

**First Session - Fortieth Legislature**  
of the  
**Legislative Assembly of Manitoba**  
**DEBATES**  
and  
**PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report**  
**(Hansard)**

*Published under the  
authority of  
The Honourable Daryl Reid  
Speaker*

**MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
**Fortieth Legislature**

<b>Member</b>	<b>Constituency</b>	<b>Political Affiliation</b>
ALLAN, Nancy, Hon.	St. Vital	NDP
ALLUM, James	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	NDP
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	NDP
BLADY, Sharon	Kirkfield Park	NDP
BRAUN, Erna	Rossmere	NDP
BRIESE, Stuart	Agassiz	PC
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	NDP
CHIEF, Kevin, Hon.	Point Douglas	NDP
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	NDP
CROTHERS, Deanne	St. James	NDP
CULLEN, Cliff	Spruce Woods	PC
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	NDP
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	PC
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FRIESEN, Cameron	Morden-Winkler	PC
GAUDREAU, Dave	St. Norbert	NDP
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Liberal
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	PC
GRAYDON, Cliff	Emerson	PC
HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
HOWARD, Jennifer, Hon.	Fort Rouge	NDP
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Richmond	NDP
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	NDP
KOSTYSHYN, Ron, Hon.	Swan River	NDP
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	Dawson Trail	NDP
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	NDP
MAGUIRE, Larry	Arthur-Virden	PC
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor, Hon.	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
McFADYEN, Hugh	Fort Whyte	PC
MELNICK, Christine, Hon.	Riel	NDP
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	PC
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	NDP
OSWALD, Theresa, Hon.	Seine River	NDP
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Midland	PC
PETTERSEN, Clarence	Flin Flon	NDP
REID, Daryl, Hon.	Transcona	NDP
ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Kewatinook	NDP
RONDEAU, Jim, Hon.	Assiniboia	NDP
ROWAT, Leanne	Riding Mountain	PC
SARAN, Mohinder	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	St. Paul	PC
SELBY, Erin, Hon.	Southdale	NDP
SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Verendrye	PC
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	PC
STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon.	Dauphin	NDP
SWAN, Andrew, Hon.	Minto	NDP
TAILLIEU, Mavis	Morris	PC
WHITEHEAD, Frank	The Pas	NDP
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WIGHT, Melanie	Burrows	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, April 24, 2012

*The House met at 1:30 p.m.*

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

Good afternoon. Please be seated.

### ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

#### Bill 9—The Public Schools Amendment Act (Community Use of Schools)

**Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Education):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald), that Bill 9, The Public Schools Amendment Act (Community Use of Schools); Loi modifiant la Loi sur les écoles publiques (utilisation communautaire des écoles), be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Ms. Allan:** The Public Schools Act is amended to require school boards to establish community use policies for school facilities when the facilities are not being used by pupils. A community use policy must set out the terms and conditions that apply when members of the community use the school facilities. Each school division and district must maintain a copy of its policy and application form and the name and contact information of its community use co-ordinator on a website that is open to the public.

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

#### Bill 211—The Increased Transparency and Accountability Act (Various Acts Amended)

**Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo):** Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu), that Bill 211, The Increased Transparency and Accountability Act (Various Acts

Amended); Loi sur la transparence et la responsabilité (modification de diverses dispositions législatives), be now read for a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Mrs. Stefanson:** This bill amends The Balanced Budget, Fiscal Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act.

The budget tabled in the Legislative Assembly must include a comparison of each fee amount charged to the public for the current fiscal year and the previous fiscal year, and an itemization of the increase in total revenue resulting from those increased fee amounts, and an itemization of each revenue increase resulting from an expansion of the tax base.

This bill also amends The Financial Administration Act and The Public Sector Compensation Disclosure Act. The information required to be disclosed by a public sector body under The Public Sector Compensation Disclosure Act must be included in the government's public accounts. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### Bill 10—The Securities Amendment Act

**Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald), that Bill 10, The Securities Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur les valeurs mobilières, be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Mr. Struthers:** I'm pleased to table Bill 10, the security amendments—Securities Amendment Act. These proposed amendments will ensure Manitoba's rules can adapt to the changing markets, function seamlessly with other provinces and maintain protection for investors.

It is important that Manitoba and all provinces continue their work to ensure Canada's national securities system, the passport system, remains one of the best and most effective in the world.

This legislation allows Manitoba to do its part to ensure that there is appropriate oversight of the securities sector. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Further bills? Seeing none, we'll move to petitions.

### PETITIONS

#### Mount Agassiz Ski Area

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

In addition, a thriving rural economy 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 B. Rasmussen, M. Hunter, R. Eastoe and many, many other fine Manitobans.

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

#### PR 227 Bridge

**Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie):** I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background for this petition is as follows:

The bridge on Provincial Road 227 was used by both heavy truck traffic and by agricultural producers back and forth to their fields.

During the flood of 2011, the heavy use of the Portage Diversion resulted in damage to this bridge.

Due to irreparable damages to the structure, it was removed in February 2012, leading to detours and associated challenges.

\* (13:40)

Because there is no natural flow in the Portage Diversion, water is only present when the provincial government opens the Portage Diversion gates.

The provincial government has no set timeline for the bridge's replacement, nor has it indicated plans to establish a temporary bridge.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to recognize the safety concerns and the negative socio-economic impact caused by the loss of the bridge and to consider establishing a low-level crossing for farm machinery to cross the Portage Diversion a half mile north of Provincial Road 227.

Signed by C. Finnie, J. Finnie, K. Yuill and many others, fine Manitobans.

Thank you.

#### Cellular Phone Service in Southeastern Manitoba

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

And these are the reasons for the petition:

During early October 2011, parts of southeastern Manitoba were hard hit by wildfires. Thanks to the swift action of provincial and municipal officials, including 27 different fire departments and

countless volunteers, no lives were lost and property damage was limited.

However, the fight against the wildfires reinforced the shortcomings with communication system in the region, specifically the gaps in cellular phone service.

These gaps made it difficult to co-ordinate firefighting efforts and to notify the people that they had to be evacuated. The situation would—also would have made it difficult for people to call for immediate medical assistance if it had been required.

Local governments, businesses, industries and area residents have for years sought a solution to this very serious communication challenge.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the appropriate provincial government departments to consider working with all stakeholders to develop a strategy to swiftly address the serious challenges posed by limited cell service in southeastern Manitoba in order to ensure that people and property can be better protected in the future.

And this petition is signed by L. Musick, S. Plaziw and B. Preteau and many, many more fine Manitobans.

**Mr. Speaker:** Any further petitions?

## COMMITTEE REPORTS

### Standing Committee on Crown Corporations Fourth Report

**Mr. Bidhu Jha (Chairperson):** I wish to present the Fourth Report of the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations.

**Madam Clerk (Patricia Chaychuk):** Your Standing Committee on Crown Corporations presents the following—

**Mr. Speaker:** Dispense? Dispense.

*Your Standing Committee on CROWN CORPORATIONS presents the following as its Fourth Report.*

### Meetings

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

- April 4, 2011 (5th Session – 39th Legislature)
- April 23, 2012

### Matters under Consideration

- *The Annual Report of the Manitoba Lotteries Corporation for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010*
- *The Annual Report of the Manitoba Lotteries Corporation for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2011*

### Committee Membership

*Committee membership for the April 4, 2011 meeting:*

- *Hon. Mr. ASHTON*
- *Ms. BLADY*
- *Mr. BOROTSIK*
- *Mr. GRAYDON*
- *Mr. MARTINDALE*
- *Mr. PEDERSEN*
- *Mr. REID (Chairperson)*
- *Mrs. ROWAT*
- *Mr. SARAN (Vice-Chairperson)*
- *Mr. WHITEHEAD*
- *Mr. WIEBE*

*Committee membership for the April 23, 2012 meeting:*

- *Mr. ALTEMEYER*
- *Hon. Mr. ASHTON*
- *Mr. BRIESE*
- *Mr. EWASKO*
- *Mr. GRAYDON*
- *Mr. JHA (Chairperson)*
- *Mr. NEVAKSHONOFF*
- *Hon. Ms. SELBY*
- *Mrs. STEFANSON*
- *Hon. Mr. SWAN*
- *Mr. WIEBE*

*Your Committee elected Mr. Wiebe as the Vice-Chairperson at the April 23, 2012 meeting.*

### Officials Speaking on Record

*Officials Speaking on Record at the April 4, 2011 meeting:*

- *Winston Hodgins, MLC President & Chief Executive Officer*

*Officials Speaking on Record at the April 23, 2012 meeting:*

- *Winston Hodgins, MLC President & Chief Executive Officer*
- *Bev Mehmel, MLC Director Corporate Social Responsibility*

### **Report Considered and Passed**

*Your Committee considered and passed the following report as presented:*

- *The Annual Report of the Manitoba Lotteries Corporation for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010*

### **Report Considered but not Passed**

*Your Committee considered the following report but did not pass it:*

*The Annual Report of the Manitoba Lotteries Corporation for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2011*

**Mr. Jha:** I move, seconded by the honourable member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe), that the report of the committee be received.

**Motion agreed to.**

### **TABLING OF REPORTS**

**Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** I am pleased to table the following report: the 2010-2011 annual report for the Vehicle Impoundment Registry.

**Mr. Speaker:** Prior to—pardon me, ministerial statements. Seeing none.

### **Introduction of Guests**

**Mr. Speaker:** Prior to oral questions, I wish to draw to the attention of all honourable members where we have seated in our public gallery from HBNI-ITV System out of Fairholme School 30 grade 9 students under the direction of Evelyn Maendel. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart).

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

And also in the public gallery, I wish to draw members' attention to the students—22 grade 4 students from Winnipeg Mennonite Elementary School under the direction of Mr. Wes Krahn. This

constituent group is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Housing and Community Development (Ms. Irvin-Ross).

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

### **ORAL QUESTIONS**

#### **Budget**

#### **School Property Taxes for Seniors and Farmers**

**Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Mr. Speaker, back in September when the Premier needed the votes of Manitobans, he made a promise where he said seniors and farmers will pay no school taxes. Seniors and farmers not only are not paying no school taxes; their school taxes have gone up.

Why did he break his promise?

**Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier):** Mr. Speaker, before I start, I'd just like to acknowledge the members of the Hutterite colonies in the gallery today. They were great volunteers during the flood and made a real difference for many communities in the service they provided.

So—and Mr. Speaker, we did say that we would keep Manitoba an affordable place to live, which we have accomplished again in this budget. We increased the property tax credit for senior citizens to \$1,025. We provided \$25 million to public schools for their budgets and an additional \$4 million to reduce class size in schools, and education taxes in Manitoba have seen the lowest increase of any province in Canada over the last decade.

**Mr. McFadyen:** Well, the Premier is bragging about an increase in school property taxes today, now that he doesn't need the vote of Manitobans. Back when he needed their vote, here's what he said, and I quote: Seniors and farmers will pay no school taxes. End of quote. This is what the NDP leader said when he needed their votes. Now that he doesn't need them, Mr. Speaker, he's raising their taxes by his own admission.

Will he acknowledge today, Mr. Speaker, he just can't be trusted?

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

We did make the commitment to reduce taxes for farmers. We started out at 20 per cent; we have gone to a reduction for farmland of up to 80 per cent on school taxes, and we said we would take it to

100 per cent during this term of office, which is what we intend to do.

With respect to senior citizens, when the—when we—when the members opposite were in office, school taxes went up 70 per cent and the property tax credit went down to \$250. We have kept school taxes the lowest in the country over the last 10 years, and the property tax credit has gone up to \$700 for everybody who owns a home and \$1,025 for senior citizens.

We will compare our record to their record any day, any year, any time of the week.

**Mr. McFadyen:** The problem, Mr. Speaker, is that what he is saying today in April of 2012 in the House is absolutely different from what he said in September of 2011, and I'll table the news release that he put out. It's got his picture on the top; it's a nice photo. It refers to Today's NDP and it says in the opening sentence, seniors and farmers will pay no school taxes, the NDP leader announced today.

I want to ask the Premier: Is this the same Premier in this news release as the one standing here today in the House?

**Mr. Selinger:** Mr. Speaker, I stand here proudly before you today to say that we will eliminate school taxes on farmland as we said we would do. We're at 80 per cent now. And we will eliminate school taxes for seniors during this term in office, before we go back to the people for a renewed mandate.

That's what we committed to; that's what we will deliver on. And we will do it in the context of retaining the lowest increase in taxes across the country over the last decade, in contrast to when the members of—opposite were in office and school taxes went up 70 per cent and the property tax credit went down.

Our property tax credit has gone up to \$700, and our school taxes have remained the lowest in the country. We will deliver on the commitments we made. Manitobans can count on it.

### **Budget**

#### **Government Record on Election Promises**

**Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet):** Listening from the Premier across the House, I—unfortunately, he's not getting to the answer of the question that we're asking.

Mr. Speaker, September 18th, 2011, the Premier promised that seniors will pay no school taxes on

their property taxes. Seven months later, the Premier has introduced a budget that hurts families, hurts seniors, hurts volunteers and hurts those Manitobans who can least afford to pay more.

Will the Premier acknowledge today that the budget that he introduced once again goes back on the promises he made during the election just seven months ago?

\* (13:50)

**Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier):** Actually, Mr. Speaker, we made it very clear that during this term in office we would eliminate seniors' taxes for schools on their homes, and we will do that. And we increased the property tax credit to \$1,025 for senior citizens of Manitoba this year, the highest property tax credit for seniors for education we have ever seen in the history of the province.

The education property tax credit for homeowners, the highest we have ever seen in the history of this province. And we have kept property taxes over the last decade the lowest in the country.

We will deliver on these commitments. The members opposite know it. They are trying to mislead the public as they have done so many times before.

#### **School Property Taxes for Seniors**

**Mr. Ewasko:** Our seniors in Manitoba will not be fooled by this government. They know that this government has not kept their promises.

The fact of the matter is that the number provided by this Premier is a far cry from the \$35 million per year that they've already promised. Seniors were promised and expected and they're still expecting the \$35 million in education property tax relief from this budget. They received no relief related to this promise.

Will this First Minister admit he broke his promise and tell Manitoba seniors when they will see the \$35 million in savings each and every year, Mr. Speaker?

**Mr. Selinger:** Mr. Speaker, it's very clear the member did not hear the previous answers I gave to the question. The education property tax credit went up to \$1,025, the highest it has ever been in the province, and we will continue along this path until we eliminate property taxes for seniors. We will do it during this term of office.

In addition, we have also kept school taxes among the lowest in the country over the last decade. And, as well, Mr. Speaker, all homeowners have seen their property tax credit rise to the highest level it has ever been in Manitoba: \$700.

So, as we move through this term in office, we will honour this commitment, as we have in the past. And, with respect to farmers, we started out at a 20 per cent property tax credit for education; that has now risen to over 80 per cent. We have not only exceeded what we have promised in the past, but we have delivered on it. And we will do so again in this term in office. The members opposite and Manitobans could count on it.

### **Property Insurance Policy Tax**

**Mr. Ewasko:** According to the Premier, I can hear absolutely, really well, thank you. He just can't, unfortunately, hear the question.

Mr. Speaker, Manitobans and seniors deserve to be told the truth. Instead of making it easier for seniors to afford their homes by increasing the education property tax credit, this government makes it more expensive by increasing the taxes on property insurance.

When will this government apologize for telling Manitobans one thing before the election and doing something completely different afterwards?

**Mr. Selinger:** Mr. Speaker, it is very clear the member opposite did not hear my previous answer.

The property tax credit for senior citizens went up to \$1,025 this year, the highest it has ever been in the country. In addition, this budget increased the personal exemption for all Manitobans, including seniors, by \$250. In addition, this budget increased the exemption for spouses by \$250. And, in addition, this budget increased the exemption for dependants by \$250.

The members opposite like to ignore the tax breaks we've offered to Manitobans because they don't want to accept the truth that we are keeping Manitoba affordable, not only for seniors but for all Manitobans.

### **Budget Farmland School Tax Rebate**

**Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland):** On September 18, 2011, the NDP promised they would save seniors a total of \$35 million every year by eliminating the school tax on seniors. They would also save farmers

\$14 million every year by eliminating the school tax on farmland. Yet another promise made, yet another promise broken.

The April 17th budget did not mention farmland school tax rebates. Despite promises made to eliminate school tax rebates, this government has chosen to continue to unfairly tax agricultural land to pay for the cost of education.

Mr. Speaker, why did this government break yet another promise to hard-working Manitobans?

**Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance):** Mr. Speaker, it's clear—it's very clear to farmers in the Midland constituency that when they're—they were in government, when their representative was on this side of the House, they had every opportunity to provide tax credits and tax breaks to the farm community and they blew it.

Those same farmers in the Midland constituency today, in April of 2012, can look at this budget and they can say this government is supporting them in a number of different ways, including the commitments that we've made to continue to move from a 20 per cent level up to an 80 per cent level in terms of these tax credits. The facts are very obvious for the farmer who farms in Midland that this government is much better for them than what that government used to be.

**Mr. Pedersen:** Mr. farm—Mr. Speaker—I'm getting my farmers and my speakers mixed up here. But you're welcome to come and be a farmer in Midland any day.

This NDP government promised to save farmers \$14 million every year by eliminating the school tax on farmland, yet school divisions across the province have been forced to raise property taxes to make up for less revenue coming from the Province. This additional tax load places a disproportionate load on farmland.

Mr. Speaker, why does this government continue to unfairly tax farmland to cover their inability to manage their own finances?

**Mr. Struthers:** Again, as the Premier (Mr. Selinger) has pointed out several times in this question period, Mr. Speaker, he has pointed out several times that the situation when the member for Midland's party had its opportunity to govern in this province, that when they had their chance, they had a 20 per cent commitment, a 20 per cent level in terms of a tax credit that benefited his constituents in Midland.

What's very clear is that our government has built from there upwards, Mr. Speaker. That means that there are more benefits for farmers in his constituency now than there was when they had their chance to govern. We're going to continue that kind of commitment to farmers to make it easier for farmers to seed and to harvest and to contribute to our provincial economy. We're going to show that support, not just in the area of tax credits but in support for the infrastructure that they need to get their product to market, and we're going to show that support in making sure that farmers are given a break and given a chance to be successful in—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please.

**Mr. Pedersen:** Mr. Speaker, the NDP promised to save farmers \$14 million every year by eliminating the school tax on farmland. I would remind this government that the school tax rebate is farmers' own money. This tax is paid by the farm community to the school divisions every year, only to be returned after applying to the Province for a rebate.

Mr. Speaker, when will this government actually fulfill its \$14-million commitment to farmers? How many years will they have to wait, or will it ever happen?

**Mr. Struthers:** Well, again, Mr. Speaker, it's very clear that 80 per cent of the tax credit we provide to the farm community today, that's a whole lot better than what members opposite can point to in terms of the 20 per cent that we inherited when we became government. That's not commitment to the Manitoba farmer; this is commitment to the Manitoba farmer.

### **Bill 211 Government Support**

**Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo):** It was my pleasure earlier to introduce Bill 211, The Increased Transparency and Accountability Act, to introduce this bill as part of our five-point alternative plan to the NDP's tax hikes and broken promises to Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 211 makes sure all Manitobans know what tax and user fee increases are by mandating the budget papers to contain a schedule that breaks out all user fees—fee increases and tax-base expansions.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Finance: Will he support more transparency in the budget process in Manitoba by supporting Bill 211?

\* (14:00)

**Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance):** First of all, Mr. Speaker, we don't need to take lectures on transparency and accountability from a group of people who, when they were in government, had one set of books that sat on top of the desk and then another set of books that were hidden underneath the desk. That's not being transparent. That's not being accountable. That—that's their history. It's awfully hard to shake that history, isn't it?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** In Budget 2012, the NDP broke their promise by raising taxes by \$148 million for Manitobans. User fees are going up \$114 million or 22 per cent from last year. Birth, death and marriage fees are going up, child abuse registry checks are going up, land titles documentation fees are going up, to name just a few, Mr. Speaker.

The problem, Mr. Speaker, aside from an NDP government breaking its promise to Manitobans, is that none of these fees were announced in the budget speech or outlined on a fee-by-fee basis in the budget. Will this—what this bill calls for is exactly that.

Will the Minister of Finance support transparency in the budget process in Manitoba and support Bill 211, yes or no?

**Mr. Struthers:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the—our approach has been very clear. Our commitments have been very clear. They've been transparent. We don't mind being held to account by the people of Manitoba.

We have a balanced approach to coming back into balance in 2014 that involves controlling expenditures and that involves fair and modest increases on the revenue side.

And, Mr. Speaker, you know, if they would only do their homework, they would know that in the lock-up pre to the budget, we handed to people in the lock-up, in the media, a list of the fees in a number of different departments that were contained in the budgets.

So I would ask the—my critic across the way to do her homework and get her facts straight before she comes in the House.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Mr. Speaker, when the government moved to summary budgets, they didn't include the listing of remuneration over \$50,000 of Crown corporations and government reporting entities in volume 2 of the Public Accounts book. This should have been done, but it has yet to happen. Bill 211

calls on the government to ensure that this does happen.

Will he support 211—Bill 211 that creates more transparency and accountability for Manitobans? Will he support this bill? If not, why not? What is he trying to hide from Manitobans?

**Mr. Struthers:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad she's worked her way up to volume 2. I can't wait till she gets to volume 4 where she can answer her own question. It's already contained there. It is contained there, the information that she seeks.

But, Mr. Speaker, I want to make it clear—I want to be clear. If the members opposite—if members opposite have some advice and they have some suggestions on how to make the budget process better or actual content of the budget, if they have some ideas, I'm more than willing to sit and talk with them about that. It's been very clear. We've been very transparent at our commitments. We're open to listening to ideas from wherever they come from. So I look forward to that. If they come up with something good, I'm all ears.

#### **Budget Impact on Small Business**

**Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach):** Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to hear the Minister of Finance is open to ideas. I have one for him.

Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, I received an email from Dave Bedard, who is the owner of Boundary Lumber, with his offices right here in Winnipeg, and I'm happy to share that correspondence with the government. Mr. Bedard states that his company is one of the few remaining businesses in the forest products industry still operating in Manitoba, and with the new sales tax on insurance he's wondering why he even bothers. He states that his company was blindsided by the unexpected \$2,000 cost he will now pay on his insurance, and he says, at this rate we're not going to be able to keep running.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier acknowledged that he broke his promise when it came to taxes. I wonder what he says to the owner of Boundary Lumber who might not survive his government.

**Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier):** Mr. Speaker, for all businesses in Manitoba, they have zero taxes on the first \$400,000 of their income, which is the lowest tax rate in Canada. And for income over that, when the Conservatives were in office, the corporate tax

rate was 17 per cent; under this government, the corporate tax rate is 12 per cent.

And when the members opposite were in office, they had a killer capital tax on businesses. That capital tax is a hundred per cent eliminated under this government. No business in Manitoba pays capital tax anymore in this province.

No capital tax, a third reduction in the corporate taxes, and zero small business tax. That's what we say to the member of Steinbach. I hope he gets back to the member that wrote him the letter and gives him accurate information for a change.

**Mr. Goertzen:** This was a business owner who said he might go out of business because of this budget, and that is the answer. You know, Mr. Bedard is not alone.

Duncan Waugh, the president of Waugh's Woods Limited in The Pas—and I hope the member for The Pas (Mr. Whitehead) is listening—he's also written me and he said: The NDP's latest cash grab is significant enough that it may well be the last straw in a very large pile; those of us still operating are seriously questioning why we keep trying.

Both Mr. Bedard and Mr. Waugh, they're entrepreneurs. They go to work every day and they employ people. They work hard. They earn their money the old-fashioned way, and now this government just wants to go along and take it. They've said they might not survive because of your budget, sir.

What do you have to say for them—to them other than empty, harsh rhetoric?

**Mr. Selinger:** To all businesses in Manitoba, what we can say for sure is their tax burden is less under this government than it was under that government, and that is for sure.

It's less in several ways. First of all, the capital tax. First of all, the capital tax has been entirely eliminated; that's a \$120-million benefit to businesses. The corporate tax rate has been reduced from 17 to 12 per cent—there's never been a corporate tax reduction in the history of Manitoba of that magnitude—done under this government; no movement under the government of the members opposite when they were in government. And the small business tax rate has been reduced to zero per cent in Manitoba, unique in the country.

When businesses struggle, we have delivered tax relief. We will continue to find ways to make sure Manitoba's businesses are competitive.

And just this morning—just this morning—we announced another tax break for any business which is hiring an apprentice. Their tax credit for hiring an apprentice will double at the top end from \$2,500 to \$5,000 in Manitoba.

**Mr. Goertzen:** I can't believe that every member of the government would clap about a business owner who says he might go out of business because of this budget, every one of them.

Mr. Bedard said that if his business fails as a result of the most recent tax grab, he and his employees will be able to look themselves in the mirror and know that they've tried their best, but he says that members of this government would not be able to do the same.

These are two business owners who came here and who said they want this government to keep their promise. They want this government to ensure that they hold up to their word when they said they wouldn't raise taxes, and they've sounded the alarm and said they might go out of business. Their employees might not have jobs, and this Premier and every member of that government clapped because those businesses might go out of business.

I want to ask this Premier on behalf of those business owners: Will you reverse your decision and please help save these businesses, sir?

**Mr. Selinger:** Yes, and the member opposite will know, unlike the members opposite that wanted to take the hydro rates for these businesses to full market value and increase them by 40 per cent, we refused to do that, Mr. Speaker, and for any business in rural Manitoba, we gave them the same rate as Winnipeggers get, so all Manitobans are better off on their hydro rates.

We have given an affordability pledge to Manitobans in this budget, that they will have the lowest home heating, lowest gas tax and lowest auto insurance rates. And small businesses have zero taxation, the best rate in the country, and we have worked with at least one of the members—businesses that the member has mentioned in his question on market development.

The forestry sector in Manitoba, like everywhere in Canada, has struggled, but in Manitoba the difference has been we have worked with the

forestry sector to preserve jobs and to create opportunities, because the forestry sector will rebound. It will rebound and we will work with them every step of the way, unlike members opposite that taxed them at least 100 per cent more on small business taxes and 100 per cent more on the cap.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. Order. Order. Order, please. Order, please. It's becoming increasingly difficult for me to hear the questions that are posed and the response to the question. I'm asking for the co-operation of all honourable members. Please, just bring the tone down a little bit so I can allow the members that—who have the floor to provide their comments.

\*(14:10)

### **Regional Health Authorities Cost Savings of Amalgamation**

**Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood):** The NDP announced in this budget that 11 RHAs will soon become five and supposedly save taxpayers \$10 million over three years. However, this isn't the first time we've heard the NDP make this sort of claim.

In 2000, the member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell), who was Education minister at the time, said that the school division amalgamation would save \$10 million. It didn't save any money. In fact, school division administrative costs have grown 36 per cent since then. So they've promised this before.

So, can the Minister of Health tell us: Why should we believe the government now?

**Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health):** I thank the member for the question, and I want to let her know and, indeed, all members of the House know, that as we are continuing on the journey of mergers of regional health authorities, I'm pleased to inform the House that 11 out of 11 regional health authority boards, as of this morning, have passed a motion agreeing to the mergers. So they're doing this voluntarily.

Mr. Speaker, I'm informed, of course, that these boards are moving forward with the process for the mergers, because what they care about—indeed, what we care about on this side of the House—is ensuring that patient care is at the centre of this discussion and that there aren't any undue anxieties happening as a result of this.

We know that we will be trimming between 30 to 40 executive positions through these mergers,

and we believe, over three years, that \$10 million isn't inaccurate target for savings.

**Mrs. Driedger:** I guess we'll believe it when we see it, Mr. Speaker.

Last year, RHA admin costs soared to \$159 million, which is \$15 million higher than the year before.

So can the Minister of Health tell us: Why should Manitobans believe that her government is now going to reduce administrative costs with this merger when they have been totally unable to control their spending for the last 12 years?

**Ms. Oswald:** Dispensing, of course, with the obvious ironies of the member from the party who created 13 RHAs, two in Winnipeg, asking me a question about mergers—you know, so much material, so little time, Mr. Speaker—I can tell the member opposite that, indeed, her facts aren't borne out by the experts in this field. TD Economics very recently cited the fact that Manitoba is actually fourth lowest when it comes to increases in health spending. CIHI ranks us now among the lowest in the country for administrative costs.

We know that Manitobans, Mr. Speaker, want very precious dollars, during uncertain economic times, to go to the front line where people are going to get care at the bedside. That's our commitment. We're reducing the number of RHAs while we're hiring nurses. They created 13 while they slashed—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. Order, please.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Mr. Speaker, with the school division amalgamation, they said they were going to save \$10 million. We have not seen that, so we are, I think, rightfully skeptical about what this minister is going to accomplish, especially her belief in the fact that it's going to happen.

She allowed a rooftop patio to be built on top of an RHA building. So, so much for her belief in the fact that admin costs are going to go down. She has done nothing in 12 years to bring down admin costs, and now, across Manitoba, they have soared to \$159 million a year.

So, Mr. Speaker, will this minister finally admit that this promise is nothing more than a smokescreen by this government to try to deflect from their broken promise in the last election?

**Ms. Oswald:** The facts simply don't bear out what the member opposite is saying. Ten years ago,

Manitoba had the highest hospital—among the highest hospital administration costs in the land. Today, we have the lowest or the second lowest hospital administration costs in the land. Those are the facts, Mr. Speaker.

And, to be clear, the member opposite has, for lo these many years, been talking about bloated bureaucracies and what a blockbuster idea it would be to trim administration. And on the day when we announced that we have consensus among 11 regional health authorities to go forward with these mergers, Mr. Speaker, on the day when this very act is happening, she's finding more bad news to talk about. It's a nabob of negativity, frankly, this conversation doesn't need.

### **Big Point Road Flood Damage Repairs**

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Mr. Speaker, the Premier's flood recovery program has been very slow and rather inequitable. As an example, the road to Big Point, a community of 80 homes and four to five hundred people each summer, has a road which is not yet passable. In almost a year, there has been no help from this government to upgrade this road and make it usable.

On the other hand, the government has spent very considerable funds on a beautifully completed road near Riverton which leads to a single property in a spot which I'm told is not very likely to flood.

I ask the Premier: When will he end the inequity and treat people fairly?

**Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier):** I thank the member for the question. I will take the specifics of that and look into it.

The reality is we've spent \$589 million in this budget on roads and bridges, and with a specific focus on repairing roads and bridges impacted by the flood. And even last year during the flood, we put extraordinary resources into the Interlake area to help build up roads after they had been flooded out and repair them to allow people to have access to their cottages and homes.

The reality is we will continue to do that, Mr. Speaker, because we know roads are important as a tool of economic recovery in that area and to allow people to have access to their cottages.

In addition, we built the \$100-million project to lower Lake St. Martin and Lake Manitoba. That project was done in record time under emergency

conditions and has brought down the lake two and a half to three feet lower than it would otherwise be. Those are the kinds of extraordinary commitments that we put in place as we spent a billion dollars to fight this flood, the worst in the history of the province of Manitoba.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Last May 30th, the minister of Agriculture, now the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers), said in reference to the support for people on Lake Manitoba, we want this money to go very quickly. And yet 10 months later, the end of the fiscal year, March 31st, 2012, only approximately 20 per cent—20 per cent—of the money allocated to the Lake Manitoba Financial Assistance plan had actually been spent.

And critical roads like the road to the Big Point community are not yet rebuilt. In all my years in politics, I have never seen a program so badly mismanaged.

When will the Premier act to make sure that critical roads are rebuilt so that homes and communities can be rebuilt?

**Mr. Selinger:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question.

We have spent \$600 million in various programs, compensation programs and infrastructure renewal programs dealing with the flood. And I've been in the Interlake and I've seen some of the roads we put in place, which not only acted as roads, but they acted as dikes as well to protect these communities in the future. These are major undertakings done in record time, and if there's a specific road that the member feels neglected, we will look into that and see what the specifics of that are and take a look at what needs to be done and what can be done as expeditiously as possible.

I'm pleased the member has raised the question. We will follow up and examine the specifics.

**Mr. Gerrard:** As the Premier knows, it's a road into Big Point.

As the Premier knows, a major contributor to the flood on Lake Manitoba was the water—enormous amount of water flowing through the Portage Diversion. At its peak, it was half the annual volume of that going over Niagara Falls—imagine that—that also contributed through the Portage Diversion a lot of silt and mud. And because Big Point is just north of the exit for the Portage Diversion, a lot of that

mud got deposited and that's what's covered up this road and caused a lot of problems there.

I'd like the Premier to acknowledge that this was a problem of the Portage Diversion, the artificial flooding, and get to work 10 months after the fact and get the road working so that people can get to their homes and cottages at Big Point.

\* (14:20)

**Mr. Selinger:** And again, I thank the member for the question. As I said in my previous question, we will look at the specifics of the issue he raised on the Big Point road.

I do want to point out that we have spent over \$600 million on addressing flood issues, both infrastructure and compensation, that staff in both MAFRI, the department of agricultural and rural development, as well as the insurance agencies over there at MASC have done an extraordinary amount of work, an extraordinary amount of overtime. Our disaster assistance people and Emergency Measures have done yeomen's work.

I remember one individual, in particular, working for Emergency Measures that literally was living in a motel for over 40 days as he fought the flood last spring and hadn't been home during that entire period of time where he worked seven-day weeks. Our public servants have done a heroic amount of work to address the flood, the worst in Manitoba history.

And again, we will look into the very specific issue that the member has raised with respect to the road into Big Point and see what can be done and how fast it can be done.

### **Apprenticeship Training Government Initiatives**

**Mr. Dave Gaudreau (St. Norbert):** We all know how important apprenticeship and training is to meet the needs of our economy and future prosperity in our province. That's why, earlier today, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) made an important announcement regarding opportunities and incentives for apprenticeship in Manitoba.

Can the minister of Entrepreneurship, Trade and Training and Trade inform the House of this important announcement?

**Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade):** And Budget 2012, as have many of our previous budgets, continues with our commitment to apprenticeship and training here

in Manitoba, and we're very pleased with the announcement today that there are additional tax incentives up to \$1,000 per apprenticeship hiring incentive for levels 1 and 2 apprentices.

And, Mr. Speaker, rural and northern apprenticeship training strategy is something that's very important to this government as well. In fact, we're supporting journeymen who start their own businesses.

We are going to be providing equipment in high school shops and upgrades for equipment in all the high schools that we're building in rural Manitoba—and upgrading rural Manitoba, more online training initiatives and, of course, we also have \$400,000 for the mobile training labs, which will be travelling on all those highways that we're building in rural and northern Manitoba.

And members opposite, of course, wanted to cut the budget for northern Manitoba highways, but we'll be putting training labs on those highways to get the training close to Manitobans who need the training and who need the opportunity.

#### **Provincial Road 227 Bridge Repair Status**

**Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie):** Due to the impact of the 2011 flood, the Provincial Road 227 is currently closed because of bridge removal on the crossing of the Portage Diversion. As well, the former Provincial Road 249 bridge is under repair.

Farmers are going to their fields with large equipment. Due to these restrictions, they must go all the way to Highway No. 1 bridge in Portage to cross the Portage Diversion. This is a very high-traffic area and safety is a real concern.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation tell my constituents when repairs on Provincial Road 227 bridge will be completed, as this is a serious safety concern?

**Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation):** I had the opportunity this morning to meet with the member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire) and residents in the Waskada area.

We have similar situations to what the member is referencing throughout the province. We have approximately 80 bridges, some of which have been totally destroyed, some of which have been significantly compromised, and as I speak, there are additional bridges that are being inspected, so that

number may grow higher. We are working as much—as quickly as possible to accelerate the work.

I mentioned Waskada, that we're going to be compressing what might normally take three or four years into a period that will see that bridge completed by next year. I will give the member a full briefing in terms of the particulars in the area that he's talking about.

And I do want to indicate, by the way, that's one of the reasons we've profiled \$50 million this year and \$50 million next year in terms of bridges directly related to the impacts of the flood, because our goal is to rebuild and reconstruct those bridges and get Manitobans back to normal as soon as possible.

**Mr. Wishart:** Mr. Speaker, given the length of time it's going to take to complete the bridge work on Provincial Road 227 and in order to improve safety on Highway 1, an alternative solution needs to be examined.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister approve the Rural Municipality of Portage la Prairie's offer to build a low-level crossing for farm equipment just off PR 227?

**Mr. Ashton:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we're engaged in discussions with a number of municipalities and a number of communities, and I reference again the meeting this morning, where the member for Arthur-Virden and I met with the two municipalities and with community residents in Waskada area.

Again, when we look at any of those kind of proposals, our first job is to get the infrastructure itself back to normal. That's what we indicated in Waskada, where we're investing \$12 million in putting in place a bridge, by the way, that will be superior to what we had before.

And I do want to indicate that, as is the case in Waskada and as is the case here, what we look at is whether it would provide a safe temporary access. We'd have to look at the impact in surrounding areas, look at the engineering issues involved, but we're certainly open to those types of discussions, whether it's in Waskada or the member's constituency, because our goal is, yes, to rebuild, to get back to normal as soon as possible.

We recognize there are very significant impacts throughout the province. Eighty bridges, Mr. Speaker; it's a real challenge. But we're trying to meet as many of those challenges by working with communities across the province.

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

### MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

#### Sharon Friesen

**Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson):** I rise today to honour a dedicated volunteer in my constituency, Mrs. Sharon Friesen. In Altona, if there's ever anything you need help with, whether it is taking minutes for a meeting, applying for a job, or writing a resume, Sharon Friesen is the person to talk to. A retired business education teacher at W.C. Miller Collegiate, her efficiency and willingness to help are perhaps what she is best known for, applying these skills inside and outside the office and community.

Sharon was born and raised on a farm in Ethelbert, Manitoba, where she learned the value of hard work and helping others. Her teaching career began in 1967 in Altona, where she soon after met and married her husband, Wilbert "Flab" Friesen. This was the beginning of a long relationship that has grown to benefit Altona through their strong sense of civic involvement and dedication to volunteer ventures in the surrounding community.

In and around Altona, Sharon is involved with Rhineland Area Food Bank, the Altona United Way, as well as her local church, where she serves on numerous communities, overseeing church functions and singing in the choir.

She is also a very skilled quilter and is involved with the Altona Heirloom Quilters, co-ordinating many fundraisers and the annual Sunflower Festival Quilt Show. Her quilts have been used both here in Canada, around the world, ensuring that many children are warm and asleep under a beautiful handmade quilt.

Sharon is a outstanding volunteer who believes that helping people is something you do because you want to do it and love to do it. She's incredibly humble and is an integral part of the town of Altona.

Recently, the Altona district chamber of commerce recognized this and named her Volunteer of the Year for 2012. There is no person I can think of who is better suited for this title.

I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of my constituents, to celebrate Sharon Friesen's work in the town of Altona.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

#### Norway House Junior Chief and Council

**Mr. Frank Whitehead (The Pas):** Mr. Speaker, I am proud to tell you and everyone else in the House today about the junior chief and council from Norway House. Members of the junior council can be 13 to 25 years of age, and everyone was encouraged to run in their recent elections. On March 20, the council grew from five to seven members, and more and more young members want to participate. For the next two years, Alfred Laughner, Spencer Chartrand, Ronald Robertson, Mitchell Simpson, Errol Anderson, Stephanie Muswaggon will be serving as junior councillors.

I had the chance to meet this inspiring group last fall after the junior chief, Tyler Duncan, contacted me. We had an excellent discussion, and I was impressed by their maturity and enthusiasm. Before we met, I heard from many community members that the junior council is well respected. They are very active in the community, encouraging other youth to get involved in local events. They want to make sure that the rest of the community hears their voices. Together, they contact the band council when local youth feel strongly about an issue. These young men and women are learning about their history and their people's contribution to Manitoba, which have made it a great place to live.

Last month, I attended the junior council elections, which were held during Youth Days at Norway House. I learned that the junior members are lobbying for more resources to invest in education, recreation and safety in their community. The junior council has been planning dances and movie nights, and they recently held a youth conference to help build community pride. They are also hoping to raise funds for an after-school drop-in centre.

This young group is driven by values and principles that guide leaders of all ages. They represent the future here in Manitoba, and our future looks bright.

Thank you.

#### Assiniboine Park Conservancy

**Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo):** I rise today to honour and congratulate the Assiniboine Park Conservancy for receiving the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce Spirit of Winnipeg Award for a non-for-profit organization.

\* (14:30)

The Spirit of Winnipeg Awards are designed to honour innovative organizations that contribute to the vibrancy of our community. The not-for-profit category showcases the passion of so many Winnipeggers who are doing the work they believe in while supporting their community. The Assiniboine Park Conservancy is a public-private, non-profit charitable group that engages the assistance of individuals, corporations, foundations and community groups to provide education, conservation, research and recreation services at the Assiniboine Park and the Assiniboine Park Zoo. It was created in response to the need for a significant reinvestment in the area that would ensure visitors experience the full potential of the park and the zoo.

The Assiniboine Park Conservancy has delivered the most significant developments to the Assiniboine Park in the past 80 years. They have acted as an administrative simplifier for the functions and operations of more than 20 city services and four distinct not-for-profit entities that had all been previously operating autonomously in the region. Together they have developed new facilities, new marketing initiatives and new programs for the Assiniboine Park and zoo.

There were two other finalists in the Spirit of Winnipeg not-for-profit category in 2012, which included BOSS Guitar Works from École Selkirk Junior High and extended education of the University of Manitoba. We congratulate all the finalists in this category for their remarkable efforts and the incredible work they have done for our communities.

It is a great privilege for me to rise in the House to honour the Assiniboine Park Conservancy and all non-profits across Winnipeg for their work in making our communities better places to live, work and play.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

#### **St. Norbert Adult Education Centre**

**Mr. Dave Gaudreau (St. Norbert):** Mr. Speaker, I recently visited the St. Norbert Adult Education Centre at the Behavioral Health Foundation to participate in the Speaker's Outreach Program. The Behavioural Health Foundation is a model addiction and mental health treatment facility that provides culturally sensitive long-term addiction treatment programming for men and women and teens and family units. As a residential facility, it allows for more sustained treatment with people experiencing a variety of addiction problems and the mental health

concerns that often accompany them. The foundation champions the community-as-a-method approach to the treatment that embraces the diversity and perspectives of—in staff and residents to create an environment dedicated to mutual support and self-help.

Mr. Speaker, the St. Norbert Adult Education Centre is administered by the Behavioural Health Foundation, offers holistic, culturally sensitive education programming that only—that allows participants to obtain their high school diploma or upgrade their skills. Open to adult learners over the age of 19, the students there represent a diversity of backgrounds, experience and learning levels. This adult education program offers a positive, safe environment and team-based, student-centred approach that encourages students to make and meet their own goals to their education journey.

In the Speaker's Outreach Program, the Speaker of the House, the local MLA and the representative of the Clerk's office go to the educational facility across the provinces and teach students how our political system works. While I was there, we staged a mock parliament where we deputized the students and facilitated a debate. The exercise provides the students with a hands-on feel for the legislative process and valuable civic lessons. Through this interaction I was able to meet and spend some time with some wonderful students and see first-hand the positive impact of the centre's educational programming.

Mr. Speaker, the St. Norbert educational centre provides a positive and supportive environment for adult learners looking to upgrade their skills and further their education. The Behavioural Health Foundation provides people suffering with addictions and associated mental health concerns the respect, support and community that they need to—on their healing journey. Both the centre and the foundation provide vital services for St. Norbert community and beyond, and I want to recognize their contributions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

#### **World Trade Centre Winnipeg Location**

**Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today in honour of the establishment of the bilingual World Trade Centre in Winnipeg. Canadian world trade centres exist in Edmonton, Halifax, Montréal, Toronto and Vancouver, and we welcome the World Trade Centre expansion to Winnipeg as a tremendous opportunity for the city of Winnipeg as well as for Manitoba businesses.

A world trade centre is sometimes described as an international business shopping centre which complements and supports existing services of private and government agencies. There are more than 320 world trade centres in 96 countries worldwide. They seek to improve our business environment, attract outside investment and facilitate the efforts of local businesses looking to connect with the global market.

We wish to congratulate Ms. Mariette Mulaire, the president and CEO of ANIM, Manitoba's bilingual trade agency, and Mr. David Angus, president and CEO of the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, who are the main negotiators from the Manitoba delegation to San Diego, California.

Thanks to their efforts, the World Trade Centers Association board of directors unanimously approved the application for the establishment of the World Trade Centre in Winnipeg.

We admire and respect Ms. Mulaire and Mr. Angus for their dedication to the prosperity of Winnipeg, Manitoba and Canada. These are examples of Manitobans who see great potential for Manitoba right in our own backyards in our—and in our own cities.

We will be able to showcase our industries, our entrepreneurs, our local businesses and our advantages as we assume our position on the world stage in the coming months ahead.

Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today and recognize the incredible achievement of the Manitoba delegation, and I believe that we will see benefits for Manitobans for years to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

#### House Business

**Hon. Jennifer Howard (Government House Leader):** Yes, Mr. Speaker, on House business.

Pursuant to rule 31(8), I'm announcing that the private members' resolution to be considered next Tuesday, assuming that private members' business is considered next Tuesday, will be one put forth by the honourable member for Burrows (Ms. Wight). The title of the resolution is Manitoba Volunteers.

**Mr. Speaker:** It has been announced that, pursuant to rule 31(8), that the private members' resolution to be considered next Tuesday, assuming that private members' business is considered next Tuesday, will be the one put forward by the honourable member for Burrows, and the title of the resolution is Manitoba Volunteers.

## ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

### BUDGET DEBATE (Fifth Day of Debate)

**Mr. Speaker:** To resume debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers), and the proposed motion of the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) in amendment thereto, standing in the name of the honourable member for Charleswood, who has 20 minutes remaining.

**Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood):** Mr. Speaker, as I was indicating yesterday, federal handouts have been propping up this Manitoba government for a number of years and I think only an arrogant government would assume that that was going to go on forever. But it has gone on for all of their 12 years and they've certainly had their hand out and been relying on a federal sugar daddy, and now they are going to be in a lot of trouble, because now they have allowed things to go on for such a long time without trying to be self-reliant, and now it's going to affect ordinary Manitobans who are going to have to pay for this government's bungling.

Mr. Speaker, only a lazy government would sit back, enjoy that largesse and not try to rein in their own spending. Eventually the chickens come home to roost, and I think I've said that every budget speech in this House for a number of years. And I can remember actually one year standing here and members opposite, when I had indicated that, they were actually laughing, and it just shows you how really out of touch they are with how wealth is created in a province and how provinces need to do a better job of job creation and budgeting and management of their own finances, and it's something that this government just couldn't seem to get a handle on, and now, indeed, those chickens have come home to roost. Sadly though, it is going to be ordinary Manitobans that are going to pay, because this government has never known what the word restraint means and it's never been part of their government agenda. And this hurt is going to be felt and is being felt now. I mean, we're all hearing it out there as we go to events and visit with our neighbours.

The gas tax is really offensive, particularly, and it was brought to my attention again by an ordinary Manitoban who said that this minister—or this Premier (Mr. Selinger) was complaining about high

gas taxes and was going to write a letter to the Prime Minister of Canada complaining about it and telling him to get it under control, and then what do we see a few months after that? We see this government actually raise gas taxes. I mean, it's bizarre, Mr. Speaker, to see something like that happen.

Ordinary Manitobans are seeing higher hydro rates and, in fact, it sounds like there was an emergency meeting on a Saturday after the government changed the chair of PUB and put in a new chair, and all of a sudden we see the hydro rates escalate; we see higher property taxes, and today again, we've seen another broken promise by this government to seniors that they were going to not have to pay property taxes. And, you know, the more we dig in to the budget, the more egregious we find many aspects of it.

\* (14:40)

I'm hearing from, actually, a number of people about the higher daycare rates that have been imposed upon them by this government, and I think there's a lot of people very, very concerned about that. And a new tax on women's haircuts and spa treatments and tattoos. Like, how low does this government go, or how much lower can it go, that they have to tax tattoos, for goodness' sakes, Mr. Speaker?

And it is something that, when we look at haircuts and spa treatments, that largely affects women. I don't think there's a whole lot of men that spend 50 bucks on hairdos, but we know that women certainly do. So this is really a budget that really hurt women.

We see higher vehicle registration fees. We see the doubling of the cost of a child abuse registry check. There's another one. Like, how low does a government go, to try to get money when they have to double the—or feel they have to double the cost of people paying for Child Abuse Registry checks. That is really, really, again, one of those fee increases that is very grating on a lot of people.

And so what happened then, Mr. Speaker, and there are others, too, but what we see is \$182 million more per year in taxes after this Premier (Mr. Selinger) said no new taxes. He said, read my lips. And, in fact, that's exactly what we got. He stuck it to Manitobans. He said one thing in an election; he turned around seven months later in the

budget and he stuck it to Manitobans by raising nine taxes.

Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of vacuous talk by this government. In reality, we have an historic deficit level and we have a historic debt and somebody told me a few years ago that wait till this government is finished. It's going to end up doing a worse job to Manitobans than what Howard Pawley did in his days. And, in fact, that is coming true.

And a broken promise by a Premier and every one of his caucus who promised not to raise taxes is going to be something that people are not going to forget. So there's a lot of smokescreens out there right now. This government is trying to deflect very, very much from their budget. They're running around with all their big announcements. They're not even waiting to roll out their announcements over the next several months. In fact, they're getting all of them out there as quickly as they can, to try to deflect and to take away the sting that everybody is feeling from their broken promise and all these tax increases.

And we heard it on the radio again—I heard it. I was coming to work today and I heard the government have their radio ad out there, talking about how they are going to be now paying for cancer drugs. If more Manitobans knew that this government refused to do that up until the middle of this last election, I think they'd be pretty appalled at the partisanship of this government and the—and would feel disgust at how this government has handled that issue of cancer drugs, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, there is going to be a political price paid for this budget. The government can flit around all they want. They can be frantically trying to make all their announcements to cover up their broken promise, but it's not going to work this time, especially when we see so many middle-income Manitobans also now paying the second highest income taxes in Canada.

So, Mr. Speaker, this province is going backwards. It's not going forwards. We're back to the old NDP. The new NDP have disappeared somewhere, although they weren't really there. They were just hiding, I think, in the bushes because we've certainly have a government that is typical to its roots and typical to how it normally behaves. And that is spend a lot of peoples' money. Don't worry so much about it. It's not our money. It's taxpayers' money and we're just going to go out there and spend it.

They are going to leave Manitoba worse off, and I think we are in for some very dark days ahead, Mr. Speaker. And those dark days are caused by this NDP government. And, Mr. Speaker, if this NDP government votes against our amendments, they will be voting against Manitoba families. No matter what they're saying, no matter their rhetoric and their spin, they will be voting against Manitoba families. The Premier (Mr. Selinger) said here the other day as he was doing some comment or answering a question, he said, well, in our budget consultations, that Manitoba families asked for this. I think he really, really is out of touch with what Manitoba families want. And it certainly wasn't, Mr. Premier, please raise our taxes. So where he heard that from in his stacked budget meetings, I don't know, but this certainly is not a budget that is good for Manitoba families.

So, Mr. Speaker, when they vote against our amendments, they're really not standing beside Manitoba families. And if they stand and vote for their own budget, they are saying it's okay to break an election promise. And that is going to affect every one of them over the next several years and into the next election. And the sting is strong out there, and I don't think Manitobans are going to forgive them this time around.

Thank you very much.

**Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health):** It's my privilege to stand today in the House to put a few words on the record concerning the budget. It's an honour for any member, indeed, to do that, as it is a privilege given to us by Manitobans in order to be able to stand on behalf of our constituents and speak to matters such as these.

We know that all jurisdictions in Canada and, indeed, across the globe are moving forward through very uncertain economic times. And we know that Budget 2012 is very focused on protecting the things that matter the most to families, including, without a doubt, improvements to health care, Mr. Speaker, investments in education and rebuilding our province after what was a devastating flood.

We're working very hard to find responsible ways to reduce spending while continuing to put families first. We know that during difficult or very uncertain economic times that decisions need to be made. And we know that Manitobans have told us very clearly that they want us to continue to focus on investing in health care. They want us to continue to focus on investing in our schools. They want to make

sure that our justice system is second to none. And, of course, they acknowledge that we have been through an extremely difficult flood period, and that infrastructure needs to be rebuilt without delay.

We're going to tackle the challenges today the way that we have all along. I believe that my esteemed colleague says it isn't flashy, but it works. We're going to take a balanced approach, Mr. Speaker, and we're going to make sure that in moving forward to bring ourselves back into balance, that we are protecting the things that matter to families the most.

Now, Mr. Speaker, of course, No. 1 on the hit parade for Manitoba families is ensuring that we are protecting health care. And, naturally, in my role as Minister of Health, I have a number of things to say about that, which I will refer to in a moment. But, of course, the people of Seine River, who have given me the privilege of standing here as their representative, have many issues and concerns that they want to ensure that we keep as our priorities, and I want to speak, just for a moment, about those things.

We know that Manitobans are very, very proud of the fact that this is a very affordable place to live, and our commitment to Manitobans to ensure that they will continue to pay the lowest combined bills in Canada for electricity, for home heating, and for auto insurance means a lot to the people that I represent. We have these conversations about the affordability of Manitoba, and there are many great reasons to live in Manitoba, and affordability is, indeed, near the top.

We also know that they care very deeply about funding for firefighters, police officers and cadets to ensure that we're safe in our communities. I have conversations with people on the streets in my constituency, in the businesses in my constituency, and ensuring that we have public safety protection, firefighters are there when we need them—it's very important to the people of my constituency, and Budget 2012 goes a long way to protect that.

\* (14:50)

People in the constituency of Seine River care very much about fairness, and they advocate for increasing the minimum wage. And we're very happy to see that the minimum wage will increase by 25 cents on October the first. And, indeed, continuing to build child-care centres, expanding existing child-care centres to have more capacity, to

take more children, and to care for them in a way that is of a very high standard, Mr. Speaker, is deeply important to the families of Seine River. This, of course, will include a brand-new build at Highbury School in the constituency of Seine River and, indeed, they're very, very happy to hear that news and are, indeed, anticipating having that additional capacity available to them as community members.

I've had a number of constituents speak to me about the issue of Sunday shopping. Without a doubt, Mr. Speaker, this is an issue on which there are a variety of opinions, all of which, I believe, are—should be respected. But seeing Manitoba loosening restrictions on Sunday shopping by working together very closely with business and with labour to ensure that there is fairness and a preservation of important family time, while ensuring that we remain competitive, particularly, in light of the loosening of some rules around cross-border shopping, this will be something that will be quite significant and of interest to the people in the constituency of Seine River.

Without a doubt, I have many connections, Mr. Speaker, with people in the education community, of course, because of my career being a teacher and a school administrator. And our commitment to continue to work to reduce class size to 20 students for kindergarten to grade 3 students, to ensure that they get that extra attention in those very important formative educational years, is a commitment from which we shall not relent, and that we'll continue to invest. And this is very, very important to the families in the constituency of Seine River.

I would also say that the seniors in Seine River will be pleased to see the continuation of the reduction of income taxes by the delivering of the commitment to increase seniors' maximum property tax credit by \$75 to an all-time high of \$1,025, Mr. Speaker. In addition, many of the seniors that I speak to care very much about ensuring that we were to increase the supply of rental housing and affordable housing, not just in my constituency but across Manitoba. And Budget 2012 will work very, very hard to do that.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, having been in the role of Minister of Health for some time now, I come to the discussion about protecting front-line care in health care with an admitted bias. It's something that I have learned much about over time. And it's something that I've grown to care more about each

and every day, as I learn more about it each and every day. Our commitments to Manitobans have been very, very clear. We know that ensuring that Manitobans having the best possible primary care will help across the system, which is why we will stand by our commitment to ensure that every Manitoban who wants access to a family doctor shall, indeed, have it by 2015.

We also know that in the face of uncertain economic times, and in the face of some decisions being made at the federal level concerning health funding and transfer payments, we must prepare for the future that may, indeed, unfold before us. We're going to work very hard to ensure that there is an authentic dialogue between provinces and territories and the federal government, which has been absent to date.

Decisions concerning funding and a potential new health accord haven't happened. They've been unilateral in nature. We want to re-engage. We want to have a meaningful conversation about how our investments in health care matter in every corner of our province, Mr. Speaker.

But as we prepare for some decisions that are very, very concerning to us, we have made the decision to move from 11 regional health authorities down to five regional health authorities, with a view to ensure that we're streamlining, that we're finding even further efficiencies, and that we're converting savings back into supporting front-line care.

This is part of a very comprehensive plan, Mr. Speaker, the details of which will be announced in the coming days, but the mergers of regional health authorities, of course, are one part of that. We want to ensure that we're doing everything we can to enhance opportunities across the system for people to access the health-care system. We do not want the emergency room to be the only place that a person can go to receive care, which is why we remain committed to opening more QuickCare Clinics, access centres and to developing primary care networks here in Manitoba, to help take that pressure off of our emergency rooms.

We want to make sure that we're getting the best possible use that we can out of the doctors that we have—net increases of doctors every single year since being in office, Mr. Speaker. We want to make sure that we work with them, so that they can develop a process by which they can offer same-day or next-day appointments in their offices.

And while there a number of other issues I want to address on the topic of health care, Mr. Speaker, I need to take a moment to reflect on the fact that I did take some time to review the *Hansard* from yesterday and listen to some of the comments made by the member from Charleswood. And while, without a doubt, we're going to find a variety of issues on which we may spar and we may disagree and that—that's indeed is the nature of politics, I have to take considerable issue with some of the comments that she put on the record, specific to our journey in dealing with the cancer patient.

And let me explain to you what I mean, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, what we know to be true is that when we came into office in 1999, we found that the wait times for radiation therapy—life-saving therapy—were dangerously long, at six weeks, and we know that there were medical professionals that were offering suggestions, including taking patients to the United States to receive their radiation therapy so they wouldn't have to wait that long.

That option was rejected by the Progressive Conservative Party, and this is a blight on their record, in my humble opinion, Mr. Speaker. And when we took office we immediately set about changing the trajectory of the cancer patient on his or her journey.

Today, Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to say that Manitoba has the lowest wait time for radiation therapy in the nation. To be fair, I think we're tied with BC off and on. But we have the lowest wait time for radiation therapy at one week or less, of course.

But we also recognize that the radiation therapy portion of the journey is just one part of that journey, and we know, as Sir Michael Richards from the United Kingdom has said, that it isn't the 60 days you might have to wait for treatment in any jurisdiction in the world, it's the 59 nights. And how right he was when he said this.

We have partnered with him—the man who led the transformation of the cancer patient journey in England, and he's working directly with CancerCare Manitoba on our commitment to do exactly the same thing; the first ones in Canada that have committed to transform that cancer patient journey so that we're tracking it and we're reducing it, from the moment that an individual and their family doctor may be worried about the suspicion of cancer to the time that

they are getting the treatment that they need. We're going to reduce that time to 60 days, Mr. Speaker, with a guarantee that someone will see a specialist within two weeks. We're investing \$40 million to do that, with the help of CancerCare Manitoba, and we're not only going to be the best in the land on the radiation therapy journey, our goal is to be the best in the land on the entire journey to improve outcomes for cancer patients.

I also want to take issue, Mr. Speaker, with comments that the member opposite made about the funding of oral cancer drugs. Certainly we know, over the last several years, there have been remarkable advancements in the development of medications for people dealing with cancer—specifically, oral chemotherapy drugs, and we know that in the past in Manitoba these drugs were covered through the Pharmacare program, but, without a doubt, did represent a financial burden to families who needed to meet their deductible, not to mention the support drugs like the anti-nauseants and so forth that they would need. And we have worked very hard over a number of years to build the capacity to enable us to be able to fully fund—which we announced last week—fully fund oral cancer drugs and the support drugs, making us only one of two provinces in Canada that will fully cover the cost of these drugs.

This is a very important commitment, Mr. Speaker; it's important to families that I'm hearing from every day since we've made that announcement.

\* (15:00)

But the members opposite have endeavoured to criticize our decision to make this announcement—the hows and the whens and the whys—and they've impugned motives on us. And what I need to put on the record is that during the election campaign, the Canadian Cancer Society, quite rightly, asked everybody in the election, will you, if you should be elected, fund oral cancer drugs. Yes or No? Up or down? Will you do it? And, Mr. Speaker, our answer was simple. The answer was, yes, we will.

And, Mr. Speaker, when I look on the Canadian Cancer Society website, at the response that was provided by the Progressive Conservative Party, assigned by the member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger)—by herself, might I say. I see references to the fact that they don't like our drug formulary and the speed with which drugs go on. I

see that—[interjection] Well, I certainly didn't, would you?

I see references to the fact that scientific evidence is important in deciding which drugs should be funded. I see some self-congratulations about pressuring the government to fund one drug or another. But in the entire response, Mr. Speaker, every letter of that response, do I see yes? Do I see up? I see nothing. At the time when they needed to put their best foot forward to—for Manitobans and say, we support the funding of oral cancer drugs in Manitoba, absolutely nothing, no commitment.

And so, Mr. Speaker, when I read in the *Hansard* comments questioning our commitment to funding oral cancer drugs in Manitoba, I suggest to the members opposite that they not need make one peep about it, when they wouldn't commit to doing it themselves. Shame on you.

So, in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, as I look at my time wrapping up, I certainly do want to say that Budget 2012 is really focused on the priorities of Manitoba families and protecting what matters to them most. As we go forward during these global-uncertain economic times, and as we go forward in paying close attention, particularly for health care, what will happen on the national stage, we know we have to work very hard to protect the things that Manitobans care about the most, and we're absolutely committed to do that.

**Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye):** Last week the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) delivered the 2012 provincial budget. This budget is one that I cannot support. This budget is one that betrays Manitobans. A short seven months ago, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and the NDP promised no tax increases. And what do we have? A budget that has no less than nine new taxes.

And who is going to pay the \$184-million tax grab? The Manitoba consumer. This budget raises the cost of gasoline by 2.5 cents per litre. This change will affect every single person in the province. Manitoba is a large province and we need to drive to everything we do. We drive to work; we drive to school; we drive to shop; we drive our kids to sporting events. In this time of record high gas prices, the Premier and the NDP want to add another cost to Manitobans who are already seeing their salaries and wages eroded by the high cost of fuel. Just a few weeks ago, the Premier was upset about the high price of gas and how it was affecting

Manitobans. So what does he do? Raises it by two and a half cents a litre. Another broken promise.

Mr. Speaker, this budget adds the 7 per cent provincial sales tax to home owners and tenants insurance. The Insurance Bureau of Canada estimates that the Premier's decision to expand—the PST to insurance, will cost Manitoba consumers \$48 million per year.

On April—an April 18th quote from the Insurance Bureau of Canada states: The Manitoba government's decision in yesterday's provincial budget to impose retail sales tax of 7 per cent on home, business and auto insurance will hurt consumers. That is from Lindsay Olson, vice-president for Manitoba with the IBC.

Insurance as an essential product will be less affordable for consumers. We know that it is prudent to have home insurance, but, unfortunately, not everyone can afford it. We hear heartbreaking stories far too often of people who have lost their possessions to fire, but were not insured. How many more of these stories will we hear about because of this budget? This new tax comes into effect July 1st, 2012, and will be applied to new and existing policies in place at that time. This means that those who've already paid their insurance premiums for periods starting July 1st will have to retroactively pay this new tax.

The cost of registering vehicles in Manitoba is going up by \$35, bringing in an estimated revenue of \$16 million.

Farming is one of the more fuel-intensive industries in this province. With an increase in fuel prices, this will ultimately mean an increase in the cost of food, and, once again, who will have to pay for this? The Manitoba consumer.

Mr. Speaker, the reduction of the dividends tax credit has a major effect on seniors. The government had retroactively increased the amount of tax on dividends. Their costs are going up, but their income is going down.

With this budget's increase in fees it now costs more to be born in Manitoba, get married in Manitoba, own a car in Manitoba and live in Manitoba. And if that weren't enough, it now costs more to die in this province. Fees for everything from birth certificate to land titles, vehicle registration and even death certificates are going up.

Mr. Speaker, small business plays an important role in Manitoba's economy. In this budget the Premier (Mr. Selinger) broke his promise to all small businesses not to raise taxes. I shall quote from a CFIB news release: The 2012 provincial budget delivered by the Finance Minister moves Manitoba backwards with its unsustainable spending and \$184 million in tax increases.

To add insult to injury, the Premier also broke his promise to raise the small business income threshold from \$400,000 to \$500,000. These new budget measures will make businesses along the border even less competitive than they are now. For people living along the Canadian-US border it is cheaper to buy gas in the States than it is here. Now, with the government increasing gas prices, there will be even more incentive for people to shop across the border.

I've spoken to small business owners who operate close to the border, and they tell me that they are very concerned that more people will now go across the border to buy their gas and groceries. Instead of helping small business create new jobs and expand the economy, the government is seemingly willing to see small businesses taxed out of existence. This budget will certainly not inspire confidence among Manitoba's small business owners.

The budget also failed to deal with the Province's record debt, said Marilyn Braun-Pollon, CFIB's vice-president for prairie and agribusiness.

Mr. Speaker, this budget does not help small business. In talking with small business owners, these new taxes will cost small business owners anywhere from hundreds to thousands of dollars in increased costs: the added cost of essential items; the two and a half cents per litre increase in gas prices; the 7 per cent PST on property and insurance liability; the 7 per cent PST on group insurance for employees; with these increased costs, they will have no choice but to increase prices on their goods or services, once again increasing the cost to consumer.

\*(15:10)

The sad thing is that in—that is the consumer, one group of people, will end up bearing the brunt of paying all of these costs. How deep does the government of Manitoba think the consumers' pockets really are?

Mr. Speaker, this government constantly reminds us of how important trade is to Manitoba's

economy, but nowhere in this budget do I see any reference to the New West Partnership. Manitoba's isolation from such ties and partnership under the NDP hurt our economy and business sector. Failing to participate in what will, essentially, be a single market that will make our western neighbours highly competitive will hurt Manitoba. The New West Partnership not only improves trade between BC, Alberta and Saskatchewan, and the rest of the world, it also puts in place common procurement and research and development co-operation, which will drive innovation in these three provinces while reducing costs.

Small businesses rely highly on skilled and experienced workers. However, here the government's take on Manitoba's population increase are out of place. Manitoba lost more people to other provinces last year than it has in five years, losing 74 per cent more residents to other parts of Canada than it did in the previous year. Despite all the rhetoric from the provincial government about how people are coming to Manitoba in droves, the province lost a net 4,356 to other Canadian jurisdictions in 2011, according to the Manitoba Bureau of Statistics.

Mr. Speaker, Manitobans continue to be the victims of bracket creep. As their income rises with inflation, the tax brackets do not. Therefore, Manitobans are paying millions more in taxes, because they fall into tax brackets that don't reflect their actual income. Manitoba is only one of three provinces that does not index its tax system to the rate of inflation. These cost Manitobans millions of dollars in personal income tax every year. Manitobans are paying more in income tax and are not even aware of it.

Mr. Speaker, this budget does nothing about the Province's record debt. To quote Colin Craig of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation: The Canadian 'taxpedder'—Taxpayers Federation responded to today's Manitoba's budget with disappointment. Noting that the Province has not only tabled a larger deficit in projected in last year's budget, it has pushed back its core balanced budget date from 2014-2015 to 2015-2016. He goes on to say, despite—despite claims of reducing core spending, budget-to-budget spending is up \$318 million or approximately 2.8 per cent. On a summary basis, spending is up budget to budget by 3.1 per cent. The spending increases, which they are marketing as spending cuts, our—causing our debt to rise by

\$47 per second. Manitoba's total debt is increased in Budget 2012 to \$27.6 billion, a new record.

Servicing Manitoba's debt is Manitoba's fourth largest core government cost. Debt services costs will now be \$857 million annually. This is money that would be better spent investing on programs that help everyday Manitobans, instead of paying for the NDP's spending habits.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) to take a simple economics lesson. It's not about how much money you take in; it's about how much money you spend or spend wisely. What will happen—or what will the cost be to service the debt this budget creates if interest rates start to rise? We saw high interest rates back in the '80s and there's nothing to say they won't rise again.

What will happen if interest rates rise by several percentage points? Has the government even taken this into account?

Mr. Speaker, the biggest thing we learn from this budget is that the government has not or refuses to answer its spending problem. Ex-St. James MLA Bonnie Korzeniowski has quietly retained her duties as provincial envoy for military affairs, a job that has seen her old constituency office turned into a permanent office with a budget of \$190,000 per year.

If the NDP wanted to actually cut spending, they could have started here. They could have given this appointment to one of their sitting members. Surely, the new member from St. James or the member from Brandon East, who both have military bases in or near their ridings, could have done the job just as well, at a lower cost to taxpayers.

Will the position of military envoy go back to an MLA after Mrs. Korzeniowski leaves the post, or will it be given to another former NDP member? Or will it perhaps be eliminated altogether? The questions are endless.

When I decided to run for the position of MLA for La Verendrye, my goal was to make this world a better place. As a parent or grandparent, we strive to make things easier for those that will follow us. I would ask each and every member on the opposite side of the House if they thought about how our debt will affect our future generations. How will our children and grandchildren pay for this debt? Have members opposite even had any input into this budget?

This budget is a budget of broken promises. Therefore, I cannot support this budget and will vote against it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs):** Mr. Speaker, after listening to many speeches across—from the members across the way and our speeches, I now know why I'm a member of the NDP and a government that's responsible, that cares about all Manitobans and wants to work hard on behalf of all Manitobans to create a brighter future.

Mr. Speaker, Manitobans want good, positive government that looks after them, not just today, but today and in the future. I look at where we need to invest and we need to make sure that the investments count. And I look at what got me involved in politics in the first place, which was the Conservative government of the time, in the '90s. And I look at where they were investing the money and where they weren't investing the money. An example is: I look at responsible actions by this government. When I got involved in government—started to talk about getting involved in government, I was talking about 1998-1999 when the member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) was the assistant to the Health Minister and the Grace Hospital emergency was closed; it was closed evenings and weekends, day after day after day. And, you know, it's funny, because I don't think that's a responsible action. I believe that it's responsible to make sure that you have emergency rooms that are open.

And I know that back in 2007 there was a hue and cry about them closing Grace Hospital. I am pleased to say not only did it not close but, right now, if the member from Charleswood goes there, she will see an access centre that's opening, she will see investments in quick care, she will see that there's doctors and nurses employed there in greater numbers, making a difference to the people in west Winnipeg.

\* (15:20)

And I want to make it clear, Mr. Speaker, that this side of the House has made investments in increasing the size of the school for—medical school and the nurses' schools, and you know what? They have created more doctors and more nurses. And in every single case, we have voted for those investments and the members opposite, the

Conservative Party of Manitoba, have voted against those investments.

And, you know, we have a financial crisis now, Mr. Speaker, and the financial crisis is the largest since the Great Depression, and, you know, in the '90s, when there was some problems with the economy, the Conservatives opposite cut back on medical school, closed emergency rooms, cut the amount of nurses—in fact, the one nurse that got money was Connie Curran—\$5 million, and her advice was to cut nurses. And you know what? I'm pleased to see that we're working.

But I do have to give the Conservatives credit. They did beat us in one part of health care, and that's because they had 13 regional health authorities, and now we're moving towards five, which is greater administrative assistance. And we know—what's nice about it, is we're moving from 13 RHAs down to five, and you know what, Mr. Speaker? I think that's a positive thing, because we're spending money on the front-line services, it's less administration and, you know—what's funny about it, is that members opposite will be voting against increasing nurses and decreasing CEOs. I think that's a positive thing.

And, you know, the RHAs—it's funny when we get questions from the members opposite about these RHAs, because it was a creation of the Conservative government, and so I think that we need to compare and contrast what's happened.

I look at the other compare and contrast that makes a difference to the people of Assiniboia. We have increased the amount of money that goes to post-secondary institutions year after year after year. I'm actually pleased that the minister responsible for post-secondary education has an increase in her budget, because that wasn't the case back in the '90s. There's more money for apprentices, there's more money for universities, there more money for colleges, and, you know what? The funny part about that is that in the Conservative years—to again, compare and contrast—the amount of money that was going to universities and colleges were decreasing; the tuition was increasing drastically.

And, you know, it's funny, because the one thing—again, different between the Conservatives and us, is that they brought down the Property Tax Credit from \$325 to \$250. We've moved it from 320—from \$250 way up, and, in fact, for seniors, we've increased it yet again to over a thousand dollars; that's \$1,025. We've increased the age credit, we've increased the basic personal deduction, we've

increased all these things including the caregiver tax credit, which is providing hundreds of dollars to people who care after their loved ones. And you know what's funny about that? Those are targeted to people who need the money. They're targeted to individuals who are caring after their loved ones.

And so, personal deductions under the Conservatives: \$6,500; under us, going over \$9,500 to \$10,000. Seniors tax credit went from two—went down; we're bringing it up over a thousand dollars. And, you know, personal exemptions, you know, when they have gone up about 60 per cent in the last 10 years, that's a positive statement. And again, up \$250 again this year. And again the Conservatives vote against it. If you look at the base—they keep on saying, oh, we will do this by—oh, the basic personal exemption—we'll use the consumer price increase to look at the increase in personal exemptions. I'm pleased to tell the members opposite, we're blowing that away; our very, very talented Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) is increasing the basic personal deduction by well over the consumer price index.

Next, when we look at other investments that are appropriate, that are responsible: more firefighters and police officers. We've increased the funding to municipalities for more firefighters and police officers. Year after year, we vote for it; the members opposite vote against it, and you know what? I think the proof is in the pudding; this is core government spending that's responsible, that makes a difference for people in there.

Next one: we're talking about cutting red tape. We're looking at that to get rid of boards and commissions. I think that's a very positive move to amalgamate them, move that forward. Again, the members don't believe in cutting red tape. When we brought forward BizPaL, when we dropped small business tax rate to zero, when we dropped the corporate tax rate from 17 to 12 per cent, when we got rid of the capital tax; those are positive things that make a difference and those are responsible actions.

I also talk about some of the things that really make a difference between us and them. When we—looking at what makes a difference in Manitoba we want to be balanced. I find it interesting that we passed a law, again, which I thought was a responsible law, I thought was a fair law that most Manitobans can understand. We charge the second lowest—after this increase we're charging the second

lowest gas tax in Canada, and more important to that is \$2 for every dollar in tax we collect goes into rebuilding highways and the infrastructure. And I'd like to compare in contrast that to the federal government, which takes between 25 and 30 cents a litre out, but doesn't put anything into the roads and highways.

And I often get the question of: What's the difference between the US government and our federal government? Well, to be blunt, the US federal government looks after all the interstates, the vast majority of the money of the maintenance and repair them. We don't do that in Canada. In Canada we have the obligation to look after highways. There's virtually no money transferred, although 27 to 30 cents per litre is taken out by the federal government. None of that money is invested.

I would love to see the members opposite, if they were truly looking out for Manitobans, what they would be talking about. Because rather than pushing us to continue to be—increase the amount of money that's spent on highways, what they would be doing is encouraging the federal government to give their tax—their gas tax money back to the Province to join our 14 cents a litre so that we could have 35 cents a litre or 34 cents a litre to improve the roads, and then we'd have better roads. But I am pleased that we're investing all of the money, in fact, two-for-one dollars raised into the roads, because I think we do need roads and I think it makes sense to have roads that go directly and taxes that go directly into the repair of roads.

Next, I think it's responsible and balanced to have a 20 per cent wage cut for ministers, and I think that shows that we're responsible, that we're taking the high road. And I think it's good because what you want to do is show that we do believe that we have to lead by example, and that's whether we defer the wage increases for all MLAs, the 20 per cent decrease in ministerial salary, and look at some of the other savings that we're going to do. But I think we need to do that.

The other contrast between myself and what I believe that our government stands for in the opposition is they actually applauded when the federal government unilaterally took away the provincial immigration system. And I look at it this way: the years before, when the federal government controlled the provincial immigration system, we would get three to 500 newcomers every single year. And, if you look at the economic benefit of the

15,700 newcomers, I think that's huge and it's huge for all of us. The business immigration program is one of the best in the country. It brings forward lots of entrepreneurs that create jobs for Manitobans and great wealth.

The—and, you know, I don't have troubles by saying that it was an idea that the Conservatives started, the provincial Conservatives started, I'll give credit where it's due, but then was enhanced by multiple ministers and other—the federal government so that it's now almost 16,000 people. And we were trying to get 20,000. I find it funny that the Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba sided with the federal government to take the best immigration settlement program, the best immigration program away from Manitobans, away from the partners that were growing the economy. That's what moved the population from one million to 1.2 million people, and, you know, if you contrast it with Conservatives in the '90s, there was a net outmigration of people. We were one of the oldest provinces in the country; now we're one of the youngest.

We're—our economy is going great, new housing push. I think it makes a huge difference. And you know what? I think that they should join us and say, let's take the best. For me, I think it's always best to try to be the best in the country, the best in the world, and I think we need to get all of us to say, let's have the best immigration and settlement system in the world. I think we shouldn't be going down to average or below average. I think we should be bringing all provinces up to the success that Manitobans have enjoyed over the last decade and more.

\*(15:30)

Finally, I'll talk a little bit about seniors before I conclude. I look at what we've done together on seniors, whether it's the caregivers tax credit, whether it's the seniors abuse line, and now the safe suites. I look at what we're doing on the tax credits, which are focus tax credits which will help people who are seniors. I think what we look at is the homes that we're building, the affordable housing. I think we look at the aging in place, where we're providing home care and supports in the homes all across this province. I look at the program like SafetyAid, which is where people go out and do audits on seniors' houses and make sure that they're safe and secure and they get rid of hazards, so that they pick up the scatter mats and make sure that there's grab bars, et cetera, which are good preventive measures.

I look at things like the Healthy Living ministry, which is focusing on chronic disease, and I compare and contrast this. We—when the federal government stepped out of the wonderful trial, which was a three-year trial, which talked about chronic disease prevention, it was fabulous. It had a great report at the end of it. And the evaluation basically said it prevented smoking, it prevented chronic disease, prevented long-term illnesses, and saved millions and millions of dollars. Unbelievable success. What happened? Our—their federal cousins walked away from it. I'm pleased to say, last year we moved in to fill the gap. We put a million dollars into it. And with food—proper, healthy food—wonderful success story. I think people need to know that we were rated as one of the three best, most sustainable food programs in the world by United Nations for the Northern Healthy Food Initiative. I think what we need to know is that the SafetyAid program saves millions of dollars. I think what we need to know is that the tobacco initiative, which is moving throughout—it's very comprehensive—which pushes against young people starting smoking and then getting people to stop, is one of the most comprehensive in the country. I think those are positive things, because then we're planning for the future.

So, in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I think the difference between us and them is when you look at the Conservatives, they might be penny wise and pound foolish. I'm pleased to say that in both those cases, we're wise just today. We're wise in the short term and in the long term, because we're investing in education, health care and prevention and more police officers, et cetera, the responsible things that Manitobans care about.

And, you know, I'm proud to be on this side of the House and voting for those things, and I would be sad to have to sit there and criticize it and say, no, I don't believe those things, I'm going to take my constituents and vote against those things that make a difference to Manitobans and their families and make a difference in the long-term benefit and economic benefit. I'm proud to be on this tie—side of the House, and I look forward to members opposite coming on over when they look at our budget, see what it is, the importance to Manitobans, and see what the difference long term those investments make.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West):** I find it interesting the minister wants to be like the US.

That's quite a change. I don't know how we can get there but, you know, they have some good things. They have some not-so-good things. I'm always interested when we travel in the US that the weather mop—map stops at the border, so obviously the frost must be different there, because when you travel on our roads to the border, you can hardly get there, but as soon as you're over the border into the US, well, they're fabulous. So there's something different there. And, you know, the federal programs—you want to talk about that. The federal government does pay for the roads down there, but only—only—if the state does abide by certain federal regulations including the speed limit. Oh, there's some catches there. So if they don't abide by speed-limit enforcement, then they don't get 'febral'—federal infrastructure money.

So—but where to start with the budget and the amendment? Now, much has been said about this government misleading Manitobans prior to the election. Apparently, there's a work that describes—a word that describes what the Premier (Mr. Selinger) did prior to the election, but we're not sure that we can use it in the House until the Speaker rules on it. So I think you all know what that word is. So we can say only that the Premier misled Manitobans. Not only the Premier, Mr. Speaker, but all the candidates on the opposite side of the floor—all the NDP candidates—said the same thing and misled Manitobans in the same way: a promise not to raise taxes. But what do we have in this budget? Nine new tax increases that we know of. So the entire NDP machine—all of its candidates—telling Manitobans no cuts, no tax increases, trust us. How can we trust them when they constantly misled Manitobans?

And, Mr. Speaker, one wonders if this is possibly a Paul Martin type of budget. Mr. Martin was famous for underpromising and overdelivering his budgets. What do we know? We have some estimates of revenue from the tax increases but will they, indeed, extract more money from Manitobans than this government has projected? Will we see much higher revenues from taxes, as forecasts might be wrong?

Mr. Martin also downloaded expenses to other areas of government, and this NDP government has also done that, forcing school boards, cities, municipalities to raise track—taxes to make up for the shortfalls. This budget is a drain on the pocketbooks of Manitobans at all levels.

What about restraint, Mr. Speaker? That's another tool often used in the budgetary process. But

this government has a huge spending problem, an addiction, so it's unlikely that they would be able to change that one, in one budget. They pay lip service to restraint, but there does not seem to be any message of that in the various departments. I've been asking departments if they've been given any message of restraint, and the answer is no.

I've asked in the MPI committee on Crown corporations last week. The CEO had met with the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) the previous month. I asked her if there was any message of restraint from him. She looked a bit confused and said no. So no message of restraint on spending in MPI, and the CO-CEO was surprised that the question would even be asked.

So, the ultimate question would be: Is this government misleading Manitobans again?

I—a year for now, will we see much higher revenues from these taxes than projected, impoverishing—than this government has projected, and impoverishing Manitobans that the government—as this government boasts about their management ability? Easy to manage, when you have all—all you have to do is increase the price.

Mr. Speaker, last week I asked the Minister responsible for Manitoba Public Insurance what the \$35 increase in vehicle registration—vehicle fees would apply to? If you own a car, truck, snowmobile, trailer, which of them are subject to the fee increase? He said he didn't know. The Finance Department tells us that they're now working on the following year's budget. The coming year's budget's submitted to the House before this Legislature, so surely someone knows the answers to these questions.

If they don't know the answers, and they're hiding something from Manitobans, shame on them. They should know better. If you're embarrassed about something, and you don't want the public to know about it, then you shouldn't have done it. It's most concerning to hear the people who should know the answers say that they don't know.

Mr. Speaker, when we had MPI in front of the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations last week, we asked about drivers who were operating a motor vehicle without registration. Police are concerned about individuals registering a vehicle,

and then coming in shortly answer—after, cancelling the registration and continuing to operate that motor vehicle, without insurance and, of course, without paying any taxes.

Since then, they've a—since they have a five-year sticker on the licence plate, it's not immediately obvious if you have insurance. I'm sure you realize how much havoc an uninsured vehicle could possibly cause if there were an accident. MPI has had to pay for a few automated licence plate readers, I think they're called ALPRs, for the police and the RCMP. In fact, MPI paid \$150,000 for five of these devices. They read the plate and check if it's registered. Wouldn't it be cheaper and more effective to register a vehicle every year, and get a new sticker, and maybe that's a little cheaper process? Extra business to the broker, or they might be able to sell more insurance to those people? But, I digress.

At committee, the CEO of MPI told me they don't believe that underinsured vehicles are a problem, because the readers out there have not shown any increase in uninsured vehicles, and because their premium totals have not changed much from year to year. But, you know, our population has changed. There are more vehicles out there on the road. Is MPI using the wrong measuring stick?

Let me tell you a story to explain. When I was involved in market research, I ran an annual study that measured the use of crop protection products on agricultural crops in Canada. It was very detailed, and very accurate. It was the standard of the industry. One of our clients found that two of their products gave the farmer enhanced control if they were mixed together. So, Mr. Speaker, when you go out to be a farmer, you'll know how to work all this.

\*(15:40)

They produced and distributed measuring cups to the retailers and farmers to promote this mixture. The cups held about a litre. They were easy to hold. They were strong and they were transparent. They were a great size for storing nails, holding paint while you were painting and cutting edges. A variety of things. Holding marbles, if you played—if your kids played marbles.

**An Honourable Member:** In case they lost their marbles.

**Mr. Helwer:** That could be too.

Mixing the two products was not high on the list for which they were used. Now, when I presented the

results of this survey to the board and the executive of that particular company, the vice-president of marketing stood up and he told me that my results were wrong for that product mix. I asked him, what gave him that idea? And he said, well, we know how many of these mixing cups we gave away, so obviously they were all used to mix the product. He was wrong—using the wrong measuring stick.

Mr. Speaker, is MPI using the right measuring stick? Is there a simpler, easier and cheaper way to accomplish the intended result? Those are some of the questions that need to be asked. Those are some of the questions that need to be answered, and they're not even the tough questions.

I am surprised by how little information is available to the public considering how much they pay in taxes, taxes that have gone up considerably in this budget. The public seems to let the government off easy by not insisting that information be readily available. Other jurisdictions make information much more readily available. Other jurisdictions have a public accounts committee that is able to do a better job for the taxpayers. Here, I'm told that we've made great deal of progress with our Public Accounts Committee; it's supposed to be a non-partisan committee, but I have seen very few questions from the government ministers.

Mr. Speaker, I met with the chair and the clerk—"clark," as they would say—in-of the public accounts committee for Britain's House of Commons. They were astonished that we have a minister on our Public Accounts Committee as a member. The position and presence of a minister is often intimidating to staff. I know we can have the discussion about whether or not the individual occupying that position is intimidating, but I'll leave that for another time. Staff are not comfortable answering questions when a minister is present. There are many things that will enhance the evolution of the Public Accounts Committee to operate at the level where it is truly making sure that the public is represented.

Mr. Speaker, the flood was front and centre for much of the year but its impact on the farmer has been largely forgotten. I was reminded by a colleague just yesterday that on the farm every day is Earth Day. It's not something we celebrate once a year; it's there every day because they are husbands of the land.

**An Honourable Member:** Mr. Farmer.

**Mr. Helwer:** Mr. Farmer.

Last year, there were large portions of agricultural land that were under water and for very long extended periods, something that has not happened before in recent memory. So what happened to the nutrients that were applied to this land? Many farmers conducted extensive soil tests with their dealers this spring to find out what happened to the levels of nutrient. What was available in the land? Phosphate levels remain remarkably level from last year's tests. In fact, sometimes it went up. Phosphate applied last year remained in the soil and is available as a nutrient for this year's crop. Phosphate did not run off in the water, much as the media would want you to believe. Mr. Speaker, farmers are often blamed for many things, but these tests prove that phosphate and water did not come from water-sodden fields.

There are, however, problems with flood compensation. Farmers are being told that to be eligible for flood compensation, they must reseed the land to the crop that was on the land last, be it pasture, winter wheat or whatever the other crop was. Now, crop rotation is an important agronomic tool and farmers should be allowed to reseed the crop to whatever was next on their crop-rotation plan. Crop insurance allows for it; flood compensation should as well. It's just common sense.

There was no mention of the payroll tax in this budget, or I—should I say, health and post-secondary education tax levy. It's a job killer.

As a business person, I always reinvest as much money in our company as possible. It just makes sense. Most business people do the same. If I took even a portion of the money that our company has paid to the government on the payroll tax, just a little bit, we would be twice as large, employing twice as many people who pay twice as much income tax. We'd pay twice as much corporate tax. So, you know, you'd be adding all these new taxpayers to the provincial tax roll. Instead, we have to remit this money to the NDP government and struggle in Manitoba to expand.

We have had national competitors move into this province, and because they are below the payroll threshold their total payroll is not within Manitoba. They don't have to pay this tax, but we, as a Manitoba firm, have to pay it. This is an unfair advantage—disadvantage to us, of course.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, I've been told by various ministers that the payroll tax is one way that we can tax the federal payroll within Manitoba and we can get some federal money back into Manitoba. That's just taxing tax dollars. That, to me, seems absolutely ludicrous. In fact, has this payroll tax driven federal employment away from Manitoba? Are we losing federal jobs from Manitoba because of this government's decision with the payroll tax? If you were an employer and you were looking to put jobs wherever you can in Canada, perhaps you could put them somewhere in a lower tax jurisdiction.

Now this government tries to defend it but raising—by raising the threshold, although they didn't do that this year. But what do you think happens to a growing company? You add new staff. You pay your existing staff more so you can keep them—especially with the oil patch with the upward pressure on salaries—and, as a result, you're always above the threshold. It's a mirage. It's just out of reach that you might one day be beneath this threshold that the government changes or doesn't change as their whim decides. So it never really happens for us and we're never going to be below that threshold. We'll just keep paying that tax and compromising our ability to expand.

The budget does a lot of things to Manitobans, and they're not happy. Deficit financing of any type is a concern. Deficit financing at these levels is not sustainable for Manitoba. At the end of the day Manitobans pay the price for this government's spending addiction. Manitobans pay the price for downloading. Manitobans pay the price for tax increases that the governments profess to not know what they apply to. Manitobans know better and, Mr. Speaker, this government should too.

Now we've had some changes, Mr. Speaker, to health care. They're talking about changing the RHAs—lot of angst out there in Brandon right now, I have to say. A lot of concern about what this means for Brandon, what does it mean for Assiniboine, what does it mean Dauphin, because, of course, there was no consultation in this. It was a mystery; it was a secret that they couldn't tell anybody. So now they're having to restructure. It may be the right approach, but, you know what? There are better ways to do it. In fact, there are a lot of better ways to do small things, small improvements in the health-care sector that are not threatening to people.

I talked a little bit yesterday about our family experience in health-care system. We have much

more than that, but in that experience we saw a wide variety of health-care expenses. Some of them we paid for; some of them we didn't have to pay for, the government paid for. Some of them delayed the process. And when your daughter is sitting on dialysis unit for eight months and you see her failing because this government won't spend the dollars in the right place, they won't do the small things the right way, it tears at your heart strings. There are—there was a time when our daughter was not able to get a transplant because she was not healthy enough, and we never knew if she would recover enough to be able to get that. That is devastating to watch.

There are things that I saw in the health-care system that this government has not stepped up and made the changes. They are small changes; they are minute changes, but they would have made the difference for our daughter. We were lucky she was able to rally back and be able to get that transplant. And there are fabulous people in the health-care system to—helped her do that. But there are small, little things that can be changed to make that much better for Manitobans 'elthwhere'—everywhere.

So, Mr. Speaker, in all this, as I said, the budget does a lot of damage, I believe, to Manitoba. We don't know where it's going to end up. I am very dismayed that this government can't give us accurate estimates.

And at the end of the day we don't know where Manitoba is going to be. Are we going to be better off? Are we going to be worse off? The government really doesn't know. They say they don't know, but the Finance Department knows the numbers. They know them cold. We know that we can get those numbers, but this government is not releasing them to us. It's not releasing them to the public, and I think that as very damaging to the Manitoba economy. Those are the types of information that we need. Those are the types of the information that Manitoba—Manitobans should be able to obtain from this government.

\* (15:50)

So, in all, I would like to see more sincerity. I would like to see more transparency, and we have an act in front of the Legislature that will make sure that those things happen for Manitobans. I hope that this government passes that amendment.

In the end, Mr. Speaker, it's Manitobans this comes down to. There's only one taxpayer here and we all know who they are—they're Manitobans all

across here, all across this great province. But they are the ones that are footing the bill for this budget and they don't know what that bill is going to be just yet. They don't know that they'll be in business next year; they don't know if they'll be able to manage their family; they don't know if they'll be able to pay for the expenses; they don't know if their children will be able to participate in any events that the school decides will be an extra cost to them.

We don't know those things, Mr. Speaker, and this is very damaging to families. They need to plan for the long term, but, unfortunately, this government is going to make that long-term extend out very, very far and we're going to be paying for this deficit budget for a long time to come. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy):** It is a pleasure, once again, to rise in this House in support of our government's budget, but let me take the time, first of all, Mr. Speaker, to congratulate our Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) on his first budget in this role.

It was a challenging task to balance everyone's needs and expectations, but I think he did so brilliantly, and, might I add, bravely, for Finance ministers are both everyone's best friend and everyone's scapegoat—often on the same day.

Mr. Speaker, there were no doubt many voices all competing to be heard by our Minister of Finance and I'm sure everywhere he went in the months leading up to the budget he met someone who had all the answers.

*Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair*

There were those who wanted reckless cuts; there were those who wanted to jeopardize the things that matter to Manitoba families in order to satisfy an ideology; there were others who called for irresponsible spending, and although their hearts may be in the right place, it's not the best way to build on our province's success and future prosperity.

Instead, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we choose to protect those things that matter most to Manitoba families. We chose balanced approach, a responsible approach. But a responsible government also must be a responsive one.

There are a number of new MLAs in our caucus and it has been a pleasure getting to know all these new members. They bring to our caucus new energy, fresh ideas and a variety of experience, and I believe

that if you're going to be a responsive government, you need to renew yourself. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you look around the government side of this Chamber, you see diversity, you see optimism and you see Manitoba reflected in the faces of our caucus. It's something we're very proud of.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 2008, the world faced an economic crisis in which many parts are still trying to recover from. One only needs to watch the international news to see that in many parts of the world, times are tough; people are losing their jobs, their homes and the services they depend on to protect them in difficult times. Manitoba did fare better than most places, but until our major trading partners recover, times will remain somewhat uncertain for us as well.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we know what other governments have done when faced these kinds of choices. We know that the Filmon government fired nurses and compromised our education system. We also know that the federal Liberals slashed funding to things such as universities, and it seems a day doesn't go by that we don't hear about more job losses as a federal government cuts front-line services here in Manitoba and across the country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we could have made those same choices, or, we could, as we have decided—as the opposition proposed to delay coming back into balance. But neither option would be the right thing to do. Instead, we're committing to protecting front-line services, supporting the growth and future of our province and coming back into balance by 2014.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have been the Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy for just over a year. It has been an incredible opportunity, and I have so valued the experience and people that I have met in this position.

Last year's budget, we committed to freeze tuition to the rate of inflation and to ensure three-year fundings to universities, committing to a 5 per cent increase last year, this year and next year. Mr. Deputy Speaker, educating people is probably one of the most important things we can do for our future. Our province is getting younger, which means education and, particularly, post-secondary education are the key to our future.

Our new economy means people need skills. Whether they gain them at college or university, a

post-secondary career is essential for many careers in our knowledge-based society, but I would also say to the member of Brandon West that an educated society also does help business.

Business today, more than ever, needs trained, skilled and educated workers. Innovation is the key to our economy's future and our economy's future successes, and so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to argue that post-secondary spending is actually essential to business success.

Our balanced approach to funding universities is much the same as our thinking on our budget: fair and predictable funding at 5 per cent for universities, and predictable, affordable tuition for our students.

We continue to support students through bursaries and our tuition rebate. We have the third lowest university tuition in the country, but even so, even so, if you graduate and put down roots in Manitoba, you will receive 60 per cent of your tuition back, and this is true no matter where you studied. If you were a student from Manitoba who decided to study in Ontario, for instance, and then return home, you're still eligible for that 60 per cent tuition rebate.

In fact, if you study anywhere in the world, and wherever you come from in the world, if you make Manitoba your home, you are still eligible for the rebate after you graduate. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is just one of the many ways we have made Manitoba attractive to immigrants who come here and bring with them their skills, their culture and their families, enriching not only our economy, but also our communities.

Manitoba has been welcoming immigrants since before we were the country of Canada. We have a long history of people finding their way here and then making it home. And, I dare say, many of us in the Chamber have heard stories around our own dinner tables of the first generation of our own families who arrived here in Manitoba.

We're not a melting pot like the United States. We welcome, in fact, we celebrate our diversity, and I just have to point out, if you're ever curious of how much diversity, just try to get to every single Folklorama pavilion in those two weeks. It is nearly impossible, but I congratulate the ministers who've managed to do that.

Manitoba has the most successful provincial nominee program in the country. Our local organizations work on the ground and in

communities to help new Canadians get the support they need to be successful in Manitoba, and it's been working. Newcomers to Manitoba find their way into our economy better than anywhere else in the country. They find jobs quicker and buy homes sooner.

Manitoba's immigrants have the lowest unemployment rate in Canada, which is why I don't understand why our federal government isn't celebrating the success and trying to replicate it across the country. Mr. Deputy Speaker, so many of our communities benefit from having new Canadians, and I do worry what the impact will be, and, more so, I wonder how it will change the face of Manitoba in ways beyond our economy.

I was watching television one morning a few months back when I saw a story on a new trend. It was how in many cities people are leaving the suburbs and moving downtown. It featured a woman who was living in a multimillion-dollar mansion in, I believe, San Francisco. The house was impressive. It was incredible. It—what stood out the most was an entire glass staircase going up at least four floors through the centre of the home and at the top there was a giant skylight so that all the light from the top storey filtered all the way through the glass staircase right through to the basement, and as I watched this story I wondered, what did this woman do to be able to afford such luxury? Well, she called herself a health-care entrepreneur. It's a title I had never heard of before, but, obviously, a very lucrative job judging by the size of the mansion that she lived in and the beautiful art and furniture that was decorating it. Well, of course, this health-care entrepreneur was Connie Curran.

When the Tories faced tough times, their solution was to make one woman extraordinarily wealthy while firing a whole bunch of nurses. I guess that is one way to deal with uncertain times, but I prefer our way. We aren't firing nurses; in fact, we're training and hiring more nurses, more doctors, more physician's assistants, nurse practitioners and health-care technologists. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are putting into place the supports so that everyone in Manitoba who wants a family doctor will have one by 2015.

\* (16:00)

And until there is a cure for cancer, we are making sure that supports are in place to make the journey a little easier by ensuring faster testing and treatment of cancer, free cancer drugs for patients,

and making sure more people can remain at home during their treatment. We can't take away all the fear and stress of having cancer, but we can help ease the burden by ensuring Manitobans get the best care possible in the most timely manner.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I've already spoken about some of our government's commitments to post-secondary education: three-year funding to universities at 5 per cent last year, 5 per cent this year, and 5 per cent next year, also, a 4 per cent increase to colleges' operating funds. We're freezing tuition at universities to the rate of inflation as well. I meet with students regularly and one of the things they told me is that they want to be able to earn more money while going to school, but in many cases will still need their student loan in order to make ends meet. Well, we listen to students and that's why, beginning this summer, Manitoba students will be able to earn more while still receiving their student loan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one gets to meet many people in this career. As an MLA, as a minister, I have the opportunity to speak with and meet many Manitobans. But some of the stories that have touched me the most are the ones I've heard when visiting our adult learning and literacy programs. I think our adult learners are among some of the bravest people I've ever met. I can't imagine having to admit that you can't read well or don't have a high school diploma. It takes a lot of courage to say those things out loud, and it takes even more courage to do something about it.

The people I've met in our learning centres all have a different story of how they got there. In many cases, they've had successful careers doing something that involves physical labour, but, as the body gets older, physical labour takes its toll. And for some folks, they've carried with them a sense of shame that, for whatever reason, they weren't able to finish high school or, perhaps, have a low level of reading. Every single one of those folks I have spoken to told me that the day they walked through the doors of an adult learning centre they felt welcome, and I take pride in the atmosphere that our teachers provide in the centres and the important work that they do. And that's why, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we've increased funding to adult literacy by 152 per cent since we came into office, and nearly a hundred per cent more for adult learning centres.

We are also the first province to bring in The Adult Literacy Act. I cannot imagine being an adult

learner in the '90s under the former Tory government. There were no adult learning centres. People had to go back to high school, literally, if they wanted to get their diploma and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is not a formula for success. In 2010-2011 school year, adult students in Manitoba completed 12,855 courses to receive high school credits, and 1,438 adult students graduated with a high school diploma and, no doubt, a stronger sense of south-self-worth.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to thank you for giving me the time to speak about our budget, a budget that protects the things that matter to Manitoba families, a budget that makes responsible choices about those things that we need now, but also ensuring that we have those things in the future.

Thank you.

**Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods):** I appreciate the opportunity to enter into debate on the—this year's budget brought forward by the new Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers). I certainly wish him all the best in the years to come in terms of finance, and I appreciate the comments from some of his members that he's a talented individual. I'm not sure if they were referring to this budget or not, but I know the current minister can be pretty talented out on a sheet of curling ice so I will recognize that today. I'm not sure about the talent side of this particular budget, but I will give him top marks for being innovative. But I think Manitobans will be a little afraid of that innovation that the minister has shown. I think most Manitobans would hope that the minister would leave the innovation up to the Department of Innovation, Energy and Mines. But I digress.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, before I get started, I just wanted to acknowledge both you and the Speaker and your important role that you play here in the Chamber. I also want to acknowledge and recognize the table Clerks and the great work that they do to keep the place running properly and smoothly and making sure that we're playing by the rules of the House. And I also want to acknowledge the pages we have, as well; we've got some new pages here. It's a great experience working in the Assembly, and I appreciate the work that they do looking after us every day.

I also want to acknowledge the staff. You know, each caucus has staff that do a lot of work behind the lines that don't often get recognized. They do a lot of the research, or the legwork, and providing

information to us. I do want to recognize the great work they do and the long hours they put in, as well.

I had—I've had the last few years, the—I guess I would call it—it's quite a nice event to take place every year, when we interview the interns for the year. We have a great group of candidates who come forward every year; just amazing the ability these young kids have and the education they have. And it's always wonderful to sit down and interview some of those students, and bring on some new people here, as far as interns into the legislative program. And it's very rewarding to see them here, and participate in the process, and I know they're quite happy to see us back in session and debating legislation. So it certainly keeps them busy from time to time. So I do want to say a welcome to them.

I also want to welcome the new members to the Chamber, as well, and hope they enjoy their time here.

Certainly, this is an interesting budget; it's an interesting for all Manitobans, and I thank the great people of Spruce Woods constituency for allowing me to represent them and to serve them. And it's going to be my job to make sure that the people, the great people of Spruce Woods, actually understand some of the fine details that are in these budget documents. And I hope the members opposite also take time to review these documents, line by line, because there is some very interesting information in there that Manitobans and, in fact, their constituents should be aware of, some very important things.

And I want to just highlight some of those things today that I think are important, and just maybe point out, you know, what the government is doing, and how it impacts the average Manitoban and, in particular, the people of Spruce Woods.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, remember the election we just had, not too long ago, and I remember the first thing—one of the things that the Premier (Mr. Selinger) said at the time was, and I'll quote from that budget back—or from that statement he made back in September 12, 2011, from the Premier: "Our plan is a five-year plan to ensure that we have future prosperity without any tax increases, and we'll deliver on that. We're ahead of schedule right now."

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it appears that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) isn't—not singing the same song that the Premier was, at that point in time. In fact, the first thing I'll point out is the new

and increased tax on fuel, two and half cents per litre. And, if we refer to the budget document, that's a \$50-million tax, at least a \$50-million tax on Manitobans. And it's not something they will see right away but, as of May 1st, I believe, when they hit the—go to the fuel tanks, they will find that extra two and a half cents tacked onto their fuel bill. And it was ironic that the same Premier said, not too long ago, that he was distressed by the price of fuel and how it was going to impact the poorer Manitobans.

And, here we are, the same Premier, not too long ago, since that statement, come in and he raises the taxes two and a half cents. Now, clearly, that's a direct tax on everybody. Now I know the government comes out and says, oh yes, don't worry, we're going to put that money into roads and infrastructure. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is where you should, and members should, have a look at page 23 of the document book, the one that talks about the Estimates of expenditure and revenue. If you look at page 23, and you look at the capital expenditures for infrastructure and transportation, you will actually note they are decreasing the budget 13.2 per cent on a capital base from last budget.

So they're misleading Manitobans by saying they're increasing the transportation bill, when in fact the capital investment is actually going to be down 13 per cent, as budgeted from last year. So that's something that Manitobans should be aware of. And that's why this particular budget is a little misleading. We know the government's good at spin. We know they're good at spin, and obviously they're doing what they can to spin this budget in a positive light, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

\* (16:10)

In sticking with the automobile side of things, the other new increased tax is the \$35 registration fee charged on automobiles. Now, of course, that's just \$35 on passenger vehicles. We're not sure, exactly, what all those other taxes are. Are those other registration will be on commercial vehicles, ATVs, snowmobiles, all those types of things? We're not sure what those extra registration fees will be.

Clearly, the insurance brokers will be collecting those extra fees when people go in to register their vehicles. They're collected through Manitoba Public Insurance; then Manitoba Public Insurance writes a cheque over to the Province of Manitoba. And if you look at the estimate and that, we're talking about somewhere in the neighbourhood of at least a

\$17-million tax grab from Manitobans in terms of that one particular increase in registration fees.

It's interesting to note—I don't know if Manitobans will remember this, but back in 1999 the cost to register a vehicle was \$48 for the average passenger vehicle. That registration fee is now \$154 each and every year just to register that particular vehicle. That is an increase of 220 per cent in vehicle registration fees on automobiles, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is one of those hidden taxes that Manitobans will find throughout the year as they move forward because it's not something that's done at the beginning of the year. You know, as your renewal comes up you will find that new additional tax on your vehicle registration.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, another interesting tax—and this is where the innovation comes in. You know, it's always—I'm sure they—the government's always looking for new—and new ways and innovative ways to tax Manitobans. Well, this is certainly a new tax to Manitobans, and it has to deal with the insurance industry. Obviously, that's an industry that's near and dear to my heart, having worked in the industry for a number of years. But Manitobans are now going to be faced with a 7 per cent provincial sales tax on their insurance products and a number of insurance products that they purchase. And there's no way to get around that because Manitobans need that particular products, need to purchase their property insurance, their life insurance, their group life insurance, those types of products.

Now that 7 per cent tax alone will generate an extra \$104 million according to the documents that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) has laid out. We expect that figure could be even higher once you take in all the premiums collected on insurance products here in the province of Manitoba. But it's a direct tax on Manitobans, and there's no way for them to avoid that particular tax.

And I know the Insurance Bureau of Canada, which represents the insurers that—across our great country here. You know, they're very disappointed that this tax is becoming on a—this—what they call an essential product. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think we have to remember that we already pay a fire tax on insurance products of four and a quarter per cent. So this extra 7 per cent will make the new tax on insurance products, on property insurance, 11 and a half per cent. So there'll be 11 and a half per cent now on insurance products. So, when you buy your homeowners' insurance, your tenants' insurance, the

provincial government will be collecting 11.5 per cent tax on every product sold. So that's a substantial amount of money that's going to be impacting all Manitobans.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we know those insurance companies will have to deal with the changes, and how they are going to deal with those changes will be quite interesting. I think it will be a nightmare for them to try and collect that tax on there. Obviously, changes are made to homeowner policies and business policy throughout the course of the year, and how those changes will work in the future will be quite interesting. You know, will we get a tax rebate once we've maybe lowered some coverage on our insurance premiums? So it will be very forward—interesting to see how that moves forward.

Now, I haven't mentioned all the other tax fees. There's quite a number of other different tax fees that are included in there, a lot of service fees and those kind of things that are going up as well. And, in fact, the line in the budget makes reference to those service fees and other miscellaneous charges. Now, this year the government is going to reel in up almost \$220 million from service fees and other miscellaneous charges. That's up a staggering \$85 million. So the Minister of Finance has been very innovative in finding ways to tax and add fees to Manitobans to the tune of \$85 million.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you'd think with all those new taxes and new fees that we would be in a pretty good financial situation, financially. But I hope the members will have a look on page 10 of the expenditures book just to see where that—how that impacts us at the end of the day. You know, we're talking about an increase of \$400 million in revenue to the Province of Manitoba, comparing last budget year to this budget year. An increase of \$400 million on the backs of Manitobans in terms of new service fees and new taxes. And you would think that would put us in a pretty good situation financially. But if we look at what the province is going to spend, you know, we're collecting just over \$11 billion here in the province, but we're going to spend \$11.7 billion. That's what the province expects to spend this year, \$11.7 billion. Even with the transfer in from the rainy day—or the fiscal stabilization account, the Minister of Finance is still budgeting a deficit of almost \$450 million. So that's very substantial. So it's pretty clear we've got an increase of income of three and a half per cent coming into the province in terms of revenue.

But the minister is also budgeting a 2.9 per cent increase in spending. Now that—as a result of that increase in spending, and we've seen the spending ratchet up year after year here in the province of Manitoba under the current government, is going to give us a \$450-million deficit. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we know that the Premier (Mr. Selinger) talks about his five-year plan and we saw in the previous budgets that there was a five-year plan laid out, unfortunately the government has not met their mark on that five-year plan. As a result, we're continuing to be in a deficit position year after year. So, clearly, the Premier has missed his mark.

Now what does that mean in terms of our debt? And I know the previous minister of Finance always had the deficit and debt component confused, but every year we run a deficit we're going to be further in debt. And I hope the members will have a look at the numbers in the book in terms of what the debt actually means here in the province of Manitoba. And they're going to have to have a look at the debt. Let's take a look at total debt here in the province of Manitoba. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I go back to the 2010-11 year, provincial debt was just under \$23 billion; \$23 billion of debt that we have in the province. The budget this year for the provincial debt 2012-2013 is \$27.7 billion of debt. So we've added close to \$5 billion in debt in a matter of only two years. That is an astounding amount of debt for a province our size.

And I think the other interesting component is, if the members would take the time looking at the budget and budget papers, page 22 and page 23, they clearly define where we're at financially. And it shows an alarming record of increasing debt here in the province of Manitoba.

And the other interesting part on page 23, is it actually breaks it down per capita so we know what every Manitoban is going to pay, what we're going to spend per every Manitoban, and also we're going to—it talks about what the debt is for every single Manitoban. So the total revenue to the province this year will be, per person, income will be about—just under \$11,000. The total expense for every person in Manitoba is \$11,400. So the government is budgeting to spend \$400 more per capita than what they're taking in.

The scary part, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that the debt servicing cost—we always have to pay interest on the debt. On a \$27-billion debt, we're talking

about debt servicing costs or interest costs of \$677 per person. So that's \$677 per person that we're paying interest on. That's \$677 that can be used for any other service, such as health care, education, or go back into infrastructure. And this number is rising. The scary part that we have to remember now when we talk about debt servicing, is that we're in an era of very low interest rates. And there's been signals from the federal government the interest rates—interest rates may increase in the near future. Any increase in interest rates will have a dramatic effect on our debt servicing cost. And as a result, there'll be less money available for the important products, important services that Manitobans are looking for.

\*(16:20)

The other interesting point is they—and they 'dist' include the summary net debt in this particular page. They don't talk about the total per capita debt that we have, but they talk about the summary net debt, which is \$12,900 per person here in the province of Manitoba. And if you look at the total debt, the total debt per capita would be somewhere double that. It'll be in the 20–\$25,000 per person in terms of total debt here in the province of Manitoba.

And it's interesting too that—you know, the Taxpayers Federation, they keep an eye on those kinds of things and an interesting point that they make is Manitoba's net debt will increase by about \$47 per second this year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which is pretty alarming if you stop to think about it. The other interesting point that Colin Craig lays out—that he says, and I quote: A few years ago, Saskatchewan actually reduced spending to get help balance their books. Here spending is up 2.8 per cent and they're trying to call it a cut. This government's inability to reduce spending is why our debt is climbing by \$47 per second.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's really all about priorities and where this government is at in terms of their priorities, and one of the things that I came across when reading the documents here was in the capital investment side of things. And we know we've got some substantial issues in terms of quality of water here in the province of Manitoba. We've got a record number of boil-water advisories around the province, so we think an investment in that capital in terms of providing quality water to Manitobans would be a sound investment. So actually, see, it was quite alarming to me that last year we had budgeted \$99 million in terms of water-related infrastructure;

this current year, the budget for water-related 'infrastructure' is down to \$47 million. So we've been—actually cut water infrastructure funding in half. And we know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that there is a tremendous need for infrastructure for water. I've got a number of municipalities in my area that are in the middle of some pretty large water programs, and they're having issues in terms of bringing the funding for it. So it's quite disturbing to see the province actually cut funding for water infrastructure.

One of the members opposite talked about Manitoba being best in the world, and I think that's something that we should strive for as well. You know, in terms of education, I look at some of the results that we've got in terms of scores and test scores we've got. Unfortunately, we're headed the wrong direction in education in terms of our scores relative other jurisdictions, not just in Canada but around the world. In fact, we're—in terms of our test scores relative to other provincial jurisdictions, we're right down near the bottom of the list.

And we know the previous premier, he guaranteed he would fix high—health and hallway medicine for a mere \$15 million back 12 years ago. Well, we know for a fact that health care is not a lot better than it was then, and we've invested billions of dollars in health care and we're not any further ahead. In fact, we spend some of the most per capita in Canada and, at the end of the day, we actually receive probably some of the least services across Canada. In fact, we still have a number of emergency rooms and health-care facilities closed across our great province.

The other interesting place for me to point out is in the mining industry. It wasn't long ago that we were ranked first in any jurisdiction in the world as far as mining. We had the resources, we had some pretty good regulations in place, and we were a place that investors looked to invest in in terms of the mining industry. Well, things have changed in just a matter of a few short years. Under the current government, we've gone from first place down to 19th place. Obviously, when the mining industries and the business community is looking to invest somewhere in the world, if we're ranked 19th, it's going to be pretty hard for us to attract any investment here in Manitoba.

And, you know, the other thing that really bothers me—and I think will alarm people in rural Manitoba and, particularly, my constituents in Spruce Woods—when I—when I look at the budget,

and it looks—I look under Agriculture and Rural Initiatives. I look at that particular budget page and I actually see a decrease in the funding for agriculture and rural development, and to me that's pretty alarming. In fact, the rural development section of Agriculture is actually being reduced by 3.3 per cent. And in my view, there is tremendous opportunity for some positive economic development in rural Manitoba that will really help the province and help the economy of the province. Instead, we see a government that's actually turning their back on rural Manitoba and actually decreasing the financing for rural Manitoba.

And clearly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is a budget—it's a budget about a lack of transparency. And I want to commend the member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson) for bringing forward Bill 211 today. I think that's an important document that all Manitobans would love to support. I certainly hope the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) will have a positive conversation with his colleagues and have a look at the—that particular piece of legislation because I think it's something that's very positive for Manitoba and I think that all Manitobans would support that particular document.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you very much for the opportunity to enter into a budget today—debate today. I think it's pretty clear from this side that we will not be supporting the budget as presented by the Minister of Finance, but I hope that the members opposite will give due consideration to the amendment that has been proposed by our leader, and I just thank you for that opportunity and look forward to hearing what Manitobans say about this Minister of Finance first budget. Thank you very much.

**Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley):** Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's an honour, as always, to rise in the Chamber and offer a few thoughts on Her Majesty's good government's most latest budget.

I want to start by adding my congratulations and thanks to our hard-working Minister of Finance, who's brought in, very successfully, his first budget. Not an easy task at the best of times, and these are certainly challenging times. And I didn't make his task any easier, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I'm the MLA for Wolseley and very honoured to be so. And part of that job description is to make sure that the residents of Wolseley and their concerns are brought forward to all of my colleagues, and the Minister of Finance in particular, around budget time. But he did

an exceptional job of listening to our concerns and doing absolutely as much as he could.

And the nice thing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about Wolseley, is they're very, very consistent. The two basic messages that I've heard from my constituents—it doesn't matter which of the half-dozen neighbourhoods they're living in—the basic message they've told me since the day I got elected, I'm sure it was the same message they gave to my predecessors, is reduce poverty and clean up the planet. And it's a very happy coincidence that those happen to be my personal priorities and have been for most of my adult life. And I don't see myself changing my focus any more than I see the priorities of my neighbourhoods changing in the days ahead.

And the intense honour that it really is to not just represent those citizens and those constituents in this building is difficult to describe. But it's much more than just representation for me, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is an honour to sit down and actively work with those people, with their community organizations and not just hear their concerns, but actively try and find solutions so that their family is more well off, that their neighbourhood is more reflective of the future that all of us would want to see. And governments have, no matter what their political stripe, governments have an opportunity to play a positive role in that, or they can get in the way of it.

And I'm very disappointed to witness so many governments in our own country and around the world who are actually going in the exact opposite direction of what they should be. And you can see the results as the citizens rise up and express their democratic right to tell governments when they don't agree with the decisions being made, austerity budgets and whatnot and deep spending cuts to much-needed social programs that are sometimes some of the few things that a family can access in order to improve their well-being, whether it be housing or whether it be education.

And Manitobans, of course, all of us have been seeing the impacts of the federal government's austerity budget practically every week and, my goodness, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the results have not been pretty.

We didn't do that. Here in Manitoba we stuck to a balanced approach. We did not go the route of those other governments in using, you know, the financial misdeeds of wealthy bankers on New York's main streets to, you know, use the financial crisis as an excuse to bring in mean-spirited cuts to

social programs. We even had the flood, with all of its additional costs, of totalling over a billion dollars. And yet we have managed to find a balanced approach which protects those front-line services that our citizens need, which they deserve to have, without bringing in the very right wing and repressive approaches that others have been so happy to jump on, including members opposite.

\* (16:30)

And my goodness, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what do the facts say about the impacts of our approach versus other peoples across our country? Well, looks like Manitoba has had the best economy across Canada over the last five years. It looks like we have, consistently, amongst the lowest unemployment rate across the country every single year. It looks like we have amongst the lowest youth unemployment rate, which is often skyrocketing in other parts of the world. Our youth know that they've got a future here and that we're here to make sure the economy has a place for them when they graduate from university and are ready to make that difficult transition.

I might also point out a topic that's been getting some attention of late. We have also seen record population increases, largely thanks to our amazing immigration programs here in Manitoba. And I want to focus on this because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, don't let anyone tell you that immigration is anything but a central priority for this government, both from an economic point of view and from just a basic social moral point of view. We know the value of family reunification, something which our federal counterparts quite clearly have lost sight off. When you have a family that is split across an ocean or a political line, it is a phenomenal achievement to be able to bring that family unit back together.

And I have been personally privileged, yes, privileged, to work with many refugee families, refugee students, the Lost Boys and Lost Girls of Sudan. Members opposite and everyone in the Chamber has heard me talk about some of their stories which I have been honoured to hear. And the settlement services program that we had signed with the federal government previously, by the Conservative government that came before us, has been exceptionally successful, especially under the stewardship of our government. In fact, Manitoba and British Columbia are the only ones to have this arrangement and every other province in the country wants to be able to do things the way that we've been doing it here, because provincially we have the

responsibility and jurisdiction to provide the supports for people that they need once they arrive. And the federal government, at one point in time, recognized that a more local level of jurisdiction was more appropriate to be providing those services directly.

And countless Wolesey constituents have come to my office looking for advice on how they can access the Provincial Nominee Program, asking how they can access the additional supports, asking how they can find a way for their children to be able to get a little bit of extra help with their homework afterwards or to be able to attend English as an additional language classes. And we have been very happy to help connect them to the amazing settlement organizations working on this issue.

And really, I think our Premier (Mr. Selinger) summed it up beautifully when he said, if it isn't broken, why do you try to fix it?

And then we have this remarkable event which happened last week where no less than four members of the federal government, four Members of Parliament, came down here with some purpose in mind to—four Members of Parliament from the government side—*[interjection]*—thank you—came down here, presumably to learn about just how fantastic Manitoba's approach has been to immigration, to take those lessons back and to convince their counterparts that, indeed, every other province does deserve to have this same approach that Manitoba has demonstrated works so well.

And the members opposite, during question period, following orders that were clearly being directed to them by the four MPs sitting on the couch over there in the Chamber. The members opposite were trying to accuse our government of being partisan with immigration. You've got to be kidding me, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's an economic and social cornerstone of good government policy—full stop—end of story.

And yet, the remarkable thing is, if I was going to try and convince someone that they were being partisan, I might point to examples where they've used their party name; in this case, the New Democratic Party. Have we been plastering NDP all over every single settlement organization and event or resident who comes here? No, we have not. Have the Conservatives been extolling the virtues of their party on this topic? Well, actually they have, and all of us, every single one of us, have written proof of this.

Let me give you an example. The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen), in this Chamber, on a radio interview just last week, used the word "Conservative", no less than three times in one answer. I love my political party, but I don't need to say NDP in my sleep. Nor do I need to say it three times in one answer, just to convince people what I'm—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

The Clerk has brought to my attention that the topic that you're currently addressing, the immigration issue, was raised by the honourable House—Opposition House Leader (Mrs. Taillieu) as a matter of privilege, and it's currently still under advisement.

So it's our advice and decision that that should not be referred to in speeches until such time that the matter of privilege has been decided upon by the Speaker.

**Mr. Altemeyer:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have absolutely no problem with the ruling that you've brought forward and I will move on in my presentation.

If anyone wants further analysis of the use of partisan phrases, I would perhaps direct them to page 380 of the *Hansard* on April the 19th. And they can count how many times the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) felt it was necessary to mention his party's name in the context of just asking one question. But, you know, enough said about that. I think it's clear where the side of virtue is on that very important topic, and I will abide by the Deputy Speaker's ruling. And I look forward to hearing the Speaker's ruling on that issue when it does come back in front of all of us.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's—you've actually done me a favour, because there's so many good things to talk about, both economic, social and environmental, when it comes to this budget. I have lots of other topics and I'm happy to move on to them.

When it comes to the austerity budgets that the members opposite would have us adapt: no more investments in the economy, no more investments in the future, no more investments in infrastructure. We've had members stand up and deliver petitions from their own constituents asking for improvements to programs, which we are very much in support of.

And then that same opposition member, in that same question period, will get up and say, actually, you know what, you guys shouldn't be spending money on anything, anywhere, ever, because we just don't like that. I got news for you. A government's job is to raise and spend money for the benefit of its citizens, its economy, its environment and its future. And until you figure that out, you deserve to be on the opposition benches.

Investments in the economy made just in this budget alone—all of the money that is going to be raised from the gas tax, as it has been for many years now by law, gets reinvested back into infrastructure. More money is going to the municipalities—I had a few folks ask me about that, concerned citizens of Wolseley, they keep close eye on things here—21 million more dollars going to the City of Winnipeg this year alone, \$21 million more than they received last year. It's not our job to tell city hall, much as we might be tempted some days, might be tempted—not our job to tell city hall where they should spend that money. They want to put that \$21 million into streets and roads and bridges, or any other priorities they have, that is their decision.

But we've done our job, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We've put more money into the hands of local municipalities to meet local needs. Investments in the economy don't stop there. We're opening a new energy opportunities office so local companies have more opportunities to take benefit of the remarkable publicly owned Manitoba Hydro work that is going to happen for years to come. And another one and a half million dollars was allocated to the Métis Economic Development Fund, to make sure that their communities have every opportunity to participate in the remarkable growth in our economy and the exciting future that lies ahead.

We are also, when it comes to financial matters, managing to reduce spending in some very creative and effective ways, I believe, ways that do not have an impact on front-line services, such as moving from 11 RHAs down to five; such as merging two Crown corporations, Lotteries and Liquor, together, and we are all personally going to be contributing toward that. And I thank the members opposite for their role, because all of our wages are going to be frozen. That's a—and that's an appropriate thing to do in this fiscal year, with the very difficult time as it is.

\* (16:40)

And ministers' salaries are taking an additional measure—their salaries, their ministerial salaries will

be reduced by 20 per cent. I think it's very important for all of us as elected leaders to show leadership, even though it may be symbolic in these matters, and this measure certainly has my full support.

And in terms of financial benefits that Manitobans are receiving, we need to remember that we have promised all Manitobans they will have the lowest combined utility costs for auto insurance, heat and electricity. When you look in the budget papers for their different family sizes and income levels in—across all of Canada, if you are a single earner on \$30,000, if you're a single parent with \$30,000 a year, if you are a two-income, two-kid family at \$60,000, or five members in your family at \$75,000, all of those different combinations, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in Manitoba you are living with the second or third lowest cost of anywhere in Canada. And this type of work is going to continue when we manage to bring in additional measures to guarantee those lower utility costs for Manitobans.

The minimum wage, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm proud to represent the University of Winnipeg. Lots of students depend on the minimum wage to continue to increase so that they can earn the money that they need to go to school and continue to pay for those funds as do other low-income Manitobans.

When we were first elected, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what was the minimum wage? Who remembers? Do the members opposite remember? Course not. They don't care. Nobody they know ever works minimum wage, right? Six dollars an hour—\$6 an hour. How on earth can you claim to be paying attention and leave the minimum wage for years at \$6 an hour? It will be \$10.25 as of October 1st this year, putting millions of more dollars into the hands of low-income and part-time workers across Manitoba. I'm exceptionally proud of that.

And for everyone who keeps screaming about more tax cuts, let me just point out, under this government, every single Manitoban is paying \$1.2 billion less altogether than we were when the Tories left office. That is how much the tax burden for individual Manitobans and businesses has been reduced under our government.

*Mr. Speaker in the Chair*

The seniors in this province will also be receiving some additional tax relief as part of our election commitment to remove them from the property tax rolls and their property tax credit will go up to \$1,025 this year.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, from an economic point of view, we are sticking with our plan to be balanced in five years. The Conservatives, if I'm not mistaken, in the election said they couldn't do that for at least an additional three years past that. If, with that admission, they're simply pointing out the obvious saying that we're faster, we're more efficient and we're better financial managers when it comes to the economy, you have no arguments from me on that point.

And just because this is a slightly tighter financial climate than what any of us would prefer, it does not mean that our progress on the environments or social equality pauses in any way, shape or form.

I'm honoured to work, Mr. Speaker, with the Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship (Mr. Mackintosh) as his legislative assistant. He may be new to this portfolio, but he's already launched many very exciting programs which will come out in the days ahead—was proud just yesterday to join him at the launch of our 13th partnership arrangement on reducing waste and improving recycling opportunities for Manitobans.

This announcement was to launch the program that will oversee fluorescent light bulb recycling and also used paint products. It was held at the Rona store in Transcona. I want to thank them and all the great business partners and community groups that are working with us on that.

And on Earth Day our government celebrated nothing less than the 600th agreement with a private landlord—or private landowner, sorry—to conserve lands and set them aside in Manitoba for future generations. These 600 agreements are now protecting 110,000 acres across Manitoba altogether and our protected areas initiative covers six—over 6.5 million acres or over 10 per cent of Manitoba's land mass area. It is a remarkable accomplishment, Mr. Speaker, and lots of exciting initiatives on the environment to come in the days ahead.

I will close out with some comments on our social progress. I mentioned I'm proud to work with the honourable Minister for Conservation, equally proud to work with the Minister for Housing and Community Development (Ms. Irvin-Ross) in her role as a co-chair of our ALL Aboard committee.

Last June, of course, we passed the poverty reduction act, which ensures that poverty reduction measures will remain a focus for all governments and their budgets for years to come. This year, no

less than \$360 million is being invested directly into community organizations that are working right on the front lines, Mr. Speaker, in the battle against poverty and social exclusion.

Very proud of the many organizations in my constituency who are actually taking the opportunities that we create here in this Chamber and making them real for the citizens that all of us care about. The entire budget paper is in fact dedicated to how we are going about poverty reduction. It's in the budget documents. I would encourage all members to read it and any interested citizens as well.

One of the things that, a course, is also related and was highlighted in the budget speech, is our commitment to build 6,500 and fund—build and fund 6,500 new child-care spaces. We made that commitment in 2008, and this year that commitment, Mr. Speaker, will be met. Exceptionally proud of our government's work on that front.

On top of that we also have 54 child-care centres which are either being built or greatly expanded under this remarkable initiative. Education, deservedly, got very high profile in our budget. We are already beginning to implement our election promise of reducing class sizes from kindergarten to grade 3, down to just 20 students. The Education budget overall received an increase of \$46 million in this year. That's an increase, Mr. Speaker. Advanced Education, looking after all of our universities and colleges, received an increase of 27 and a half million dollars. What this money is going to go towards is ensuring that tuition increases can only happen at the rate of inflation at the very most, and that universities receive 5 per cent funding increases per year for three years in a row. I can't imagine how many other institutions across the country and students across the country—what—just how floored they would be to learn that that's the level of commitment that we have here in Manitoba, and that doesn't even count the fact that students can get up to 60 per cent of their tuition back in cash when they choose to stay in Manitoba, thanks to our government's graduation tax credit program.

We help people get into school. We make sure it's affordable when they're in school. We support them while they're in school and we make sure they stay here after they graduate from school. And the apprenticeship program that we announced just today is a key, fundamental part of that. And indeed, Mr. Speaker, according to Statistics Canada, in Manitoba you will find not only the third lowest

university tuition fees in the country, but the second lowest college tuition fees in all of Canada.

On the community safety front, was very pleased to join the honourable Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan), the minister for youth and children and opportunities, and other of my MLA colleagues recently at the University of Winnipeg, for a very successful forum. The MLAs from Tyndall Park and for Burrows were there as well. We had a wonderful turnout and he is doing some exceptional work all across the province, seeking ideas on how to reduce crime at its source, and we really want to applaud him and thank him for coming to the Wolseley constituency and listening to what people have to say.

And on health care, Mr. Speaker, some further remarkable achievements. Can you imagine another place in the world—how many other places in the world, where the idea that if you or a loved one contracted cancer of any sort, that your cancer drug would be free, that you would not have to pay for that.

Well, you're going to have that reality here in Manitoba, thanks to our government avoiding the cuts that members opposite would have us do. This government is going to be training more doctors, more nurses, more technicians, more support staff, all so—because our government did the right thing rather than listen to the members opposite. People in Manitoba, every single person, every family in Manitoba will have access to a family doctor should they want them, by 2015, because our government has brought in this budget.

And yesterday I was also pleased to attend the reception hosted by the diabetes association, where our new initiative to provide pump services—insulin pump program for pediatric cases, was lauded by those people. They were so thankful that here, in Manitoba, they have a government that listens, a government that is prepared to act and a government that brings in a budget that makes a difference in their lives, which is what all governments should be doing, Mr. Speaker.

\* (16:50)

I'm so proud to be here as a member of my team, as a member of my caucus and to represent the good folks of Wolseley, and I can't look forward, Mr. Speaker, enough to what we're going to do next.

Thank you so much.

**Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson):** The member from Wolseley has a strange likeness to Yosemite Sam; he talks a lot and doesn't say a whole bunch.

The NDP have tabled another fairy-tale budget, and it's designed to hurt many Manitoba families and keep on moving with the spend, spend, spend addiction that we—we've known and seen from the past. This budget amounts to throwing money down a rat hole with no accountability whatsoever. Mr. Speaker, there's—management skills that they're showing make Fletcher the 4-H'r seem like Warren Buffet.

There seems to be no concept of financial management on the other side of this House, no idea how to balance the books and know how—no idea on how to invest money. And after listening to the member from Wolseley, and he was quoting and pointing his finger at the members on this side of the House, and we were the only ones that were opposed to this budget, this poor budget, this budget that was brought in by a half-baked Finance Minister.

I want to just read from the *MHCA Heavy News Weekly* from a very reputable individual, Chris Lorenc, and he said, our industry waited nervously for the 2012-2013 April 17th budget speech, and with good reason. On March 2nd, 2012, the Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation reduced a 2012-2013 program by deleting 10 projects whose construction values were estimated to hover in the vicinity of \$50 million, a huge blow to our industry and the people that we employ.

But Finance Minister Struthers, on his April 17th, 2011, budget—and we each—made a number of announcements affecting infrastructure investment money: drivers will pay an extra 2.5 cents a litre to fill their vehicle tanks; as of May 12th, one cent equals \$22 millions, two and a half is \$55 million; registration—vehicle registration fees will increase by \$35, an estimated 15 to 17 million dollars in revenue.

Minister Struthers stated in his budget speech that every cent raised in these ways will be invested in roads, bridges and other infrastructures, guaranteed. Failure to do so would be a shell game ignoring economic enabling characteristics of a well-funded transportation system to trade dependent upon provincial economy.

And on a municipal front, Manitobans will be the judge. They will judge, Mr. Speaker, the streets, the bridges, sewer, water, regional trade carriers are pathetic in municipal—in municipalities, right across

the province. Winnipeg streets are frankly an embarrassing atrocious—and atrocious. Like it or not, the fact is that municipalities do not have the required revenue streams dedicated to address Manitoba's crumbling municipal infrastructure and a government's response—with nothing, nada.

So, and I quote, it's in an interesting twist, that \$50 million of the gas tax increase will generate is the same amount that government had to cut from the 2012 highways construction program in early March 2012, which was not announced to the public. And, obviously, it wasn't announced to the member from Wolseley either because he hasn't heard about it until just now, and I feel good that I'm able to bring him up to speed, that he doesn't make a fool of himself in public outside of this House.

The president also went on to say, that to us it looks like the government is taking \$50 million more in fuel taxes from the public while at the same time reducing highway construction program by \$50 million. Mr. Speaker, that is a shell game. That's a shell game that this fairy-tale budget has continued to try and push down the throats of the good people of Manitoba and try and make them think that this is what's going to carry them through to a balanced budget in 2014.

The PST expansion on personal services and insurance programs is a slap in the face to very many people—and a personal life insurance and health insurance is just a further expansion to the NDP's dreamland, which adds to the fairy-tale budget that they're building on the backs of the poorest Manitoban. Mr. Speaker, I am sure that these members opposite have some insurance policies, but there are many, many people out there that can't infer—can't afford the insurance today without this type of increase, this 7 per cent increase in their insurance. And for many of our small businesses that are out there, that 7 per cent is going to make the difference between whether there is a black mark in the book or a red mark in the book at the end of the year. And in many cases it will be the straw that broke the camel's back.

This is a party that's hooked on spending. They just can't shake that addiction, and it's a terrible thing. Addiction is a terrible thing, and surely they must recognize that because they seem to be very addicted to spending. They seem to be caught up in a belief that they can spend their way out of a spending problem. That's pure folly, Mr. Speaker. It's pure folly. Because they can't give to someone or to

themselves without taking it from someone. The government owns nothing. And in order to do what they're doing now they have to take it from somebody. They're taking it from the backs of the poor in the—with the PST on the personal services, on insurance programs, insurance premiums and the health insurance.

It just doesn't make sense. This government has decided that insurance should cost more. How can we expect the poorest Manitobans to go out and purchase insurance if the government raises the price out of their income level? Seven per cent—there's no Manitoban getting a 7 per cent increase in their pay, none, Mr. Speaker.

What is exceedingly interesting, however, is that Greg Selinger, or the Premier of the province—

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. I want to draw to the attention of the honourable member for Emerson that the use of names of individuals of the Chamber is not permitted under our rules. I ask for the co-operation of the all—honourable member to refer to members of the Chamber by their constituency names, or ministers by their portfolios.

I ask the honourable member to correct the record, please.

**Mr. Graydon:** Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I apologize for that. It—it's a word that doesn't come out of my mouth very often, and I'm sorry that I used it here in the House.

But I would say that the Premier (Mr. Selinger) of the province is betraying his election promise and commitments not to raise taxes.

**An Honourable Member:** Is a broken promise a lie?

**Mr. Graydon:** And I've been asked a question: Is a broken promise a lie?

And, Mr. Speaker, I believe that a broken promise is a lie. He's taking \$184 million in new taxes from Manitobans. That wasn't the promise during the election campaign. It was clear; he said that he would not raise taxes. He said that farmers would benefit from this new budget. There is no benefit in that budget whatsoever. Manitobans are paying the price for the NDP's spending addiction through higher gas taxes, higher hydro rates, higher property taxes and higher 'daycay'—daycare fees.

And let's just explore some of this a little bit. The gas taxes, of course, affect everybody. They affect every worker in the province of Manitoba. And understand that outside of the city of Winnipeg, the workers out there don't have the ability or the luxury of being able to catch a bus to go someplace or ride their bicycle to go to work. They have to drive to work. So right off the hop you nail them for \$35 on their vehicle registration and now you add cost to them on the gas tax, and you've cut the budget for the highways and for the roads.

I would really invite the people here, from inside this House, to get outside that cement circle. Get outside the cement jungle that they're living in here today and see the deplorable conditions that the roads are in in rural Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, we warned the Premier of the province that he was massaging the books and that

he had over \$600 million of deficit spending from Manitobans during election. So this budget confirms that the Manitobans have known for years that the Premier has a spending problem. Instead of being—focusing on restraining spending, Budget 2012 increases taxes and Manitobans—increase taxes on Manitobans by \$184 million.

The PST on all of these services that I have brought forward—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. Order.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Emerson will have 20 minutes remaining.

The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow afternoon.

# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, April 24, 2012

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