manitoba vehicle owners are going to pay the same or less for their auto insurance. I suppose that's a secret to her, but no longer. We can all learn things in this House, Mr. Speaker.

I can also let the member for Morris know that—perhaps she didn't know this—that over the past nine years, MPI has returned \$263 million to Manitoba ratepayers in terms of rebates. Try that with a private insurance company.

And as well, another secret that I can reveal today is that MPI's administration costs are approximately 50 percent of the Canadian average. People get better service from MPI than they do virtually in any other jurisdiction. I'm very proud of that. I wish the member for Morris—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Health-Care Services Surgery Wait Lists

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, one of my constituents is suffering from a five-and-a-half-centimetre stone in his bladder that has gone untreated for more than a year. This causes him frequent urinary tract infections and spasms.

* (14:00)

Last week my constituent learned that the earliest he can get surgery to 'alleviate' his condition is July and that's only if someone else cancels. He can't get it sooner because a surgeon is on vacation until June. There is not apparently anyone else can perform this surgery.

Mr. Speaker, can I ask the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) to explain to my constituents why her health-care system has failed my constituent.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Acting Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I would certainly invite the member to talk to the department with regard to the specifics. And while we've indicated that things can always get better, they certainly have gotten a lot better than they were over the—over 10 years ago.

I'm very pleased, Mr. Speaker, that in this province we now have in rural Manitoba—where the member represents—96 more doctors than there were 10 years ago. We have 2,034 more nurses in the province than there were 10 years ago. We have new or renovated hospitals in Brandon, Swan River, Thompson, The Pas, Beausejour, Gimli, Morden, Winkler, Ste. Anne, Steinbach, Shoal Lake and on the way in—out in south and—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, I do want to put on the record congratulations from all members of the House to the member from Kildonan on his recent marriage, but the Minister of Health has already received a letter regarding my constituent and she's done nothing to solve this problem. My constituent's also a paraplegic. His quality of life is severely impacted by this condition. He cannot be with us today—in QP today—because he can't even sit up in his wheelchair due to the spasms caused by the bladder stone. He is forced to spend most of his time lying down waiting for surgery to take place.

Why is this NDP government can't find the money? They can find money for the stadiums, WRHA offices. Why can't they provide surgery for my constituent?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his genuine comments for Debbi and me, and I appreciate the House's comment. I also appreciate the point the member is making.

The state of, obviously, that individual and the pain and the suffering and the care from that is dramatic and we understand that. And I will—we will inquire as to what the circumstances are, Mr. Speaker, because I know that the Health Department over the past 10 years has improved and has wanted to make every situation as accessible and as—and prevent as much pain and suffering as possible. And that's been my experience in the health-care system.

And with regard to matters about spending money, Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased that we spent close to—we spent \$900,000 in emergency medical facilities in Neepawa. We spent five million on Portage, 720—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Eichler: As I stated, Mr. Speaker, we did send a letter and the minister—or the critic for Health did send that letter in. And also my constituent—I know what it's like. I had kidney stones two years ago. I can tell you it's unbearable, the pain. I would not wish it on anybody.

Mr. Speaker, my constituent is on the cancellation list for that surgery. He desperately needs to restore his quality of life. Will the Minister of Health today commit to making sure my constituent has surgery as soon as possible?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, I think the members—and members of this House and the public know that on this side of the House we will do everything possible for any individual in the health-care system to make it better. That's why the waiting lists are down. That's why, on the top four waiting list schedules across Canada, Manitoba is the No. 1 on top—on the top four surgical areas. And that's why we've reduced, in half, waiting lists for CT scans and MRIs from the time when I was the critic on that side. So I know we will undertake to do as much as possible.

In circumstances like this, Mr. Speaker, there are a variety of instances, but I know that we always try and we have succeeded in moving things forward and making things faster, which is why the public understands why the expanded facilities across the county and why I'm so sorry members opposite have voted against those improvements in the health-care system.

Agriculture Industry Supply Management Commodities Quota Tax

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, I've risen in this House many times to support the family farms and agriculture and to offer support to the Minister of Agriculture who has little understanding of agriculture and no idea how supply management works.

Nowhere is this more obvious than his attempt to tax the transfers of quota on the dairy and poultry industries. They're the very management tools that make supply management work, yet producers will receive no services as the result of this levy cut. This can only be classified as a cash grab to fund past, present and future NDP mismanagement.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister commit today to abandon his ill-thought-out cash grab?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Well, Mr. Speaker, we want to thank the member for the question because it gives me, again, a chance to tell him, on the same issue over and over again, that we have committed to dealing with the supply management sector. We have agreed to sit and speak with them about different initiatives that we think can work on behalf of the farmers that draw their living from this sector. That's exactly what we've been doing. Officials from our department have been meeting with officials from that sector. I have met with people, the leadership of the groups from that sector. We've committed to a very thorough consultation, and we're doing that.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Speaker, the minister doesn't get it. Progressive Conservatives recognize that agriculture is a key economic driver, and our No. 1 rule would be farmers first. We understand that considerable primary and secondary benefits that the supply management commodities provide to our economy, in addition to the many on-farm jobs, countless off-farm jobs are created such as electricians, plumbers, welders, carpenters, truckers, and many, many more.

This NDP government sees the success in the supply management sector and wants to find a new way to tax it, yet he's not going to provide a service to effect the producer's return.

Mr. Speaker, will the cash-grab straps—minister abandon his tax grab attempt on the family farms?

Mr. Struthers: Who is it over there that we can believe, Mr. Speaker? On the one hand—

[interjection] Now, they can all put their hands up in the Legislature, Mr. Speaker, but the member for Carman (Mr. Pedersen) probably said it the best. He said we're not going to win any elections based on standing up for farmers and for agriculture. What else did he put in there? Oh, health care, roads, social services, rural depopulation. You know, who do we believe across the way there? They should just pick a story and stick to it.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Speaker, talking about making a story and stick to it, it was the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) that said that this was a tax, and the Minister of Agriculture calls it a levy; he doesn't know what it is.

We know that the family farms are the backbone of Manitoba and that they generate in excess of 5 percent of the GDP. Rural communities that are growing and thriving today often have a strong supply management base. Unlike this mismanaged NDP government, these family farms understand business and are quite capable of running their operations without government intervention. This cash-strapped, spend-happy government is forcing the minister to make poor decisions about business. He knows nothing about it. Ultimately, it will end up being the consumer that—the staples like dairy and poultry products that pay for this. It's clear that the minister has no respect or concern for the family farms or the consumers.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister show some leadership and scrap this misguided tax grab?

Mr. Struthers: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of rhetoric coming—and tired old clichés that we've heard from members opposite over and over and over for years. And when they do have a chance to stand up for farmers, or they do have a chance to stand up and be leaders in farm country, what do they do? They work against single-desk selling of the Canadian Wheat Board. They stand up—they would prefer to stand up for their friends in Ottawa instead of standing up for the farmers and saying, the rules you've introduced, Mr. Minister, are nothing more than gerrymandering. And why they won't get up and say that, I don't know. Why they want to pretend to support the farmer and the family farm in rural Manitoba, it's beyond me.

Addictions Treatment Wait Lists

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, at least 25 Manitobans have died in the last two years

as they wait to get treatment for opiate addiction. But instead of addressing this issue, the waiting list for methadone treatment in our province has increased by 20 percent in just three months. This is an emergency situation. There's clearly a crisis in this area of Manitoba's addiction services.

* (14:10)

Will the Premier (Mr. Selinger) commit today to providing the emergency funding to increase access to methadone treatment? Will the Premier commit the funding needed to save the lives of the 180 Manitobans who are now waiting and waiting to get addictions treatment?

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Healthy Living, Youth and Seniors): Mr. Speaker, and just like in the emergency room when people come forward with addictions, they're triaged. And when they're triaged, if they need service, they will get service. And not only that—the other thing—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable minister has the floor.

Mr. Rondeau: So what happens is that people are triaged. They come forward. They could get day service. They could go to the other parts of the addiction services, but what we do is they do an assessment, and the assessment then refers people to the appropriate services.

And, Mr. Speaker, we have basically doubled the amount of resources in the addiction services, and that was voted against by all opposition members, including the member from River Heights.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, if treatment is so good, why is it that more than 25 Manitobans have died, many of them waiting for treatment?

This government is treating addicts in this province like second-class citizens. These people are our mothers, our fathers, our sons, our daughters, our sisters and brothers. They deserve to live and thrive just like everyone, but they need this government's help in order to beat their addictions.

Will this Premier commit to saving the lives of 180 Manitobans who are waiting for methadone treatment? Will the Premier commit to emergency funding to expand this program immediately or will this government just sit quietly by and refer addicted people and their families to the feel-good government of Manitoba news releases?

Mr. Speaker, addicts will continue to—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable minister's—or honourable member's time has expired.

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Speaker, when we recognized the issue on OxyContin, we set up a task force with people from the Addictions Foundation, from doctors—doctors. We took community people, we took pharmacists and we came up with a strategy, and they said you have to do education; you have to do prevention; you have to expand the services. And that's exactly what we're doing.

We're taking the treatment—those people who're stabilized—and we're training docs to have a methadone program out in the community. We are taking the whole availability of OxyContin and moving it from part 1 where it's easily prescribed, to part 3 where there's secondary checks and a greatly restricted supply of OxyContin.

And, Mr. Speaker, we're expanding all the education resources to the public and to doctors—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Addictions Treatment Wait Lists

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Yes, Mr. Speaker, my question is also for the Premier (Mr. Selinger). Used properly, 'oxygon' is a drug that has a wonderful opportunity for individuals that are suffering terminal cancer, and so forth. Sadly, for those that do get addicted to this particular drug the real answer is methadone and without methadone, the likelihood of being able to conquer the addiction is not good and that is, in essence, what is causing the problem.

I'm asking for the Premier to acknowledge the need for emergency funding that would ensure that there is adequate resources to provide methadone for those individuals that have this addiction and that is, in essence, what's going to save lives. Will the Premier do that today?

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Healthy Living, Youth and Seniors): Mr. Speaker, I'd hate to state that the member might not have it absolutely accurate.

Methadone is a treatment. There's other treatments out there, and what we want to do is work with the addiction community to have a whole host of treatments. But more importantly, what we wanted to do is also prevent future addictions. That's why we

limited the supply. So we're limiting the supply. We're offering addiction treatment, and we're expanding that treatment out into the community.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is a comprehensive systematic approach to addictions that was recommended by the community, by addiction experts, by doctors, by pharmacists, and I hate to say this, but I think they know a lot more than the member opposite.

Wetlands Restoration Government Initiatives

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Mr. Speaker, many Manitobans are increasingly interested in the health of this province's marshes. Studies continuously remind us of the value and importance of the ecological services wetlands provide by reducing nutrient loads to our waterways and supporting the biodiversity of plants and animals in our province.

Could the Minister of Water Stewardship inform the House of the work that this government is doing to protect and restore our valuable wetlands?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Water Stewardship): Well, Mr. Speaker, it's very nice to get a question on water. Of course, it comes from this side of this House, and I know the member from Concordia has asked many important questions of many ministers.

We know that kidney—that the wetlands are the kidneys of the water world, and they cleanse the water. They remove a lot of the foreign objects. They remove nitrogen. They remove phosphorus.

So I was very, very pleased last September to announce that the Province is investing a million dollars to protect and restore wetlands in Manitoba. And I'd like to thank my colleague, the member from Gimli, Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade (Mr. Bjornson). Last week, we announced further funding for scientific research on restoring the wetlands. Not only are we working to restore Delta Marsh and Netley-Libau, we believe 6 percent of the nutrient loading can be—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Rural Emergency Health-Care Services Ambulance Services

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, the people of Ebb and Flow First Nation, Bacon Ridge and the Eddystone routinely wait one hour or more for ambulance services.

Now, the minister will probably give us her standard responses about how many ambulances are in the fleet and how many have been replaced. Mr. Speaker, the fact remains the people of the area are faced with very long response times.

What is the minister doing to address the concerns of the people of Ebb and Flow First Nation, Bacon Ridge and Eddystone?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Acting Minister of Health): And I thank the member for that question. I've been to Ebb and Flow myself on many occasions, and I certainly appreciate the difficulty in the—in terms of access, which is a problem.

I am very pleased, though, that we not only managed over the past several years to completely renew our fleet, completely renew the transportation as well as the geolocation services of our ambulance, Mr. Speaker, but we've also removed the transfer fee that was forced upon northern residents as a tax or a penalty on taking the ambulance.

And we do work, Mr. Speaker, with First Nations and with the federal government with respect to transfers, and we are looking at that and we'll continue to look at that.

Mr. Briese: Mr. Speaker, Ebb and Flow First Nation has trained EMTs. There's about 2,500 people in the area, but they are lacking an ambulance. They transport most people in private vehicles. There are over 200 calls per year. The minister said a year ago that she was consulting the people of the area.

Mr. Speaker, would the minister confirm that consultation with the people of the area and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada has taken place and share the outcome of those consultations with the members of this Assembly?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, and I am very pleased and I appreciate the fact that the member is interested in ambulance and transportation services, particularly those relating to First Nations communities because it has been very much a challenge in Manitoba, and so much on First Nations communities was neglected over the '90s and, in fact, completely disregarded. So I'm very pleased the member's asking that.

And I know that the regional health authorities have looked at the overall needs in the area, Mr. Speaker, and have 'prioritized' funding requests and are working with that region. But I think it's very important that we appreciate the fact that not only

have we made significant progress with respect to ambulance services but expanding rural services to make readier access and closer access vis-à-vis location and access for individuals, as well as the expanded doctors and nurses—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Time for oral questions has expired.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Order. Prior to moving on to members' statements, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us from Riverside School, we have 11 grade 3, 4 and 5 students under the direction of Ms. Martha Penner. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik).

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

* (14:20)

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Child Find Manitoba Missing Children's Month

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): I rise in the House today to recognize the month of May as Child Find Manitoba's Missing Children's Month. Each year children go missing when they run away or are abducted. Children are put at risk and families are devastated when a child of any age goes missing. Child Find Manitoba's Missing Children's Month campaign aims to draw awareness of the issue of missing children and hopes that they can be returned to their families.

They also strive to educate children and their parents to prevent this nightmare from happening to families across our province. Child Find provides many different forms of assistance to families who have a missing child. Child managers and staff provide emotional support to parents and assist them in contacting the appropriate authorities and with distributing photos to help bring missing children home.

Agency staff also meet regularly with counterparts across the country to set best practices and maintain the flow of information. Child Find provides assistance from when a child first goes missing to reunification and afterwards. A complete cycle of support makes sure that families are supported throughout what is a very difficult time.

Child Find has adopted the green ribbon as part of the Missing Children's Month campaign. The green ribbon was first used following the abduction and murder of Kristen French in 1992 in St. Catharines, Ontario. The community chose the colour green, which is often regarded as the colour of hope, to symbolize their hope for her return. The green ribbon is now used as a symbol of hope for the safe return of all missing children.

I want to thank all of the staff at Child Find Manitoba for putting together this month's advocacy campaign. When a child goes missing, it is a terrible event. Yet, too few people know of the resources available to them in such a difficult time.

I also want to recognize the work that is done by Child Find throughout the year. Helping to keep children safe is a noble goal and one that each member of this House, and, indeed, all Manitobans, should be a part of.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

National Missing Children's Day

Ms. Erna Braun (Rossmere): Mr. Speaker, I rise today with a heavy heart to speak of Manitoba's missing children. May is Missing Children's Month in Canada and May 25th marks Missing Children's Day, a time during which far too many parents across our country grieve the horrible unknown, the fate of their child.

In Canada each year, there are over 62,000 reported cases of missing children. While many of these cases are resolved with children and family safely reunited, others remain unsolved. These children leave behind hundreds of dashed dreams and countless grieving friends and family members.

While the rest of us can never know the pain of—the pain the parent of a missing child feels, we can support them by championing this cause. During this month, we can raise awareness of the issue of missing children and the important work that is being done by organizations like Child Find Manitoba to protect children in our province.

For over 20 years, Child Find Manitoba has worked in partnership with the Manitoba government, the federal government, law enforcement and other non-profit organizations to assist in the location of missing children, prevent the sexual exploitation of children and promote healthy—promote child personal safety programs.

In our province, our government has recently began a campaign to stop sex with kids, one of the most dangerous causes of child disappearance. Our government spearheaded the Children On-line Protection Committee, working with Child Find Manitoba, to establish cybertip.ca, an Internet-based tip line designed to clamp down on child exploitation on the Internet.

Just this month, we launched a new safety plan and code of conduct for child-care facilities that is meant to create a safe and healthy environment and, among other things, protect children from predators.

Today, members of the Legislature are wearing the green ribbon of hope to show their support for missing children and their families. Green is the colour of hope and epitomizes the quest for the safe return of all missing children.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of this House to join me in thanking Child Find Manitoba for all their efforts to prevent child abduction and reunite missing children with their families. Thank you.

Memorial Cup 2010

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, for a rabid hockey fan, the last 11 days in the city of Brandon has been living a dream.

The city of Brandon and the Brandon Wheat Kings have played host to the 2010 MasterCard Memorial Cup. The best major junior hockey talent in Canada and, arguably, in the world played their hearts out to win the opportunity to hoist the Memorial Cup, the symbol of major junior hockey supremacy.

The 11-day event started with the rededication of the Memorial Cup to recognize all of the fallen Canadian soldiers of wars past and present. The solemn ceremony took place at CFB Shilo and featured a flypast by the Snowbirds.

The Memorial Cup Tournament showcased the champions of three leagues that make up the CHL: the Moncton Wildcats of the Québec Hockey League, the Calgary Hitmen of the Western Hockey League and the Windsor Spitfires of the Ontario Hockey League, and the host city's own Brandon Wheat Kings.

The icing on the cake would have been for the Wheat Kings to be crowned champions, but it was not to be, as Brandon lost to the Windsor Spitfires in Sunday's final. But don't forget, Mr. Speaker, to get

there, to get to the final, we beat the west's best and we beat the Québec's best.

Congratulations to Wheat Kings coach and general manager, Kelly McCrimmon, and his staff for providing Brandon with an amazing hockey team and a wild 2010 hockey season.

Congratulations to the talented young men of the 2010 Wheat Kings who provided hockey fans with a year of hockey mastery. Thank you to the fans, that without you, none of this could have been possible.

Last, but certainly not least, a great big thank you goes out to chairman Jeff Cristall, events manager Lois MacDonald and the 850 dedicated volunteers who gave their time, their effort, their heart and their soul, into presenting the best-organized Memorial Cup ever. The fans and visitors were treated with a spectacular event.

Mr. Speaker, the Memorial Cup for this year is over. But, like the agricultural community that the Wheat Kings are named after, there is always next year. Go, Wheaties, go.

Cranberry Portage Forest Fire

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, May the 15th, at mid-afternoon, a wildfire threatened to burn down my home town of Cranberry Portage. I actually watched the drama unfold because I happened to be there. Everyone was anxious; no one wanted a repetition of 1929 when the entire town burnt down, although there had been two close calls in the last few years.

Last year, the town had cleared a fireguard around its perimeter but this fire was within the fireguard. The bush was tinder dry. The fire spread rapidly. People immediately organized a response. Members of the local fire department, along with fire rangers from town, were on site first and an initial attack crew came in from Cold Lake by helicopter.

Crews worked steadily but the fire was out of control. Residents began to fear the worst and some started to remove prized possessions from their homes in the event that the fire escalated. Finally, around 5 p.m. when it seemed disaster was imminent, a bird dog or spotter plane and a yellow CL-215 water bomber arrived on the scene. It was a most welcome sight. The water bomber dropped nine loads on the three-hectare fire. The fire was put out.

Standing on the ground, watching a water bomber save your home town, one realizes how valuable these water bombers really are. I am proud

that our government has had the foresight to purchase four new 415 turboprop water-bomber aircraft from Bombardier Aerospace.

Afterwards, there was a great sense of relief in Cranberry Portage. Thank you, Fire Chief Robbie James and Vice Fire Chief Gordon Kosmenko. Also, a huge thanks to all volunteers and professionals who played a role in putting out this fire.

As long-time Cranberry Portage resident Wayne Streamer aptly said, Cranberry Portage dodged another bullet.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Philippine Heritage Week Events

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I would stand to acknowledge and recognize the many volunteers, in particular, the Philippine Heritage Council of Manitoba Incorporated for the efforts that they put in, in terms of preserving, promoting and encouraging the community involvement in the upcoming week of activities that they host on an annual basis. Along with the heritage council, there is a number of other organizations that get directly involved in promotion; in particular, organizations like the Manitoba Association of Filipino Teachers—association, and a number of other groups.

Mr. Speaker, the week's activities will begin on June the 5th in a flag-raising ceremony. At the same time, you'll witness an opening. This is an event in which I've had the opportunity to participate in for many years. I would encourage all members of the Legislature to give consideration in terms of participating by showing up and showing your support for the Filipino community, as we did last year when this Legislature passed, unanimously, a resolution recognizing the valuable contributions over the last 50, now 51 years, that the Filipino community has made.

It goes on to A Philippine Adventure for the Young, Saturday, again, June 5th, a Welcome to Bagong Dating, June the 6th, Pista Sa Nasyon, Tuesday, June the 8th, a MAFTI Cultural Presentation on June the 9th, the Philippine Independence Ball, Friday, June the 11th.

* (14:30)

You'll find, Mr. Speaker, a great number of people, in particular, individuals from outside the community, will participate with this event, as they do with the other events, but this is kind of like one

of the highlights in which a formal dinner is provided. Then it's followed by a picnic in the park on Saturday, June the 12th, which is a wonderful opportunity just to get a sense of Filipino hospitality and generosity and their kind attitudes towards all people.

And there'll be a celebration of faith on Sunday, June the 13th, which will be at the Philippine Canadian cultural centre on Keewatin Street. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if I might ask the House for leave to include in the *Hansard* the roster of the 2009-2010 Brandon Wheat Kings, coaches and staff. If I could ask for leave to have that included.

Mr. Speaker: I think that'd be a wonderful request. Does the honourable member have leave to include the roster of the Brandon Wheat Kings hockey team that played in the final in the Memorial Cup?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, there is leave, and if you'd just give it to the recorder at the back, we'll make sure it's included in the *Hansard*.

Mr. Borotsik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Brandon Wheat Kings 2010 Memorial Cup Roster

Players: Brenden Walker, Brent Raedeke, Brayden Schenn, Matt Calvert, Scott Glennie, Mark Stone, Shayne Wiebe, Jesse Sinatynski, Aaron Lewadniuk, Toni Rajala, Jay Fehr, Paul Ciarelli, Michael Ferland, Brodie Melnychuk, Colby Robak, Jordan Fransoo, Mark Schneider, Travis Hamonic, Jordan Hale, Alexander Urbom, Darren Bestland, Ryley Miller, Jacob De Serres, Andrew Hayes

Coaches: Kelly McCrimmon, Head Coach; Darren Ritchie, Assistant Coach; Dwayne Gylywoychuk, Assistant Coach.

ORDERS OF THE DAY (Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Government House Leader): Just before I announce the business of the day, I also want to announce, pursuant to rule 31(8), that the private member's resolution to be considered next Tuesday will be one put forward by the honourable

member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff), and the title of the resolution is Rural and Northern Vocational Training.

* (14:30)

Mr. Speaker: Okay, pursuant to rule 31(8), it has been announced that the private member's resolution to be considered next Tuesday will be the one put forward by the honourable member for the Interlake. The title of the resolution is Rural and Northern Vocational Training.

The honourable Government House Leader, on further House business.

Mr. Blaikie: Yes, Mr. Speaker, in terms of government business, today the House will resume debate on second reading of Bill 31.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Bill 31—The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

Mr. Speaker: Okay, I'm going to be—order.

The House business for this afternoon will be—will deal with second reading of Bill 31, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, and it's standing in the name of the honourable member for Portage la Prairie, who has 22 minutes remaining.

Mr. David Faurchou (Portage la Prairie): Once again I am very pleased to have the opportunity to rise on second reading debate of Bill 31, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act.

Last day I know that ran out of time, but I appreciate once again commencing comments that pertain to this government's employment of tactics that we see very often south of the border within the American legislation, and that being incorporation of bills and statutes that should essentially be dealt with independently within the legislative process, but because they may be controversial and the government wants not to deal with the controversy, they put it into another statute, another piece of legislation, and attempt to slide it through without any public debate or attention drawn to it.

And I'm speaking specifically today about the gas tax act and The Motive Fuel Tax Act, which effectively are dissolved and the fuel tax act incorporated into legislation to essentially merge or amalgamate those two previous acts.

I do, though, want to ask the government at this time as to whether or not they have forgotten about The Gas Tax Accountability Act, which essentially dealt with The Gasoline Tax Act, making it incumbent upon the government to take all proceeds from that tax and to reinvest those proceeds into the roadways of the province of Manitoba. And now, being that the gas tax act is no more and we now have a fuel tax act, according to this particular piece of legislation, I'm wondering whether or not The Gas Tax Accountability Act will then effectively be applied to the fuel tax act, where all taxes collected—regardless of whether it be diesel fuel or gasoline or any other alternative energy sources for motive conveyance within the province of Manitoba—whether or not The Gas Tax Accountability Act indeed does apply and so all proceeds from the collection of taxation of motive fuels—or fuels here in the province of Manitoba will be reinvested, guaranteed by a legislation, within the roadways of Manitoba.

So I leave that question with government because I cannot find within the bill as to whether or not there is any reference to The Gas Tax Accountability Act that was passed by the Legislature a number of years ago.

I do also want to ask the government about the specific nature of a 1 percent tax on the profits of credit unions and caisses populaires that is in excess of 400,000, because within this legislation, 1 percent tax is levied on those institutions and whether or not that is in excess of other taxes paid—income taxes, corporate taxes, business taxes.

And also, too, we recognize that those institutions are—function like a co-operative where we are as participants in deposits and within those institutions that we are recognized as members and, therefore, eligible for dividends that are payable to membership from the profits that are generated through the activity of the caisses populaires and credit unions that we might be members of.

Also, too, I want to know whether or not it is a double taxation, if you will, because it is taxing the profits of the caisses populaires and that of the credit unions prior to the dispensation of dividends, and those dividends then, essentially, that one might be in receipt of that we are again being taxed upon when we, as individuals, do our income tax returns on an annual basis.

So I wonder, again, whether this government is introducing a tax on tax which is something that

really, truly runs contrary to the mandate to which this government was elected on and essentially was campaigning on a status quo, go-forward basis as far as financing of the Province's operations. And so, again, another deviation by the new leadership of this New Democratic Party that is contrary to the previous administration that was led by the former first minister, Gary Doer.

So, again, we wonder why the government is moving in this direction without the—essentially the support of the voting public, and we want to draw this to the attention of Manitobans as we debate this bill this afternoon and for the next few days and on into committee where the public will have opportunity to make presentation.

We see that there is a number of different changes to other acts that are very specific to revenue generation for the Province, and does fall within the purview of the normally accepted practices of the BITSA bill, which is provided to the Legislative Assembly by the government for debate following the budget passage.

And—but, as I said, I've just drawn the number of deviations to the attention of the House today and last Thursday, and there are a number of questions I hope that government will take the opportunity to effectively address prior to final passage of this bill. And I would hope that they would consider removing the specifics to which I've mentioned because they do not fall within the traditional BITSA bill.

* (14:40)

Well, my honourable colleague from Morris was very eloquent in her address last Thursday, as it pertained to the legislation and its address of the ministerial salaries, and that this government, only just a year ago, amended the balanced budget legislation and made very specific reference to ministerial salaries that—and the responsibilities of keeping a balanced portfolio of government operations if not one year but every second year. And through the incorporation of the accounting of Crown corporations' operations within the government financial statements, it's now recognized that even with all the Crown corporation proceeds of—towards government operations, that the ministers are not going to be able to balance the books within their respective portfolios. So once again this House is being asked to change the legislation because of—well, there are a number of ways of describing it, but we will leave it with the statement that the various

ministers seem incapable of balancing their books in the best interests of Manitobans and for future generations to repay.

We wonder if that is the practice when they return to their own homes and their household expenses as to whether or not they look to their children and say, look, I can't make it on my own salary, but we're going to re-mortgage everything that you will be inheriting so that then you can pay the mortgage on those inheritance, and being responsible for our debt because we feel that we need to live a certain lifestyle and we're unable to do it on our current salaries.

And that's essentially what this government is doing. It's looking to future generations of Manitobans to repay the debt of the government that is currently in office because they are incapable of running within the available revenues.

And I—anyone will recognize and they will say that they are a majority government and that Manitobans have overwhelmingly supported them in the polls. But, honestly speaking, I can be a very popular individual in my own household, within my own family if I secure the credit cards from our children and our relatives and rack up charges on their—and give them the proceeds of those charges without them really realizing that they are going to be responsible for paying the debt.

So popularity without full disclosure is under—again, under false pretences, allowing for the popularity of this government. And I hope that somewhere in the not-too-distant future that persons will effectively realize why this government has been popular today and in the past. It is because they have been saddling the future generations with unheard-of historic debt.

And so the legislation that was before this House that would provide for some type of accountability, and that being within the ministerial salaries, is now being asked to be waived, to be set aside because the ministers are not responsible and don't want to be responsible so they are then asking legislation being changed because they are effectively breaking the law.

And I made mention of a radio talk show call-in session that basically mocked the current government ministers and asked why they got to stay in office when they're effectively breaking the law. But what they're going to do through this act is to change the law, so therefore they won't be

technically breaking the law because then, that legislation is now being changed.

So we're looking at a bill that is to generate massive amounts of revenue; revenue for the operations of government that is at a historic level. And we're wondering why this government is continuously requiring more revenue than it is taking in, because we have seen, even though the government has made a statement that their budgets have been balanced, the bottom line in the documentation provided to this House by the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) indicates year in, year out that the debt of this province has been increasing—increasing by over \$10 billion over the course of the last 11 years. And this government seems unwilling to go out and tell the public that, really, their budgets were not balanced and that debt is continuing to increase and that it will be not us but our children and our children's children that will be responsible for paying it back.

And believe me, the debt does have to be paid back. No one, and government included, can escape the fact that a dollar borrowed has to be a dollar repaid. And we're looking at, globally, a situation, now, that involves a number of countries that the debt that has been accumulated, effectively, is now going to encumber persons that have worked long and hard and are expecting to receive a pension, and those pensions are now in jeopardy because of government indebtedness.

And so I hope this government recognizes the fact that money does have to be repaid, if borrowed, and I hope that they will convey, through their advertising budget that has significantly increased, to all Manitobans that, indeed, if you are counting on a pension, if you are counting on a service from government in the future, that it may not be there because the debt has grown to a point where effectively services must be cut.

And a lot is made by this government just on the—at the record low interest rates that they are being fiscally responsible and that their interest payments are less than they were 10 years ago. But they fail to tell the rest of the story. They fail to make the statement that interest rates were four and five times what they are today. If they were to complete the equation and the statement, if they were wanting to be totally disclosing, they would say that today's debt is being repaid at interest rates that are only one-fifth or one-quarter the rate 10—of 10 years ago, and if, though, we had to repay the current debt at a

rate that was incorporated—that was 10 years ago—what that level would be. And it would be staggering, and, once again, the level of indebtedness would, indeed, come home to roost because people would see what that interest monies could be employed.

* (14:50)

More than a billion dollars of interest is being paid on an annual basis, but it is something that this government—and I'm sorry, I have made an incorrect statement—it's almost three-quarters of a billion dollars of interest is being paid by the agencies and institutions within the purview of the financial records of the Province of Manitoba. And if we—only could only make a quick calculation and say that if the rates return, that where previously experienced, that we would take that three-quarters of a billion dollars and times it by three, four and, perhaps, five times. Can you imagine this province and the level of service if, in fact, one was expected to pay in excess of \$3 billion in interest alone? That's not any principal payment whatsoever. That's no reducing the debt at all.

Ms. Marilyn Brick, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

And those persons that are within the financial business do, indeed, forecast that interest rates will rise and potentially rise to levels experienced approximately a decade ago. So I hope this government is prepared for that eventuality, whereby we, as a province, could very well on an annual basis be paying in excess of \$3 billion in just interest alone. Think of the services that \$3 billion could purchase.

I know this government seems to be oblivious to that fact because there's been no participation within debate of Bill 31 by members on the government side of the House—quite content to chitchat amongst themselves and remain silent in their seats, because they want this legislation to pass through simply by a vote. And that way, then, they can remain as a collective group and not be singled out when one goes to campaign as being the individual that was responsible for this. Well, it was someone else; I just want along. But why not stand up for your constituents, constituents that, in the Interlake—the farming community there that's undertaken to work under very adverse conditions, the fields this year and have experienced significant financial duress. And yet the government continues to spend merrily along its way, unrecognizing that there are many

areas of this province that are experiencing significant financial pressures.

The agricultural sector, regardless of what commodity one is involved in or engaged in production, has experienced very, very tight margins and cannot continue without increasing those margins so that new equipment and other inputs can be effectively purchased to enhanced one's operations in the agriculture sector. And the agricultural sector's not the only sector of the province that has felt the downturn. We know that many manufacturers within the province of Manitoba have had to lay off and downsize because of the global economic realities.

And so, Madam Deputy Speaker, I do see that my time is coming to a conclusion here. But I emphasize the importance of what we do as members of this Legislative Assembly, to not only the current generation but future generations. And this particular bill, indeed, has untold ramifications upon future generations which they, the government, is not recognizing. And I believe that the government does not have the right to change other pieces of legislation within the BITSA bill, which I've stated here today. And I also want to say that the government does not—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The honourable member's time has expired.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I, too, wish to put a few comments on the record in regards to this legislation. And we all have raised children, or some might already have grandchildren, and what we try to do is impart upon them that you should always be truthful. I know for a fact that I spend a lot of time trying to mentor my children now, who are in their teenage years, try to impart upon them that when you're dealing with issues, it's best to be up front. Just tell the truth. Tell it the way it is. You know, you don't want to hurt people's feelings, of course, you want to be respectful in how you do it. What you want to do is you want to be as truthful as possible.

This piece of legislation, which, normally, would be a money bill, basically, what it would do is it would normally allow the government to continue with the functioning of paying bills. It's a routine piece of legislation, allows public servants to get paid—and we want them to be paid. They serve us well and they service the province well. It is to pay for all kinds of different services that we've become accustomed to that we need to keep the province

functioning normally. I may daresay, for instance, things like keeping the lights on in public buildings including this wonderful Legislative Assembly.

So what is so troubling about this particular piece of legislation? It is snuck in and probably not the most open, transparent—I guess one would almost say it's almost a little devious, little less than honest way that they've stuck in a piece of legislation to, amongst other things—and we want to flush this out in its entirety— amongst other things, it is going to protect 19 members of this Legislature's paycheque. So is this really a routine piece of legislation that is meant to keep the government going, keep the lights on in the building, let paycheques be paid out, or is it subtly more than that, in that it protects Cabinet ministers' and the Premier's paycheque?

Because, you see, if you go back a few years, Madam Deputy Speaker, you will find that there was an agreement, a time long gone past, and I look at our young, bright pages, a time probably before they can remember. It was a different time and everybody at that time agreed on something called balanced budget legislation, and it was actually very unique legislation. It was the first of its kind in the nation. In fact, I daresay it was almost one of the first of its kind in the world, and what it did is it said, if you can't live within your means, you have to take a pay cut. And, you know, I would like to put it in terms that perhaps even the member for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson) could understand. I'll put it in these terms. If you're ringing up your debt too high, the punishment is they're going to cut your paycheque. And what it is, it's an alarm bell. It says, stop, pause for a moment, you're spending too much money. You are putting the public into debt, far too deep into debt, to the point where, perhaps, the public then has to, with great pain, pay back this debt.

And it makes Cabinet ministers, it makes those who have the ultimate decision-making—not all 57 of us are actually those that make the decision. It actually is the Cabinet, the 19 members chaired by the Premier (Mr. Selinger), himself. So what it was, this balanced budget legislation, was something very reasonable, and at first, members of the New Democratic Party were opposed to it. It was doom and gloom. It would bring an end to civilization as the way we know it today.

Ah, but then, on the road to Damascus, the former member from Concordia, the honourable Gary Doer, our now esteemed ambassador and best friend of the Conservative Prime Minister, Gary

Doer, he looked upon this legislation and realized, oh, maybe the NDP caucus didn't like it in the '90s, but the public did. It was popular. The people liked the fact that politicians had to live within their means, and they thought this was such a novel idea, such a good idea. It actually made politicians accountable, something which we see very little of in today's NDP government, but I digress.

*(15:00)

So what the balanced budget legislation did is it said to the public, we will be accountable as decision makers, the Cabinet and the Premier. That was basically what it did. And the public loved it. Former member for Concordia, smart as he was on his feet, very good at politics, realized this was a good thing, and in every election that he ran after that piece of legislation was passed, '99, 2003 and 2007, he supported it. In fact, if you would go back into *Hansard*, and I would encourage people to do that, go back and look at the language that he used. He didn't just say, you know, I like it, or, yeah, I can live with it. Oh, no, Madam Deputy Speaker, he went way over the top talking about how this was the only way to go and—[interjection] No, no, he didn't just promise to keep it, he loved it. He loved it. In fact, if you ever listened to him speak, you would have thought it was the NDP that brought it in. My goodness. He was the biggest balanced budget lover, the biggest balanced budget legislation hugger. He was the biggest balanced budget Premier we had. He was more into it than Premier Filmon, and that was our Premier Doer. He, every election, said, never. He would sooner resign. He would sooner quit as Premier than see that legislation changed.

And guess what happened, Madam Deputy Speaker? He quit and no sooner did he walk out of the Chamber and the door slammed behind him, and the new crew stepped in and said, whoop, out goes the balanced budget legislation. They threw that budget balanced legislation under the bus faster than you can say—never mind what you can say. But the point is the former Premier Gary Doer's plane hadn't even landed in Washington and they'd already thrown the legislation under the bus. That's how fast they did it.

But they realized that there is unbelievable public support for this legislation, and there still is. If you did a poll on it you would find at least 80 percent of the population think that politicians should live within their means. They like it, and if they can't live within their means, then they should

be punished with their paycheque. The public loves it.

Ah, so, I can now see that the new Premier, the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger), and his wise counsel, probably the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak), and the sage advice from, you know, others like the member for St. Vital (Ms. Allan) and, you know, others sitting around the table—okay, we got to protect our paycheques. You know, when they all sat around that Cabinet table, how are we going to sneak this? How are we going to hoodwink the general public on this piece of legislation? It's got to go. We can't take a pay cut. My goodness, the honourable member for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson) went home and told his wife, I took another pay cut. I can't imagine what he'd be facing at home. He'd have to drive all the way home to St. Vital and have to tell his family he took another pay cut—the member for Gimli—drive to St. Vital. But I digress. I digress.

So, in the meantime, they all sat around and they came up with this—you know, maybe it was the member for Minto (Mr. Swan). I can see it now. Ho, ho. The Slurpee king himself, he actually probably put up his hand, he said, I got it. I got it figured out. We'll sneak it into a routine finance bill. We will hide it under the cover of darkness, and he knows what it's like to get snookered under the cover of darkness, like the time when the genie appeared during the leadership at his door at three in the morning and said, ah, member for Minto, out you go, out you go. And the great genie hath spoketh, and that was it, the honourable member for Minto was gone. So maybe it was the great genie at that time said, listen, if you throw yourself under the bus willingly in the leadership, I've got an idea for you how you can save your paycheque. I know how you can save your paycheque, because, you know—and by the way, the member for Minto, Madam Deputy Speaker, he's got a beautiful family, and I've seen them. He has a lovely family, and you know what? He couldn't go home either and tell his—mind you, he'd only have to drive into Minto, unlike the member for Gimli would have to drive to St. Vital—but the member from Minto couldn't handle the thought of going home and going, you know—this time it would be him knocking at the door and saying, family, I'm going to—I overspent. I can't help myself. I overspent and I'm going to have to take a big cut in pay. No, so, the big genie, the great genie spoke to him—*[interjection]*—and said—Eugene Kostyra said, ah, I tell you what you can do, member for Minto. Sneak, sneak this—protect your

paycheque—part of the bill into routine legislation under the cover of darkness. The great genie always works best under the cover of darkness.

And what he would—what he then proposed to Cabinet—I'm sure—the member from Minto—he said, what we'll do, we'll sneak it into the BITSA bill. Now, of course, if you walked the fine—you know, if you walked the fine streets of Winnipeg and communities across this province, you would find out that nobody has a clue what the BITSA bill is, nobody. So they pick the bill that most people have absolutely no clue what it is and they snuck it into the BITSA bill, after the great genie met with the member for Minto and explained to him this is the way you can do it, this is how you can protect your paycheque.

Now, the question is, if we were going to put this onto a survey and go into our schools and say: do you think it's right that rather than taking a pay cut because you overspent, legislation that your former leader, the great Stephen Harper friend, the golfing buddy of the Conservative Prime Minister, Gary Doer himself, supported and spoke so highly of all the time, do you think it's right that now you are going to overspend, not take the pay cut and change the rules sort of half way in between? Do you think that that is right?

Schoolchildren—you know, like, for instance, let's say the member for Gimli would go into his kid's school in St. Vital and would put this survey in front of them. You know, maybe the member for St. Vital (Ms. Allan) could go to Gimli and do the same survey. You know, maybe the member for Minto—and he's got a lovely family by the way—great—and I hope I see them during my travels during Folklorama again—great people. But maybe if he put this survey in front of them and he were to say, do you think this is ethical? Let's just use a nice word, "ethical." And, you know, maybe after you've explained it to them, that's fine, you know, do you think it's cool? Do you think it's on, you know, that you do this kind of thing? I suspect, Madam Deputy Speaker, I suspect that every one of those children would say, well, no, that's kind of like cheating, kind of. You know, it's—no, no. Your word should be your word. Your yes should be your yes; your no should be your no. You know, if you've got something to say, it should be public.

In fact, you know, we've seen our federal cousins dealing with this whole issue, you know, with the auditor and their expenses and all the rest of

it, and you know what? I doubt there is much of a problem there except that Canadians view these things as, you know, they have a right for their politicians to be totally transparent and totally open.

And I would say that this is one of those instances where you sneak—[interjection]—I would—the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) has a question, Madam Deputy Speaker. The member for Minto, the one who caved into the great genie at 3 o'clock in the morning one Sunday night, the member for Minto has this question, and this question is: What would we cut? Well, how about the Cabinet ministers—the 19 of them—their salaries, like the legislation says. Legislation that they all cheered for. Legislation that they all voted for. Legislation that they thought was the greatest thing.

* (15:10)

Why don't they—that's the member for Minto who opposes the west-side hydro line and actually supports the east-side hydro line. We could save not 10 million, not 100 million, not 500 million, not a billion—1.2 billion there, there we could save. We don't even have to cut anything. In fact, we have to cut less trees if we go down the east side.

So there's an answer to the honourable member for Minto—[interjection]—and what—you know what? And I wait for his next question, but maybe he could let me finish my few, brief, brief, mild, mild comments—mild, serious, mild comments—that I'd like to put on the record.

And—so, you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, if you took this issue into any quadrant, to any group where their religion, culture, creed, gender, belief system, age group—doesn't matter—and if you were to lay it out for them that there's a group, a cabal of 19 people that want to not live—[interjection] not a gang, not a gang—a cabal. We want to be very careful with our word choice here—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I just want to caution all members on their selection of words.

Mr. Schuler: So—well, let's say there's a grouping—19—the grouping of 19, and you were to lay out for them that this group of 19 have broken the law. Their—a law they cheered for, a law they actually ran on, a law they supported, a law they said was great, a law they felt was the best thing because it showed accountability, a law—balanced budget legislation they felt was the best thing for this province. It showed transparency, it showed that they actually meant what they said. Their yes would be their yes;

and their no would be their no. If they overspent, they would take a pay cut.

And then halfway through, would change the rules. And if you were to lay that out to anybody in this province, if you laid it out to anybody else in this province and you asked them for feedback, can you imagine what the feedback would be? Can you imagine if those beautiful children that were in the gallery today, can you imagine if we'd laid out for them that there is a group of 19 that continuously changes the rules halfway in the game, are you—would you be fine with that?

I mean people, and young people, would be horrified that you can actually stand up—stand up—and thump your chest how you're the biggest proponents and lovers and supporters of balanced budget legislation and then when there is a bit of heat on, it actually looks like you're going to get a pay cut, then all of a sudden, you change your rules. And you stick it into a bill that (a) most people don't understand, most people have never heard of, instead of putting it a legislation, we—they should've have put it into legislation which said—should've said, we won't take a pay cut ever. We will overspend and never take a pay cut, and it should've been more than that—the NDP hates balanced budget legislation.

There—then you—we would be in this House and you'd say, okay, you know what? You're being up front about it. You hate balanced budget legislation. You have no intentions on living by any of those rules, although, along with the throng and the masses, there you were cheering it on. You were the biggest supporters and best friends of balanced budget legislation until it started to tickle their wallet and then, all of a sudden, all of a sudden the rules had to change secretly at some meeting and sure enough, out goes balanced budget legislation.

So I would go back to my original comments. I believe you should be as good as your word. It should be up front. That part of the BITSA bill should be pulled out, and it should be made its own piece of legislation, and it should stand or fall on its own and not be hidden into other legislation.

It's omnibus bill all over again—trying to ram things through that the public doesn't want to—the public doesn't want this repealed. The public still supports balanced budget legislation. In fact, it will be members opposite from the NDP—they'll run around saying, oh no, oh no, we still have some form of balanced budget legislation—because they know most people won't even have an understanding that it

was killed by the BITSA bill, which is a very basic, general piece of legislation that pays wages and keeps the lights on in buildings. And that's all the BITSA bill ever was supposed to be. The balanced budget—the killing of the balanced budget legislation should actually be taken right out of the BITSA bill and it should be put into its own, and then members here should have a decent and reasonable debate on it, which the NDP won't let us have because they're going to make us either vote against BITSA bill and vote for the killing of balanced budget legislation or the reverse. And that is what's so unfortunate because it is not truthful, it is not upfront, it is not upstanding what they have done. And you know what? I know the members opposite, and they are, by and large, great people, but their politics on this one is wrong. It is not right, Madam Deputy Speaker, and it does not sit well with us in the opposition, and we know it does not sit well with the general public.

They should stand up and say, we now have done a 180; we completely disagree—completely disagree with balanced budget legislation. We disagree with former Premier Gary Doer. He was wrong—he was wrong to support it in '99. He was wrong to claim it as his own in 2003. He was wrong to stand up and support it in 2007. He was wrong in all of his statements. Premier Doer was wrong all the way along. They should stand up and let their word be their word, their yes be their no, their no be their no, Madam Deputy Speaker.

So I would suggest that after these debates are done that they do the right thing and pull that part out of the BITSA bill and make it its own piece of legislation. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, that would be where I would recommend this House goes. In fact, I would suggest that if the members opposite would be so inclined, we'd be willing to sit down with them and talk about, you know, for instance, a good name for that piece of legislation. They won't—they haven't even gotten up and spoken to it. Their visceral anger and hatred for balanced budget legislation, they can't even get up and be reasonable on this legislation. You know what? They should get up and they should have the forthrightness to say that they oppose it. They always did.

Maybe it was the great genie. Maybe the great Eugene Kostyra at that time, maybe he was a pro balanced budget legislation individual. Maybe it was that the great genie forced each and every one of them to get into line and stand in line on balanced budget legislation, and as soon as Premier Doer was gone, no sooner had his airplane taken off from

Winnipeg international airport, then they were ready throwing the legislation under the bus.

And perhaps it was that they were forced to get in line behind balanced budget legislation. Maybe that's what it was. And that's fine. If they always did oppose it, if they always were in opposition to the legislation, then maybe they should then put that in the legislation and get up and debate it. Perhaps we would like to see the member from Gimli get up and debate even this piece of legislation and say that part of the BITSA bill that protects his paycheque—as he drives home to St. Vital every day and back again, the member for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson) driving to St. Vital or maybe the member for St. Vital (Ms. Allan) driving to Gimli, as she's driving around cutting schools, hack and slashing schools—maybe they should get up and they should say why they oppose gutting balanced budget legislation.

And, you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, they talk about, well, where should the money come from? Well, how about starting with—gee, where does one start with? The hydro line. And we went through that—\$1.2 billion. You don't have to cut anything. In fact, you cut less. It's amazing. You actually—changing the hydro line means you cut less. You cut less trees, you cut less forests, you cut through far less farmland—[interjection]—you save the caribou, you actually would be viewed as a great environmentalist going on the east side. And, you know, there are some amazing individuals in Manitoba Hydro, great minds there. Why don't they listen to them? They should listen to them.

*(15:20)

Madam Deputy Speaker, back to the legislation at hand. Your yes should be your yes. Your no should be your no. This is a very open Chamber. In fact, we're not allowed to even sit here and abstain from votes. We must state where we are on a position.

I would suggest to members opposite, why not? Why not take the gutting of balanced budget legislation out of the BITSA bill and make it its own piece of legislation? I'm sure our House leader, our whip, our leader, the other leadership of our caucus would be prepared to sit down in the loges, come up with a suitable name for that piece of legislation.

An Honourable Member: We're ready.

Mr. Schuler: We're ready right now. We'll do it right now, and, you know, we could call it, for instance, how the NDP hates balanced budget

legislation. There'd be a good name for it, or we could cut it—call it, how the NDP Cabinet wants to protect their paycheques by gutting the balanced budget legislation. You know, those are just a few, you know, brainstorming ideas, but whatever it is, they should stand up, let their yes be their yes, their no be their no. And don't hide behind the BITSA bill and try to get away with what they're doing, and that's gutting balanced budget legislation.

It was very good legislation. It was, and is, very good legislation. It was legislation before its time. It was a cutting-edge legislation, and they knew it, because once they realized how popular it was, they all jumped on board. Well, we thought they all were. We know that the former member for Concordia, Premier Doer, was on board, and, maybe they obligingly had to—you know, they were dragged along.

However, we'll, give them the benefit of the doubt. They've changed their mind. They want to run up massive deficits, which they're doing. They want to do it without proper scrutiny. They certainly don't want to be punished for it; that's the group of 19, the Cabinet ministers, headed up by the Premier (Mr. Selinger). What they want to do is they want to have their debt and their big paycheque too. That's what they want. It's called having your cake and eating it too.

And, in the meantime, where's all the other legislation? We've got four weeks of session left. They'll call no other piece of legislation. Nothing else matters to them. Nothing, nothing else matters but the paycheque of the 19 Cabinet ministers headed by the Premier, the member for St. Boniface. That's what's so unfortunate. They should pull the bill, take out the killing the balanced budget legislation component of it, make it its own bill.

Let's move on with the business of this House. This shouldn't just be a Chamber that protects the paycheques, that protects the 19 members of Cabinet headed by the Premier, the member for St. Boniface.

Let's move on with the duties and the work of this Chamber, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Let's do the right thing and pull the killing of balanced budget legislation out of this bill.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to put some comments on the record

with respect to Bill 31, named The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2010.

I want to thank the member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler) for his impassioned comments, and I also thank other members who have done what they're sent to do here by their constituents, and that is stand up and speak on matters of important—on important matters of legislation that impacts on the people of Manitoba.

Bill 31 does five things, in essence, Madam Deputy Speaker, all of which we believe are the wrong way to go for Manitoba. Number 1, it puts a final nail in the coffin of balanced budget legislation, the very legislation that this government, the NDP, promised they would keep in place in successive election campaigns. Secondly, it enables massive increases in the Province's debt, increases that are unsustainable at a time of moderate economic growth. Thirdly, it imposes new taxes on Manitoba families at a time when they can least afford to pay them. Number 4, it allows for cuts to front-line services through the mismanagement of this government, which we've seen becoming public over the past number of weeks, including delays in projects to support people with addictions, including reductions in services and the pulling out of the rug from underneath families with children with autism, other cuts to front-line services that we've seen playing themselves out through the province, cuts to adult education in Portage la Prairie and a variety of other cuts to front-line services around the province.

And No. 5, Madam Deputy Speaker, this bill, Bill 31 protects the 19 members of the NDP Cabinet by getting rid of the measures that were put in place only two years ago and which the Premier at that time committed to maintaining in the event that the government ran two deficits in a row. Five negative steps, five reasons to vote against Bill 31, and five significant concerns, not just for members in this House, but for families across the province of Manitoba.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it's telling that Bill 31 is the only bill in this session that's been called and moved through the legislative process by this NDP government. Every session provides a glimpse into the priorities of the government and perhaps the most telling glimpse of those priorities is the order in which bills get called in this House, the priority that's given by the government to getting bills from introduction to final votes during this sitting of the

Legislative Chamber. And Bill 31, it's very clear, is the No. 1 priority for the NDP government.

There are other pieces of legislation, introduced by members from all parties, that we support, that are currently on the legislative list, but those bills have all taken a backseat to Bill 31 because of decisions made by the NDP government, and because of their clear desire to make protection of ministerial salaries the top priority of the NDP government in this session of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly.

It's indicative, Madam Deputy Speaker, of a government that has been in power for more than a decade, almost 11 years, and which seems to believe that it has no need for accountability to the people who elected them, that seems to believe that it governs by some divine right and that there's no obligation to be accountable to the people of Manitoba. This is what happens after 11 years when a government reaches levels of arrogance that causes it to put the protection of ministerial salaries ahead of so many other important issues in the province of Manitoba.

Other members have already spoken to the various issues contained in this bill, but on the 5.0 raise, let me go back to the first point, the final nail in the coffin of balanced budget legislation. We all remember all the way back to 1999 after the NDP had lost three elections in a row, that the then leader of the NDP said that he would keep the things the Tories got right, including balanced budget legislation, and make changes where he felt the government was on the wrong track.

One of those fundamental commitments to the people of the province was a commitment to live within the government's means. And the reason that commitment was made was not just because of the popularity of that position, a position that was taken by the prior Progressive Conservative government, but because it aligns with the basic sensibilities of Manitobans, people who don't believe in running up debt, people who believe that you fix the roof when the sun is shining and you don't live beyond your means, otherwise you fail in your legacy to the next generation. And that's what this bill does most fundamentally. It certainly has an impact on Manitobans of all ages today, but the group that's most negatively impacted by Bill 31 is the generation to come, a generation that will pick up the tab for this reckless out-of-control government which is spending money without any regard for the impact that this will have on future generations.

And so, in taking this final step, even after Bill 38 two years ago, which fundamentally weakened the balanced budget laws that were already in place, only two years later, the government concludes they didn't go far enough with Bill 38, that they didn't go all the way and completely finish off any commitment to balanced budgets in Manitoba. And so that's what necessitated Bill 31 to do—to ensure that their campaign against balanced budgets came to its conclusion. It's the fait accompli of this NDP government and party which is fundamentally opposed, and has been from the get go, to the idea of balanced budgets and governments having to live within their means.

* (15:30)

Balanced budgets require governments to be disciplined, to be mindful not only of current pressures and wishes, but also be mindful of our obligations to the next generation. And, with Bill 31, the government has dispensed with any sense of obligation to the next generation of Manitobans. And, for that reason alone, this is a bill that all members should be voting against.

Bill 31 also allows the government, in addition to completely removing any constraints on expenditures, in addition to completely removing any commitment to the next generation, Bill 31 enables the government to continue to run up debt at record levels. Now, we know, when look at the Crown corporations, including Hydro, as well as central government, we have a debt in Manitoba today that's higher than Saskatchewan and Alberta combined, provinces which, when combined, have more than four times the population of Manitoba to support their provinces' debt.

So, at \$23.4 billion by the end of this year, and growing at a rate of 10 percent a year, this government is leading Manitoba down the wrong path. This debt level represents a debt on every family in Manitoba, approaching \$20,000 per family, and growing at a rapidly increasing rate. It takes no account of the fact that there are factors beyond the immediate control of this government or the opposition or any individual in this province, such as interest rates, which are set by the Bank of Canada in Ottawa, and which this government has no ability to control. And those rates are set for a variety of reasons. But, if those rates should go up going forward, as has happened many times in the past, then this debt goes from being a significant problem

to, potentially, a major financial crisis for the people of Manitoba.

Our job in this Chamber is not just to cater to people in terms of the short-term wishes, but also to look to the future and to bear in mind the implications of decisions that are made today for that next generation. And, when you build up debt to record levels, when you increase it by 10 percent a year, when you do it during a time where such increases are completely unnecessary, given the moderate levels of growth that we are into this year and which are projected over the coming years, you do it solely for the purpose of proceeding with short-term wishes on the part of the NDP at the expense of longer term necessities for the next generation of Manitobans. And, for that reason, Madam Deputy Speaker, Bill 31 is completely wrong for Manitoba.

Secondly, on the issue of debt, we have seen the consequences of debt growing out of control in other places. We saw it right here in Manitoba. It's not purely an issue in other places and other countries around the world, Madam Deputy Speaker; we saw it right here in Manitoba when an earlier government ran debt up to unsustainable levels without regard to the potential impact of future interest rates, and when, sure enough, those rates started to go up, debt grew and ate up a larger and larger share of the Province's budget. It took resources away from hospitals, from doctors and nurses. It took resources away from schools and roads, and police officers and firefighters and paramedics and others who provide those public services that are so important to Manitobans. It resulted in increases in rates in taxes, increases in MPI rates, increases in Hydro rates, increases in taxes across the board, in order to repay the debt that had been created. So this is not just a Greece issue or a Europe issue. This has been a Manitoba issue in the past, and, if we're not careful, we'll go right back to those terrible days of out-of-control NDP debt and rising pressure on Manitoba families, on their finances and on the social programs that they rely on.

As we look today what's happening overseas, we see countries that have lived beyond their means for many years and today are paying the price in very concrete and very dramatic ways. If you watch the images on television from Europe, from Greece, in particular, and from other countries, we know that the issue of debt is not just an academic discussion. It is a real-life issue for real people—for families, for children, for mothers and fathers and grandparents—as we see cuts to social programs, as we see restraint

being imposed externally on countries that hitch their short-term financial prosperity to borrowing from outside institutions.

And that's exactly what Bill 31 does. It enables this government to borrow more and more from banks and from institutions outside of the province, who both have the right to, and the expectation to be repaid on that debt at some point down the road. And we, in essence, give up control over our destiny to those people who are currently paying the bills. And the people paying the bills today, Madam Deputy Speaker, are, increasingly, banks. It's increasingly dependence on federal transfer payments. And this is bad news for the people of Manitoba and particularly those of the next generation, who are going to be put into a position of having to repay the debt built up by this NDP government.

So Bill 31 is a—is an insult to the next generation. It is a betrayal of our legacy to that generation in terms of its move to get rid of balanced budget legislation and to enable massive increases in debt, increases that are growing beyond our capacity to repay them.

Thirdly, Madam Deputy Speaker, this bill imposes an array of new taxes on Manitobans in a variety of areas on people who cannot afford to pay them. We see a new tax, most incredibly of all, perhaps, on our producers in the supply managed commodity areas, our dairy farmers, our poultry farmers, those who provide us with eggs, poultry and milk. Those who provide the basic necessities of life to Manitoba families are being asked by this NDP government to pay more on taxes imposed on quotas, licences and other transfers that are a day-to-day part of those family farm operations, and impose taxes—imposes taxes and fees and levies in a whole range of other areas, a lot of it below the radar. And I think the government—this is one of the most insulting things about this bill and this budget, much of it the government thought would go unnoticed by Manitobans, by bringing in below-the-radar stealth taxes and levies such as the tax on farm families. And we see within the bill a variety of other measures that take money from the pockets of Manitoba consumers, both directly and indirectly, as well as those producers who are a fundamental part of the fabric of Manitoba's society who put food on the table each and every day for Manitoba families. People who have been taken for granted for too long by this NDP government have now been penalized by a government that is desperately looking for revenue wherever they can find it.

And so to increase debt the same time as you increase the cost of food, Madam Deputy Speaker, is the ultimate in being out of touch. It's the ultimate insult to Manitobans, and Manitobans are beginning to take notice.

Number 4, Madam Deputy Speaker, the cuts to front-line services, some of which have been outlined through media stories and through questions in this House over the past number of weeks. But we see school divisions under pressure to reduce services. We saw reductions in services to children with hearing impairments. We saw a delay in a promised addictions treatment centre for Manitobans. We saw cuts to adult education in Portage la Prairie. We have seen an insulting proposal to pull the rug out from under those hundreds of families who have children with autism. We've seen a variety of other cuts in small areas across the board, throughout the province, impacting people in a variety of negative ways, in a variety of places around the province.

And it's not limited, Madam Deputy Speaker, to just one or two groups. It's people in rural communities, people here in the city of Winnipeg, people in the north, people across Manitoba, who are seeing and being asked by this government to pay more in order to get less from their government.

Now, this government, we have noticed, likes to make a lot of announcements. They make new spending announcements almost every day, and many of those projects in and of themselves are worthy of support, and we do support them. However, what I think Manitobans find disconcerting and offensive is the way this government treats the money as though it's their own.

*(15:40)

They make announcements wanting political credit for expenditures as though the money—they're taking the money out of their own pockets to spend on these announcements. Now, if they were taking money from their own pockets and spending it in these areas, Madam Deputy Speaker, we would be the first to line up and congratulate them for their generosity and for their public spiritedness here in Manitoba. But, when that money's being taken from the pockets of other Manitobans and being spent on NDP pet projects that do nothing to move our province forward, that is a sign of a government that has an overwhelming sense of entitlement and who believes that they are spending money that is their own as opposed to the hard-earned money of

Manitoba families and Manitoba taxpayers, both present and future. To the extent that they're borrowing or that they're getting money from the federal government, that's all money that's going to be repaid by Manitobans at some point down the road in a variety of ways. And so it's Manitoba families today, tomorrow, next month, next year, and in the next decade who will pay for all of the out-of-control spending currently under way under this NDP government.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when a government earns the right to have control over the public treasury, they handle that money as a trust for the people of Manitoba. It's not a piggybank to be spent on pet political projects. It's a trust that has been granted to them by the voters and taxpayers of the province, and Bill 31 is a breach of that trust. What it says is that we, the small, select, elite group of people who have been granted the opportunity to govern, no longer feel we have any obligation to the people we govern. We no longer feel that we have any sense of accountability to taxpayers. We're going to treat this money as though it's our own personal slush fund to be spent and allocated on the backs of our own personal, financial, and political interests. And that is an indication of a government that has overstayed its welcome.

So, as we see in this budget, there are four very negative aspects and a fifth one which I'm going to get to in a moment. But to put the nail in the coffin of the balanced budget legislation that they promised to keep in place; to enable massive increases in a debt that's already at record levels, moving us even further out of step of the provinces around us; No. 3, to impose new taxes on food and on Manitoba families; and No. 4, to allow for cuts to front-line services are four steps in the wrong direction that hurt Manitoba families at a time when they're looking to their government to protect them.

Number 5, perhaps the most offensive aspect of all, is that what this bill does, even as it damages the interests of Manitoba families, it protects the interests of 19 members of this House, the 19 members of the NDP Cabinet who, only two years ago, made a solemn promise when they voted for Bill 38 that they would adhere to the provisions of that bill and take a reduction in their own salaries in the event that the government ran two deficits in a row. This is not even a bill that they were left by the last government. It was their own bill two years ago, Madam Deputy Speaker, that made that promise. It was their own bill two years ago that enshrined in

legislation a commitment to pay the price in the event that the government ran two deficits in a row.

It wasn't as though it was a bill introduced in a completely different era of history by a different government. It was this NDP government two years ago, on the eve of the financial crisis, that brought it in. They spoke to it. They voted for it and they made a promise, through Bill 38, to the people of Manitoba that, if they failed to balance the budget under the terms of Bill 38, they would take a reduction in their own incomes of 20 percent the first time they failed and a further 20 percent the second time.

With a budget that was introduced, what we saw was a plan for long-term failure: not just once, not just twice, not three times or four times, but five years in a row of failure by the NDP to uphold the commitments that were made under Bill 38 only two years ago. Five years of promised failure and then a bill, Bill 31, designed to rewrite the rules now that they're inconvenient.

It was a great PR stunt two years ago by the NDP government to make the promise, but now that they actually have to live with it, Madam Deputy Speaker, they don't have the courage of their convictions. They don't have the integrity to keep their promise made two years ago, and so they're gutting the law that they introduced two years ago to protect the salaries of the 19 members of the NDP Cabinet. It's shameful. They ought to stick with the commitment that was made in that bill, Bill 38, only two years ago, but now that it's too hard on the individuals across the floor to keep that promise, they've brought another bill to rewrite the law, a privilege not available to any other Manitoban, a privilege and an entitlement that belongs to the 19 members of the NDP Cabinet that doesn't belong to any other of the 1.2 million people in Manitoba.

We've heard from people across this province who have been angry or frustrated at different points in time in, for example, receiving photo radar tickets that they felt weren't justified, people who may have been driving through a construction zone below the normal speed limit but who got tickets in areas that didn't—that weren't properly marked as speed-reduction zones.

In one case, I think all of us recall, Madam Deputy Speaker, was an 80-year-old woman who had never breached the law in her life before, who got three such tickets, coming to and returning from visits to her ailing husband in Victoria Hospital, three photo radar tickets. Immense frustration and

surprise when she gets home to her mailbox weeks later to open up these three tickets received over three days to find that she owed the government hundreds of dollars in unjust fines. Was she given the opportunity to rewrite the law to get out of paying those fines?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. McFadyen I think what I hear, Madam Deputy Speaker, is no, clearly she wasn't. She would have loved that opportunity to rewrite the photo radar law, to cut her fines in half, when she was put into that position of receiving her photo radar tickets. But, because she's not one of the 19 members of the NDP Cabinet, she didn't have that privilege. She was required to pay those tickets, to suffer the consequences, hundreds of dollars in fines unjustly levied against her and no opportunity to rewrite the law just because it was not just inconvenient, but very significantly hard on her, her husband and her family.

And so it's to Manitobans like that, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we address our comments today; Manitobans who are playing by the rules, who don't have the luxury and the entitlement to be able to rewrite the law to suit their own purposes, who haven't been granted the power to simply show up in front of this Legislature with a piece of paper in order to protect their own personal financial interests and to muster the votes in order to get themselves out of having to make payments to the government.

And so, Madam Deputy Speaker, what I find both surprising and disappointing is that members of the NDP caucus who are not members of Cabinet would go along with this bill. How can they go along with this Bill 31? There are some independent-minded people across the floor. There are people across the floor whose integrity I respect. We may disagree on issues from time to time, but I believe that they came here with a view toward serving their constituents and not simply taking orders from the party leader who was just put in place by the unions a number of months ago. I think that they came here with a higher purpose. They came here with a view towards serving people like the 80-year-old woman who was visiting her husband in hospital. People across the province who were waiting for and counting on addiction services. People who can't afford to pay more for milk, eggs and poultry. I think they came here because they wanted to look out for the next generation. But all of those good intentions

mean nothing if they're not prepared to stand up and vote to enact those intentions.

It's been said many times that the road to hell is paved with good intentions and we hear a lot of good intentions from members opposite. But they have a unique opportunity, Madam Deputy Speaker, with Bill 31, to translate those good intentions into good actions on behalf of the people that they were sent here to represent.

And I know that those members must be looking at Bill 31. They must be looking at the increases in debt. They must be looking at the broken promise with respect to balanced budgets. They must be looking at these new taxes on milk, eggs and poultry. They must be looking at these cuts to services to their constituents. They must be wondering about the salary-protection measures put in place to protect only 19 members of their caucus and wondering, is this really why I got into politics. Is this really why I wanted to be elected to this Chamber, to simply take orders from Cabinet and to fall in line every time they ask us to fall in line?

*(15:50)

I want to call—and I would expect the 19 members of Cabinet to vote for this bill. Certainly, in their financial—direct personal financial interests to vote for Bill 31 because the status quo, obviously, has a very direct impact on their own salaries. And so a vote for Bill 31 by those 19 members is a direct vote related to their personal financial circumstances. And I think those 19 members should think long and hard about whose interests they were sent here to protect. I hope that they're giving close consideration to whether or not they may be feeling conflicted in terms of whether Bill 31 is really about the interests of Manitobans or about their own personal interests, and I hope those 19 members will consider that. But, for the other members of the government caucus who aren't in a personal conflict, I would ask them to simply do what they were sent here to do, which is stand up for regular Manitobans, to stand up for their constituents, to adhere to the principles that they came here to uphold, not simply to be there to vote in favour of any bill that this Premier or this Finance Minister and this Cabinet puts before the House. That's what democracy is all about. It's about the right of members to exercise their judgment independently and to do what they believe is right for their own constituents.

We have many, many other concerns, Madam Deputy Speaker, about where we stand today. Bill 31, for example, with all of the new debt that it creates, fails to put in place or even signal a plan as to how we're going to pay our way out of the current mess being created under the watch of this NDP government. We see, for example, the provinces and the premiers of Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia forming a partnership, the New West Partnership, which is designed to bring investment to Manitoba and to ensure that jobs are created here, that money is being spent here and that the prosperity is being created that will allow their provinces to repay any debt that they're incurring currently as they make expenditures in those provinces.

We also note, if you look historically at what those provinces did, is that they took a very different path when the sun was shining and when times were good. They did what common sense people do; they fixed the roof, the financial roof of their provinces when the sun was shining. They went out and they paid their debt down. British Columbia made significant repayments on its debt during the decade of prosperity because they had the foresight—they had the foresight—to know that the good times don't last forever, that there are lots of factors beyond their control which could send their economy into a downturn.

And so they had the foresight to pay down debt. Alberta eliminated their debt during that time period, down to zero. Saskatchewan made large payments on their debt. In fact, they made a single payment of over \$1 billion just a couple of years ago to bring their debt down. They positioned their provinces to weather whatever storm might be coming. Here, in NDP Manitoba, they did the opposite; they built up the debt during the good years, and now, Madam Deputy Speaker, we're less well prepared for the challenges that we now face. We are closer to a crisis in this province than we are in any other province in western Canada. Bill 31 furthers the move toward that inevitable day of reckoning that will come when the bills need to be paid, when the lenders are calling on those loans to be repaid, and when the next generation of Manitobans are going to be forced to work longer hours for less pay in order to pay off the negative legacy of this out-of-control NDP government.

And so, Madam Deputy Speaker, we are voting against Bill 31. And we have great concerns about Bill 31. We will not stand in this Chamber and vote in favour of the end of balanced budget laws. We

will vote in favour of lower debt and against higher debt. We will vote in favour of lower taxes, lower fees and lower rates and against higher taxes, higher fees and higher rates for Manitobans. We will vote against cuts to front-line services and in favour of enhancements to front-line services and value for money for Manitoba taxpayers when it comes to health, education, public safety, family services and those many other areas that are important to Manitoba families.

And we will vote against the self-serving move on the part of this NDP Cabinet to break their promise, to undo the law that they themselves brought in place just two years ago and which they today propose to repeal with the sole purpose of protecting the salaries of those 19 members.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we call on members opposite to think long and hard about what Bill 31 means for today, for next year and for beyond in our province. We call them to get over their obsession with decades past and to focus on what Manitoba's going to look like a decade from now. And Bill 31 takes our province in the wrong direction. Our province will not be as strong or safe or as prosperous 10 years from now if Bill 31 passes than if it's defeated.

And so we owe it to that next generation to defeat Bill 31. I call on members opposite, particularly those who are not in Cabinet, to vote against Bill 31, to come here and stand up for those people who sent them here in good faith and to go back to their very, I believe, their very good intentions when they first decided to seek public office here in the province of Manitoba.

And I know that many came into this place with a sense of real idealism and commitment to the ideas of democracy, fiscal prudence, progressive social policy and other values that they believed in. Bill 31 is an abandonment of all of those principles. This is not the principled NDP that some members, I believe, thought they were signing up for. This is an unprincipled piece of legislation that is not only unprincipled, but damaging for the next generation of Manitobans.

So we, Madam Deputy Speaker, are calling on Manitobans, when this bill goes to committee, to come forward to have their say. We know the government is going to follow the requirements of Bill 38 and allow for a week's notice to allow Manitobans to come to this building, their building, to speak on Bill 31 and make their views known.

We look to the government to ensure a maximum opportunity for public debate on what Bill 31 really entails for our province, and we're looking forward to hearing from regular Manitobans at committee. We encourage them to call the Legislative Clerk's office, and that number is available on-line. It's available in the phone book, and they can call; they can register—945-3636 is the number to call. They can call. They can ask the clerk to register to make a presentation on Bill 31 when it comes to committee, and we'll look forward to hearing the views of Manitobans on Bill 31.

We know, Madam Deputy Speaker, that when Manitobans understand that Bill 31 is the nail in the coffin for balanced budget laws, that it enables massive increases in a rapidly expanding debt, when they find out it imposes new taxes on farm families and on consumers of basic food items, when they find out that it allows for cuts to front-line services, and when they find out that it does nothing more than protect the 19 members of Cabinet, that they will oppose it. And we hope that members opposite will listen carefully to those comments and that they will ensure every opportunity for Manitobans to participate in the process leading up to the final debate and final vote on Bill 31.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we know that there are many pieces of legislation on the Order Paper today. We had a bill introduced today by the member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu) relating to the accountability of Crown corporations to ensure that ratepayers are protected and are given information.

We have before us bills relating to improvements to our democratic processes, bills—a bill introduced by the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) to improve public safety here in the province of Manitoba. We see on the Order Paper other government bills, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we support, many that contain very good objectives and very good principles related to changes to family law, and changes that will protect workers, and other changes that we believe are good changes for Manitoba. And we will look at the detail of all of those bills and we'll have debate about whether those bills actually achieve the goals that are stated, but these are bills that should be before the House. They should be high priorities for this government. They should be moving through the process of debate, and they should be coming to a vote in a timely way.

And so we are disappointed, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the government has decided to line up

all their horses behind Bill 31, to put the full muscle of the government Cabinet behind getting Bill 31 passed by the time the House rises. They're going gangbusters to make sure that the salary protection bill gets through before the House rises for the summer so that they can go off on their summer break knowing that they've got their top priority Bill 31 through the House.

* (16:00)

We think other bills should be coming forward for debate ahead of Bill 31, and we would call on the government to advance debate on many of these other bills, as I've said, bills which many—relating to dealing with the very significant issue of domestic violence, bills which relate to transparency and accountability of Crown corporations. We see a bill relating to the rights of seniors introduced by the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik), which is a good piece of legislation which seniors deserve to see moved through the legislative process. We see other bills introduced related to more accountability within the health-care system, and who can stand up in this House and argue against accountability in our health-care system, when we see the brown envelop scandal, we see what happened with Brian Sinclair, when we see massive budget increases and yet cuts to front-line services. We know that these are all bills that should be priorities for the NDP, Madam Deputy Speaker, and yet, seemingly, are not priorities. Well, they're priorities for the Progressive Conservative opposition.

Still, let's bring them forward. Let's get on with the debate in these—on these other important bills and let us move forward to do what we were sent here to do, Madam Deputy Speaker, and that's to serve the people of Manitoba.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in closing, I just want to say that we're disappointed that members opposite haven't been able to muster enough support for Bill 31 to put up a single speaker on first reading related to Bill 31. Not a single member feels that they can justify this bill on the record. So they're going to use every legislative trick in the book to try to slip it through below the radar to avoid putting comments on the record, and that speaks volumes. Their silence on Bill 31 speaks volumes, that not even they feel that they can stand up and support it. But I guarantee you—and I hope I'm wrong about that—they're going to show up to vote on it, to jam it through as quickly as they can and to get on with their summer, putting everything else, the priorities

of Manitobans on the back burner as the priorities of the 19 members of the NDP Cabinet get top priority. It's wrong for Manitobans.

I call on members opposite who are not within the Cabinet to do what's right for their constituents: vote against Bill 31; vote for living within our means; vote for the next generation; vote for public services; vote for lower taxes and less debt; vote against Bill 31. I call on them to do that, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I want to put a few things on the record in regards to Bill 31. And when I first looked at Bill 31, I was worried about the treasure in my life, and, of course, that's not my money or lack of, but it's about my grandchildren, my three grandchildren that this government is taking money away from, the debt that's being putting on to my grandchildren, and, of course, their children to come.

And I can tell you, from this side of the House, Bill 31 is certainly something we're very concerned about. I'm also very disappointed in the fact that no members on that side of the House felt fit to put anything in the record in regard to Bill 31. In fact, I know our House leaders have done a great job in trying to talk about some of the other bills that are so important here, and yet we've had nothing called but Bill 31 to—for debate. And, unfortunately, those other bills a number of us have put forward on the record, are very important to us, very important to Manitobans. So I'm very concerned that the government has not called those other bills that should be called for debate, because we are running out of time. We know the 17th of June we're going to be out of here, and a number of those bills will have to be carried over, and, unfortunately, we have not had the opportunity to debate a number of those bills that we should be debating and giving attention to make sure that Manitobans, in fact, do have a voice in regards to what those bills are entailed.

So with that, I want to talk in particular—our leader had talked about the New West Partnership, and I think that's very important to understand what this is all about. And the New West Partnership, Madam Deputy Speaker, is a new and far-reaching economic partnership between the governments of British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan. These three provinces are committed to ongoing collaboration on any innovative ideas to strength the economy of the west. Where's Manitoba? Nowhere to be found, unfortunately. The New West

Partnership—the three provinces will foster a strong, vibrant and lasting prosperity for the region and for our people. The partnership goes on to say, we'll be focussing on four areas of key economic growth of the west: trade, international co-operation, innovation and procurement.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

The New West Partnership Trade Agreement is a comprehensive agreement to remove barriers of trade, investment and labour mobility between those three provinces. Again, Manitoba is being left out once again.

Also, the other key ingredients in this agreement, I think, is important to bear putting on the record, is non-discrimination. Workers in businesses from the three provinces will be treated equally.

Transparency: Provinces will notify each other to ensure that new measures, including standards and regulations, are not unnecessary different or result in new impeding to trade, investment or labour mobility.

Legitimate objectives: Provinces continue to have flexibility, protect important public interest, such as public security and safety, human, animal, or plant life or health, the environment, the health and safety of workers, and provisions of social services and health services.

Another provision in this agreement is streamlined regulations. Something we have way too much of here in the province of Manitoba is red tape.

Unfortunately, this government has decided to stay out of that agreement, leaving us out once again.

The streamlined regulations and unnecessary differences in provinces, business and occupation-related regulations and standards, will be eliminated within those three provinces.

Procurement: Public procurements will be conducted openly and transparently ensuring equal opportunity for suppliers in all three provinces.

What does that tell us? That tells us once again, Manitobans are going to be left out.

Dispute resolution: The three governments demonstrated their serious commitment to the New West Partnership Trade Agreement by including the possibility of financial penalties up to \$5 million if a government is found to be non-compliant with its obligations that the government subsequently fails to bring itself into compliance.

Another innovative idea is international co-operation. Under the New West Partnership international co-operation agreement, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia will collaborate at high-quality, cost-efficient joint international initiatives, including undertaking joint missions or marketing visits; sharing resources international markets, such as co-locating market offices or personnel and sharing market intelligence in the areas of common interest.

We have an initiative here in Manitoba that's very important to us that's called CentrePort. And that is a opportunity for Manitoba to step forward. We missed that opportunity by not being able to work with our sister provinces to the west. We're being left out once again, and we're going to be on our own trying to find the businesses initiatives to bring into that CentrePort, which I find is going to be very disturbing. And we, on this side of the House, realize how important this initiative is to us, and it would've been so much easier, Mr. Acting Speaker, if we would've been in partnerships with these other provinces. Now they're going to be out searching on their own for theirs as a group of three provinces. It's going to speak volume to all those businesses wanting to locate in the west. Unfortunately, we'll be left out once again. Our work is going to be that much harder.

I want also to talk about the agreement and the timelines. The New West Partnership Trade Agreement comes into effect July the 1st of 2010. British Columbia and Alberta fully comply with the agreement. Saskatchewan fully complies, subject to the transition measures listed below, which will come to effect by the date specified.

Saskatchewan specific transition measures: Ministries to post all tendering on a common electronic tendering system one year later by July the 1st of 2011. Reconciled differences in commercial vehicle registration, again, by July 1st 2011. Also, need to recognize to otherwise reconcile differences in regulations and standards that restrict or impair trade, investment or labour mobility. That's two years later, Mr. Acting Speaker, which will be July the 1st of 2012. Also, mutually recognize and otherwise reconcile differences in business, registration and reporting requirements.

* (16:10)

Now, I know from my past business experience that my particular business, which I had several dealers and people, not only in Saskatchewan,

Alberta and British Columbia, we had to be registered in each of those provinces. This would've been a big step in my business, cutting my overhead down, seeing that these other provinces want, in fact, to deal with the other provinces. But, once again, what we have found out, as a result of Manitoba not being at the table, is we will now be an island all of our own.

Also there's one other program in their mutually recognized, otherwise reconciled, differences, to measure related financial services that restrict or impair trade, investment or labour mobility, which will be July the 1st of 2013. Also in regards to the partnership agreement, the ministries and department, government agency boards and commissions, goods and services, goods of 10,000, services of 75,000, construction of 100,000, Crown corporations 25,000, 100,000 for services and construction, again 100,000. These are significant, Mr. Acting Speaker, in regards to where Manitoba is positioning their self. We are left out, once again, not only because of Bill 31. It's because of the lack of leadership that this government has shown in taking us forward on a number of initiatives that's so important.

We're more in tune to talk about Bill 17—anti-business and anti-business climate for our hog producers, which is so important. They put a stamp on it, saying, look, we don't want more hog farms within our province of Manitoba. We want to put a ban on building. We want to put a 2 percent levy on all services under the supply and management. We're talking about the dairy. We're talking about the poultry industry. We're talking about the egg business. These are very viable operations within the province of Manitoba. Unfortunately, what we've seen is another backdoor tax put onto those farmers, those producers, which will, in the end, come back to haunt this government. People will not sit by idly and take this year after year after year.

I know that the pushback has come from people in my area across this province. And I know I talk to these producers each and every week and every time I have an opportunity, even during the week before we're in session, to talk about what's important to these people in rural Manitoba. Unfortunately, it's—what we've seen from this government is the leadership that we needed to take it to the next level—rather than encouraging growing within rural Manitoba, what we've seen is a step backwards. And that's by instituting the regulations that they have put forward.

We think about the sewer injector system. We have thousands and thousands of dollars that are pending right now on whether or not the minister is going to, in fact, make that announcement on those changes that we brought forward, that the people have brought forward, within the province of Manitoba, to ensure that their voices are heard. We encourage the minister to make that announcement. The real estate, as I talked about, is in the millions and millions of dollars, that's being held up each and every day. Yes, the homework should have been done, and he inherited a mess from the previous minister who put the ban on the hog barns and put this ban on the sewer injector system. As a result, this minister now has to come in and clean up that mess that was brought forward by his previous minister.

And, as I said, we're encouraging this minister to make those necessary changes in order that rural Manitobans can in fact move forward, can in fact look after what's so important to them. We all want clean water. We all want to make sure that the next generation has those services and that livelihood that's available to them in the rural life setting that has been there for generations and generations.

Also, I want to talk about some of things that our leader talked about and that is on Bill 38. That was a first start at selling out Manitobans. Unfortunately, what we see in Bill 31 is, again, another sell-out for our people of Manitoba. In fact, I would challenge the government to allow free vote. I know the members from Wolseley, the members from Kirkfield Park, the members from Rossmere, Brandon East, Radisson, St. James, Burrows, Riel, Interlake, Transcona, Southdale, Concordia, would like the opportunity to be able to say back to their constituents who put them there, why did we vote for Bill 31? Is it the legislation that what we wanted, that's best for all Manitobans? And I can tell you that each one of those members will be held accountable.

Now the ministers, they did take their 20 percent cut this year, which they had to do by the legislation that was put before them. What they're worried about now is the 40 percent that they're going to have to go to next year as a result of this government's mismanagement on the financial affairs of this province. Unfortunately, they have done a terrible job. And, of course, that I've talked about the treasures in my life earlier, with—in regards to my grandchildren, the debt that's going to be passed on to them, the cuts—the cost that will be paid for, time and time again, by the generations to come.

Manitoba has seen some growth within population. When you look at the overall debt and the debt that's going to be incurred by the 1.2 million people that's in this province, we can't sustain that debt. We don't have the population for it. We don't have the wherewithal to be able to stand here in this government and spend, spend, spend. It's about priorities. Yes, it's very important that we do spend money in time of recession, a time of which we need to ensure that, in fact, the money has been spent wisely.

I know there's a number of initiatives that's been brought forward that we on this side of the House have suggested to the government quite strongly, quite frankly, that some of them are wrong. We do listen to our Manitobans. We consult with Manitobans and we make sure that those decisions we bring forward are decisions that's best for all Manitobans.

In fact, in October of 2011, I'm sure that we'll see the change reflected as a result of those changes being brought forward by our side of the House. And, also, I know that Manitobans are listening. Manitobans are paying attention to what is going on within this Legislative Building. Yes, it's on the press every day. It's not something that we get the coverage on, either on the government or the opposition side, about the issues that we talk about in this House. But I think people are appalled of the fact that we've been debating Bill 31, the only bill that's been called as a result of this government's mismanagement, as a result of ministers trying to protect their salaries, as I said, from the 20 percent to the 40 percent reduction, which, quite frankly, they should take a cut because they have mismanaged their affairs.

What they've done is they've added another minister. It went from 18 to 19. No matter how you cut it, you're looking at half a million dollars no matter what you do to set up another ministry. Is that good management? I would think not. Is it reward for those that supported the current Premier (Mr. Selinger) of this province? Is it reward for their services or their commitment to see that he got elected? I would guess so. Unfortunately, that cost is being borne by each and every Manitoban within the province of Manitoba, not only today, but in the days and years to come.

I remember going back to the balanced budget legislation in 1999. In fact, Doer acknowledged that balanced budget legislation, introduced by the

Tories, was a good idea, one his party would keep, he said. We said all along that we're not going to change things that got it right, said Mr. Doer. That also included sticking with the Filmon government's debt retirement plan, which calls for annual payment of \$75 million. It was August the 19th, 1999.

Also, in 2007, this government—again, Mr. Doer placed balanced budgets as a priority in 2007. When referring to spending promises made by the parties, he stated they're going to be running deficits if they keep their election promises, God forbid. That was in the *Brandon Sun*, May 11th of 2007.

Also, the Doer government committed to abide by balanced budget legislation in 2008. In fact, in 2008, Selinger said ministers would take a penalty if they failed to balance the budget under the new rules. If you don't do that, balance the budget, you will take a penalty as prescribed in the legislation.

And we went through that just a couple of weeks ago in regards to the Estimates and those that was brought forward, and the ministers, in fact, did take their 20 percent cut. But Bill 31 eliminates that. It's another loophole for these ministers to, again, retain back to their salary rather than doing the right thing and taking the 20 percent additional cut, which they should.

* (16:20)

Bill 31, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, includes changes to the Manitoba balanced budget legislation. This legislation was amended in 2008 and again in 2009. The changes in 2008 were substantial by eliminating the Province's requirement to balance the core budget on an annual basis. The changes in 2009 reduced the mandatory debt repayment amounts for the 2009-2010 budget years.

The changes that are proposed in Bill 31 further erode the original balanced budget legislation. Under the bill there is no requirements for the Province to balance its books until 2014. That's a long time, Mr. Acting Speaker. Next year, as I said, is an election year in 2011. We can expect more spending. We can expect more mismanagement from this government. Unfortunately, it will be as bad as we said it was. In fact, it will be worse.

The changes that are also being—come as a result of the 40 percent pay cuts for the multiple deficit years as prescribed in the current legislation will return sooner than later as a result of that. In fact, the deficits that have been presented by this government

are deficits of choice. We have an opportunity to live within the budgetary means, of which we should be and ought to be living under in regards to the Province's financial situation—an ability to make those decisions based on sound financial information that's been provided by the staff, by the representation, by the members within this House, by every member in this Assembly, has a responsibility to ensure that money's been invested wisely, being spent wisely and not something that, just because it's the whim of the government to be able to do that into such a way that we'll be paying for it for years and years to come.

In fact, the recent data from Statistics Canada revealed that Manitoba's GDP declined by 0.2 percent in 2009. Manitoba has fared fairly well compared to other jurisdictions than the recent global economic turndown. The *Free Press* ran this story with the headline "Manitoba Weathered Recession Well," reports. In fact, adding billions of dollars to our debt and running projected deficits totally over 2 billion over five years and gutting balanced budget legislation are not appropriate reactions with a 0.2 percent decline in the GDP.

And, Mr. Acting Speaker, we know that on this side of the House, when we look at expenditures that are going to be coming forward, when we look at infrastructure, we know that a number of those initiatives are very important. It's a matter about prioritizing, a matter about what is going to be the best decisions for Manitobans. Those decisions are tough; they have to come through in a time that's going to be the best timing for all Manitobans.

We talk about the hydro line that we're talking about from time to time during question period and other debates in the House. And I know that that's one of the priorities that this government has decided to take on. It's going to cost us \$1.7 billion to go down the west side as opposed to the east side. Now I know the road on the east side is very important. It's very important for those people that have the opportunity to get the goods and services that we on this side of the lake enjoy, and we are in favour of that road going on the east side. However, that road will not take much more room with a hydro line down the same side. In fact, there's hydro lines there now. We invite the members to go out and have a look, the Cabinet to go out and have a look, at those lines that are already there. We know that there's an opportunity to save that \$1.7 billion, an opportunity to look at some of the infrastructure, some of the

debt that's going to have to be repaid, some of the services that are lacking.

And today I asked a question in regards to a stone that was in a bladder of one of my constituents that's not going to be taken out until July of this year. Those are very important services; we take those very seriously. We need to ensure the fact that whenever we're looking at any of these services, that we do them in a timely manner, and having a person such as a constituent that I was talking about earlier to wait until July is certainly not acceptable. I know that and I talked about it just briefly in question period. I know that I had kidney stone in July of 2008 and, I can tell you, it's something I wouldn't wish on anyone.

And, whenever we have a paraplegic such as my constituent within the town of Stonewall—and the quality of life that he suffers as a result of not only his condition, but to have to put up with pain that he's putting up with because of lack of decisions made on behalf of this government, unfortunately, is certainly unacceptable, certainly unacceptable. And I know that we have, from time to time, brought other issues forward that are very important to us within the government and making sure that those priorities do, in fact, get brought forward so the government does have an opportunity to make the rights right and the wrongs right as a result of the information that's being provided to them.

Also, Mr. Acting Speaker, I know that, you know, agriculture has certainly taken its hit in regards to the flooding that's been going on in the Interlake, and we've been encouraging the government to take those initiatives very seriously. I know the minister had drafted those recommendations on the ag recovery program and sent them in to the federal government. That was money well spent. That money's going to come back to, in fact, the province very, very quickly. That money will turn over and over and over again whenever we look at the investment into agriculture.

And I know that a number of producers have called me as a result of it, and that's because rain knows no boundaries. It don't know it stops at Armstrong. It don't know it stops at the city Perimeter. It don't know that it stopped at Virden or Melita, or lack of, in that case, but I can tell the minister how disappointed a number of those producers are and, whether they're looking at a case-by-case basis, or a non-rain area, or an area that's received way too much rain, I can assure the minister

those people were left out through no fault of their own, other than an oversight on this government, not once, but twice. Not twice, the current minister's predecessor did the same thing. It looked as if it was a great solution, but it didn't go quite far enough. Unfortunately, those producers are the ones that are going to be bearing the brunt of the cost of that mismanagement of this government.

Bill 31 doesn't help any more in regards to that because what Bill 31 does, it gives the minister the ability, because of his mismanagement, not to take a cut in pay. Well, I'll tell you what. Those producers took a cut in pay, substantial cut in pay, and we have done nothing about it. We have not shown the leadership that we needed to show from this government on those producers that were, once again, left out.

And I know that when we had our meetings—in fact, the government stands up and says what a great job the member from Interlake does in regards to advocating for his farmers. Well, he was at that meeting. We agreed unanimously with the Member of Parliament for the area, with the reeves and councils, and with the member from Interlake that we would all bring forward one recommendation for this government to look at. It got a deaf ear. Obviously, we didn't catch the attention of the minister. If we did, he didn't understand or maybe both or maybe none of the above.

I can tell you that those people in that region will not forget what happened. They will not forget what happened. Unfortunately, those producers feel they've been left out; they've been slighted. And I know the member, the minister will probably get up in debate later on and talk about his position in regards to this, and I know that the federal government has a role to play as well, but I know that the minister has to develop those programs and submit them to the government—federal government for their approval. And then the funding, of course, is a shared-cost basis.

And we also look at the AgriStability program, which there's also a number of issues there that need to be looked at as well, and I know that members on this side of the House have brought forward different ideas. In fact, I did it as I—when I was a critic in regards to some of the recommended changes that's being talked about. Also, we looked at the Manitoba Crop Insurance Program, and I know the member from Pembina brought forward several ideas in regards to the corn issue. I mean, it saved the

government tons of money. Unfortunately, it didn't help the producers. They opted to try to do the best thing and that was try and get the crop off, and they did. A number of the farmers did get that off.

* (16:30)

However, the farmer that chose to blow it back into the field and claim crop insurance was compensated. Those producers that decided to try and do the right thing and salvage what they could were penalized. They didn't receive a payment. So, unfortunately, those people are the losers in this particular situation. And, when farmers take so much pride in trying get their crop off, sometimes it's easier to take the easy road. Most of them don't. Most of them take the rough road, and that rough road was very costly to them in that particular situation.

Now I know that the government doesn't want to talk about Bill 31, least on the record. And I don't know if that's because they're ashamed of it, whether they're not really wanting to make sure that their voice is heard, or what they're trying to defend, or what they're trying to put forward other than protect their salaries.

So we on this side of the House are opposed to Bill 31. We certainly understand the fact that the government is only trying to protect their own best interest rather than that of the taxpayer within here of the province of Manitoba. So I know, as we move forward on different initiatives and bills as they are called, we're going to be in a position where we're going to be rushed. We're not going to have the opportunity to debate some of those bills. As a result, some of those bills will be carried over to the fall session, and it's going to leave us an awful lot of work in a very short time.

So, with that, I see my time is about up. I invite the government ministers, I invite the backbenchers, to step up to the plate, do the right thing. Call a vote, a free vote on this particular bill that will allow the members to voice their concerns, voice those concerns by their constituencies of which they've been elected to represent, and be accountable. Be accountable to the people that put them there to make those decisions based on the information that you've been provided, and let's study this thing. Let's make sure that we're doing the right thing by saving a minister's salary by 20 percent. When you make a mistake, it takes a man or a woman to admit that you've made a mistake. And let's not try and cover it

up in regards to voting and passing this particular bill.

So, with that, Mr. Acting Speaker, I see my time's up, but we on this side of the House will be voting against this bill and welcome input from all members of the House. Thank you.

Mr. Stuart Briese (St. Rose): Mr. Acting Speaker, I am pleased to rise today and speak on the Bill 31, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act. You know, I've been in this House now, I believe it's three days over three years, and the one constant in the three years that I've been here has been we're going to get the balanced budget legislation brought up every year.

If I stay for another couple of terms, I hope that isn't going to be the process we're going to follow forward all the way through that where it has to be opened up every year. And I don't think it is the process we're going to have to follow, because basically there is no balanced budget legislation after this year. It's gutted. It's gone. It's something of the past, so they've—the NDP government has certainly taken care of it.

You know, quite some time ago, the former premier of this province, Mr. Doer, said all along that they weren't going to change the things that the Tories had got right. And he was referring to the balanced budget legislation and the debt retirement plan that Filmon had put in place. And, you know, I don't know where things fell off the tracks for the NDP, but that was certainly the vision that the former premier had and, obviously, it's not the vision that the current Premier (Mr. Selinger) has.

You know, I quite often hear the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) and the First Minister respond across this House, when we talk about the deficits we're running, that we would cut this and we would cut that, and we would cut something else. You know, we would never have been in the position in the first place. We would have spent responsibly over the 10 years, the 10 good years, the 10 years that revenues were coming in in this province. We would have spent responsibly. We would have built up some reserves and been prepared for a downturn in the economy because inevitably there's going to be downturns in the economy and inevitably you're going to have to deal with them.

What's happening right now is because every cent was spent, all those transfer payments, all those increases in tax revenues, all those increases in user

fees, permit fees, licences, everywhere you could pull out extra money out of the populace, all those increases were spent the moment they came in. No thought for tomorrow. It's a little bit like the grasshopper and the ant. They fiddled when they should have been saving. And thank heaven that the next government in this province is going to be Conservative, and we're probably going to have to right that ship and get things—the spending in this province under control again, as we did after the Pawley government.

You know, Mr. Doer also placed balanced budgets as a priority as recently as 2007, and one of the things he stated was they're going to be running deficits if they keep their election promises, he said, God forbid, and nobody appears to have been listening to him.

Now, I'm sure that the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) looked at her tea leaves and she checked the tarot cards and referred to the alignment of the stars, and after all that, Mr. Acting Speaker, she went out and tried to construct a fairy tale. She said to herself, how can I mislead the people of Manitoba once more? And she came up with a plan. She came up with a plan that supposedly is a five-year plan that's supposedly going to eventually result in balanced budgets again after five years but no reference in there to paying down any of the accumulated debt, any gain on that.

You know, right now, in this province, we're paying over \$2 million a day in debt financing, rapidly headed for \$3 million a day. And it won't be very long and \$3 million a day becomes a billion dollars a year. Then you start to think about if we weren't paying all this money on debt, what could we be using it for? Well, you know, even at the inflated doubling of the price, the Wuskwatim power dam that's going in right now is 1.6 billion. That means in a year and a half you can pay for that whole Wuskwatim project with just the interest we're paying in this province.

You know, when you break it down at the \$2 million a day that it is right now, we could build a rec facility in every small town in this province in about 60 days, maybe 80 days, but we could do it very quickly. You know, a new stadium at \$200 million. Let's even go higher than what the proposal is. At \$200 million, a hundred days of the interest we pay in this province would pay for that stadium. A hundred days would have it free and clear. Instead, we're paying it on interest. We're

sending it somewhere else. It's being used elsewhere. It's shameful really, what's happening.

* (16:40)

There's no requirement in Bill 31 to budget—to balance the books anytime before 2014. Now, that's getting a long ways down the road with deficit budgets, increasing interest, and increasing debt, and that debt is getting to the point where it's almost uncontrollable. We see places like Saskatchewan, Alberta, with little or no debt—Alberta with none, Saskatchewan with some—but they certainly cut their debt down a lot over the last couple of years.

You know, I see the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Struthers) over here, and I keep hearing from him every time I mention Saskatchewan. I keep hearing from him that—should talk to the farmers out there and find out, because Saskatchewan did some cuts in their agricultural budget this year and they've got to be really upset. That's what I hear from him.

They're not all that upset. I do know the farmers out in Saskatchewan. They did have some changes made last year. They were told this year times are a little bit tough; we all got to play together. But these commitments are made, and, as we move along, these commitments are there that these things will happen. They're not very unhappy. They know that the commitment's there. What commitments are we hearing from the Minister of Agriculture right now? Very few, outside of the fact that they may hand out a little more frozen pickerel at Ste. Rose, but very few.

In 2008, you know, the Premier, Premier Selinger, said the balanced budget rules, he said, if you don't do that, balance the budget, we will take a penalty as prescribed in the legislation. Well, I look at the BITSA bill, and I see other, there's a penalty there right now, but they're going to take away half that penalty for the next four or five years. I think, and we've heard it said many times in here, I think when only, there's only 19 people in this province that have the ability to pass legislation to protect their own butts, and that—you know, it's something that they shouldn't even be considering doing, but they are.

You know, the deficit years will be excluded out of, in the four-year rolling average that used to be, determine ministerial pay reductions. And, you know, that phrase really caught me. I have a five-year rolling average in my AgriStability. I would really love to see the deficit years cut out of that

rolling average. Maybe AgriStability would actually work then if they took out my deficit years, but I can't do it. But in here the members of that, from that side of the House, they can do it. They can protect their own butts; they can protect their own money.

You know, as I said in opening, the NDP can't live within the rules, and so they just change—just change—the legislation and protect their own salaries. They're added over, since they came into power, they've added billions to the debt and the projected deficits over the next five years total another 2 billion. And this year I believe it was about 2.4 billion.

The other thing they're doing is sneaking this—well, it's not sneaking, because we caught it. But they're trying to put this salary protection through in the BITSA bill. It's not where it belongs. They should be opening the balanced budget legislation bill, and we should have full debate on it. It shouldn't be included in this bill.

One of the other things I've noticed in the BITSA bill, and I understand my—one of my colleagues did ask about it in Estimates—but there's a 1 percent tax going on the profits of credit unions, over \$400,000, I believe it is. And I understand the credit unions are quite upset about that. The minister was responding that they were certainly consulted with, but I kind of wonder what those consultations maybe looked like. It may have just been a situation where they got told what was going to happen.

You know, in the budget we saw cuts to almost everything that's rural in Manitoba. The Ag budget was cut by 4.2 percent; Conservation by 5.4; and Water Stewardship received a smaller cut. It—one out of every nine people in this province works in something—some industry that's related to agriculture or directly in the agriculture industry. It's an economic driver of this province, and it's been getting into more and more difficulty under this government. The government continues to underestimate the value of agriculture in this province, and we've seen it in many ways.

The ball was totally dropped on BSE when it first happened. Nothing significant was—we were told—nothing significant happened, and we were told at the time that it would be temporary. It would be over very quickly. We wouldn't have to worry about the border closures for very long. That certainly was a myth, but instead of getting out there and doing what a government should be doing and negotiating the trade agreements and getting the borders open

quickly again, we sat—the NDP government and the former minister of Agriculture sat and wrung her hands and wondered what might have went wrong and hoped that things would sort themselves out.

You know, the other thing that's happened is the former minister of Conservation, now the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Struthers), put in his hog moratorium, and what happens there—and I don't think that was very well thought out because it froze improvements and even small expansions that are sometimes necessary to keep an operation going. It's putting operations out of business, flat, stone cold out of business.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

The manure handling and mortalities regulations that will come into full effect in 2013 are putting all the small producers out of business. We've seen a dramatic drop in hog producers in this province, and that was a big economy here. We talk about Manitoba Hydro. We talk about a number of things and—actually, the hog industry in this province employed more people, created more economic activity than Manitoba Hydro does. It's hard to maybe get your head around that, but that's exactly as it is.

What we see—and some of it's legitimate and some of it is very questionable—what we see is environmentalism by convenience and, when we're using environmentalism and we're using it in Manitoba, we're using it beyond Manitoba as a new way of pushing social engineering and redistribution of wealth, and that's where we're headed with carbon taxes and things. It's redistribution of wealth, not necessary, but that's the direction we're headed.

You know, I've often referred to 1999 and the wet conditions in the southwest corner of this province and how Premier Filmon at that time flowed \$50 an acre very quickly out to farmers. Did it probably within two to three weeks after the seeding deadline, the money flowed.

We've had some very wet conditions in the Interlake the last couple of years. Finally, a little bit of money went out there after two years. It took two years to get it to happen. You know, there are so many ways that could have made things a little better out there, and they weren't done and they were ignored. And when it was finally happened, it was \$15 an acre.

* (16:50)

Now, the members opposite are going to claim that, oh, no, they got \$50 out of the wet conditions for last year and \$50 this year—the \$50 an acre in '99 that Filmon flowed when government revenues weren't very good and the buying power of that \$50,000 was a major, major commitment. I was at the meeting where he made that announcement, and I was surprised at what they were rolling out.

And we got some problems in agriculture a lot of the time, but, you know, it's been a fairly tough time the last few years, and what does this government do in this budget and in this BITSA bill? They add a tax on quota, a tax on quota, which is a tax on food, tax on milk, tax on eggs, tax on chicken because, believe me, the producers aren't going to be paying it. It's going to go on the food end of things.

What else'd they do? They put on a 30-cent-an-acre excess moisture premium, another 30 cents an acre that farmers in tough conditions are having trouble paying. They've raised the Crown land rents, and you know what's really happening out there? This government just simply is not looking after young farmers, has no vision, no plan to help young farmers. But what's even worse, they're not listening to old farmers. And, you know, guys that have been there for 40 years probably have some insights that probably would be fairly useful, and I'm referring to myself when I say that.

You know the—I referred a little earlier to Manitoba Hydro, and I do want to touch on some of the things related to Manitoba Hydro that I find, at the very least, somewhat alarming. You know, there's been this ongoing debate about east side, west side, Mr. Speaker, and it doesn't—we agree totally that we need a new hydro line, a Bipole III. We agree that it needs separation from Bipole I and Bipole II for security reasons, but we don't agree that it should go 450 kilometres further, require 1,300 more towers, and go through the heavier populated area of the province and privately owned land. On the east side, that line can go through Crown land pretty well all the way from north to south, shorter route, lot less line loss simply because of the shorter route, less maintenance because you've got 1,300 less towers, so there's a lot less maintenance.

And, you know, when you take a look at some of these things, Jim Collison, in a letter to the *Winnipeg Free Press*, made statements like, in other words, the impact of a road on the boreal forest is many times greater than a power line. When you blast through the forest, the boreal forest, to build a road, you are

creating animal corridors. You are increasing road kills. You're producing easier access for hunters, and predators have new routes to prey on those animals.

We hear mixed stories from the other side of the House. We hear stories about the pristine wilderness, but, then, in the next breath, we hear things about tourism and mining. What became of the pristine wilderness?

Jim Collison, by the way, is a strategic energy and economy environmental consultant. He headed Parks Canada for five years and, for two terms, he was president of the UNESCO World Heritage site committee. I think he's probably somewhat of an authority on UNESCO World Heritage sites.

We hear over and over again about how huge our boreal forest area is, and the part from Lake Winnipeg east to the Ontario border is less than, well, it's 0.045 percent of all of Canada's boreal forest. We get told in here what a huge expanse this is every day, but it doesn't appear that it's quite as huge as it is in some people's minds.

Another thing Collison said was the potential for a World Heritage site remains unaffected with careful site selection for the power line. He referred to the west side, and the west side means, in all likelihood, coming right through my constituency, close to Lake Manitoba, which is the staging area for some 200 species of waterfowl. And there's going to be a tremendous impact on them with the hydro line going through their flyway. That staging area is all the way from the Delta Marsh north to The Pas.

But I just wonder how this government can totally ignore things like, people like Jim Collison. They totally ignore Manitoba Hydro employees themselves. I have not yet talked to one single Hydro employee that says the west-side line is a good idea, and I ask everyone I meet. Everyone, whether they're presently with Hydro or whether they're retired, I ask them if they agree with it. And every single one of them says no—everyone, linemen, vice-presidents, even.

You know, the other thing that happens is, on this whole issue is the Minister responsible for Hydro goes to great lengths to refer to the Farlinger report. So does the First Minister. They completely

missed some of the other things that the Farlinger report says. Farlinger said west side routing will cross not only the boreal shield but also boreal plains eco zone. This latter eco zone is considered to be highly impacted and at greater risk, as less than 15 percent remains in large, intact areas. It's at greater risk than the boreal forest on the east side.

This region has greater urgency for protection of ecological integrity than the vaster boreal shield forest of the east side. However, this forest does not have the same profile and emotional appeal as the east side. So we're talking about emotional appeal rather than what's best here. A more detailed discussion of the potential UNESCO World Heritage site is provided below, but some references suggest that, if 50 percent or more of the region's land is given protective status—the integrity is protected, so 50 percent. The hydro line is a very small impact on that whole thing.

You know, the other thing they say is it would set us back if we shifted now to the east side. That's total hogwash. The east side's been studied for 15 or 20 years. They have the route picked out on the east side. They're just not being allowed to use it. We have letters on file from six retired university engineering professors, the guys that teach the engineers that are going to work on this line, or taught them, saying that it's absolutely ludicrous to go the way they want to go here.

We watch things like, we are going to through these—the heavier agricultural land. We're going to go right through the irrigation area, the aerial spray area. *[interjection]* You're not growing potatoes in Springfield—and you're not, they're not irrigating potatoes in Springfield, I stand corrected. You are growing potatoes; you're not irrigating them in Springfield.

And there is already a right of way for Manitoba Hydro through Springfield, I might add—

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter's again before the House, the honourable member for Ste. Rose will have three minutes remaining.

The time now being—order. The time now being 5 p.m., the House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 25, 2010

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