

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
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
MELNICK, Christine, Hon.	Riel	NDP
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	PC
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	NDP
OSWALD, Theresa, Hon.	Seine River	NDP
PALLISTER, Brian	Fort Whyte	PC
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
WHITEHEAD, Frank	The Pas	NDP
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WIGHT, Melanie	Burrows	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	Morris	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 18, 2013

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, everyone. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 21—The Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Impoundment of Vehicles—Ignition-Interlock Program)

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Act): I move, seconded by the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Ashton), that Bill 21, The Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Impoundment of Vehicles—Ignition-Interlock Program); Loi modifiant le Code de la route (mise en fourrière des véhicules—programme de verrouillage du système de démarrage), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Swan: This bill would amend The Highway Traffic Act to clarify that operating a motor vehicle in contravention of ignition-interlock requirements not only constitutes driving while disqualified but also carries all of the consequences that flow from the offence of driving while disqualified, including vehicle impoundment.

This bill would also give the registrar of motor vehicles the narrow authority to modify a restricted driver's licence to allow the driver to operate, only in the course of employment, an employer's vehicle that is not equipped with an ignition-interlock device, if the use of that vehicle is necessary to maintain the driver's employment.

I hope that all members of this Legislature will support these further measures to combat impaired driving in Manitoba.

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

Bill 202—The Increased Transparency and Accountability Act (Various Acts Amended)

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger), that Bill 202, 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: At a time when this NDP government is proposing to strip Manitobans of their democratic and legal right to vote on a PST hike in this province, Mr. Speaker, we need changes to this act to ensure more transparency and accountability from this NDP government.

This bill will list year-over-year comparisons in fee hikes, Mr. Speaker, and will require an itemization of the revenue effects stemming from an expansion of a tax base.

Now, I hope that all members of this House will see the importance of transparency and accountability for all Manitobans and see to it to support this bill today. Thank you.

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

Any further introduction of bills? Seeing none, we'll go on with—

PETITIONS

St. Ambroise Beach Provincial Park

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

And these are the reasons for the petition:

The St. Ambroise provincial park was hard hit by the 2011 flood, resulting in the park's ongoing closure, the loss of local access to Lake Manitoba, as well as untold harm to the ecosystem and wildlife in the region.

The park's closure is having a negative impact in many areas, including disruptions to the local tourism, hunting and fishing operations and diminished economic and employment opportunities, the potential loss of the local store and decrease in property values.

Local residents and visitors alike want St. Ambroise provincial park to be reopened as soon as possible.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the appropriate ministers of the provincial government to consider repairing St. Ambroise provincial park and its access points to their pre-flood condition so the park can be reopened for the 2013 season or earlier if possible.

Signed by J. Hofer, T. Hofer and P. Holle.

Mr. Speaker: According to our rule 132(6), when petitions are read they're deemed to have been received by the House.

Municipal Amalgamations—Reversal

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

The provincial government recently announced plans to amalgamate any municipality with fewer than 1,000 constituents.

The provincial government did not consult or notify the affected municipalities of this decision prior to the Throne Speech announcement on November 19th, 2012, and has further imposed unrealistic deadlines.

If the provincial government imposes amalgamations, local democratic representation will be drastically limited while not providing any real improvements in cost savings.

Local governments are further concerned that amalgamation will fail to address the serious issues currently facing municipalities, including an absence of reliable infrastructure funding and timely flood compensation.

Municipalities deserve to be treated with respect. Any amalgamations should be voluntary in nature and led by the municipalities themselves.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Local Government afford local governments the respect they deserve and reverse his decision to force municipalities with fewer than 1,000 constituents to amalgamate.

This petition is signed by B.J. Burton, D. Orr, R. Wasslen and so many more Manitobans.

Hydro Capital Development—NFAT Review

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The reasons for this petition:

Manitoba Hydro was mandated by the provincial government to commence a \$21-billion capital development plan to service uncertain electricity export markets.

In the last five years, competition from alternative energy sources is decreasing the price and demand for Manitoba's hydroelectricity and causing the financial viability of this capital plan to be questioned.

The \$21-billion capital plan requires Manitoba Hydro to increase domestic electricity rates by up to 4 per cent annually for the next 20 years and possibly more if export opportunities fail to materialize.

* (13:40)

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro create a complete and transparent Needs For and Alternatives To review of Manitoba Hydro's total capital development plan to ensure the financial viability of Manitoba Hydro.

And this petition is signed by L. Ferris, G. Latimer, J. Latimer and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Highway 217 Bridge Repair

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

And this is the background to the petition:

The bridge over the Red River on Highway 217 outside of St. Jean was built in 1947 and provides a vital link for economic opportunities and community development on both sides of the river.

The Department of Infrastructure and Transportation closed the bridge after spending significant sums of money and time on rehabilitation efforts in the summer of 2012.

Individual inquiries numerous trips across the river—individuals require numerous trips across the river each day to access schools, businesses and health-care facilities. The bridge closure has caused daily unique hardships and inconvenience for residents due to time requirements and high transportation costs.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the 'manitoba'—Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to repair or replace the existing bridge as soon as possible to allow communities on both sides of the river to return to regular activities.

And this petition has been signed by B. Manning, G. Janzen and R. Storoschuk and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: Any further petitions? Seeing none—

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Flooding Forecast Update

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): A statement for the House.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to provide a brief statement on the newly upgraded flood outlook.

Recent record snowfall in North Dakota has increased the flood threat on the Red River. Continued unfavourable weather could result in flood levels on the Red River half a foot to one foot higher than in 2009.

As everyone in this House is well aware, we're experiencing unseasonably cold weather this spring. This has delayed the spring melt and has increased the chance of a rapid melt. The potential for spring rainstorms could aggravate overland flooding and increase flows on tributaries.

Based on the current weather forecast, melt and subsequent runoff could start as early as this weekend. It is expected the Red River will not crest in the United States until mid-May, meaning the crest could arrive in Winnipeg as late as the last week of May. With unfavourable conditions, levels at James Avenue could reach 21.5 feet.

The forecast indicates partial closures will be required for all 18 Red River community ring dikes. The forecast indicates PTH 75 will be closed. A PTH 75 detour was in place for 36 days in 2009. The forecast indicates evacuations for rural homes and farms are to be expected.

The government of Manitoba has equipment and material ready to respond to the need for dike closures. Ice jams were a significant issue on the Red River north of Winnipeg in 2009. Since then, the Province has bought out 86 vulnerable homes in Breezy Point, St. Clements and St. Andrews.

The Premier (Mr. Selinger) met today with the mayor of Brandon to discuss flood protection and preparation. The Province has already stationed a sandbag machine in Brandon and started installing a super-sandbag dike along 18th Street as a precautionary measure.

The evolving flood situation points to the wisdom of the significant investments in flood protection infrastructure that we have put in place in Manitoba and the need for further investments in the future.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I thank the minister for the statement.

We will be watching closely the forecast and look forward to regular flood updates as the spring events unfold. As we have seen over the past few days, weeks and months, weather events will have a significant impact on the level of flooding we will see in various locations around the province this spring. Saskatchewan has already indicated their concerns with above-normal moisture in the Qu'Appelle and Souris River basins, and significant snowfall in North Dakota received this past weekend will impact upcoming forecasts.

In looking south of the border in places like Grand Forks and west of us in Saskatchewan, we see a tremendous sense of urgency as officials and residents work to protect their community. We hope our government is prepared for the upcoming challenges we will be facing. As we are [*inaudible*] possibly the latest spring in a hundred years, my colleagues and I are committed to working 'co-operly' with the members of government, our communities and our neighbours who tackle the challenges this spring's flood will pose. As with past disasters, Manitobans will pull together in times of need for the betterment of others.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member for River Heights have leave to speak to the ministerial statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Gerrard: First of all, I want to thank the minister for his statement and update in terms of where we are in the flood. I think it's important that we all know as closely as possible the situation. I want to say that, you know, as having been through a number of floods as a politician, as usual I offer whatever advice I can and certainly working with people around the province to try and improve the situation and decrease the impact of any flooding.

I hope this year the minister will have Alf Warkentin on speed-dial, and I hope as well that the modelling is up to date and that those technical things have been addressed. I'm hoping that we have a slightly increased capacity now on the Assiniboine River. I can say it was—sure would have been nice to have had that permanent dike in Brandon, but I'm glad that at least we're putting up the super sandbags and getting ready.

From the sound of it, with a potential for rain to have a pretty big impact, I think it's pretty important that we're agile, we're ready for eventualities and ready to move quickly if need be. Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I wish to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have seated today 34 grade 9 students from HBNI-ITV system out of Fairholme school, 34 grade 9 students under the direction of Ms. Evelyn Maendel. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart). On behalf of honourable members, we welcome you here this afternoon.

And also seated in the public gallery, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members, where we have with us today from Aurora Farm Louise May, Michelle and José Blanchette-Lavergne and Bill and Shirley Loewen and Miléna and Zelda Perret, who are the guests of the honourable member for St. Norbert (Mr. Gaudreau).

And we also have—*[interjection]* Yes, go ahead. And also in the public gallery we have David, June and Kim Milroy, who are the guests of the honourable member for St. James (Ms. Crothers).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

NDP Election Promise Tax Increase

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): During the last election's leaders debate, the Premier made a solemn promise to the people of Manitoba. He promised not to increase taxes. But then right after, he responded to my predecessor's assertion that he would actually increase the PST, by replying, quote: That is nonsense.

Now, Webster's says that nonsense actually means, quote, an idea that is absurd or contrary to common sense. Examples of absurdities would be making a promise and then breaking it or breaking a promise and then expecting people to believe your next promise. That would be absurd.

My question for the Premier is very simple: Doesn't he admit that increasing the PST after promising not to is nonsense?

* (13:50)

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Acting Premier): I want to say that this decision to increase the PST was a very difficult decision for those of us involved in making it. And it was difficult because we all, as members all over this House do, talk to our constituents, our neighbors, our family members, and we hear from them and we know that it's difficult to ask Manitobans to pay more. And what we've done in this budget is invest in the things that we know are facing us as Manitobans.

We've just heard from the minister for Infrastructure about the flood forecast. We know that that is coming. We know that that's facing us and we know that we don't have a choice but to fight that flood and we don't have a choice but to have the revenue in place to fight that flood.

There are other choices, and this morning we heard from the Leader of the Opposition what the choices he would make are. We have decided to make the choice to invest in those critical needs that are in front of us, and we've taken a difficult decision of asking Manitobans to pay more to help us do that.

Taxpayer Protection Tax Increase

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, difficult decisions aren't tearing up the taxpayer protection act. According to this government, they've torn up the ability of Manitobans to actually decide whether the decisions of the government are credible or not. Eliminating that ability of Manitobans was an easy decision for that government to make.

The fact of the matter is that we all understand this is a strategic call by the government. We all understand, here in this Chamber, that it's based on the hope that Manitobans will forget these betrayals of their trust before the next election. To make this strategy work the government wants to lessen the public debate around this tax hike, and to do that they decided to tear up the taxpayer protection act which requires a referendum and, therefore, citizen participation in the discussion around the tax hike.

Now, what this means is that the government now has a free hand to increase all major taxes going forward if they wish and no amount of taxpayer unrest, no amount of taxpayer discontent, no amount of taxpayer frustration can stop them.

So I ask the government: Will they guarantee that they will not increase the PST from 7 to 8 to 9 per cent?

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Acting Premier): I think the bill that is in front of the House, Bill 20, does make clear what this increase is. It's a 1 per cent increase in place for 10 years so that this government can take advantage of federal infrastructure funding so we don't leave any of that money on the table that we know is desperately needed for roads, is desperately needed for hospitals, for personal care homes, for schools.

I do note, Mr. Speaker, that at their first opportunity to bring questions to this House on the first day, they spent that day asking for over a hundred million dollars in spending on infrastructure. I would think that's because they recognize, as we recognize, that that is a critical need. And now it is come time for them to talk about how they would pay for it, and the member opposite laid out his plan for how to pay for it and that plan involves over \$200 million in cuts, \$120 million in cuts to the services that Manitobans need. And we don't think that that is a choice that—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. The minister's time has expired.

PST Increase Future Increases

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, cuts that Manitobans need like doubling your communication staff, doubling your advertising budget. It's laughable. In fact, Mr. Speaker, it's nonsense, words with no meaning, words with no meaning whatsoever. That's nonsense.

The Premier (Mr. Selinger) and his government promise us a 10-year PST hike and they guarantee it. Manitobans understand what temporary tax increases are with this government or any other government. That's nonsense words. That has no meaning. The Premier couldn't keep his election promises for 10 weeks, let alone 10 years, Mr. Speaker, and now he expects Manitobans to believe and accept that he's going to keep his hands off PST revenue and the PST rate for a further decade.

With this lack of planning and this ad hoc tax reactionary approach, the government has destabilized Manitoba's economy, and it's the uncertainty that hurts working people. It hurts seniors. It hurts job creation. It hurts our economy as a whole, and it's time to reduce that uncertainty and I want to give the government the opportunity to do so today.

Will he commit, will the Premier commit today that he will not in the rest of his term raise major tax rates?

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Acting Premier): Well, Mr. Speaker, what the Leader of the Opposition isn't telling you is what else is in his plan that he released today. Today, he released a plan that very clearly calls for a 1 per cent cut across government, a 1 per cent cut worth \$120 million in this budget.

What does \$120 million less in this budget look like? It looks like over \$50 million out of health care. What does \$50 million mean in this year for health care? That is the equivalent of firing 700 nurses, Mr. Speaker, in one year. To get to that \$120 million, what else does he have to do? He has to cut \$5 million from Justice, the equivalent of 60 correctional officers; \$16 million from Education, almost 200 teachers gone in one year under this plan; \$11 million from Family Services, that's over a hundred social workers.

That is the plan that he laid out for Manitobans today, Mr. Speaker, and it's a plan that looks a lot like—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The minister's time has expired.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. We're wasting precious time.

Taxation Future Increases

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): It's important to put things on the record. This government's been plying its repetitive falsehoods and mendacity about nurse firings for a decade to the point where they believe their own rhetoric, so I wouldn't want any of them to be misguided enough to believe that rhetoric from that member.

The reality is that the cuts we referred to today are promises the government made last year in their own budget speech.

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Acting Premier): Well, Mr. Speaker, I didn't hear a question, but I'm happy to get the opportunity to respond.

You know what? We don't have to look to the past. The past—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Ms. Howard: We just have to look at the press release that they put out today that clearly says—that clearly says—that they would take another \$120 million out of the budget that was presented in this House, \$120 million. That comes at the expense of nurses. It comes at the expense of teachers. It comes at the expense of social workers.

We know that that is their current plan; we know that that was their past plan. And there's a saying in French: The more things change, the more they stay the same.

Mr. Pallister: The reductions in spending that the member refers to and attributes to our plan are actually one of the good ideas they had last year, one of the promises they made last year and one of the many promises they made that they did not fulfill, Mr. Speaker. Another broken promise by them.

We have recommitted to look for the savings within government. We have made that commitment

to the people of Manitoba. That government has made a commitment to the people of Manitoba that it will look to Manitobans to find the money it can't decide not to spend within its own offices.

Instead of looking to Manitobans, working Manitobans, farmers, seniors, dedicated families trying to survive, why doesn't this government take a look in the mirror?

Ms. Howard: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I mean, I, you know, I assume he had some input into the press release that his party put out today. It is very clearly says that they will cut \$120 million from this budget. That is on top of the savings that we found in last year's budget by doing things such as merging regional health authorities, not taking money from the front lines of health care but looking to where we can make smart and efficient savings in the services we provide so that people can get the services that they need, so that they can rely on.

Mr. Speaker, it is very instructive when we look at what the history has been here, and the member opposite was part of a government, sat around a Cabinet table that was faced with difficult decisions, and the choices that they made were to cut health-care spending, were to make real cuts to the number of nurses and doctors that were being trained, cuts that we live with today. To make the choice to freeze all health care—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The minister's time has expired.

PST Legality of Increase

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, this NDP Premier (Mr. Selinger) has shown poor judgment, a level of arrogance that is astounding to Manitobans and a blatant disregard for rule of law by ignoring legislation that says he can't increase the PST without a referendum.

* (14:00)

Should we be surprised by this, Mr. Speaker? The answer is no. This is the same Premier that sat silently and covered up an NDP scheme when his party ignored the law and falsified election returns in 1999 to get public rebates that they were not entitled to.

So I'd like to ask the Premier: Why does he think he has the right to break promises and to break the law repeatedly?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the dilemma that faces everyone in this Legislature is how do we pay for the flood protections and the critical infrastructure that has to be put in place.

You know, Mr. Speaker, there is no one—there is no one—in this Legislature that enjoys reminiscing about the Filmon days more than the Leader of the Opposition. He called that government, you know, the finest government in the history of this province.

Yesterday I heard that member talk about tough love in his speech: time for a little tough love. We found out about that—we found out about that today. Mr. Speaker, \$287 million in cuts is how they would—what they would do if they were in a position to do—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. Minister's time has expired.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, public anger against this budget and behaviour by the NDP government is escalating at a fast rate. All of us are being inundated with phone calls and emails unlike anything we've ever seen in the last decade.

One letter sent to the Premier yesterday lambasted him for changing the law so he could bulldoze through a PST hike without the public having a say and so he can break a law that's on the books that says a referendum should be in place.

So this angry letter writer asked: Does this Premier agree with the writer who called this banana republic governance?

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Speaker, a banana republic approach would be to cut \$287 million out of the government. That's not even taking into consideration the \$265 million that this Leader of the Opposition hasn't got the courage to say where he's going to get the money from. That total—that total—is about \$550 million that they would take out of services that Manitoba families depend on. They would take that money right out of our economy.

Mr. Speaker, that is a very short-sighted, very narrow approach that this government doesn't believe in, and we're not going to turn to our public—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

The honourable member for Charleswood, on a final supplementary.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, after the comments by the Minister of Finance, why doesn't he have the guts,

then, to call a referendum and let Manitobans have a say in whether or not they should increase the PST?

An Honourable Member: Let the people decide.

Mrs. Driedger: Let the people decide, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, there is another letter that all of us in this Chamber got yesterday, and I'd just like to quote from that letter: As a private citizen I am very disturbed by the fact that both you and your Finance Minister have chosen to disregard the law which states you must hold a referendum if you are looking to increase the provincial sales tax. As a private citizen I respect all the laws have—that have been implemented. These are put in place to keep our province and country in order. If I choose to ignore a law, as I do not think it should apply to me, I would be fined or put in jail.

I'd like to ask this Premier (Mr. Selinger) and this Finance Minister: Do they believe that they are above the law?

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Speaker, let's take a good, close look at just how narrow and how short-sighted members opposite are on this issue. Let's take a look at that, and I'll tell you that the Leader of the Opposition isn't going to be the only one who likes to go back to the 1990s and talk about what the—those actions were because this is very reminiscent about what he was involved in back then. It's the same old, same old from across the way.

What would they—what would this mean, \$550 million coming right out of our—the Manitobans' futures, Mr. Speaker? Freezing health capital spending—I remember when they did that—laying off 700 teachers, firing a thousand nurses, reducing funding for bridges and highways—not once and not twice, but—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. The minister's time has expired.

PST Increase Impact on Low-Income Families

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): Yesterday in the House the Minister of Finance said, and I quote: Here's some investments in infrastructure for that family of four she just mentioned who needs that protection from their government and we're going to give it to them, Mr. Speaker.

Well, Mr. Speaker, poverty advocates throughout Manitoba such as Samaritan House, Winnipeg Harvest, have all identified and are correct

in pointing out that the 20 additional dollars per month EIA recipients will receive for rent will certainly not go far as the NDP claim. Manitobans know the PST tax will obviously widen the gap between the haves and the have-nots.

I ask the Minister of Finance: How many low-income families in Manitoba will be forced to use food banks or will be forced into homelessness as a result of this, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the narrow, short-sighted approach that was put forward this morning by the Leader of the Opposition—not only is it reminiscent of his actions from the 1990s in that government, but today, as he said, cuts to today's budget, that would be \$52 million from health care, and as my colleague pointed out, that translates into 700 nurses.

Mr. Speaker, this party across the way, this group of people across the way who pretend that they're interested in the plight of people who are poor, what would that—those families say to this group of people, with 700 fewer nurses in this province to administer health care to take care of people? It's a short-sighted—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Poverty Reduction Government Commitment

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I don't know what he's afraid of. Call a referendum and let Manitoba decide.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance's response—or I should say spin—yesterday was offensive and inaccurate. Yesterday in the House the Minister of Finance stated, and I quote: Since the year 2000, between 2000 and 2010, there were 16,000 fewer people in Manitoba living in poverty. I question that; Stats Canada discredits this minister's numbers. There are, in fact, at least 10,000 more Manitobans living below the poverty line than there were in 2000. To be specific, in the year 2000 there were 155,000 people living in poverty compared to this stat of 2010 of 165,000.

My question is for the Minister of Finance, who has no credibility: Will he agree that his statements yesterday instill little confidence in his government and that his government is not serious about reducing poverty?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, what is absolutely clear is when this Leader of the Opposition and his friends in Gary Filmon's government had a chance to do something for poor people, they took \$48 million out of their pockets; they clawed back the National Child Benefit from the hands of people trying to raise families in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I take no lessons—no lessons—from members opposite who did those kinds of things, and I'll stand up for this government's policy and I'll stand up for the record that we have because it's a record that takes people off of poverty and not puts them on, like what you did.

PST Increase Impact on Low-Income Families

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): I ask again: And what is he afraid of? Call a referendum, or at least stand by his words yesterday when he said, who needs the protection from their government? Manitobans do, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, David Northcott of Winnipeg Harvest has stated that Winnipeg Harvest clients are Manitoba's second largest city. Shame on this government.

For the minister to state that there are less Manitobans living in poverty today than there were 10 years ago is completely false. Research from the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg and other poverty advocates suggest the opposite trend is more likely. And I would suggest that Manitoba working poor agree.

Mr. Speaker, will this minister admit today that the numbers are used—that he's using in the House are fictitious and admit that his PST increase will especially hurt the bottom line of low-income Manitobans?

* (14:10)

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): That decision that the government of the day back then made cost \$533 per month for a single parent with two small children. How could they come to that kind of a decision, Mr. Speaker?

The budget that we presented—[interjection] They're not very interested, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the budget that we presented the other day, look—indicates a \$240-a-year increase to RentAid. That's a real, tangible benefit for people

living in poverty in our province. I bet they vote against it.

That budget we presented in this House talks about and commits to hundreds of housing units—housing of rent—hundreds of rental units that'll be of a real benefit for people living in poverty, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Bill 20 Legality

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, more myths from the government, and just, you know, call a referendum and I will have it the way we go and let's let the Manitobans vote on that.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) said the five-year economic plan is on track to return the budget to balance by 2014 while protecting jobs and services without raising taxes. We now know that this government lied to Manitobans about balancing the budget, as they've changed the date to the 2016-2017 fiscal year. We know this government lied to Manitobans about not raising taxes.

Mr. Speaker, Tuesday in this House, this NDP government tabled a budget with a huge tax increase on Manitobans, an increase to the PST which breaks the balanced budget legislation and drains at least millions of dollars from the fine, fine citizens of Manitoba. Manitobans now know they cannot trust anything this government says. This government has not only lied to Manitobans, they've broken their trust.

With Bill 20, has this government broken the law?

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Acting Premier): You know, I was very attentive on the first day that the House was called back into session. I listened to all of the questions coming from the opposition and I remember the question that the member opposite asked that day. I think that he asked a question that had to do with repairs to Victoria Avenue, a street that I know well, having grown up in Brandon. Well, I think I timed the amount of time to pass from him asking for that and receiving it in the budget. I think it was less than half an hour from the time that he asked for something that he received it. And we'll see, when he gets a chance to stand up with his constituents and vote for that expenditure, for that

spending in his constituency, we'll see how he does that day, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Helwer: Well, Mr. Speaker, call a referendum, let Manitobans vote on it. Yes, indeed.

Mr. Speaker, Manitobans deserve much better treatment that they—than they receive at the hands of this NDP government, yet all we get are lies from this government about raising taxes. This government's promises are no sooner made than they are broken. Even Tuesday, the Minister of Finance said that every dollar that goes into the Manitoba Building and Renewal Plan will be spent on infrastructure. Today, we know this is not true. The budget effectively breaks The Balanced Budget, Fiscal Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act.

Does Bill 20 also break the law?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I just got back from Brandon and I can tell you that the announcement we made of Victoria Avenue was very well received out there. And prior to doing that, we were out at the Keystone Centre where we announced a \$2-million partnership with the City of Brandon, total of \$4 million, to fix the roof on the Keystone Centre, Mr. Speaker.

These things are possible because we're willing to make a commitment to infrastructure in this province. We're willing to build roads. We're willing to build schools and hospitals, and we're willing provide flood protection to all Manitobans.

What are the members afraid of? Do they not want to support Manitobans in a time of need, or do they want to just pretend the only thing that matters is tax cuts?

Mr. Helwer: Well, Mr. Speaker, yes, indeed, that's what partners do. When they show up, they do need to be part of an environment. But did he also announce a referendum? I didn't hear that.

Mr. Speaker, this government tries to say that their plans are guaranteed by law, but we know those laws only last as long as they are convenient to this government. A referendum is required by law to increase taxes such as the PST.

Did this government break that law yesterday?

Mr. Selinger: The legislation we're putting forward is a time-limited 10-year program to invest in infrastructure in Manitoba. We know—Manitobans have told us they want flood protection. We had a

report that came out just two weeks ago that said we need an additional \$1 billion in flood protection all through the Assiniboine valley, up through Lake Manitoba, into Lake St. Martin.

The members opposite want to spend \$112 million on Tuesday. On Thursday they want to reduce the revenues of the government by \$287 million. Mr. Speaker, \$550 million of cuts and no way to pay for it except laying off nurses, teachers, civil servants, shutting hospitals and schools. That's not the future of Manitoba.

Tax Increase Government Promise

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, there's only one way this tax increase will be time-limited, and that's if the time runs out on this government and a Conservative government rolls it back.

You know, this was the Premier—maybe he said it in Brandon. Did he remind them that he once said that Crocus was strong? Did he remind them that he once said he'd eliminate the deficit by 2015? Did he remind them when he falsified an election return? Did he remind him when he said that his five-year economic plan was ahead of schedule? Did he remind them when he changed the law to protect the salaries of his incompetent ministers? Did he remind them when he once said it would be nonsense to increase the PST?

I want to know from this Premier: Can he not remember what he says day to day, or does he just not care to keep his promises day to day?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I really do appreciate the question from the member opposite, because we were able to tell the good people of Brandon that when they were in office small-business tax was 9 per cent, and now it's zero.

We were able to remind them that when those members were in office, they cut the property tax credits from \$325 to \$250. Now they're \$700 and \$1,100 for a senior citizen.

We were able to remind them that members opposite promised a hospital four or five times; they never built it. It's now built and operating in Brandon, Mr. Speaker.

We were able to remind them that they did nothing for people with cancer in Brandon. Now we have a full-service CancerCare clinic in Brandon and free cancer care drugs.

We're making a difference for the people out there. Members opposite did nothing when they were in power.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

PST Increase Call for Referendum

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): You know, the Premier just doesn't get it. The people of Brandon don't want to listen to him. They want him to listen to them, Mr. Speaker. He just doesn't get it.

Oh, the Premier can go to Brandon and he can lecture them. He can go throughout Manitoba and he can lecture them. He can go all through this great province and he can lecture them like he tries to lecture people in this House.

But this was about hearing from Manitobans. This wasn't about hearing from the Premier; this was about hearing what Manitobans would say. I believe strongly the reason this Premier wouldn't call a referendum is because he knows the answer would be no.

But maybe he can enlighten me: Does he think that Manitobans would say yes to a PST increase if they held a referendum?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the reason all those things were accomplished in Brandon is because the good people of Brandon told us those were their priorities.

They told us that the hospital was a priority. They gave the members opposite 11 years to do something about that hospital; not a thing was done, Mr. Speaker. They gave the members opposite time to expand Assiniboine Community College; not a thing was done. They gave members opposite time to fix up the roads; not a thing was done.

We went out and listened to the people of Brandon and then we delivered results for the people of Brandon, Mr. Speaker. And we will continue to do that with the good leadership of the member from Brandon East, who's out there every day working shoulder to shoulder with the people of Brandon, listening to the people of Brandon and making a difference for the people of Brandon.

Mr. Goertzen: Listen to them and give them that vote, sir.

This is a Premier who's shown bad judgment through his entire time as Premier: bad judgment on Crocus, bad judgment on his promises on the deficit,

bad judgment in telling Manitobans that he wasn't going to raise taxes and then turn around and raising those taxes, bad judgment when he changed the law to protect the salaries of his minister and himself, and bad judgment by doing away with the referendum. There has never been a Premier—never been a Premier—who has needed the judgment and the wisdom of Manitobans more than this Premier, Mr. Speaker.

* (14:20)

Does he actually believe that they would say yes in a referendum? Listen to their judgment. Go to the people, sir. Just don't go there and lecture them; listen to Manitobans.

Mr. Selinger: It's precisely because we listened to Manitobans that we're committing to flood protection in the Assiniboine valley.

I had—I went down to street No. 18 today. We looked at the super sandbags that are being put up there. They're going to be three rows of super sandbags because of the great work the people of Brandon did in 2011. That water was 10 feet above street No. 18 in Brandon, and the good people of Brandon held the waters back. We were there to support them. We're well ahead of preparation for that today.

The members opposite do not want to put the money in the budget to protect the people of Brandon. They do not want to put the money into the budget for Lake Manitoba or Lake St. Martin or the dikes along Assiniboine valley. What they want to do is they want to spend without a source of revenue to support it. That's irresponsible. That's the members opposite, Mr. Speaker.

Shelter Rates Effects on Child Apprehensions

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, under NDP governments Manitoba has consistently had one of the highest rates of child poverty in all of Canada. According to a recent report by the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy, a child living in a poor area of urban Manitoba is 47 times more likely to be apprehended and taken into care than one living in a high-income area. According to CFS guidelines, children can be apprehended for neglect when there's inadequate shelter and not enough food.

I ask the Minister of Family Services (Ms. Howard): Why did the NDP not raise the shelter

rates to start reversing the strikingly high numbers of children being apprehended by CFS?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I thank the member for the question because it is an important question, what we do to relieve poverty to ensure that people have a decent life, which is why three years ago we announced the largest build of social housing in the last 20 years in Manitoba, 1,500 units over five years. We're ahead of schedule on that. In this budget, which I believe the member of River Heights will vote against, we announced another 500 units of social housing.

We ensured that every family, including single-parent families on social assistance, were eligible for the National Child Benefit, which the members of the Progressive Conservative Party, the members opposite, when Mr.—the leader of the Fort Whyte was in Cabinet, they clawed back \$150 per family. They clawed back the child benefit of five—over \$500 for every family in the province of Manitoba. That did not allow them to live with dignity. We have put those resources back into the budgets of low-income people to the tune of \$48 million, Mr. Speaker.

Request for Increase

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, the Premier's forgetting the importance of human infrastructure and our poorest Manitobans.

Many times this last year I've called on the government to raise shelter rates. Make Poverty History has recommended raising the shelter rates to 75 per cent of market rates so that Manitoba families would not have to use their food money to pay the rent. This is affordable in the budget.

I ask the Minister of Family Services: Why did she not ensure that in this year's NDP budget that the shelter rates were adequately raised so that families would not have to use their food money to pay the rent?

Mr. Selinger: I thank the member again for the question because underlying the challenge for low-income people is access to decent and affordable housing, which is why we've made a record commitment to build more social housing in the province of Manitoba in the areas where it's most needed, and we're doing that. We're doing that in partnership with community agencies.

We've raised the shelter benefit or RentAid by \$240 this year. We had \$9 million we invested in that previously. We've got special benefits for people

when they're training or working, which adds more money to their budgets. People with mental health issues get an additional \$200 a month—\$200 a month, Mr. Speaker—so that they do not have to be homeless.

All of these benefits are intended to ensure that people have housing first. They have a stable lifestyle. They get access to supports and services through the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, through our mental health agencies and our non-profit agencies. And we've reduced admissions—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. The Premier's time has expired.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, the Premier knows that raising the RentAid by \$20 a month does not provide an adequate base for poor people to get shelter.

Indeed, as he must know, the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry has revealed to Manitobans how dangerously mismanaged Manitoba's child and family services system has become under the NDP. Under their policies children remain entrenched in poverty and are subsequently apprehended by CFS and placed into the NDP's expensive and chaotic child and family services system.

I ask the Minister of Family Services (Ms. Howard): Why hasn't she, as minister, insisted to the Premier and the NDP Cabinet that shelter rates must be raised, as Make Poverty History has asked?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, all the members of this side of the House, and I believe many members on the other side of the House, know that addressing child poverty is a very important issue.

We have reduced poverty in Manitoba for children by 28 per cent since the year 2000 on a market-basket measure, which is the purchasing power that people have in the province of Manitoba. Children living in poverty, single-parent families living in poverty have been reduced by 24 per cent, and we have 16,000 people that have not—no longer live in poverty since the year 2000. So we've lifted the floor for Manitobans.

We've lifted the minimum wage again in this year's budget to another 20 cents, something I know the members of both of the opposition parties have opposed consistently. We've lifted the minimum wage so that when people have the opportunity to enter the labour market they get a decent wage for doing that.

We provide additional supports: we provide optical supports, we provide other supports to people

that are entering the labour market, and we're ensuring people with mental health issues have an extra \$200 a month—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. The minister's time has expired.

An Honourable Member: Mr. Speaker, this government is planning to raise the—I beg your pardon.

Mr. Speaker: Sorry to interrupt. It's the member for Radisson's opportunity to ask a question.

What if She Was Your Daughter Campaign Outcome

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): I'm sure we are all concerned about the well-being of all women in our society, but I'm certain that all of us here in this House are very concerned about the Aboriginal women that are being murdered and are missing. And I know compassionately our minister has been working to address that issue. There are some initiatives like [*inaudible*] wiping tears, Tracia's Trust, what if she was your daughter campaign.

I also understand, Mr. Speaker, that this week—last week the—Manitoba has hosted Aboriginal ministers of Canada and leaders of Aboriginal organizations, you know, meetings in this city.

Can the minister address the House and suggest to us what is the outcome of this meeting on that particular issue that we just talked?

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs): Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm—I want to thank the member for Radisson for asking the question.

Our government was pleased to host the other ministers from the other provinces and territories and the national Aboriginal organizations, and I was happy to arrive at a consensus among all the ministers from the different provinces and territories on joining with the five national Aboriginal organizations in calling upon the federal government for a national public inquiry to deal with this issue.

In the province of Manitoba alone, I need not tell members that we have 80 women that are missing or murdered, and 600 nationwide. I don't think that's acceptable, and I'm very proud of what our government has done in being able to address the issue in a very meaningful way, in working with families, first and foremost, the victims, and secondly, in telling them that their issue is important,

that we simply have not—are not ignoring their pleas for help in their time of grief.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Minister's time has expired.

PST Increase Call for Referendum

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, for a party with democratic in their name, they should really start acting like one. They're going to raise the PST without hearing from Manitobans. They're going to force a vote tax on Manitobans to pay for their own political activity. Becky Cianflone, the manager of the Altona and district credit—or chamber of commerce, called this the most blatant disregard for democracy that she's ever seen in Canada. This disregard impacts businesses not only in Altona but across the total province.

Mr. Speaker, when will this government honour the democratic right of the people of Manitoba and call a referendum on this 14 per cent PST tyke?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, we take very seriously our commitments to the people of Manitoba in terms of protecting families from Manitoba against floods and building critical infrastructure. Even in the member's own constituency, we will do that.

* (14:30)

We're not the ones who will stick our heads in the sand and ignore the problem and hope it goes away. We're not the ones that are going to cut deeply into health care and education as we see this morning from members opposite, Mr. Speaker. We're not going to do that. That's not the approach that we take.

We're going to stand with Manitoba families. We're going to build infrastructure in this province, and we're not going to do it at the expense of health care and education, like members opposite proved they'd do this morning.

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

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to members' statements, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today Alison Kuran, Kelly McLellan-Page and Karen Boily, who are the guests of the honourable member for Rossmere (Ms. Braun).

On behalf of honourable members, we welcome you here today.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Steinbach Pistons

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, it's always a great day in Steinbach, but yesterday was a particularly great day as the Steinbach Pistons won their first Turnbull Trophy and became the champions of the Manitoba Junior Hockey League.

Many would've looked at the regular season standings and seen the Pistons' run as improbable. They defeated the defending champion Portage Terriers. They defeated the Addison Division winners, the Winnipeg Blues. And yesterday they defeated the powerful Dauphin Kings.

But the regular season standings only told a small part of the story about the young men who make up the Pistons hockey team. They are mentally tough and a resilient group of athletes who believe in themselves and brought an entire community and region together along the way.

Playoff MVP Corey Koop provided incredible goaltending and team captain Kyle Rous was its leader, but every player on the team can claim credit because this was truly a team effort. And, Mr. Speaker, I wonder before I continue with my statement if I can have leave of the House to table the names of the players and team staff for insertion into the record.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to table a list of names of the players of the team? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Goertzen: I also want to pay special recognition to the local ownership group who purchased the Pistons in the summer and were a huge part of transforming the team and ingraining it into the community.

Each of the management and staff and volunteers of the Pistons were also a part of the win, Mr. Speaker, and I would note, especially assistant coach Rob Smith and coach and general manager Paul Dyck. Paul is a long-time Steinbach resident but spent many years away from home after being drafted by the Pittsburgh Penguins in 1991 and playing several years international hockey overseas professionally. His humble nature and hockey credentials made him a well respected—both in the community and among his players and he was a catalyst for this championship.

I want to commend the Dauphin Kings on a hard-fought series and note that the MLA for Dauphin, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers), will be making a financial contribution to the South East Helping Hands food bank as a result of the outcome of this series, Mr. Speaker. We always appreciate the support of our local food bank and I want to thank the member for Dauphin for that.

Now, Mr. Speaker, all Manitoba hockey fans can be united as we cheer the Pistons, as they represent the province in the Western Canada Cup beginning later this month.

Congratulations and good luck to the Steinbach Pistons. Go, Pistons, Go!

Coaching staff: Paul Dyck, head coach and GM; Rob Smith, assistant coach; Graham Pollock, assistant and video coach; Chris Mikolajek, athletic therapist and equipment manager; Riley Kosmolak, assistant equipment manager.

Team players: Zachary Rakochy, Corey Koop, Matthew Franczyk, Richard Olson, Justin Baudry, Taylor Friesen, Trent Genyk, Daniel Taillefer, Myles Nykoluk, Justin Dalebozik, Garret Bruce, Hayden Goderis, Jonah Wasylak, Kyle Rous, Gabriel Minville, Nicholas Kobelka, Garret Schmitz, Dustin Loeppky, Justin Augert, Brendan Hopkins, Riley Soderstrom, Tyler Penner.

Aurora Farms

Mr. Dave Gaudreau (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform you today of a wonderful family operation in St. Norbert, Aurora Farm. Not your typical farming operation, owner Louise May invites others to live with her during four months in the summer, and during this time the farm is loosely structured as a co-operative. There are about two dozen people who regularly farm and the minimum three times per week and another two dozen more who come to work the farm every Sunday afternoon. In the times of expansive projects, she also hires casual labour through the Behavioural Health Foundation.

There are countless reasons why the Aurora Farm is a special entity worth recognizing. The farmers are passionate about their supportive—and supportive of healthy and happy animals, local food production, sustainable development, renewable energy and fostering creativity. Lifelong learners themselves participating in active sustainable agriculture education, teaching workshops, giving tours, encouraging volunteerism and providing

employment opportunities. While touring the acreage, visitors are able to meet a wide variety of animals, including heritage chickens, goats, alpacas, horses and cows, as well as the people who are so proud to call their farm home. On Manitoba Open Farm Day, over 300 people came to visit. Tour groups visit in the spring and fall, averaging an additional 400 visitors annually. Goods produced on the farm, such as food, herbal medicines, hygiene products and clothes, are available for purchase on-site, online and at craft sales and, of course, at the farmers' market.

Notably, Aurora Farms is the site of the woman-centred Manitoba Goddess Festival and the Summer Horse Camp for Youth, where children learn how to care for horses, horseback riding and safety skills. As Ms. May says, life moves fast every day on the farm.

Mr. Speaker, it's because of the passionate and inspirational people like Louise May and everyone at Aurora Farm that I can confidently say that St. Norbert is an incredible place to work, play and live. These Manitobans are proud of our collective prairie heritage and they showcase it every chance they get. Now that a—spring is upon us, I urge everyone here today present to experience Aurora Farm, the pride of St. Norbert.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Central Station Community Center

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to draw to the attention of this Chamber a new initiative taking place in the city of Winkler. The Central Station Community Center opened its doors last September with the vision to be a central staging ground, providing resources and programming to people in the community. Leadership team member Terry Dueck says, we understand that all families need support on the challenging journey of living and growing. At Central Station our mission is simple: to assist people in finding the right options so they can access what they need for themselves.

Central Station offers a broad range of programming, including a cooking class for men, the Shine and Share community store, divorce care seminars for children and families, and support groups for people struggling with anxiety and depression.

Last week 70 people took part in a regular community meal.

The first course offered was the financial peace budget course. By program's end participants had paid off \$112,000 in debt and saved an additional \$64,000.

Central Station has found a beautiful home on Industrial Drive next door to The Bunker, a youth drop-in centre. The facility operates without government funding. It is supported by a broad-base group of individuals, businesses and community builders. Special credit goes to the Winkler MB Church for the vision, energy and enthusiasm of their leadership team.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to highlight the great work taking place at Central Station. New director, Christina Wall, is encouraged by the number of new volunteers coming on board and talks about new collaborations with South Central Immigrant Services, Garden Valley School Division, Segue Career Options and the Winkler Family Resource Centre.

Winkler has always been a community that places tremendous importance on families and helping others, and Central Station promises to be the centrepiece of this community's commitment to meet people at the point of their need and offer hope, encouragement and practical support that makes a difference in their lives.

Thank you.

David Milloy

Ms. Deanne Crothers (St. James): Mr. Speaker, many hard-working volunteers across Manitoba are engaged not just in their local communities, but in the international community as well.

Today I would like to recognize one of these hidden heroes, St. James resident David Milloy. I met Mr. Milloy, a retiree through Mensheds Manitoba, a grassroots group of retired men that meet twice a week to volunteer in the community, socialize or do crafts and woodworking, to name just a few of the things that they regularly do. They focus on ways to help other organizations or community groups and to be of service. It was through their good work that Mr. Milloy discovered International HOPE.

International HOPE is a non-profit organization based in St. James that redistributes surplus medical equipment and supplies to countries where such items are in critically short supply. They take donations from hospitals, clinics and individuals

across Manitoba and process and pack them into shipping containers to be sent out to destinations around the world.

Through International HOPE's work, still useful supplies such as hospital beds, stretchers, crash carts, walkers and wheelchairs are provided to those who need them. And in order to do this great work International HOPE relies entirely on the support of its many dedicated volunteers. Donated equipment and supplies from around and outside of Winnipeg are sorted, repaired, cleaned and readied for shipping at the warehouse. Mr. Milloy, along with other working—other hard-working individuals, give of their time to help ensure that others can get the medical treatment that they need.

In March I was given a guided tour of the International HOPE warehouse by Mr. Milloy. The pride he takes in the work that is done there is clear and it stems from the certainty that what he does at International HOPE makes an absolute difference. Their efforts have a huge impact on the well-being of those in need of basic health care in developing countries. Their work also makes a significant impact here in Manitoba as well because they divert an immense amount of salvageable equipment that would otherwise end up in our landfill.

It is this spirit of volunteerism, Mr. Speaker, that make people like Mr. Milloy such a great example for the rest of us. His commitment to community is evident, but his passion for the work that he does runs very deep.

I invite all honourable members to join me in congratulating and thanking Mr. Milloy and those like him for their dedication to giving back to the community at both the local and global level.

Thank you.

*(14:40)

Springfield Heights School Resource and Administration Team

Ms. Erna Braun (Rossmere): Mr. Speaker, I rise today during Education Week in Manitoba to honour a group of outstanding educators from the River East Transcona School Division.

Earlier this year, the Manitoba Council for Exceptional Children recognized the Springfield Heights School resource and administration team, with a Yes I Can! Award. These awards celebrate the achievements of children and youth with exceptional needs, as well as the educators who support them.

The Springfield Heights School resource and administration team has spent seven years working together to ensure that every student can access the educational tools they need to succeed both in the classroom and beyond. The enthusiastic group is always developing new strategies and creative approaches that put children first, so that all students may benefit.

The Springfield Heights student services clinical unit includes psychology, social work, speech and language, as well as reading and occupational therapy. The school also integrates specialized initiatives for students with exceptional needs, including a program that helps develop word formation and prompts students to learn to read.

Education is about supporting and encouraging children and youth to reach their full potential. During Education Week, it is important to thank all those who work towards the success of our children. Teachers, administrators, students, parents and the community all play important roles in our schools and in the lives of young Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to be able to recognize the Springfield Heights School resource and administration team today. They have worked tirelessly to ensure students' diverse educational needs are met and exceeded.

I would like to ask all members of the Legislative Assembly to join me in thanking the team for their dedication and commitment to our children and the innovative ways they help students learn.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to request leave to include the names of the Springfield Heights resource and administration team into the record.

Three resource teachers are in the gallery with us today: Alison Kuran, Kelly McLellan-Page, Karen Boily. The additional members of the team are Nellie Pauls, Jenni Foubister, Kelsey Shalay, Kristy Peterson, Michelle Sopher, Vice-Principal Scott Lysack and Principal Mario Beauchamp.

Thank you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

BUDGET DEBATE

(Third Day of Debate)

Mr. Speaker: To resume debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr.

Struthers), that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government, and the amendment thereto, standing in the name of the honourable member for Riding Mountain who has 24 minutes remaining.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): It's a pleasure to continue my debate today and share some of the concerns that I have with regard to this government and its very, very serious lack of judgment in their budget this year.

Earlier today, I raised questions with regard to families who are living below the poverty line, and I questioned the Minister of Finance's numbers with regard to the number of individuals who are living below the poverty line, and they went from 6,000 last year to 16,000 that are off the—off of the poverty line stats. And, actually, the numbers that I have indicate that we see an increase of 10,000 people in Manitoba who are living below the poverty line, from 155,000 in 2000 to 165,000 Manitobans now living below the poverty line. So I guess my concern is the concern of many Manitobans, that Manitoba has a significant challenge ahead of them and that the shock—it—the numbers are actually very shocking indeed.

According to the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, while the nation's poverty rate has remained relatively stable, the child poverty rate in Manitoba has been gradually increasing and remains at least 6 to 6 and a half per cent above—points higher than the national average. And the Social Planning Council reports that Manitoba has the second highest rate in Canada in 2012, continuing to be a leader in that area, which is not something to be extremely proud about. Twenty per cent of our children, and that's about 54,000 children, Mr. Speaker—that is a city in every term—and they live below the poverty line as defined by Stats Canada low-income measures after taxes.

So, in Manitoba, the fastest growing banks are the food banks in Manitoba, and that's something not to be proud of. Winnipeg Harvest has indicated that for the last two years Manitoba is the No. 1 province for food bank use, and Winnipeg Harvest feeds over 30,000 children each month. So we are the child poverty capital of Canada, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, when the government speaks to poverty and the challenges that young families face, I don't understand how they would believe that the 1 per cent PST increase would actually be in the best interest of these families. We know that they will be looking at using the food banks and other resources

out there to help feed their families and take care of their families. And, as David Northcott indicated, how many more meals a month will low-income families miss?

I know that the Samaritan House in Brandon is—their clientele is significantly high. They've gone from 10,000 pounds a year to something like 25,000 pounds a year in food disbursement, Mr. Speaker. And that's very disturbing and very concerning. I know that they do their best and I believe that families are receiving the best care possible; but, instead of providing the supports as a hand up to this sector of society, they've actually caused more problems and more questions and caused more fear to those in care.

Mr. Speaker, with regard to something a little closer to home, with regard to forced amalgamations, again, this government doesn't legally have the right to do that. They're going to have to bring in legislation to change that. Again, another situation where they're not listening to Manitobans, they're not asking Manitobans to be a part of a process, part of a change that would happen.

The municipalities that I represent, and I represent 25, the majority of them, and I would say almost all of them agree, that amalgamation isn't necessarily a bad idea, but they would like to be a part of that process. They would like to be part of the decision making.

And I've talked to people that have worked within municipal government—within the provincial government and focusing on municipal government. And they've indicated to me that this is not the way to go, that, you know, municipalities will not be able to meet the mandate of being able to amalgamate in three years. And I guess it's more than just the timeline; it's the process that takes place and how that actually works against municipalities being able to work together.

To have a municipality go to another municipality and say, can we amalgamate, is not that simple, Mr. Speaker. Some municipalities, and it's obvious, have more revenue than others, and have different mandates and ideas on how to run their municipalities. So I think that there should be a bit more support from this government with regard to how this is going to happen.

I know that one municipality, the RM of Shellmouth-Boulton, has gone through an amalgamation process. It was—amalgamation process

that they determined they wanted to do and they indicated that it was not an easy process, but it was something they knew their constituents wanted. And they indicated that, you know, by forcing amalgamations, it's going to be very difficult for the municipality or the community leaders to defend this amalgamation process because if they themselves don't believe that it is in the best interests of their constituents, how are they going to be leading that type of decision making?

And it was rather interesting, because I believe that municipality tried to initiate a meeting with the Minister of Local Government (Mr. Lemieux), and their request, I don't believe, ever made it to the minister. I believe that his political staff indicated to him that the minister wasn't going to be meeting with them. He had no interest in meeting with them. He'll be meeting with them through the process of municipal meetings.

And I thought, how ironic, because this minister had recently been out into that—into my constituency, and to discuss other things, to deliver a cheque, and was more than willing to meet with municipality members at that time. But when it comes down to issues and concerns that are relevant to the communities, we fail to see the minister want to take the reeve's call, Mr. Speaker. And that's very, very disappointing.

*(14:50)

Amalgamations are going to be a very serious matter and, I believe, will have a direct impact on the ratepayers and citizens in our municipalities and in—throughout our province, and we need to consult with those individuals.

The—these individuals have felt neglected by this government for so many years, Mr. Speaker, and I believe that when this government says this PST, this 1 per cent, is going to, you know, respond to the needs of the communities and respond to the needs of municipalities who have infrastructure challenges, well, these communities have seen 13 years of neglect by this government. And they have seen this government receive unprecedented revenue from the federal government and through taxes, and they know that this government had the ability to make things happen, to address the challenges that were needed within the communities outside of the Perimeter, be it Winnipeg—be it Brandon, be it Thompson, be it Lynn Lake and others. We've seen things deteriorate to a point that I'm very concerned

that this government is going to continue to break promises.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen hallway medicine now become highway medicine, and I guess the report that I've recently been made aware of with regard to EMS and the possible reduction of EMS supports in rural Manitoba, is very, very concerning, because we've seen, and I have personally witnessed, individuals who have—for example, have been playing hockey and have fallen and have been put into an ambulance to be rushed to Killarney, only to find out that the diagnostic services were shut down that day in Killarney. So halfway to Killarney the ambulance has to turn around and go to Brandon. We need this minister and this government to pay attention to the health-care needs in our province.

We have facilities that have 30 beds, and 26 of those beds are filled with patients who are waiting for placement at personal care. That leaves four beds for people that are sick, that may need care. And you know what, Mr. Speaker? One nurse has told me that if by chance an individual in my family should have heart attack symptoms and would be going to the hospital, that individual, more than likely, would have to be put in a recliner in the hall and treated until an air ambulance would come and take them to Winnipeg. Now, that's not quality health care, and that's not a government that's caring about Manitobans, and that is not the way that I would want to see a family member being treated with a heart condition.

Mr. Speaker, we have individuals in rural Manitoba who are looking for respite for their spouses. I have a constituent has a 50-year-old—their husband is 50 years old; he has MS. And she was renovating the house to accommodate his declining health and she asked for respite so that her husband could stay overnight in the hospital while they did the more serious reconstruction—taking the wall out, et cetera—and she was told, no, sorry, there's no room; there's no room for him to receive the respite. And you know, that's so disturbing. And what they did recommend and offer was for him to be transferred to a facility that was 25, 30 miles away. That is absolutely ridiculous; it's not acceptable.

And I think that what we're seeing in rural Manitoba is more and more of a crisis. We are seeing more and more beds within our ERs being filled with people that are waiting for placement for personal care, and we are hearing more and more that any health-care professional who wants to speak out,

who has a concern, is being duct taped, being told, don't you dare speak to them, keep—you know, keep your mouth shut, don't share the stories.

But you know what, Mr. Speaker? More and more families are coming forward, and I believe that what we are seeing are families that are just getting fed up with the quality of care that this NDP government is providing for families. We have doctors that are saying, you know, I went into the practice to be helping people that are sick, and what I'm finding is I am more and more becoming a physician who is dealing with individuals who are waiting for placement.

Mr. Speaker, if this government is really concerned about doctors remaining in the communities, nurses remaining in communities, health-care professionals remaining in the communities, then they have to pay attention to this very serious crisis. When you have 26 beds out of 30 that are inhabited by people who are waiting for placement, I think that's a pretty good indicator that the system needs some work, because where do the sick people go? You know, I'm very concerned.

With regard to the flood, Mr. Speaker, we asked the minister if he was going to, you know, respond to the individuals along Assiniboine valley the—or, Assiniboine Valley Producers—and, actually, you know, take into consideration the Shellmouth compensation act and, actually, you know, work at working with those—work with those individuals who are entitled to a compensation package or at least have the minister meet with them. Again last year we asked the minister's office if he would meet with the individuals in that area, and they said, no, that that just wasn't going to be possible. We were not going to be doing that is what the minister's assistant had indicated and, you know, it's very concerning because these individuals, it's their livelihoods. They live along the river. They've been asking for support. We know that the former minister, the member for Seine River, you know, did very little in the area of water stewardship or conservation and, actually, she—*[interjection]* Oh, sorry. Riel. Sorry. I didn't mean Seine River. It's the Minister for Health. I apologize. That was my earlier statements were for Seine River. I apologize.

An Honourable Member: It was inadvertent.

Mrs. Rowat: Yes.

An Honourable Member: They all know who screwed it up.

Mrs. Rowat: See, yes. I would appreciate the members from the other side for letting me get the MLA for Riel, helping me with that because they knew exactly who I was talking about and they know exactly who failed a lot of rural people [*inaudible*] that area, Mr. Speaker.

So we really need Assiniboine valley landowners to be taken seriously, Mr. Speaker, and they do require assistance and I do believe that there's a lot of work to do with that regard.

St. Lazare and the RM of Ellice have the Qu'Appelle Valley and Assiniboine River fork right within their community, or just on the outskirts of that community, and there's a river bend there that Highway 41 travels along. And, Mr. Speaker, that community has been hit very hard by previous floods, and so many of those families are still not in their homes and we saw a lot of situations that individuals just gave up. They just gave up trying to work through their flood claims. You know, individuals who had obvious issues and obvious claims that should have been considered, and when they heard that this NDP government was going to accept the vote tax of \$280,000 or a million dollars by the end of this term they were outraged. Mr. Speaker, \$280,000 a year, and so many of these families who continue to be out of their homes is just absolutely ridiculous.

So we want to ensure that communities are receiving the supports they need. I know St. Lazare has asked for Highway 41 to be raised and that didn't happen. So we need to ensure that they receive the protection that they've asked for, the super sandbags along Highway 41, to ensure that people are not disconnected from the community.

Mr. Speaker, Phoenix Sinclair, Gage Guimond, baby Amelia, Tracia Owen, Michael Helgason, these are all children that have been under the watch of Family Services within this province. The Province was responsible for their well-being and failed them.

* (15:00)

We've recently learned of a four-year-old who lost her life a few years ago, and lost her life in very similar circumstances to Phoenix Sinclair. And that raises some very serious questions. We want to know if there actually are the improvements happening within Family Services as the minister has indicated. We know that there are things put on the record by the former minister of Family Services that were just, actually, very misleading to the House and to

Manitobans with regard to what exactly was happening within Family Services at that time.

Taking children from their parents is always the last resort, but returning them should only be when the situation is safe, Mr. Speaker, and we're finding that that is not happening. We are also finding that the department continues to struggle with providing the supports necessary for agencies to do the work that they need to do. There are a lot of lessons to learn and I believe that the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry is providing Manitobans with the insight in exactly how poorly this government has managed that file.

With regard to education, Mr. Speaker, there's been a significant amount of media recently on the government reneging on its 5 per cent commitment for a long-term funding of education within the universities. I know that when I was a critic for post-secondary education, that was something that was a priority asked of the post-secondary education presidents. They wanted to see stable funding of 5 per cent, or whatever per cent, but stable funding for an extended period of time so that they would be able to focus on other things that needed to be done to ensure that their education facilities were providing quality education, and instead of every year developing a budget and trying to determine how best they can work their programs within a budget. So to hear that there was going to be a three year commitment with 5 per cent was excellent, and I think that the universities were pleased to have that. But to hear in this budget that the 5 per cent in the final year was actually going to only be 2 and a half per cent, was probably something that was very disturbing and very disappointing for the university—the universities.

I believe Brandon University especially would feel that hit because they've recently come through a strike which, again, we failed to see the minister and we failed to see the government respond to the needs of those students, and I believe that a number of students who were planning to go to Brandon University have chosen to go elsewhere. I know one went to Saskatchewan, the other one went to U of M, and that's very disappointing, Mr. Speaker, because in a community where I come from, living half an hour away from Brandon, that would have been an excellent option for them and financially it would have been a lot better choice for them to be able to remain at home and to receive their education, but the instability of Brandon University's negotiations with the Province have caused students to decide to go elsewhere.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba Hydro—it's rather interesting, I—my son lives in Minot; he's playing hockey there. And I was travelling from Bismarck to Minot and I couldn't get over the number of wind power [*interjection*]-turbines there were as we were travelling, and I just laugh because this government talked about, you know, the energy, the green energy that they were bringing forward with regard to wind power and geothermal, and at Waverley West and all those areas. And what I've found is this government likes to do a pilot or a one-off and they think they're a player, and it's so disappointing because it just doesn't create a lot of credibility with this province in being, you know, green energy friendly.

And what I'm finding and what I'm hearing from Manitobans is that the price of hydro that is going up is obviously going to be causing a lot of extra burden on Manitobans. So to see the PST go up by 1 per cent and then to see rates increase with hydro, are—is causing a lot of concern to Manitobans that I've been talking to.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that we need to be looking at the export sales, and by keeping the rates low and Manitoba Hydro affordable, the numbers just don't seem to be adding up. And we really need to ensure that Hydro is generating electricity for Manitobans first and that the rates that are being negotiated with other states in the United States are actually—are negotiated where we're actually trying to make some money on this, and I don't think that seems to be the case.

Recently at committee at MPI, I noticed that, you know, they continue to receive Winnipeg Jets tickets—and I believe there's eight—and I indicated to them that I really think that those tickets should go to charities such as—or to non-profit organizations who have children at risk. And they had indicated to me that, you know, that it's an important tool, that Manitoba Hydro employees work hard, and I agree. They do. I have a niece that works within that industry and I know they do work hard.

However, Mr. Speaker, I do believe that they should be using those tickets to support families who may have been experiencing flood issues or are maybe being displaced because of domestic violence. There are other ways that we could be using those tickets than providing them to MPI staff.

So, in closing, Mr. Speaker, I would have to say that this government speaks about priorities, and I believe that in the last 13 years there has been very little priority given to the issues that they're now

trying to address. And that 1 per cent PST, actually, I believe, is an example of their inability to manage and their total incompetence.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Melanie Wight (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to be in the House again representing the constituents of Burrows and responding to the budget, and I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to do so.

I'd like to first just take a minute and thank the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and the Finance Minister and all of those people who worked directly on creating a budget during such an—uncertain times.

Good government is about making choices that will benefit all Manitobans, Mr. Speaker, their children and their grandchildren over the long term, and I believe that's what we've done in budget 2013. I know that the decisions were difficult to make. It wasn't an easy choice to increase the PST even for a time-limited period, but it was a necessary choice. It is a choice that allows Manitobans to continue to move forward in critical areas like fighting the flood that must be done.

It will allow us to participate in the federal government's Building Canada plan to build critical infrastructure. They have said they will put some money into our infrastructure—and it's not easy to get them to invest in Manitoba—and for the promise to access that they have to match them. Infrastructure, as everyone knows, is expensive. But the key to moving forward and keeping Manitoba one of the most affordable places to live in the country is doing this work. The investments that we've made and will continue to make in infrastructure provide the high quality of life that Manitoba families have come to expect at least since 1999.

Good government means we cannot ignore the infrastructure. The flood of 2011 was historic in its proportions. The MLA for the Interlake described flying over the land and that it looked like a tornado had devastated the country.

We will have had three floods, Mr. Speaker, in five years. This is not the norm. Manitoba faces the largest natural disasters due to these floods of any province in Canada. It cost and is costing over \$1.2 billion. I know the opposition at times has referred to this as an excuse of government. It's not an excuse to the people who lost their homes and their businesses and their livelihood. And one of the great things about Manitobans and about the

constituents in my area is they care about people beyond their borders. They want to see them helped as we have been doing.

Other governments in the past have made different choices. The MLA from St. Norbert yesterday spoke of how in the flood of 1997, 3,000 homes in St. Norbert were evacuated. The people were told, Mr. Speaker, that they needed to move their furnaces and their hot water heaters to the main floor in order to save them.

* (15:10)

Following that flood, did the government do anything to help those people? No, not a thing. They did not. It was not until the government changed that the floodway was expanded. And the St. Norbert folks are now able to remain comfortably in their homes. No one is moving those furnaces now, Mr. Speaker.

A study has come in following the flood of 2011 and it recommends various flood mitigation expenditures, to the tune of about \$1 billion. This work would help prevent flooding in particular areas as the floodway did for Winnipeg, Mr. Speaker. At the time, when that was built, people were angry. They didn't want to spend the money. It's difficult to commit that kind of money. But time has proven that it was the right decision. Billions of dollars have been saved in Manitoba because of that decision, and we need to make the same kind of investment for our children and our grandchildren.

When tough times hit, and they will hit over and over, every government makes choices, Mr. Speaker. In the '90s, there were tough times. The government of the day chose to cut education, health care, 1,000 nurses, I believe. Medical spaces to train more doctors were reduced, and those things had long-term effects for Manitobans. As the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) mentions, it takes about 10 years to build up a doctor. It's not a short process to try and catch up over those cuts.

The Margaret Thatcher government, going back in the news—it's in the news lately because of the death of Margaret Thatcher—the mayor of London said that every real problem that Britain faces today is a legacy of the fact that she was fundamentally wrong. And the people who lived through that time, and I know some of them, I have friends from there, she cut drastically and deeply, and that was the philosophy of her government. Glenda Jackson, an MP in Britain, said that the schools during that time

had to fundraise to put paper and pencils on the desks of the children. I mention these things only to indicate that different governments have different philosophies, Mr. Speaker. Some care only about the books, there's a—but there is a balanced approach to protect the average person of Manitoba.

In opposition, it is easy to shout, yes, let's cut. You never have to make those cuts. You don't have the tough choices. That's a—just a part of being in opposition. You don't have to come up with valid solutions. Fair enough. You don't have to protect Manitoba's future. In fact, one of the very first days back in the Legislature the opposition members called for what turned out to be over \$114 million of infrastructure that they wanted done in their ridings. This, while asking us to cut. Well, once you're in government, you've realized that in order to spend, you have to have the money, and we understand that. In government, you have to make tough, responsible choices, and we believe strongly in certain things, Mr. Speaker, because we believe these things will protect Manitobans and protect Manitoba's future.

We have done well, and Manitoba is growing. Manitoba builds and Manitoba works. But there are risks out there, Mr. Speaker, and sometimes, when we're busy, as people in my constituency are, working hard and taking care of their families, often of their parents, who have chosen to remain in their homes, there—have not have a lot of time to be looking outside of the borders of Manitoba. But we live now in a global economy and there is no way that will change. We are affected by the fact that the economy did not improve in the rest of the world around us the way the forecasts of others claimed they would. We are affected by the floods. We are affected by the federal government not paying out the money they owe on that flood. We can only hope that one day they will do so.

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

But you don't always hear these things because we like to talk as a government about what we can do, rather than about what other governments are not doing for the people of Manitoba. Our government has strong beliefs about what we need to do, and other governments have slashed education. We have not. We have not cut the education funding for your children and the grandchildren of Manitoba because, as our Premier (Mr. Selinger) has said, the public education is the No. 1 prevention program that we have.

Our graduation rates in this province, Mr. Speaker, have risen from about 71 per cent to a little over 84 per cent. I recently was talking to some teachers in the United States, and one of them mentioned that the graduation rate in Chicago is 50 per cent. Helping our kids succeed by helping them graduate is a key to Manitoba's future. It is what makes it possible for us to maintain that low unemployment rate.

Manitoba is not jobless. Joblessness is the death of our economy. It is something to be rightfully feared. Budget 2013 will keep Manitobans working. We have one of the lowest unemployment rates in Canada, Mr. Speaker, and it will keep them able to continue to spend in Manitoba. You know, I come from rural Manitoba from a farm family. And I was reminded by one of my colleagues of the Depression of the 1930s that my father lived through. And I can remember that my dad, 40 to 50 years after the Depression, said to me he was solely responsible as a very young man to try to not lose that farm and for not allowing the animals to starve, and he felt that he had failed not because he lost the farm, but because the effects of that experience stayed with him for the rest of his life. And he said, I should have been buying the land around my farm as it came up; I should have been expanding. And he couldn't do it because that fear remained with him, for 40, 50 years, of not having the money to be able to make sure that he was going to be able to pay that mortgage. It's terrifying. And the one thing that we need to do, and that we are doing in this province, is ensuring that Manitobans were continue to work—Manitobans continue to work.

Alberta, our apparently rich neighbour, with the gigantic deficit, chose to slash advance education. Again, we've not chosen that road. They're still our neighbours. We're still close to them. Because those kids are your kids, they're our grandchildren, and every person in my constituency with children wants them to do well—that is what these investments that we are making in Manitoba make it possible to do. Education, as someone said, is not the filling of the pail, Mr. Speaker, it is the lighting of a fire. And we are committed, as a government, to do all we can to light the fire of creativity and curiosity and study and research and learning in the youth of our province. We do that, also, with excellent legislation. And you know what? Sometimes it's the little things that can make the biggest difference. The legislation that we just put through last year, for example, on changing student report cards—I was recently told by one of the

principals, Doug Taylor, that it has had the greatest effect that he has seen in 33 years of education on providing concrete feedback for the students about their learning, and it has revitalized the teachers themselves, as they had to more specifically assess each student's strengths and challenges and next steps.

Because Manitoba builds, we have excellent jobs in the trades, and we continue to invest in our youth with apprentice programs and mentorship programs and job training. There was an article in the Free Press just today, I believe, that the engineers were talking about how busy they are in this province. That was not the case in the 1990s. The plumber, the next plumbers, the next engineer could be your son or daughter, and it's an investment that we need to continue. It's an investment in the families of our province.

Health care—yes, other governments would have slashed health care. There's no doubt about it. We have seen it before. But as I went from door to door—and we talk about listening to our constituents—not one of them asked me to cut health care—not one. No. The access centre will open soon on Keewatin and Burrows. The QuickCare clinic has already opened on McGregor with extended hours into the evening and weekends.

* (15:20)

And people on the—[*interjection*] No, you know what they've said on the door. They've got tears in their eyes, Mr. Speaker, as they told me how thankful they are for the free cancer drugs that have changed their lives.

The Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) recently mentioned how she'd just heard a story of someone saved by one of the defibrillators that are now distributed throughout the province. That person obviously will not be the only one saved. We are the only province in the country who has done it, the only country in the province. And when that person who is saved is your grandmother or your mother or your father or perhaps your child, you will not pause to complain that the government did not cancel that program.

Early childhood education, another key prevention strategy: we continue to work to increase the number of daycare spaces available to the people of our city and our province. As I said, Manitoba works, and they need excellent early childhood education in order to do that. We want to also help

those single moms that are out there get back to work and for that we need to continue to invest in early childhood education.

Our province is known throughout the country as the only one with a Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet, the only one in Canada. We have done significant research into what works to help our children grow and succeed, and we are not cutting that. The Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities (Mr. Chief) has a constant message on the importance of prevention, as do many in our government because prevention is responsible governing. He speaks of our after-school programs. I have one in my neighbourhood; it happens to be called the Wayfinders program, and it is a key to the success of our youth. And our youth are key to your old age, Mr. Speaker—not that I'm suggesting it's imminent. I know you're a long way from old age yet. The after-school program in my area started with about 40 kids. There are now about 260 young people and it's a six-day-a-weeks all summer long program that invests in our youth and, no, we are not cutting it.

An Honourable Member: No?

Ms. Wight: No, we're not. It is helping them to graduate. One of young people last year, in fact, ended up with a scholarship to the Asper School of Business. I understand they're doing very well.

Back in the '90s during tough times, you might remember that neighbourhoods were dying, particularly neighbourhoods that were not in the Conservative riding, such as Burrows. No money was coming in; nothing was being built. It is this government that began and continues with a program called Neighbourhoods Alive! that brings life back into our communities. We have that programming operating right now in Burrows in an area around Elwick and it is bringing that area back to life. The community is working together, and I would like to thank them for all their tremendous work and using that funding to invest in area—that area's future, in the future of our youth and the adults that live there. We have an adult learning centre there on Jefferson that is doing an amazing job, including helping newcomers with language, new cultures, driver's licence. And no, Mr. Speaker, we're not cutting that.

Hydro, Mr. Speaker, again, Manitoba works and Manitoba builds clean energy, and it remains our No. 1 resource. It is our oil, and anyone who thinks that we should again mothball our projects is not building for Manitoba's future.

We have the lowest package of costs in Canada when it comes to heat, light and auto insurance.

In this province, you can afford child care. It's one of the lowest cost child cares in the country. The children of Manitoba can be involved in recreation programs in Manitoba because they can afford to use them. They can be involved in music programs and art programs and theatre programs in their schools because, unlike other parts of the world, these have not and will not be cut. Your child may, like some of the children at Elwick Community School, find themselves on stage with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra because of not cutting those programs.

Our government supports the work of our police and, no, I don't think we're cutting them either.

We know that people in Manitoba need more housing, and we are building an addition 500 units of social housing and we are creating a new tax credit for construction of rental units in Manitoba. This will not only create more housing; it creates more jobs. It creates money flowing into the economy. It helps our businesses.

You know, it's funny, Aristotle—do we have Aristotle? Is one of these guys here Aristotle? I don't know—[interjection] No Aristotles, eh? Don't have them? Okay, he's not here with us today. Well, I'm going to quote him anyway—am I allowed to quote him? To avoid criticism say nothing, do nothing and be nothing, because that is the only way you will never be criticized is if you do nothing—but that is not the way of this government.

The money from this tax will go into a building fund for the length of time that the federal government will—is running their Building Canada program. The people will know exactly where the money is being spent. It's going into the future of our youth and, more importantly, into the future of your children, your grandchildren. For some people the personal income tax deduction that they're getting will offset a good amount of that a—money. For others it will cost them approximately, in the end, after that, about \$4 a month. It's \$4 a month to keep Manitoba working and Manitoba building. There is no perfect answer. There isn't; we know that. But there are very clear-cut choices between what you can do. You can slash, you can cut or you can build a future, and we choose to build a future. The lights in Manitoba, thanks to hydro, if you happened to hear one of our speakers yesterday, are fully on and blazing brightly and we intend to keep them that way.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): I'm pleased to rise to speak to the 2013 budget amendment proposed by the Leader of the Opposition. But what can one say about the budget? It is, you know, a civil service and salary increase masquerading as an infrastructure budget. PST increase, democratic rights curtailed—shocking. The—this government has ignored infrastructure to the point where it is now critical, but what do we see in this budget? A huge tax increase on Manitobans with somewhere around \$28 million supposedly going into infrastructure, supposedly for capital. Does it include planning, engineering? So what will actual be the dollar number spent on the roads? The government tries to sell it as an investment but there is very little there and it all comes from Manitobans' pockets. The government takes \$10 out of your pocket and tells you it all goes to infrastructure, but in reality they might spend a dollar on roads. The budget makes several announcements on roads, but we know how this works: announcement after announcement after announcement, then delays in starting and eventually partially completed, over budget and overdue.

You know, Victorian avenue in Brandon, the worst road in Manitoba according to CAA, was proposed to be rebuilt in three years. The mayor hoped this year; that was her tweet. The Province says, over two years, but we'll wait and see. The highway bypass in Brandon took 14 years and it was over twice the original estimate. Thompson bridges, again, over twice the original estimate and not completed on time nor actually even completed. The approaches continue to 'defall' to the bridges and the minister said, this is part of the design. Interesting how the previous bridge never had those problems. There are nice lights on the bridge with a bison emblem, not connected. Maybe sometime in the future we might have lights on the bridge.

So, Mr. Speaker, I trust that you will understand that the people of Brandon are not holding their breath waiting for Victorian—Victoria Avenue to be, I believe improved was the work—you know, what the minister said in his speech here, that was the word.

Mr. Speaker, I will continue on with infrastructure a little bit. I—you know, I was recently in Hartney, and I saw again a temporary bridge on Highway 21 over the Souris River. You may know where this is, I don't know if you've been there. You know, when a small town gets a stoplight it's usually a sign of progress, it's a sign the community is

growing and thriving, vehicular traffic is increasing—not so in Manitoba. In Manitoba, this Manitoba, this failing NDP government, you get a stoplight to control the traffic over the one-lane temporary bridge.

An Honourable Member: Hey, I've got one of those in my constituency.

Mr. Helwer: Good for you. This one's been temporary since what, about a year after the original bridge was damaged in the flood? So how much longer is temporary in Manitoba? Permanently temporary.

*(15:30)

Mr. Speaker, we see this government centralizing offices at the expense of service and economic development in rural Manitoba. Brandon might get a few positions, Winnipeg will get more. But Brandon depends on a strong, rural 'economy' and when you pull those positions out of rural Manitoba, you damage that economy.

Winnipeg depends on the same rural economy. They don't always realize it, but it has a big impact on Winnipeg. And I caution the government that damaging that rural economy will eventually have very negative repercussions in Winnipeg.

So what do we do with child care in Manitoba? They talk about child care and what happens? In Brandon we have a waiting list of 400 people looking for child care, and the list is growing. There is about, I think, 24 graduates every year for child care and those are snapped up immediately for the current positions. We're looking at expanding positions but where are you going to hire the staff?

I know this NDP government does not really understand and we heard that from the previous speaker, but there is an oil boom in southwestern Manitoba. You know, we really do have oil in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, and this oil is being developed by the private sector. The Manitoba government is a great beneficiary of this boom. Tax dollars flowing in, but they seem to hamper its development at every turn. Companies try to invest in the oil patch; they're denied, they can't get access to hydro.

Companies try to set up in Manitoba to service the oil patch, but they find it too difficult to deal with the NDP government. So what do they do? They set up shop in Saskatchewan and service Manitoba from there.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I don't know if the Chamber of Commerce in Carlyle, Saskatchewan, has a Business Builder Award. But, if they do, I would nominate the Manitoba government, because this government's ability to drive business out of Manitoba is the biggest economic driver in Carlyle right now. We're growing that community like you would not believe.

Every time this government says that Manitoba is—that hydro is Manitoba's oil, and we just heard it again today, it just emphasizes how little they understand about—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order. Could individuals who want to have conversations, rather than shout across the floor at each other, maybe adjourn to the loges, please?

Mr. Helwer: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, every time this government says that hydro is Manitoba's oil, it just emphasizes how little they understand about economic development in Manitoba, how little they understand the private sector, how little they understand the energy market.

Manitoba Hydro is indeed very important to the Manitoba economy, but this government has put it at risk. They're losing money as their costs of production spirals far above the selling price of their product. But we know there are huge expansion plans, but those plans are based on a different market. We're now at a low point in the business cycle. Is this the bottom? No one knows, might go up, might go down. Will there be an upswing? Certainly. But when?

The business cycle always works. That is one thing that we do know; it is a constant. The business cycle always works. We just don't know when. And, you know, when the market will come back—but forecasting the swings in the business cycle is a fool's game. The market will come back, unless there's a paradigm shift. It used to be a popular world—word.

You know, North American oil exploration has found large amounts of natural gas, shale gas. That's driven changes in electrical generation throughout North America; gas-fired plants, coal-fired plants, wind generation, nuclear options, all have implications for Manitoba Hydro. The United States wants to be self-sufficient in energy production. We may be great friends with the United States but, unless you don't know this, we are a foreign producer to them. How much of this—of a risk does this

government want to take? How long will Manitobans subsidize American electrical use?

The American environment right now with the shale gas is a little uncertain. Prices are low, the lowest we've seen in many, many years for natural gas. Fertilizer market used to mirror the natural gas product—prices, but they don't any more. They've split. Eventually, that natural gas will be taken up by business development, that natural gas will be taken up by energy development, that natural gas will be exported; but, currently, we don't have enough terminals to export the gas. We don't have enough businesses that use the gas in North America, and the United States is still in a downturn. So it hasn't recovered to the point where they've taken up all the new natural gas. So, until that happens, we're going to see lower energy prices in North America.

We hope that some time you will see businesses that will start that will use that gas in production, and that may happen as well. But that's an unknown right now. So that's all part of that business cycle and until that happens we're going to continue to see low energy prices for electricity.

You know, I spoke about a paradigm shift. What is that? Can it be predicted? It was a bit of a buzzword at one time, and a great example has always been Swiss watch manufacturers. I'm sure some of you have heard the story. It was at one time that the Swiss, they were the major watch manufacturers in the world. If you wanted a good watch, it was a Swiss watch. All great watches came out of Switzerland. There was a trade show and there was an individual that tried to pitch an electronic watch, a digital watch. Swiss weren't interested, couldn't be possible because they knew. They knew the truth of the marketplace. They knew that there was no market for something like that. It was all about jewels and intricate movements.

An Honourable Member: There's your pair o' dimes.

Mr. Helwer: There's my pair o' dimes. There we go. And that's what the world wanted. The world wanted these fancy watches that Swiss produced and the Swiss knew that. Nothing was going to change.

So what happened? Well, Japanese were at the trade show. They looked at this; they bought the technology. What happened? Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if you wear a watch, but where is your watch made today? Do you even wear a watch? You know what happened. The Japanese created a new market.

They took over the watch market. Swiss watches still exist, but they are fewer and far between. They tend to target the high end of the market.

But that is not the end, because now we're going into another one, another paradigm shift. Many of us, all in this House, I believe we have cellphones or smart phones. And, Mr. Speaker, do you know what the most accessed part of a cellphone is? Is it to make a call? You might think it's a phone, but, no. Is it to send an email? Is it to send a text? No. Is it to go on your browser? Is it to download music? Again, no. The most used part of your cellphone is actually to check the time.

Many of us no longer wear watches, another paradigm shift. This is what may be happening in Manitoba Hydro. We don't know what's going to happen to the energy market. We don't know if it's going to come back. Should we really bet the farm? Is this a shift in the production and consumption for electricity in North America? Would you, should you, bet the province on new production? Those are all very important questions that should be addressed, that should be answered, and there needs to be discussion on them rather than moving ahead on a plan that was produced 10 years ago when the market was considerably different. It's very important that Manitoba should look at those questions.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I noted in some of the speeches that the government takes credit often for bringing the Jets back to Winnipeg, and they're in the playoff run. They're still there. They've got a chance. Very exciting, Winnipeg is exciting. You know, it's very interesting. But to bring the Jets back, I thought it was a dynamic business group that took a chance. And mainly, there were dramatic changes in the exchange rate. There was definitely no viable business plan when they were dealing with a 60-cent dollar—*[interjection]*

Some of the members opposite seem to believe that the provincial government can influence monetary policy—very strange. I guess, you know, that's what you get when you have no training or experience in economics or business. Monetary policy falls under the federal government. The provincial government can't impact monetary policy. Can you impact the exchange rate? I don't believe so.

* (15:40)

So what about education, Mr. Speaker? This government likes to pay lip service to education,

especially post-secondary education. But what's happened in this budget? Well, they broke a funding agreement—isn't really surprising for this government. They like to break agreements; they like to break laws. But—you know, we had an expectation when you sign an agreement that they will carry it through, but they broke the funding agreement with post-secondary education. Imagine that—the government broke yet another promise. Another agreement cut in half. Be careful when you sign an agreement with the NDP because they will change it without notice, even though it may be illegal.

You know, the federal government develops a Canada Job Grant, which has education and training as a key component. How do we respond? We cut funding to post-secondary education. Even prior to the cuts, critical programs were full with large waiting lists. Opportunity comes along, and because of some of this NDP's poor decisions we have neither the space in our post-secondary institutions nor the matching funding. Those are opportunities that when you look at in business, Mr. Speaker, you'll hear people say, you know, that business person's really lucky, he's always lucky. Well, business people create their own luck, and often they create their own luck by having reserves so that when an opportunity comes along like the Canada Job Grant they might actually have money to put into that opportunity and take advantage of it instead of going and raiding taxpayers for more dollars and then cutting funding to the universities. Those are things that lucky businesses do and successful businesses do; they have that money. They have those resources available when those opportunities come along, because you never know when they're going to come along and you need to have those reserves.

It's a very sad statement on the future of Manitoba that this 'gosmerent'—government doesn't care about education. And, Mr. Speaker, this is the government that sat idly by while there were not one, but two strikes at Brandon University. Students are not important to this NDP government. So what has occurred since the 2011 strike to prevent the next one? Nothing? No action then on the part of the government; no action now on the part of the government. So what's going to happen next time around? All that people have learned at Brandon University is the longer you hold out with this government, the more you'll get closer to the agreement that you want. Does that benefit the students? Is that going to benefit the students when we have the next strike? But it doesn't seem to be

about the students anymore, and we definitely learned that during these strikes—that they were not the important, critical part of this. It should be about the students. This is what they paid for. This is what their families paid for. This is what they saved to pay for their education so that they could go on and be successful, and this government is taking that opportunity away. In fact, this cut to post-secondary education and the cap on tuition has just made things work—just made things worse in the institutions. It's going to be very sad to see the impact this will have on them.

You know, Mr. Speaker, with this budget, the NDP government continues to destroy Manitoba's competitive advantage. I'm not sure if people are aware what a competitive advantage is, but that is what we directly do when we compete with somebody else in the same industry. The PST increase will drive up cost of production to the point where we may lose our comparative advantage.

So what's a comparative advantage? Well, you know we are very good in Manitoba at growing things like canola. Somebody in North or South Korea may not be so good at producing canola, but they might be good at producing television sets. So we'll produce our canola and we'll trade it to them and we'll get the television set. That's our comparative advantage. We are better at canola production than we are at television production, at this point—not always, but that may change. With PST increases, the higher you increase the taxes on people the more and more you lose that comparative advantage to the point where you can no longer do business in Manitoba, and you have to shut down or you have to leave. And that's what we've seen businesses do; they've gone to other provinces. They start up in Saskatchewan. They service Manitoba out of there. In fact, I've spoken to a couple very large businesses in Manitoba not that long ago, and it was a little sad to hear them say that at this time the climate in Manitoba is too risky to invest. All our investments now are happening in Saskatchewan and Alberta. Those are—one of those is a homegrown Manitoba company; another has its Canadian headquarters in Manitoba, but they don't see that the risk and reward here makes sense to invest in Manitoba.

Very see—sad to see that we're driving that investment away. It's not that we even have to ask them say—to stay, we just have to create the opportunity here that they want to invest here.

And what do we do? We've put a PST increase on, so now we're three points above Saskatchewan, 60 per cent higher, I believe. What's that going to do to border communities? What's that going to do to communities that drive there all the time? So how are we going to possibly maintain those communities if you can go buy things less expensive in Saskatchewan than you can here? What do you think is going to happen? How much can we do to keep those people in Manitoba spending their money here? I don't think you can do it. You're going to put security on the border; they're going to make their choice. They're going to go where the opportunity is to spend the money, you know, where they can save money because it's just a little too high here.

The PS tree crossed—will drive up cost of productions to the point where they may not be sustainable. Margins are very, very tight in Manitoba as it is, and productivity continues to be a challenge due to this government's overregulation.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that Manitoba has some of the greatest opportunities of any Canadian province. But those opportunities are being ignored and damaged by this budget, by this government. Eight per cent provincial sales tax: who would have imagined that a government would bring that in? How damaging. We won't real—know the real damage to individual Manitobans or the economy for years. The poverty of—capital of Canada just became poorer.

The government talks about infrastructure, but where's the spending? New positions in the civil service and salary increases. When I look through the detail here—I went looking for investments, I went looking for infrastructure, but line after line after line, it's minister's salary, executive support, salaries and employee benefits, support services, salaries and employee benefits, salaries and employee benefits, salaries and employee benefits. Gosh, you know. But this is an infrastructure budget. How does that work? If we're spending money on new positions, how do we spend money in infrastructure? It's very difficult to do, and it's not there.

You look at the budget and it is all salaries: executive support, salaries and employee benefits. I don't know, you know, Mr. Speaker, I just don't understand. Obviously, this government doesn't understand what an investment in infrastructure means because everything in there that I see is all about salaries. So that is that this idea of economic development, that's—I guess that's this government's

idea of economic development: you increase salaries, you hire more civil servants. That's economic development in Manitoba. And then they pay tax and then you increase the tax, and it just becomes a vicious circle. Very sad, very sad.

But, you know, now they want to change the law, and how's that going to work? Manitobans thought that they were protected against things like PST increase. There was legislation in place to protect them, again the—against the excesses of the government. And now we've got legislation here that pretends to be a time machine.

You know, it's very unique. It's kind of interesting. I know that there is things in particular legislation that is retroactive, but it's very unique that this one goes back to a particular date and says, you know, this change to that particular budget law will, in fact, take place prior to the budget being introduced. But my recollection was that the budget was introduced and then this was introduced.

* (15:50)

So, you know, forgive me if Manitobans are a little confused by this because you're not following the law, you're breaking the law. Manitobans thought they were protected against the excesses. They thought if you were going to increase taxes they would get a say, they would get a vote, they would have a referendum. The government is taking away their rights and that is not acceptable and Manitobans are furious. But I'm sure you've heard from some of them, Mr. Speaker; I'm sure you have.

You know, again, positions, new positions, but all new money—doesn't do anything to the old part. The government's idea of economic development—what do you do? So this is not great for Manitoba taxpayers but we know all this. So, Mr. Speaker, with most of this increase in the budget going to new positions and salary increases—not capital, not infrastructure—what happens next year?

Those salaries are still there; those positions are still there. They'll be looking for an increase. You—the government will have to abide by the contracts, I would imagine. They have settled for these increases in salaries, but what happens next year? Another point, another percentage increase, another PST increase? Is that what you do, because you're going to need more money again next year. That money's already spent, not just this year, but for years into the future.

So what do we do next year? What do we—what happens when the government needs more money? You know, they don't know how to—the government doesn't know how to reduce their spending again, so they're going to need more tax dollars. Shocking—another increase in PST, is that what you're going to do? Are you going to be able to break this law so you can have another increase?

Of course, that does assume that that legislation can pass, that it's legal. Take away the rights of Manitobans to vote on this tax increase. Is the legislation legal? Does that bother the NDP at all? The taxpayers that I have talked to really did believe that they were protected. They liked that balanced budget legislation that has been gutted by this NDP government, but they knew that they had one last protection, that a referendum was necessary on major tax increases. And this government, this NDP government, wants to take that away; they want to take that vote away.

Does that bother the NDP at all? They've continued to peck away at that legislation and now they find they can't peck away any more, so we're just going to have to break the whole thing. That, Mr. Speaker, is a breach of trust with Manitobans. This NDP government ran in—on no tax increases in the election. I remember hearing it time and time again: We will not increase taxes, from the NDP. The candidate that run against me, we will not increase taxes. Everybody else in Manitoba that was running for the NDP, we will not increase taxes. Time and time again the taxes have increased, and here we are with the biggest one we've seen yet. No control over anything.

So they've broken—the NDP have broken their promise repeatedly time after time, and now, Mr. Speaker, we want to take away the voting rights of Manitobans—very sad. What's going to happen next? How far into a dictatorship will this government sink?

As I mentioned yesterday during question period, we have veterans all over Manitoba and we're very proud of those veterans. We celebrate their successes. We celebrate what they went to war to defend, especially the first two World Wars, and that defence was our right to vote. Those are things we achieved; those are things that they went to war for; those are the things they died for; and those are things that they fought for. And this government wants to take away that right to vote. How do you think veterans feel about that? Probably the same as

the rest of the Manitobans, that they're quite angry with this, and it's just shameful, Mr. Speaker—it's shameful.

You know, I haven't even got onto the debt and deficit here and that's just a whole another story of where we're going in Manitoba. Very strange that we released the quarterly financial report for last year just about the same time as released the budget for this year, because we seem to delay on releasing it here. I—the numbers should have been done; third quarter was quite a while ago and it does look very desperate. You know, the deficit again above the projection, but that shouldn't be a surprise to us that this government constantly misses its targets. It—you know, there is probably going to have to be another transfer from the fiscal stabilization account. Surely that account is getting a little bit slim now—it used to be the rainy day fund, and we had a rainy day and we didn't have the fund. So now we're down to almost nothing in that fund, so where do you go? You go to Manitoban's pockets, and this government continues to do that again, and again, and again. And this one, Mr. Speaker, I think is the most devastating on Manitobans, all Manitobans whether they be poor, whether they be middle class, or whether they be wealthy. It all inflicts damage on Manitoba and it drives people away from Manitoba. Indeed, it inflicts a great deal of pain and inequity on Manitobans.

I do encourage all members here to vote for the amendment. It would be great to see that you finally came to your senses and saw that Manitobans really don't want you to have this PST increase. They look at the budget. We look at the budget and we don't see that the spending there will benefit Manitobans other than those people that are getting the salary increases and the employee benefits increases. We don't see the infrastructure is all that big in there. And all they're doing is taking money out of your pocket and then spending it back in your community and wanting you to thank them for it.

So, again, Mr. Speaker, I do encourage all members to vote in favour of the amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Housing and Community Development): I am very pleased to stand up and put some more energy into this room, and to thank the people of Fort Richmond for allowing me this opportunity to represent them and to stand in support of this budget.

Since 1999 we have strategically built the level of services. We've improved them: health care, education, family services, and created thousands of opportunities for all Manitobans. As well, we opened our doors and welcomed many new Canadians to this great province where they are providing us with many gifts as well.

We have a story to tell in every region, in every constituency of Manitoba: improved health-care services; education opportunities; post-secondary opportunities at our colleges and universities; housing development; recreation development; better highways and bridges; as well as our Crown jewel, the hydro developments that have happened.

What does that mean? That means healthy, safe communities where families are thriving. This has happened in partnership with the individual families as well as with other levels of government and the non-profit organizations in the communities that represent them.

I will not tell you that this was—this—that this has been an easy decision, this budget, as we worked together as a team, as a strong team talking about what our options were. The global uncertainty as well as the risk of another flood, the third in this—in five years creates us with this interest of what are we going to do so we can continue to build this great province and continue to follow on our record.

So what we've done in Budget 2013 is providing better health care and that's by hiring more doctors and nurse practitioners and other health professionals and expanding life-saving STARS helicopter ambulance to 24-hour service, seven days a week; creating more opportunities by creating new partnership apprenticeship opportunities and endorsing new training and skills development strategies; and keeping Manitoba among the most affordable places to live by improving the basic personal, spousal and dependent exemptions and removing the PST from baby essentials and taking steps to eliminate school taxes paid by seniors on their homes.

As we made these tough decisions, we considered the importance of taking a balanced approach making sure that we did not make those deep, deep cuts that were going to cause a disruption in service and also ensure that we were able to provide those supports for what matters most to families. We made sure that when we did make reductions that the reductions that we made they

went directly to the front-line services, and we are going to continue to do that.

I know that as we proceed through these difficult times together that it's not going to be easy, but I know Manitobans. We come together and we take on the challenges that are presented, and we will succeed. I am very, very confident of that.

* (16:00)

I'd like to focus my conversation on what we've done. There's been lots of talk from across the House about poverty. I welcome the conversation; I welcome the debate. It's really passing strange this recent interest of theirs on poverty. It's important that we all stand up for all Manitobans and I'm glad that they want to participate in that debate this year.

I can tell you that this has not just ended up on our agenda, this has been part of our strategy as a government for—since 1999, when we were first elected. I can point to a billion dollars' worth of expenditures that we've made to better support individuals and families living in poverty.

I'm not here saying that we have resolved all issues, we have a lot more work to do. But I am very confident that as we proceed that we will be able to make a difference, to continue to better support families, ensuring that they have affordable housing to live in, making sure that they have healthy communities to work, to learn and to play in. And as we move forward, we have some specific things that we have developed as a comprehensive plan to support people living in poverty.

We share all the concerns of the advocates and the importance placed on the issues of poverty and social inclusion, and that's why we have the ALL Aboard committee of Cabinet, as well as why we have the legislation that we have. So we are going to continue to work with all of our partners and make a difference.

The most important difference that we are going to make is the increase in social and affordable housing. We have committed \$114.3 million for 500 new social housing units and \$25 million for 500 affordable housing units over the next three years.

And I can tell you that in the past four years we have built almost 1,300 units across this province. And I know that people will say, what did they build when they were in government? And I know that that question was presented yesterday and there was dead

silence. I can tell you that—pretty confident, not a lot of housing was built. But I can tell you, under this government we have built housing projects for seniors, for families, for Aboriginal people, for individuals that are dealing with mental health issues across this province. And on that side of the House we've built in Steinbach, Portage la Prairie, McCreary, Oakbank, Virden, Neepawa, Brandon, but we've also built in Winnipeg, in The Pas, in Selkirk and Swan River and Dauphin, and we will continue to do that, to provide those essential services across the province.

We know that housing is a key component; it's a key component to our economy. It provides local jobs, local hiring policies, and we can also use it as part of our training and employment strategy. We have a great partnership with ETT, and as we work together we are training hundreds of individuals, some of them who've never had an opportunity to be employed before. And one of the greatest successes that we can point to over the last year were 35 individuals, men and women, who've worked as part of our community forces across the province, being hired the private sector—now that is success. That's 35 families which will multiply when you think about their families as well as their community; it will touch over hundreds of people.

So we are going to continue with our commitment of building affordable housing, but we're going to go beyond that. We are going to continue to redevelop and restore our existing housing, so our government is going to make a commitment of \$134 million annually to the renovation of properties that we already own.

And, again, we will be providing these services across the province and making sure that we are investing in our existing housing stock so that people can be proud of where they live. And, again, we will be using a local hiring strategy as well as a training strategy, and making a difference.

I think I've told this House on a number of occasions the success that we have experienced at Lord Selkirk Park, when we redeveloped that with the community forces and the individuals who chose their homes based on who redeveloped their units. They wanted to live in the units that their neighbours built, and that we're going to continue to do.

There will be a tax credit for the development of rental housing, and this is a really interesting exercise that we went through as a government. We knew and know that there is a shortage of housing

across this province. So what we did is we brought together the housing advocates as well as the private sector and had a conversation and said, please give us some solutions about what we can do differently to start investing in affordable housing. We had some very interesting conversations as we proceeded through the dialogue, but at the end of the day we were able to agree on 22 recommendations and one of those recommendations was the tax credit for PST. So developers now, when they build, they will be saving millions of dollars across this province to insure that they're building affordable housing.

What we're also going to do is 10 per cent of that affordable housing will be rent geared to income and that, too, will provide important housing options for individuals. We've also have gone and had developed some improved rent regulations to insure that tenants have rights and they know their responsibilities. But also looking to insure that landlords also have—that they know what their responsibilities are to provide good quality housing.

Then we have the shelter benefit and the RentAid, and there's been lots of debate about how we support people in paying for rent. I really, strongly believe in a comprehensive package that includes shelter benefits like RentAid, but also include employment and education as well as building our own housing. The extra \$240 a year that families are going to be getting is going to make a difference. What we also are going to do is we are going to look at how do we improve the application process. How do we make it easier for people to apply? We also are going to have funding for people that are transitioning into work and they will receive \$110 per month as they're moving from social assistance into the workforce.

We also have the seniors' education property tax credit, which we know across the province people are asking and people are celebrating about and looking forward to this being implemented. The basic income tax exemption where we have moved—we've increased the exemption to \$250. That is going to move an additional 5,500 people off the tax roll.

The best way for people to move from poverty is education and employment, and that's why I'm very proud to see our government continue to support education initiatives for young students, but also its supporting our post-secondary education. *[interjection]*

I heard across the way a criticism. Well, there are other jurisdictions that are reducing the amount

of funding that they're putting into post-secondary. Well, we increased it and we will continue to work with our partners to do that.

We should talk a bit about what happened. Those were the choices that we made as a government. What were the choices that happened the last time the province felt this uncertainty? What did the PCs choose to do? Well, they aggressively cut a \$150 a month of benefits for the people that needed it the most. They looked at—*[interjection]* Well, they did. They developed policies such as work fair and a snitch line. They clawed back the National Child Benefit. That's what they did to support people living in poverty. I would much rather see us supporting what I have presented and what our government have—has presented. That's how we're going to build this province, by working with everyone and ensuring that opportunities are across the province.

There's been lots of talk about the increase of PST and what that means for people living in poverty. What that means is that we will be able to insure that we will be investing in infrastructure, whether it's flood-related infrastructure, whether it's highways and bridges, recreation centres, hospitals and schools. And I see that as an economic driver; I see that, again, as an opportunity to support individuals with training and education opportunities as we provide those services to families.

So I'm here to say, support this budget. This is a good budget in a very uncertain time. I would much rather make the choices we've made than the choices that we've seen from the other side in the past. This is about opportunities, economic growth and building the future for Manitoba.

Thank you.

* (16:10)

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's a privilege to reply to the budget and also to endorse the amendment that the leader brought in yesterday.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

And this spend-NDP, or spendDP—I'll have to get the terminology right—it's spendDP budget is certainly consistent. First of all, they blame the world economy, and then they blame the federal government. They even blame us, the opposition and, of course, they had to go back and blame the '90s while they have that one in there, too. They blame Mother Nature. After blaming Mother Nature,

though, which was—which is rather a low blow, then they blame Manitobans, and they blame Manitobans.

Now this budget was very consistent. In this budget, we see higher taxes and more fees, consistent with last year. We see a higher annual deficit. This year, it's going to be over \$500 million. So the consistency remains there, as well as they—as-if consistency holds, and we'll have to see, they'll also blow past that \$500 million. It'll be far higher than what they're even projecting, and I guess balancing the budget on an annual basis has just gone out the window because there's—there is no way they can do that now, based on the way they're taxing and spending. On top of that, the consistency remains. We now have more debt for the province. They're forecasting to borrow another, I think it's 2 and a half billion dollars, to put us over the \$30-billion mark. This year we're going to spend \$838 million, just to service the debt, never mind paying any capital back, just to service the debt, the \$838 million.

And, of course, we know these debt-service costs will skyrocket when interest rates rise. They always have risen in the past. They always will rise. So they're at rock bottom now and the only way for them to go is up, and I guess that one, in particular, really scares me because I happen to be one of those people who had a lot of money borrowed back in the early '80s, and this would be before many of these or even—were even able to borrow money, and I remember very well when the interest rate hit 21 per cent. And that was a terrible time on the economy. I hope it never goes back there. But the 2 and a half or whatever it is—the interest rate is right now can only go up, and that's what's really going to hurt the province in the future years because they continue to borrow more money and we're now going to be over \$30 billion in borrowing.

So our—again the consistency remains with the bottom of the barrel status. It seems to be a pride of this spenDP party, to remain at the bottom of the barrel for Canadian provinces. We also have more unfulfilled promises while the money is being spent somewhere else, and today they were taking us to a task for quoting their own budget from last year about promises broken. Of course, we all know that this Premier (Mr. Selinger) has ranked last in fiscal management, according to the Fraser Institute. However, don't despair; we're not last in everything. We're first in overwhelming red tape which hampers business. We're first in child poverty. We're the murder capital of Canada and we're only surpassed by Prince Edward Island in outward migration of

people in businesses, and I suspect we may even beat them now, given that the sales tax really does increase because we all know that people, businesses and money, is mobile and they will go where there's a better deal. This spenDP proudly remains at the bottom of the barrel, and I can see now we have a new definition of front-line services. It's not front-line services anymore now; it's front-bench services because they need to get the vote tax in order to look after their own party and they'll use that as their priority. They need to raise taxes for a vote tax to pay themselves. It's front-bench services now.

Now, of course, all these tax increases and fee increases over the last year and this year, it's going to take over \$400 million out of the pockets of families across this province, from all families across this province. And now that sounds like a—that's a number—\$400 million is a hard number to comprehend on a family basis, but let's break it down. That's going to cost each and every family about \$1,200, and that's \$1,200 less that they will have to spend on their family requirements.

Now, let's go back to this debt servicing requirement, to this \$838 million. If you take \$838 million that they're spending to debt service the debt that's an additional \$2,800 for every family to pay just to pay our debt. So now we have \$4,000 less per family, and families are very good at balancing their budgets, unlike the spenDP. So somewhere, every family in Manitoba is going to have to give up \$4,000.

So what are they going to give up? They're going to give up some food purchases, some clothing. Are they going to not be able to register their kids in sports? Maybe that staycation in Manitoba is now a backyard vacation because they just won't have the money to do this because they will have to pay these taxes. That is coming off first. Not only that, then we add in that Manitoba—their very low basic personal exemption, and they not only have less money because of taxes, they start paying taxes even sooner in Manitoba versus other provinces.

The other day, on Tuesday when we had—when the budget speech was being delivered and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) was delivering this budget and he got to the part about raising the sales tax by 1 per cent, my BlackBerry was vibrating and I had a text message from a young Manitoban. I know him very well. He grew up not too far away from us. He's presently working in the grain industry, and his question is, why should I stay in Manitoba?

And it's a very valid question because I also know that the grain company that he's working for—I happen to know another fellow from out by Portage who's already in Yorkton, Saskatchewan working for the grain company out there. And this fellow's question is, why should I stay? Why should my family—and he has a young child, his wife and young child. His question is, why should I stay in Manitoba? Why don't I just move with the company to Saskatchewan or Alberta? And he could do it tomorrow. What incentive do we have for him to stay here?

Yesterday I received a call from a reeve of one of the western Manitoba municipalities, one of those municipalities that's currently being bullied by the Minister of Local Government (Mr. Lemieux)—by the way, he thanks you very much—and he called me and he was really concerned about the impact on the local economy with this rise in the PST to 8 per cent. With a 3 per cent cheaper PST in Saskatchewan, cross-border shopping is taken—will take on an even larger percentage of the shopping. It's already been an issue because there are items in Saskatchewan which are not subject to the PST which they are in Manitoba. And we know that as you go to pick up something in another town you're going to do even more shopping, and that's going to increase the commerce in that town across the border at the detriment of our local communities.

The same goes for residents across southern Manitoba who can slip across the border into North Dakota, Minnesota. It's very simple to do that now. You're encouraging out-of-province shopping by being—we're not an island here. Manitoba's not an island. We have to be competitive with other jurisdictions. And this tax increase punishes our local businesses and encourages out-of-Manitoba purchases. So it's a very sad day for Manitoba to have to deal with this.

Of course, when our leader suggested Manitoba raise our basic personal exemption to the—at least to the Canadian average, never mind what Saskatchewan and Alberta have—but at least to the Canadian average, government howled and ridiculed the idea. The Minister of Finance said, no, we can't do this. This is going to—this is our money. We have to spend our money. You have to realize, it's not your money. This is money that would stay in the pockets of our families and they would either choose to spend it or they would choose to save it. It's their money. Why don't we encourage families to save and to be prudent with their own money?

* (16:20)

When we suggested raising the social housing allowance, government was silent on this. They didn't know what to say, because they haven't done it. This government is increasingly—it always has been, and it's increasingly—so now, it's about state control; it's about income redistribution. And, of course, government, as they decide to redistribute this money, they taking their cut off the top of it and their cut is getting larger and larger.

We still believe—we, as a party, still believe it's better to give a hand up rather than a handout. It's about dignity; it's about independence; it's about empowering individual Manitobans to make this province the great province.

And as I go back to this—you know, this \$4,000 less for every family, one of the things Manitoba is known for is our volunteerism and our charitable donations. And as families have less money to spend because of this increase in taxes, are we now going to see them cutting back their charitable donations? That would be—that's an unfortunate choice: either you feed the government or you give money to charities, and we know who has their hand out first and foremost, and charities will suffer for this.

As I said, it's about empowering individual Manitobans to make their—to have that—the economic well-being and to be able to choose how to spend their money; it's not about state control.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba Hydro and the spenDP—the spenDP has seemed to have taken over complete control of Manitoba Hydro. They seem to feel it's their company now; it doesn't belong to Manitobans. The spenDP seem intent not only just to own and control Manitoba Hydro, they seem to be intent on bankrupting this veritable Manitoba institution—\$20-billion capital program putting US power needs ahead of Manitoba power needs. It has been a matter of record, anytime a hydro construction—dam construction has taken place, the first purpose of that dam is to serve Manitoba needs. We have never yet had a power project built to serve export needs first and Manitoba needs second, but this new capital program is betting all in on the US market.

And, of course, the US market will gladly take our power. At 2 and a half cents a kilowatt, why wouldn't they? They can build all the gas plants they want down there and the—but the minute they can buy power here at 2 and a half cents a kilowatt, why wouldn't they do that? That's good business sense on

them. And our cost of generation is expected to be at least 12 cents—10 to 12 cents, transmission costs are another 3 cents. We're looking at 13 cents-plus to sell this power into the US. At 2 and a half cents a kilowatt, there's something wrong with this picture, and what's wrong with it is that the spenDP are in control of Manitoba Hydro.

I was in—at the Hydro committee last week, and it was interesting that the spenDP seem to think—and they are the only ones who seem to think that natural gas prices are going to recover very soon, and that it's going to put them back in the black to sell power down there. Apparently they're not familiar with shale gas and with the great potential of the new exploration in natural gas. US government has—is very adamant about becoming energy self-sufficient the next 20 years. This is going to have a long-term effect on Manitoba Hydro and on our export sales.

So, before you spend \$20 billion, let's take a step back and take a good look at what this is going to cost, what the markets are, and proceed with caution. Perhaps down the road this power will be needed—perhaps—but nobody but the spenDP is saying that right now. So we need an independent voice to tell us what really is required in terms of Manitoba Hydro.

And, of course, they continue to—the spenDP continue to push their Bipole III project, which is probably one of their biggest mistakes that they've made to date, although they seem to be piling those mistakes up as well. But they continue to push Bipole III in spite of escalating prices to build. As I said, the power market is deteriorated quite a bit in the US and not in any near future recovering. There's environmental concerns. There are technical issues which the spenDP have no intent on addressing. There are Metis and landowner complaints. I, again, asked in committee about landowner issues and I—the stock answer I get from government, because even Hydro is muzzled on this one, is that not interested in looking at landowner issues, landowner complaints.

They were given some really good alternatives during the Clean Environment Commission hearings. I hope the Clean Environment Commission takes it in hand, takes it under advisement and would recommend some of those—bring some of those recommendations back to the minister when they bring their report in, which is expected the end of June.

But to pay for this \$20-billion capital project Manitobans now are going to have to pick up the tab because, as I said, the US market's not doing it.

We're building a market to export to the US which is not going to pay for it. So someone has to pay for it. So Manitobans now are faced with rate increases of 4 per cent plus, at least 4 per cent per year, every year for the next 20 years. This'll have a dramatic effect on—again, it just goes back to households. This is going to increase the household bill, never mind the industrial. We always had this advantage of being able to attract high use—high electricity use energy companies, but if you're going to increase the price of power—we're not an island. All of a sudden now we're not competitive any more. Never mind the effect on our Manitoba consumers.

And just—it's almost like this government just wants to rub everybody's—no, every Manitoban's nose in what they're out there to do.

Now, the spenDP have forced Manitoba Hydro to engage in a \$700,000 advertising campaign just to justify the stupidity of their \$20-billion capital project. They won't do a financial review of the entire project, but they'll force Manitoba Hydro to spend \$700,000 to advertise why the spenDP have the best idea on this. Who's paying for that? We are. As consumers, Manitoba consumers, we're going to pay for this, and it's unfortunate.

So really, Manitoba Hydro, we have to ask, who is Manitoba Hydro really working for? Are they working for Manitobans who are paying 7 cents on your domestic rates right now per kilowatt, or are we working for the US power companies who are posting some very record profits right now, buying our power at 2 and a half cents? Are we—is Manitoba Hydro for Manitobans, for us here, or are they for the US?

In this consistent budget there was a slight mention of agriculture in the budget, but it was just more rhetoric. It was promised for more talking regarding Growing Forward 2. Talking is the code word for stall. Always—there's a report that came out and it's been coined by one of the Interlake reeves as the S and S report, and it's no reflection on the people who did the report. It's a reflection on the government. He now calls it the S and S report. It's a study and stall.

* (16:30)

So, here we are, back in Growing Forward 2, while all other provinces are moving ahead on Growing Forward 2, this government says, we're just going to talk about it. This government destroyed the hog industry. You destroyed the hog industry in

Manitoba, and then the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Kostyshyn) last week has the audacity to go in front of the Manitoba Pork annual general meeting banquet and say: We need to keep talking.

And there was—it's a good thing hog-pork producers are polite. It's a good thing for this government that they're polite because there was a lot of head-banging on the table. When the minister stood up there and says we need to talk some more, and the fellow at my table is saying: Enough of the talk, let's have some action.

Manitoba Pork gave a very viable option as an insurance option for the hog industry, and the government—this government rejected it. They said, no, can't afford it.

They can afford a vote tax but they can't afford to—they didn't even have to put out cash. All they had to do was backstop this. There are now a thousand jobs, good-paying jobs, in the packing plants, in the packing industry in Manitoba. In a hog-packing industry, there are now at stake—a thousand jobs at stake because of this government's refusal to quit talking and start taking positive action.

And, of course, they were very consistent, as well, in their tax shift. They have now capped the farmland education tax rebate at \$5,000. Most farms are well above that, just due to the size of farms nowadays, but they've capped that. So much for going to a hundred per cent, which was the promise of a while ago. But promises are easily broken by this government. They've now capped it at \$5,000. And there's also some hollow promises made to seniors about their education property taxes, but I suspect capping this tax, this education tax rebate to farms will more than cover any promises they're making to seniors, but they've only made promises; they haven't done it.

And, of course, prior to the budget, the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) announced office closing across Manitoba, another hit to rural communities. These—and they've closed rural offices in these rural communities, and they have the gall to say, well, you'll just go to the next town and get your services there.

It doesn't work that way. There is trade corridors in rural Manitoba. The one office they closed, and they said, you just go to the next town.

Well, the next town happens to be 30 minutes of gravel road in the opposite direction of where the local commerce is, so that's not going to happen. It's

unfortunate that they see so little value in rural Manitoba that they just blatantly close offices with no respect to the local communities.

And, of course, with my critic portfolio of Local Government, I was waiting with bated breath to see what they would have to say about Local Government. Good thing I wasn't holding my breath; I would have expired. This spendDP government, in the last six months, has destroyed a working relationship with municipalities that was built up over the years. This minister single-handedly destroyed a working relationship, and I get lots of emails every day about this. It was a lack of respect. It was deaf ear to real concerns, unrealistic timelines, more excuses than Carter's got pills about why this would be good for municipalities, which didn't add up at all. In fact, when he was at some of the mayors' and reeves' meetings, he—the minister was trying to give out some information, and he was corrected by municipalities that this is not really so. In fact, at one of the meetings I was at, he said, well, you know, just don't even bother doing all the details. Just do the amalgamation. You'll finish the details next time.

And one of the CAOs, who happens to be from one of the municipalities who's already amalgamated, stood up and said: Mr. Minister, never, never do a business deal until you know all the details.

Now, you would think the Minister of Local Government (Mr. Lemieux) would've at least done his homework before then. But, you know, beside the lack of respect for municipalities, I think that what really is troubling in this is that the minister was never honest about what their real intentions are. He's threatened—he's threatened amalgamation—he threatened amalgamation on current legislation. Then, when he realized, well, I can't do that because the legislation doesn't allow for that, I'm going to bring in amalgamation, and have no doubt it's going to happen. I was at a number of the mayors' and reeves' meetings. He stood up there and told them that. People would say: It doesn't work; it doesn't work; it's—your timelines are too tight; there's a lot of problems in here. Doesn't matter. We're going to force you.

Boy, if you want to kill respect and kill a working relationship, just keep it up. This is a—this is actually a classic case of bullying. I wonder if the new legislation will handle this.

Of course, the municipalities weren't totally left out of the new budget, the consistent budget, because

in this budget when they raised the PST, municipalities also have to pay PST on all their purchases. Municipalities, the AMM have, again, consistently come to the government and said: Listen, we're a government entity. We're paying PST to our ratepayers—on behalf of our ratepayers who then in turn have to pay you. Why won't you exempt us from this? This is double taxation.

However, instead of helping them in terms of that double taxation, they will now have to pay an extra point, and from some of the municipalities that we've heard from already, this is significant coin that they're going to have to come up with. Where will it come from? Well, it's going to come from the ratepayers. There is only one taxpayer, and it's going to come from the ratepayers. And that's unfortunate. Again, it all goes back to working relationships and the—how this relationship has been destroyed.

So, Mr. Speaker, again, I'm not surprised at all. And, actually, the consistency of this budget and the consistency of this spenDP is just ongoing. Higher taxes, more fees. Hard on families, hard on businesses. You've made families sit back and say: Do I really need to be here in Manitoba? What—where can I go? Who would show me some love? Because it sure as heck isn't the spenDP that is showing them any love; all they have is their hand in their pocket.

We're going to have a higher annual deficit, and if consistency plays through, the deficit will be even higher than what they're projecting, \$500 million and counting. There'll be more debt to the Province. Our children and our grandchildren are going to be paying for this. And those costs are going to skyrocket when the interest rate does rise. In the meantime, our bottom-of-the-barrel status remains. More unfulfilled promises while the money is spent somewhere.

And, Mr. Speaker, that's why I support the amendment that the leader brought in. This amendment speaks to the shortcomings of this budget, and I think it gives—it will give Manitobans—this amendment will give Manitobans some sense of comfort that at least someone's out there listening to them, speaking on their behalf. They've said they won't go to a referendum; they're going to bypass it; they're going to change the law. The law doesn't apply to them. And that's sad.

The new spenDP is going to bankrupt this province if they keep it up. And they have all the signs of keeping it up.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

* (16:40)

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism): Mr. Speaker, it is very nice to rise to speak in favour of this budget.

You know, this has been a very tough number of years, not only in the province of Manitoba but throughout Canada and internationally. And very, very tough decisions are being made by governments all over the world, and governments are looking at how they deal with front-line services, how they deal with health care, how they deal with education and all the elements that create civil society in the jurisdictions in which they are honoured to serve.

And our government is no different. There have been many months of deliberation; there has been a lot of discussion; and there has been a lot of effort put in by the Finance Minister, whose work I want to applaud today. And I want to thank him for his hard work and his team over the last number of months. And just let folks know that the decisions we have made are not easy; they're not what we would choose to make at any other time but we're not at another time. We are at this time.

And what we chose to do was to ask Manitobans to contribute 1 per cent more so that we could secure for all Manitobans the front-line services that create healthy civil society and the front-line services that help to care for the people of Manitoba through health care, through home care, through child care, all traditional NDP initiatives, Mr. Speaker, but also continue to build our province. And so that's where when we talk about putting money into post-secondary institutions, into our early childhood educators, into our child-care centres, into our grade schools, we want to keep building that. And we also want to keep building towards our goal of 75,000 skilled workers coming to the province, being part of building this province by 2020.

And so we need to balance all of this, and what we don't need are the short-sighted, short-term, snappy, narrow-minded, mean-spirited, tough love, you know, TV clips. That's not what we're about on this side of the House.

And I also want to thank my colleagues in Cabinet because each one of us as ministers have taken on some pretty tough tasks of looking at our departments and looking at ways that we could still maintain the front-line services but reduce our expenditures. And it hasn't been easy, Mr. Speaker.

We'll all admit that it hasn't been easy, that this isn't an easy time, but we are committed to bringing our budget back into balance and continuing to build our province.

So I was quite surprised when I learned about the plans of the current Leader of the Opposition, the cut, cut, cut mentality; that's what we've heard from the last fellow who occupied that seat. I'm not sure where he is now. But we do know that there has been a recycling of sorts on the other side of the House. They have recycled—they are starting to recycle their MLAs, and now they've made one the leader of their party.

So, when we look at when the Leader of the Opposition was sitting on this side of the House and in Cabinet, what sorts of decisions were made during tough times? Well, I'll tell you what he did. Now I guess it depends on which set of books you read, because apparently they had the two sets of books, so I guess I'll just go with the official set of books, Mr. Speaker. Yes, under the table, over the table, who knows. So on— *[interjection]* Yes, oh, I think some agreement from across the way; that's great. The sun is shining.

So what did they do? Well, this Leader of the Opposition has spent a lot of time reminiscing about what he calls the finest government Manitoba's been blessed with, so finest government, I guess, means two set of books; I guess, means vote splitting; I guess, means cut, cut, cut all kinds of things. But, when we talk about what it really meant, Mr. Speaker, what it really meant to Manitobans is freezing health, capital spending, so not building hospitals.

In fact, I remember them closing the Misericordia. So that's pretty tough love, I got to tell you. Laying off 700 teachers—that's not building, that's not investing, even in tough times, that's shutting down. Firing a thousand nurses, and that, of course, on top of cutting the spots for the medical practitioners, for the doctors, from a hundred to, I think, 70. *[interjection]* Thank you. So that, too, is not building; that's going backwards.

And now we have reducing funding for bridges and highways five times—five times, Mr. Speaker. And we've all heard about them asking for \$102 million one day on infrastructure, I'm not sure how many millions the next day, and on and on it goes. But reducing five times is the record and putting the brakes on infrastructure spending. And this was, you know, 1997 was a pretty tough year for

Manitoba and we did not see the sort of investment that we need to see.

And I know a lot about the floods we've been having, Mr. Speaker. I had the honour to serve as Minister of Water Stewardship, and I saw, as I travelled around the province and visited with people and talked with people, I saw the devastation in their eyes, their fear, that 1997 would be revisited upon them, but it wasn't.

And so I know that when the Minister of MIT gives his flood report, his flood forecast, and his update to the House, he is sincere in what he is telling us. He is sincere in what he is telling Manitobans.

You know, Mr. Speaker, fighting floods is not a political issue; fighting floods is a very human issue. And for all the questions, for everything that was said by members opposite in 2011, the one thing we never heard was, how do we help? And that shows the true spirit of the caucus over there.

So that's the record from the 1990s, of the now Leader of the Opposition. So yesterday he talks about tough love and he talks about cutting the equivalent of \$550 million in services to Manitoba families. So today, what does that mean? Well, if the Leader of the Opposition were to get his way, he would cut every government department by 1 per cent. So, if we look at front-line services, Mr. Speaker, we look at \$52 million being taken from health care; that's nearly 700 nurses. We look at \$5 million taken from Justice; that's about 60 correction officers.

Mr. Speaker, \$16 million from Education; that's 200 teachers. Well, I think that's shutting down education in rural Manitoba, which are the areas that members opposite purport to represent, and I don't think they really want to shut down education in their area. I mean, they, too, saw what happened in the 1990s. And, since we came into power in 1999, they've seen more teachers, more money into education, brand new schools, additions to schools. So I don't think they really want to support the 1 per cent that's being put forward by their leader.

When we talk about Family Services, \$11 million from Family Services; that's 135 social workers. And, Mr. Speaker, that is a very, very difficult department. There is such heartache in that department. I know, from having been minister, that sometimes you see a family in crisis, sometimes you see a community in crisis, sometimes the crisis is

intergenerational, and these are extremely, extremely difficult and tough issues to work on. And cutting 135 social workers is just simply not the way to go; it really isn't.

* (16:50)

Now, we also heard the Leader of the Opposition talking about a hiring chill in the civil service—a hiring chill. Well, okay, what is he talking about here? He is talking about \$77.9 million. Now, we know, having been through the tough years, Cabinet and our colleagues in the government caucus, that tough decisions were made. And it was a tough decision to say, that through attrition—last year we said that through attrition, we would reduce 600 positions in the civil service, and we would do this without affecting front-line services. So to wipe out \$77.9 million in the civil service equals 1,000 people. That's 1,000 people, Mr. Speaker. Now, that wouldn't just put a chill through the civil service; that would put a chill through all of Manitoba, and, if they were to have their way, they would put a chill through all of Manitoba. When you talk about growing an economy, you have to speak with confidence about the work that people are doing and about the way that the province is developing. And putting a chill on those families on those communities on this province is not the way to go.

This budget stimulates the economy, Mr. Speaker. That's the big picture here: is stimulating the economy. Yes, asking people to pay a little bit more on the PST, and we know it's an ask and it wasn't a decision made lightly, but we have asked them to do that so that we can all benefit. Now, something else that has not been said so far is—except I believe the Premier mentioned it the other day, is that through this budget 55–5,500 low-income folks will come off the tax rolls. So we all understand the concerns around low-income folks, which is why we keep going with early childhood education and education and our inner-city programs, but actually taking people off the tax rolls is a way to give them an even better chance. It's a way to give them a better chance to raise their families, to take jobs that will allow them higher income to get the training and education that they need.

You know, when I was Minister of Family Services, and I was fortunate to follow Tim Sale—because we really started to invest in early learning and child care when we came in in 1999, we were able to reduce the number of single parents—female single-parent families by 50 per cent so that parents

knew that they could take children to places where they would be safe and cared for. And that allowed parents to go out and get jobs or to get education or sometimes work during the day and work during the evening so they could get even better jobs to give their kids even a better start, and that's the way you build the economy: is by investing in reasonable, balanced ways. So 5,500 people coming off the tax rolls, Mr. Speaker, I think, is a pretty progressive move.

We also have not heard a response from members opposite on the minimum wage increase. Now, it's really interesting because their previous leader made it clear he didn't agree that minimum wage should be increased; political candy is what he called it. But I'm just wondering are these folks across the way against an increase in minimum wage, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to say that this would put Manitoba as the highest minimum wage in Canada, and I think that's a good accomplishment. And I'm proud of that, and I think it's important that we keep helping people who are at least getting minimum wage help them to increase what they're making. A lot of these people are students. A lot of these people are single parents, and they are trying very hard and they are working very hard, and I think we should honour their work through that.

And I know the member from Springfield has awoken, Mr. Speaker, and I know he's chirping away in his sleep, but I want to ask him, is he or is he not in favour of a raise of minimum wage? Is he or is he not in favour of 5,500 low-income people coming off the tax rolls through this budget? I'm not sure where he is on it, because he never really gives clear answers; just sort of the chirping that continues on. But, you know, it's nice to know some things never change. Some things never change.

So I think it's important, Mr. Speaker, that as we look at the progress and the development in this province that we also recognize the efforts to continue to build and grow hydro and our commitment to this. Now, I understand that the Leader of the Opposition has also said—no surprise to anyone—mothball any hydro development; don't move forward. So I don't know what he's looking at as the way to progress. I mean, hydro is clean, sustainable, renewable energy. We are working to lower the space taken by the footprints of the new dams that we're building. There are local hiring policies. There are partnerships with First Nations people such as we've never seen. You know, in short, we've learned how to do hydro on this side of the

House, and we've learned how to do it better from our past experiences. So we come forward saying, let's build the province of Manitoba.

You know, if only we had the Manitoba Telephone System, Mr. Speaker, the way it was as another building block of this province. Again, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Pallister) was part of the Cabinet who, when they campaigned, said, we won't sell MTS, and then ended up selling MTS. So this is a little bit of a back-to-the-future kind of experience and one that I really don't think that Manitobans are all that interested in going back to.

So what are some of the key commitments that we're building on from the 2012 budget?

Some of the key commitments that we made in 2012 include reducing the number of regional health authorities from 11 to five. Now, it was interesting, Mr. Speaker, that the opposition created an abundance of health authorities in the province, including two in the city of Winnipeg, which we reduced, I think, about five, six years ago. But when we were reducing the number of regional health authorities, they were, again, opposing their own steps. So we saw a little bit of a flip-flop there, and we have noted that.

We also—rather than selling off Lotteries or selling off the Liquor Control Commission and privatizing it for the benefit of private individuals, we have instead merged. We've merged the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission and the Manitoba Lotteries Corporation, Mr. Speaker. Again, we're seeking efficiencies. We're working towards better placement of Lotteries' abilities throughout the province, and we're looking to save money.

We cut an additional \$128 million from in your government spending, Mr. Speaker, and, again, those were not slash kind of get up in the morning, I'm going to cut the civil service by a thousand people. Those were well-thought-out, well-intentioned initiatives that we worked together on to again maintain front-line services.

Consolidating government office spaces, Mr. Speaker: we felt that it was important again to make sure that services were available, make sure that they were available in the communities that needed them. But we also learned that many people today get their information off the Internet. So I'm not talking about Frank, the blogger from yesterday. I'm not talking about someone sitting in the basement blogging

away, playing Pac-Man. I'm talking about people who get good information to start businesses, good information on agriculture, good information throughout the province on whatever they need. And we understand that times are a-changin' and that people are going to on-site information, and so we're making that more readily available.

Freezing or reducing the budgets of 10 departments, Mr. Speaker: again, part of the same exercise—to ensure front-line services are there, but also to make sure that the backup within departments is there to help the front-line services deliver the information that they need to do. And this, too, has been a long process that has been worked out in a very rational way—not slash and gash, but rather thinking about what are the services that are needed and how do we best provide them. So again, more online service.

Realizing \$75 million through the sale of government assets: looking at, in a modern-day sense what is the job of government. How do we best deliver those services? How do we make sure that we are making the right decisions, not only for today, but into tomorrow and into the years to come?

So, building on our key commitments of Budget 2013, we are continuing to freeze or reduce the budgets of 11 departments.

Of course, I took the biggest hit this year, Mr. Speaker, thanks to Ottawa reducing the budget by over 54 per cent in Immigration, so I speak from a particular position of experience. And again, we did not have one member on the other side stand with us, stand with Manitobans, stand with the newcomers to say, hey, immigration is a big part of our future, and we need to encourage people to come. We didn't hear anything like that.

* (17:00)

We are expanding lean management practices to more departments to improve efficiency and realize savings, extending the 20 per cent reduction on ministerial salaries, which we are—we're continuing with, initiating a program efficiency review, continuing to look for ways, saving money by consolidating more government offices and modernizing government service delivery, making greater use of online services such as I've spoken about.

But I want to speak in particular about flood infrastructure, Mr. Speaker. This is imperative. And this is the reason we need to move forward on the

plan that we have. We're not talking about 10 years from now; we're not talking about five years; we're talking about, as the minister presented to the House today, maybe three, maybe four weeks at best. Maybe three, maybe four weeks at best. And I know, I've seen those communities. I've seen the pride in—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order, please.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism (Ms. Melnick) will have nine minutes remaining.

The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 18, 2013

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