

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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The Honourable Daryl Reid
Speaker*

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
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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
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MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	PC
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ROWAT, Leanne	Riding Mountain	PC
SARAN, Mohinder	The Maples	NDP
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SELBY, Erin, Hon.	Southdale	NDP
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WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, April 20, 2012

The House met at 10 a.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 morning, colleagues and visitors.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 5—The Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Inter-City Bus Service)

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): I move, seconded by the Minister of Local Government (Mr. Lemieux), that Bill 5, The Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Inter-City Bus Service); Loi modifiant le Code de la route (service d'autobus interurbain), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Ashton: This bill modernizes our regulations and our regulatory framework for intercity bus service, will ensure greater flexibility of entry and exit for bus service providers while maintaining the regulatory provisions that deal with safety and other important matters, and I urge members to support it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Bill 6—The Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act (Improved Fiscal Responsibility and Community Involvement)

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I move, seconded by the Minister for Conservation and Water Stewardship (Mr. Mackintosh), that Bill 6, The Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act (Improved Fiscal Responsibility and Community Involvement); Loi modifiant la Loi sur les offices régionaux de la santé (accroissement de la

responsabilité financière et de la participation communautaire, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Oswald: These legislative amendments will support the regional health authority mergers announced as part of Budget 2012, which will see the number of regional health authorities reduced from 11 to five and administrative savings redirected into supporting front-line care.

This legislation will make RHAs more responsive to the patients and local communities they serve with the creation of local health involvement groups. Also included are a number of provisions to improve fiscal responsibility, including the implementation of tighter controls on executive compensation in RHAs, hospitals and other health corporations; placing restrictions on the rehiring of CEOs and senior managers; requiring CEOs and RHAs, hospitals and other health corporations to post their expenses online; and ensuring any surpluses and public funding to regional health authorities or health corporations are used appropriately for delivering health services.

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

PETITIONS

Newborn Universal Hearing Screening Program

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

More than three in 1,000 newborns are born with educationally significant hearing loss, but Manitoba's current hearing screening program does not allow for every child to be screened.

Without early detection, children are more likely to develop poor speech and language skills and also encounter social and emotional difficulties, which leads to poor academic performance.

Early diagnosis of hearing loss in newborns can make a considerable difference in a child's development because newborns can be provided with

effective programs and support that foster developmental success.

While most other developed countries and many Canadian provinces have a newborn screening program, Manitoba is lagging behind. There are only a handful of screening programs in the province, while all other newborns can only be tested if they have a risk factor of hearing loss or if parents specifically request a test.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the minister of healthy living, youth and seniors to consider implementing a universal hearing screening program accessible to parents of all newborns in Manitoba.

This petition is signed by L. Williams, B. Flynn, C. Stevens and many, many, many more Manitobans.

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

PTH 16 and PTH 5 North—Traffic Signals

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

The junction of PTH 16 and PTH 5 north is an increasingly busy intersection which is used by motorists and pedestrians alike.

The Town of Neepawa has raised a concern with the Highway Traffic Board is about the safety levels at that intersection.

The Town of Neepawa has also passed a resolution requesting that Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation install traffic lights at this intersection in order to increase safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly in Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to consider making the installation of traffic lights at the intersection of PTH 16 and PTH 5 north a priority project in order to help protect the safety of the motorists and pedestrians who use it.

This petition is signed by R. James, A. Guillas, B. Pearson and many, many other fine Manitobans.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I'm rising today to table the responses to the written questions from the member for Riding Mountain (Mrs. Rowat).

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 with us today the participants in the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba's fifth annual Teachers' Institute on Parliamentary Democracy.

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

* (10:10)

ORAL QUESTIONS

Budget

Government Record on Election Promises

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, seven months ago, this Premier promised to protect Manitoba families with a—by not raising taxes. He said that he would introduce budgets that never raised taxes on Manitoba families.

Seven months later, the Premier has introduced a budget that hurts families. It hurts seniors. It hurts transit riders. It hurts volunteers. It hurts those Manitobans who can least afford to pay more.

Will the Premier acknowledge today that the budget that he introduced on Tuesday is a total betrayal of the Manitobans that he promised to protect?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): The budget we introduced protects the priorities of Manitobans, for health care, for education, for services to families and children, for infrastructure.

And in contrast to the members opposite, who in the middle of a recession wanted to cut a half a billion dollars out of health care and education and services to families—they wanted to lay off people in the middle of a recession—we have protected those services, and we've done it while retaining a high standard of affordability in Manitoba. Manitoba is one of the most affordable places to live in Canada.

The balanced approach we've taken is one Manitobans have said they wanted us to follow, and we have followed it.

Mr. McFadyen: The fact is that the meaningless rhetoric coming from the Premier in the House today is completely at odds with what he told Manitoba families back in September. He said at the time that they will move forward, balance the budget, without raising taxes.

Mr. Speaker, seven months later they've raised nine taxes, including the gas tax, and I'm interested to hear the member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell) voice his support for increasing the gas tax. That surprises me, and it surprises me that any member opposite would support these tax increases after campaigning last September against increasing taxes.

Will the Premier acknowledge that there is a gap wider than the Grand Canyon between what he said in September and what he is now doing in April?

Mr. Selinger: We have protected front-line services to Manitobans while, over the last decade, we've provided \$1.2 billion of tax relief to Manitobans. It's a remarkable achievement because—that has been possible because we've had a focus on growing the economy in Manitoba. The economy has grown almost double during the time we have been in office. There's less unemployment now than there's ever been. There's more people working now than there's ever been. There's more students graduating from high school and attending post-secondary institutions than in the history of the province.

This budget continues to focus on protecting those things that Manitobans count on and keeping Manitoba life affordable. That's what we've done. We've honoured the commitment we've made to Manitobans.

Mr. McFadyen: Well, the fact is the Premier's lips were just moving, so we assume that nothing he said was true. The fact of the matter—

Mr. Speaker: Order. You're coming very close to the line with respect to showing respect to all members of the House, and I caution the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition to pick and choose your words very carefully, please.

Mr. McFadyen: And I would remind the Premier and members of the words that the Premier picked back in September, which were that, and I quote, we will move forward without raising taxes. That was the Premier of September, completely different Premier from the Premier of April who brought in nine tax increases, including an increase on the gas tax.

Just three months ago, he was on the radio complaining about rising gas prices and saying something needed to be done about it. In this budget he increases the gas tax by over 21 per cent, the tax that he's got control over.

Mr. Speaker, back in February, during a debate over rising transit fares, he said, let's come up with a solution that doesn't ding the folks who are among the least able to afford it. That was the Premier of February.

The Premier of April comes in with a budget that raises gas taxes and puts pressure on transit to raise fares even more than they already have. This is a budget that hurts transit riders. It hurts families. It hurts seniors. It hurts volunteers.

Will the Premier acknowledge today, without continuing his attempts at deflection, that his budget is a betrayal of the promise he made to Manitobans back in September?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, this budget did a number of things that the Tories cut—the Tories completely cut.

The Progressive Conservative Party on the other side of the House completely cut their funding to transit in Winnipeg; we've restored it to 50 per cent and kept the rates low.

The members opposite cut property tax credits to Manitobans; we've increased them for senior citizens this year. The members opposite laid off nurses and doctors; we've increased them in the budget this year. The members opposite raised the gas tax and cut the highways budget; for every dollar in gas tax we have in Manitoba, which is the second lowest in country, we're spending \$2 on bridges and roads in Manitoba.

And it was just the other day when the members opposite said that we're spending too much at the beginning of question period, and by the end of question period they were demanding more investments in roads and bridges. Hypocrisy reigns supreme on the other side of the House.

We're protecting services that Manitobans count on. We're keeping the affordability advantage. We're growing the economy. We're educating people, and we're getting them the opportunity to work and live

in Manitoba. That's what we're about; they're about cuts and misleading the public.

Budget

Government Record on Election Promises

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): We have a Premier across the way that speaks out of both sides of his mouth.

Seven months ago, Mr. Speaker, he said, read my lips, no new taxes. And what did he do this week: \$184 million in new taxes on the backs of Manitoba families.

How can this Premier stand up with any credibility? Will he apologize to hard-working Manitobans for misleading them in September?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I appreciate the questions from the members opposite because it allows us, again, to show the difference between what they would do if they were in power and what we would do.

They were about cutting services to children and youth. They were about cutting housing programs. They were about reducing their support for public transportation in Winnipeg. They were about raising gas tax while reducing their expenditure on roads and highways.

We have done the opposite. We have protected front-line services. We have reduced the cost to Manitobans by \$1.2 billion on taxes. We have invested 2 to 1 in roads and infrastructure in Manitoba, and we funded education in a way that they've never seen in the history of this province. Every single year we've increased our funding for education; they were cutting it at 2 per cent a year when they were in office and putting kids on the street. We won't do that. We'll do the opposite, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Mitchelson: But how can this Premier stand up with any credibility in this House, Mr. Speaker, when seven months ago, he said, no new taxes?

Mr. Speaker, but what did he do? What he says and what he does are two different things. No new taxes in September, \$184 million in new taxes today.

Mr. Speaker, how does he justify that to hard-working Manitobans?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the budget does what Manitobans asked us to do. They asked us to protect front-line services—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. I'm asking for the co-operation of all honourable members to allow those that wish to pose questions and to have the opportunity to hear the answers replied to as well.

So I ask for the co-operation of all honourable members. Please show some respect to our colleagues in this Chamber.

Mr. Selinger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have protected services that Manitobans count on in this budget while retaining the second lowest sales tax in the country, while retaining the second lowest gas tax in the country.

And members opposite, in the first question period in this House, were demanding that we improve bridges and roads in Manitoba. We are doing that. We're actually doing what they asked us to do.

* (10:20)

The difference between us and them is we pay for what we do; they wanted to deficit finance it for another four years. They wanted to stretch out deficits in Manitoba beyond the entire term of office from now until the next election. They were planning to run deficits and spend money that they didn't have while not making it add up.

The difference is fiscal responsibility while protecting front-line services versus deficits and cuts on the other side—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order.

The honourable member for River East, on the final supplementary.

Mrs. Mitchelson: But Manitobans asked this government to tell the truth, Mr. Speaker. The Premier again has just displayed the arrogance in this House with the answer to that last question.

Seven months ago he said, read my lips, no new taxes. This week he said, you asked for \$184 million in new taxes. How can he stand with any credibility in this House and tell Manitobans that he's telling the truth?

Mr. Speaker, Manitobans don't deserve to be lied to. Will he apologize now for telling Manitobans one thing before the election and doing something different afterwards?

Mr. Selinger: We have followed through on what we pledged to Manitobans. We said we would protect the services they count on.

When the members opposite demanded that we cut a half a billion dollars in front-line services—that's what they were demanding at the height of a recession—we protected those services while creating 29,000 jobs in the province of Manitoba. That's a very stark contrast. They cut education when they were in office; we're funding education. They reduced the number of young people graduating from high school; we're increasing it. They laid off nurses; we're hiring and training nurses. They drove doctors out of Manitoba; we're hiring and training doctors and increasing the number of doctors in Manitoba.

And just yesterday we provided free oral cancer care drugs to Manitobans with cancer, something the members opposite, I guarantee you, will vote against in this budget. They will vote against Manitobans with cancer getting access to oral drugs which they need to survive. That's what they'll vote against.

Personal Income Tax Levels Provincial Comparisons

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): The fact of the matter is members across the way broke their promise on taxes in Manitoba and what they ran in in the election, and each and every one of them should apologize to all of their constituents for misleading them in the last election.

But, Mr. Speaker, not only have they broken their promises but they've misled Manitobans in their very own budget books. A two-income family of four earning \$60,000 a year pays the second highest taxes in Canada. And all of this information is contained in an area in a section in the budget books entitled The Manitoba Advantage.

Well, I ask the Minister of Finance: Is being second last in Canada really an advantage?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Well, first of all, it really is something listening to members opposite pretend they know anything about credibility when it comes to finances and pretending to know anything at all about commitments that we made to the people of Manitoba.

We consistently told the people of Manitoba that we were going to come back into balance in 2014. We consistently told the people of Manitoba that we would do it by protecting front-line services, as opposed to members opposite, who came into this

House with a resolution saying they were going to cut deeply—cut deeply into health and education and infrastructure, and then, magically, on the Monday night before the election was called, what did they do? Well, they changed their position just in time for the election. They changed their position. Now they're not going to come into balance until 2018.

Now, again, it seems they've changed their position after the election, and now they're saying, go back to cut deeply, you're not cutting deeply enough. They can give nobody a lecture when it comes to credibility—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Mr. Speaker, apparently this Minister of Finance changed his position on taxation in Manitoba now, and that is despicable. I can't believe he would stand up and talk about things this way.

Mr. Speaker, that same two-income earner family of four earning \$60,000 pays \$2,563 more than that same family in Saskatchewan. That is 530 per cent more than the same family in Saskatchewan, yet this is put in an area of the budget that calls it a Manitoba advantage.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Finance: Is paying a 530 per cent more than in Saskatchewan the new Manitoba advantage?

Mr. Struthers: As opposed to Conservative candidates who promised to privatize Autopac in this country, we're going to take the Autopac rates, bundle it into an affordability advantage for Manitoba and make sure that they—that Manitoba families that she pretends to be worried about are in at least the top three. But we're saying we can do better than that even and be the most affordable province in this country.

I'd refer the member—doesn't it—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order. I'm asking for the co-operation of all honourable members to allow the Minister of Finance the opportunity to respond to the question posed by the member for Tuxedo.

We have guests in the gallery here with us here today, teachers from various schools in Manitoba that would like to have a positive experience coming out of this Assembly and watching this question period. So I'm asking for the co-operation of all honourable members. Please allow the Minister of

Finance and the member for Tuxedo to ask and respond to the questions.

Mr. Struthers: If—I suppose the number of flip-flops we've seen over there, I can understand their sensitivity.

Mr. Speaker, I would refer the—I would refer my critic to page C20 of the budget itself. There's four charts there that I think she should be very interested in. Each one of those charts looks at Manitoba in comparison to other provinces. For example: a single person earning \$30,000, third best in the country; single parent earning \$30,000, third best in the country, despite the information brought forward by members of the opposition; a two-earner family of four earning \$60,000, third best in the country; two-earner family of five earning \$75,000, second best.

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

The honourable member from Tuxedo, final supplementary.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, only an NDP government can stand before Manitobans and call second last in Canada an advantage. Only an NDP government can stand before Manitobans and call paying 530 per cent more than our neighbours an advantage. Dare I ask what the NDP definition is of disadvantage?

Will he not admit that his budget books are misleading by calling this a—an advantage, Mr. Speaker? Make an amendment now and call it the Manitoba disadvantage, which is the actual reality.

Mr. Struthers: Well, I—Mr. Speaker, I'd like to remind my half-full-glass friends across the way that it was not just us. It's not just us that believe that we're—that Manitoba is amongst the best in terms of affordability. Our neighbours in Saskatchewan have said it over and over again. Our neighbours in Saskatchewan, who spend some time objectively looking at this—unlike members opposite—have said over and over that they'd love to have the kind of advantages that we have in Manitoba. The Saskatchewan government itself has said that we're 1 or 2 in terms of affordability.

Mr. Speaker, we know that Manitobans work hard. We know that Manitobans know that they need to contribute to us coming back into balance. We know that Manitobans understand—and their families—that we need to work to get a good strong—

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

Budget Impact on Small Business

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): Mr. Speaker, small business plays an important role in Manitoba's economy. In this week's budget, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) broke his promise not to raise taxes.

The budget adds 7 per cent PST to property and group insurance. This budget increased the cost of gasoline by two and a half cents a litre.

Mr. Speaker, does the Minister of ETT have an estimate of what the impact of his government's decision will be on small business, especially in the delivery business where gasoline and insurance are a major part of their overhead?

* (10:30)

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, when I've met with representatives of small business, when I've met with small business people themselves, they even point to me the fact that this government—and this government and no other government in the country—has reduced to zero the small business tax. That allows small business to hire more people, create more jobs, create more employment, which is good for Manitoba and puts us in the top rung in the provincial comparisons.

We—they say to us, as well, can we look to reduce—can reduce red tape? And that's something else we've accomplished in this budget. They're going to have fewer chance—fewer demands on filing their provincial sales tax. That's something that small business people and their leadership have said to me is a good thing.

So, again, Mr. Speaker, I like to see that the province—in a half-full-glass mode. I wish—

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

Mr. Smook: Mr. Speaker, the budget increased the costs of doing business in Manitoba. Small business owners tell me this budget will cost them thousands of dollars and will force them to raise prices, passing on that cost to consumers.

The Insurance Bureau of Canada estimates that the Premier's decision to expend—expand the PST to insurance alone will cost Manitoba consumers 48 million more dollars a year.

Does the Minister of ETT not recognize that this will make small business in Manitoba less competitive with their counterparts throughout Canada?

Mr. Struthers: Well, I would ask them to look—he mentioned the counterparts across Canada. I'd ask them to talk about the fact that we are the only province, the only government, to take small business tax down to zero. I said that the first time. I said it again.

And, you know, Mr. Speaker, I have a great deal of respect for communities and their chambers of commerce and the work that they do. I need to point to Graham Starmer, who leads up the Manitoba Chamber of Commerce. What did he say? We're supportive of their methodology to increase the gas tax so that they can put it towards infrastructure. That's a good idea.

Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that members are a little off base on this. I think they don't give Manitoba small business enough credit.

Small business wants to have infrastructure in place so that their produce and their retail can be mobile and that they puts them in a strong position to compete with their neighbours in other provinces.

Mr. Smook: Mr. Speaker, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) broke his promise to Manitobans not to raise taxes. He also broke his promise to raise the small business income threshold by \$100,000. Instead of helping small businesses create new jobs and expand the economy, this government wants to tax businesses out of existence.

Will the Minister of ETT acknowledge that this government has turned their back to small business concerns? Will the minister accept responsibility for making Manitoba's small business uncompetitive in the Canadian marketplace?

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Speaker, if you apply some common sense to this, you'll understand that reducing small business tax to zero does not make our small businesses uncompetitive. Reducing red tape for small business in Manitoba does not make small business uncompetitive. Relaxing the rules involving Sunday shopping in Manitoba does not make small business more uncompetitive.

Mr. Speaker, they got to get their homework done over there.

Dauphin Lake Fishery Regulations Enforcement Policies

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): Mr. Speaker, for many years there have been concerns about the sustainability of Dauphin Lake wildlife fishery. It was once one of Canada's premier walleye fisheries. We have raised this issue repeatedly, as have First Nations, conservation groups, and sport fishermen and local residents.

Unlike the foot-dragging by his predecessor, the new Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship has announced a number of new actions to protect the fishery.

Mr. Speaker, as always, when actions of this magnitude are taken, enforcement is the key. Will the minister elaborate on the enforcement measures being taken this year and now commit to putting similar programs in place in future years?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship): Well, I thank and commend the member for his interest in this issue. It's—I understand that it's been a regular concern of the member and I was pleased to hear from him and hear his advice when it came to the Dauphin Lake fishery again this year.

I think this year we've had a particularly successful round of discussions with the West Region Tribal Council among others, and I think that when it comes to answering the question, the answer comes from a—the result of those discussions, where not only are the natural resource officers of the department at work with enforcement duties at that—in that location, but I think that we have both empowered and helped to raise awareness among the First Nations communities around the lake about their treaty rights and respecting those rights.

So I think that really is the best way to answer it. It's important that all persons who are stakeholders in that lake have a role, have awareness of how important it is, but particularly in the spring, to guard against the taking of spawning fish. And I think we've accomplished that, at least as we've set out so far, and we'll keep a very close eye in the coming weeks on what is happening on the tributaries of that lake.

Mr. Briese: As I said, Mr. Speaker, enforcement is always the key to these programs.

The Conservation Programs to protect Dauphin Lake wildlife fishery include restrictions on

commercial fishing and the sale of wildlife from the lake. However, concerns have been raised that walleye are being taken from Dauphin Lake and sold as legal commercial catch from other lakes, such as Lake Winnipegosis and Lake Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Conservation assure this House that he will provide the necessary enforcement going forward to put an end to these types of illegal practices?

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes, first of all, I've been getting daily updates on the activity on the tributaries and the—any enforcement action that may be necessary. And I'm very heartened by what's happening in the watershed there. I've also asked the department to ensure that their oversight includes looking to see what might be happening in the neighbouring towns to guard against any commercial sales and making sure that the taking of fish is for sustenance only.

I just, perhaps, just want to conclude that I think this may be a breakthrough in terms of moving towards a resource management arrangement with the tribal council on a long-term basis. There have been investments made very wisely by my predecessor that, hopefully, will have some—come to some fruition now as a result of these discussions. Thank you.

Road and Bridge Repairs Government Transport of Material

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, this NDP Premier (Mr. Selinger) says he can't do anything about his government's spending addiction, so he continues to raise taxes by \$184 million and he budgets for a bigger deficit than last year. It's the same direction this Premier was going even when he was the Finance Minister.

But Manitobans are watching, Mr. Speaker. At Wednesday's Finance Minister's meeting in Brandon, Walter Finlay asked why this NDP government is hauling rock some 300 kilometres from Stonewall to Hartney for repairs to roads when there's lots of a supply of ready rock much closer than that.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister actually confirm that Mr. Finlay's statement is correct?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm really pleased to answer questions in regards to the tremendous amount of work that's happening in terms of highways across the province.

I know that the member has raised many important issues. In fact, we're going to be meeting next week regards to a very significant bridge issue in Coulter in the RM of Arthur. And I was perhaps expecting a question, perhaps at that level or perhaps a question on our overall capital budget, which, again this year, it's going to \$589 million including capital and maintenance, which is historic level.

But I got to tell you, Mr. Speaker, I'm really, you know, this is a department where we—we're concerned about everything from one load of rock all the way through to that \$589-million program. So I will do what I've done in the past on any issue the member's raised; I will look into it.

*(10:40)

Mr. Maguire: Well, Mr. Speaker, at Wednesday's Finance Minister's meeting in Brandon, Mr. Finlay was cited in the *Brandon Sun*, and I quote: They are hauling rock from Stonewall to Hartney. Why would you haul stone 200 miles when you can get it from 10 miles away? They are hauling rock in from Ethelbert and dumping it a mile from where they got it last year. Talk about waste. That costs one pile of money. End quote.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister explain with—the rationale behind hauling load after load of heavy rock many, many miles, potentially damaging roads, causing more greenhouse gas emissions, and at great expense to the public purse? Has the minister examined such wasteful spending or does he simply just condone it?

Mr. Ashton: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to get into any internal debate between the member for Lakeside and the member for Arthur-Virden about which is the best source of rock in the province. I'll leave that to their caucus meetings.

I do want to stress that our department does take things very seriously, and I do know last year we were being criticized being wasteful when we purchased sandbag machines, and actually I want to admit there was maybe a week or two in which they weren't in operation, then we used them six months straight to fight a flood. So I do hope the member would understand that our department takes very seriously the finances of this Province. I mean, it is a big budget, \$589 million; it's three times what it was in 1999. I don't want to get too political here.

And I'll tell you we value providing value for money for Manitobans. In fact we're giving back \$2 in highway expenditure for every dollar that's

paid in gas tax. So, Mr. Speaker, that's important on the macro level, but I'll follow up on this rock shipment for the member opposite.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Arthur-Virden, final supplementary.

Mr. Maguire: Mr. Speaker, the minister is fully aware of the deplorable state of infrastructure in southwest Manitoba, however, local citizens want their tax dollars maximized. So if the NDP has no power to curtail their own spending addiction, maybe the Premier can show accountability for taxpayers' money.

Mr. Speaker, does the Premier support hauling rock from Stonewall to Hartney for bridge repairs when rock is available nearby? Is this a good use of his new two-and-a-half-cent-a-litre gas tax or of the extra \$35 registration that he's hoisting onto all Manitobans, the taxes that he said he wouldn't increase, or is this just some kind of joke at taxpayers' expense?

Mr. Ashton: Well, Mr. Speaker, I give the member credit. He stuck to his script for three questions, and I'm going to stick to my script too, and I'm actually going to remind the member opposite of the—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Ashton: —perhaps that he may want to, while he's watching highways issues in his area, he may want to look at the surfacing of 22 kilometres of Highway 10 north of Minto, the structure on Highway 2, they are repairing—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, order. Order, please. Order, please. I'm having a great difficulty hearing the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation who is responding to the question by the honourable member for Arthur-Virden. Please, I ask all colleagues to co-operate and allow the minister to complete his answer.

Mr. Ashton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I was just reading into the record some of things happening to members' area: the surfacing of 12 kilometres, Highway 2 between Sinclair and Reston; the continuing of pavement of 29 kilometres, Highway 1 east of Virden; the continuing surfacing of 15.6 kilometres of Highway 1. You know, Mr. Speaker, we've got a record highway program in the—in this province. I thought the member opposite would be standing up and asking questions about our highway program.

But I want to stress again, we're the big picture in terms of the highway program, \$589 million, but we are concerned about every rock shipment. I will make sure by Monday morning I get him an answer on the rock shipment, and perhaps on Monday in question period he can ask about our record highway capital—

Mr. Speaker: Order, order.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for River Heights has the floor.

Cereal Research Centre Government Support

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, investments in research are a key to our future. You know, for example, research on plant diseases like rust in wheat has allowed Manitoba to grow very high quality wheat. The federal Conservative government is killing the Cereal Research Centre and the Premier has failed to stand up for Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, the federal government announced in 2008 that it would build a grain research centre of excellence, and yet delays and inadequate support from the Province mean that it have not happened.

I ask the Premier: Why is he not standing up for Manitoba to ensure we keep and enhance our important research capacities?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I've—I thank the member for the question, Mr. Speaker, on the cereals and grains research centre of excellence. We do think that that is—has enormous potential here in Manitoba. It's regrettable that people are being laid off as a—at the existing facility right now, and we have to make sure that we don't lose some of the excellent research scientists that we do have in this province.

Manitoba has always been a leader on research with respect to grains, canola and other food crops in Manitoba. We continue to have the best cluster for research on foods and nutraceuticals at the Food Development Centre in Portage la Prairie where we've made significant millions of dollars of improvements at the Richardson Nutraceutical Centre at the University of Manitoba, at the St. Boniface Hospital. And we've improved in this budget our research and development resources for all companies in Manitoba that want to develop better products all across the board.

We will continue to work with our partners in the community and the federal government on developing a cereals and grains research centre of excellence in Manitoba. I'm on the—we're on the radar of that. We've discussed it with them. I've communicated with the federal government on this, and we will continue to pursue this because Manitoba is the best place to do that kind of research in Canada. No doubt about it.

NRC Institute for Biodiagnostics Government Support

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Why hasn't it been done in five years?

Mr. Speaker, the Institute for Biodiagnostics on Ellice Avenue is another example of a very critical research facility and for the future of health care and the future of our economy. The institute has had extraordinary success in producing new products and services, in spinning off companies like IMRIS and Novadaq with international sales of tens of millions of dollars and employing hundreds of people here in Manitoba. And now we learn the federal Conservative government is axing all the research at the research Institute for Biodiagnostics.

And I ask: Why is the Premier not standing up for Manitoba and Manitobans? Why isn't he speaking up about the importance of investing in research, keeping scientists here instead of having them leave the province?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Again, Mr. Speaker, I think the member from River Heights asked another excellent question.

The loss of the biodiagnostic centre on Ellice Avenue is a very significant hit on Manitoba's capacity to do the kind of research in magnetic resonance technology of which IMRIS came out of that centre. Dr. Ian Smith has done a good job incubating new businesses out of there. I'm very concerned about the loss of that.

It actually does relate to the other issue that we've had some small discussion on here. Many of the scientists there are immigrants and newcomers to come to Manitoba. We want to continue to recruit those people to those people to this province. We want them to have opportunities to do research and development in Manitoba.

The member is right. This is a very significant concern. I hope he will communicate with his federal

counterparts and raise the issue at the federal level where these cuts are actually occurring.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for River Heights, for the final supplementary.

Mr. Gerrard: But why is he, as Premier, not doing anything?

Mr. Speaker, the federal Conservative government has appointed a president of the National Research Council who's a real estate mogul from Alberta, and he's moving very rapidly to sell off the priceless treasures here in Manitoba.

The Institute for Biodiagnostics has achieved an incredible international reputation for creativity, for research and for innovation. It 'promotes' amazing new diagnostic tools to help improve health care and help our economy, and now it's being sold off as if it was just real estate.

When will the Premier stand up to this sell-off of assets here in Manitoba which are so critical to our future?

Mr. Selinger: And I concur with the member from River Heights. I think these reductions and this cutting of research and development capacity in Manitoba is a tragic loss of our economic potential.

And, you know, we've brought newcomers to Manitoba. We've trained people in Manitoba. We have a graduate tuition tax rebate program which allows us to recruit people from all around the world, and when they live and work in Manitoba they can get 60 per cent of their tuition back. That is a tragic loss of that facility as with the cereals and grain in— as well.

We are going to pursue these activities and try to retain as many of them in Manitoba as possible. I will work with the member from River Heights to do that. I only wish the members of the Progressive Conservative Party had the same level of concern about the future of Manitoba as the member of River Heights does and the members on this side of the House do, Mr. Speaker.

* (10:50)

The Missing Persons Act Introduction

Ms. Melanie Wight (Burrows): When a loved one goes missing, families naturally turn to police for answers and help. But often police are limited in their ability to help unless there is evidence that a crime has been committed.

Can the Attorney General tell us about the new legislation that will help police and families locate loved ones when they go missing?

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): –Member for Burrows for the question, and certainly helping families find loved ones who are missing is an extremely important job done by police services across this province. And I would like to put on the record, at least on behalf of our caucus, the appreciation for law enforcement and the job they do in this province.

We know that across Canada and in Manitoba too many people, too many women, too many children do go missing. And often they end up in situations where they're sexually exploited or murdered, Mr. Speaker, and police are very frustrated. They're frustrated when they can't get the information they need to help people recover their loved ones, and that's why we've listened to police, and that's why we're giving them the tools that'll make it easier for them to move quickly to return loved ones to their homes. We know that timely access to this information can be critical to the safe return home of missing family members. It matches with our investments in police, our investments in public safety, our investment to protect young people from sexual exploitation.

So I thank the member for Burrows for her knowledge and her interest in this issue.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

St. Norbert Parish-La Barrière Métis Council

Mr. Dave Gaudreau (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, earlier this month, I had the pleasure of attending the St. Norbert-La Barrière parish Métis council AGM. The St. Norbert Métis council was started in 2000 by Don Benoit and his family and community members of the local chapter of the Manitoba Métis Federation and has enjoyed 12 successful years since then.

The council's goal is to help preserve and celebrate the historic Métis community in St. Norbert, and it accomplishes this through outreach programs and community events. The council is rightly proud of its Métis heritage, and I had the pleasure of meeting with Linda St. Cyr, chair of the council, about the Métis role in settling St. Norbert. St. Norbert has traditionally been a meeting and trading ground for the local people and the Métis established the first permanent settlement there. The

Métis have always been a vibrant and integral to the culture and prosperity of St. Norbert community, and the Métis council continues to work hard to preserve and promote this connection.

I was able to say a few welcoming words at the AGM and meet the rest of the community, alongside Linda: Vice-Chair Joanne Pagee, Treasurer Rosemary Rozyk, and Secretary Adrienne Carriere. The AGM demonstrates the passion which the council approaches their work and inform me about many great activities and events that they put on throughout the year. In addition to their bimonthly meetings, the council hosts an annual potluck supper in September, throws socials, volunteers with local schools, donates books and educational materials. It hosts local events, like a meat draw on April 14th that I was able to attend and volunteer for, as well as numerous outreach events.

They also erected a cairn in 2010 celebrating the Métis community and the council. Each of these events, in their own small way, helps maintain and preserve the Métis culture and heritage in St. Norbert. Mr. Speaker, the St. Norbert-La Barrière parish Métis council is a wonderful organization that helps celebrate and preserve the important contributions of the Métis people and the St. Norbert community.

Thank you.

Earth Day

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Earth Day, a yearly celebration to promote awareness and appreciation of our natural environment. Earth Day, celebrated on April 22nd this year, serves as an opportunity to reflect on the important of role that nature has in our lives.

As Manitobans living in a vast land of prairie landscapes, forests and lakes, we are privileged to have the opportunity to have easy access to this pristine environment. I think that I can speak for many Manitobans when I say that Manitoba's provincial parks and other natural areas provide a perfect setting for swimming, canoeing and enjoying time with friends and family. Of particular beauty are our unique prairie skies and sunsets that are unlike any other place on earth.

We are fortunate here in Manitoba to enjoy clean air, clean water, and thriving plant and animal species. As such, it is up to all Manitobans to help sustain this through responsible management of our

land and energy resources. I encourage Manitobans to think about the environmentally sustainable practices that they can implement in their daily lives, like carpooling or taking public transit and conserving energy use in their homes. Even small changes on a day-to-day basis can certainly make a huge difference.

In the province of 100,000 lakes, Manitobans have a particular duty to ensure the protection of our natural environment now and for future generations. I wish everyone a happy and active Earth Day this Sunday.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

École Lacerte Choir

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): On Wednesday, April 11th, 40 grade 4 and 5 choir students from École Lacerte honoured us by singing on the grand staircase of the Manitoba Legislature in celebration of Music Month.

This wonderful group of students, led by their director, Mme Chantal Courcelles Lancaster, and their teacher's assistant, Mme Rachelle Saurette, shared with us their love of singing and the joy of music. These students take choir by choice and their enthusiasm was contagious.

After a tour of the building, the students serenaded us with three French songs. They started with a traditional French-Canadian song, "Ah! si mon moine voulait danser," followed by "Il faudra leur dire," a beautiful song by Francis Cabrel. They ended their performance with "J'imagine," the theme song for the Vancouver Olympics, certainly one of our favourites. I had the great pleasure of meeting the students afterwards and offering my warm congratulations to them.

Mr. Speaker, École Lacerte is located in the heart of Windsor Park and serves part of Manitoba's strong francophone community. As part of the Division scolaire franco-manitobaine, it forms a vital education link for Franco-Manitoban families and helps to maintain the cultural identity of francophones in our province. The students' performance certainly embodies their school's motto: "Je vois la vie en rose et en français."

Mr. Speaker, it's always wonderful to hear the music throughout the halls of the Legislature. The students from École Lacerte demonstrated through their singing the energy and the power of music to bring to people together and to celebrate our

province's many cultures. The students should be congratulated for their performance, and I would like to ask leave to have the École Lacerte's grade 4 and 5 choir students' names included in this statement in the *Hansard*.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to have the names mentioned by the honourable member for Radisson included in the *Hansard* proceedings? *[Agreed]*

Lianne Adair, Immaculée Bahiga-Wampire, Paul-Miki Bahiga-Mungu Ohana, Zoeline Bonnee, Mary Charney, Isabelle Cloutier, Sophie Connor, Sophie Delaquis, Dédé Doumbia, Pierre Druwé-Elliott, Imane El Aaji, Alyssa Erickson, Sylvie Gauthier, Émilie Giroux, Riana Hahlweg, Zoé Hegarty, Chloé Henderson, Gulaine Iragi Musahagalusa, Lou-Grace Irié, Sarah-Lou Irié, Arianne Jones, Renelle Kimery, Alyssa Kissick, Isabelle Lambert, Natacha Langelier, François Legal, Lara Letain, Colin McNeill, Brianne Moroz, Josée Navitka, Jean-Pierre Normandeau, Deborah Pehe, Natasha Perkins, Gillian Peterson, Taylor Pineau, Camille Préfontaine, Danica Ruest, Aliou Sane, Kira Tuba, Michelle Volk.

Bothwell Cheese 75th Anniversary

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, I want to honour Bothwell Cheese, who celebrated their 75th anniversary on November 4th, 2011.

Bothwell Cheese began as a—as the Bothwell co-operative dairy society in New Bothwell, Manitoba, in 1936, when seven dairy farmers collectively invested \$15,000 into a plant built by local volunteers. Today, Bothwell operates out of a 35,000-square-foot complex where its staff of 60, including Rob Hiebert, the plant manager and my brother-in-law, Mr. Speaker, continues the tradition of producing a number of different types of cheddar and over 25 different varieties of cheese and exotic flavours.

Over the years, Bothwell Cheese has won numerous prestigious awards, ranging from the mild cheddar, best mature cheddar and the best industrial milk plant. Two thousand eleven, they once again were successful with a first-place win for their marble cheese at the prestigious British Empire Cheese Competition.

CEO Ivan Balenovic would proudly say that the secret to their success is doubtlessly their commitment to the principles and their tradition of

artisan craftsmanship. Over the decades, Bothwell Cheese has built a reputation of producing premium quality cheese made with all-natural ingredients purchased directly from local dairy farmers.

In honouring Bothwell Cheese, I think it's important to realize that many of Manitoba's rural businesses are sustained by a similar dedication to high quality standards and the ability to adapt traditional business models to meet these standards and the needs of today's marketplace. Bothwell Cheese provides Manitobans with an example of their ability to achieve long-term business success in Manitoba, and it's a great honour to be able to speak on behalf of such a rich heritage for the people of New Bothwell, the RM of Hanover and all of southeastern Manitoba.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Vaisakhi Celebration

Mr. Mohinder Saran (The Maples): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to recognize a celebration that is very important to one of Manitoba's vibrant religious communities.

Earlier this month, millions of Sikhs around the world celebrated Vaisakhi. This annual festival marks the founding of the Sikh community known as Khalsa. Vaisakhi also celebrates the Sikh New Year and the beginning of the harvest in northern India.

* (11:00)

While many Manitobans may not be familiar with the tradition of Vaisakhi, they will be able to appreciate its principles: equality, generosity and compassion. In 1699, the 10th guru, Gobind Singh Ji, initiated five Sikhs from different caste backgrounds to be leaders of a new faith, one based on social equality. The guru then received initiation from the same five members, erasing all direction—all distinctions between them and creating the Khalsa, or Order of the Pure. By doing so, the guru ensured that within Sikhism, people would no longer be judged first by their caste.

Today's Sikhs acknowledge this day of beginning in a variety of ways. Many Sikhs often choose to get baptized during Vaisakhi. Many people in The Maples happily celebrate the birth of Khalsa at our gurdwaras, our Sikh houses of worship. Families come together to sing religious hymns and share traditional food and to celebrate the values of Vaisakhi. This year, I attended the raising the flag of Khalsa at Winnipeg City Hall. The member for

Radisson (Mr. Jha), the Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism (Ms. Melnick) and I also had the chance to join the wonderful Vaisakhi celebration at Gurdwara Singh Sabha.

Manitobans are proud that, in this diverse province, many of us live side by side with families from different cultures and traditions. It is important to celebrate these differences and also to remember that while we hold different beliefs, there are some values, like those of Vaisakhi, that we have in common.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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), and the proposed motion of the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) in amendment thereto, standing in the name of the Minister of Innovation, Energy and Mines, who has 19 minutes remaining.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Innovation, Energy and Mines): And I'm very pleased to, again, have an opportunity to continue my discussion that I had that I commenced the other day in the Chamber.

As a prelude to that, Mr. Speaker, I just want to make reference to some of the misstatements made by members opposite during the course of debate yesterday, when members opposite had a—had to have a group of mentors in the loge to come in and to guide them through the tasks of the debate in the House. I don't think, in my entire life, I've ever seen a political party or group have to have a—have to have their federal counterparts in Chamber to direct them as to how they should speak and how they should act in the Chamber.

But, I—despite that, Mr. Speaker, despite that, they got it wrong. First off, my friend, the member for St. Paul (Mr. Schuler), with his extraordinary—his extraordinarily inaccurate depiction—a depiction of the settlement program and of immigration this country, was astounding in its inaccuracy.

You know, the member talked about immigrants coming to this country, wanting to get away from certain attitudes. I remind the member opposite that they wanted to get away from right-wing

governments and governments who, by fiat, would tell everyone in a country what they had to do, Mr. Speaker. Per example, relatives—per example, immigrants from the Austrian-Hungarian empire that consisted of Jews and Ukrainians and Germans and Mennonites and Poles were not allowed—were told they had to speak a particular language. They were told in the schools they had to do things a certain way, Mr. Speaker. They came to this country for freedom.

Now, the member for St. Paul extraordinarily said the settlement program that they want to put in place wants to be identical in every part of this country. They want the same program in Cape Breton Island as they have in northern Manitoba, as they have in the inner city of Toronto, Mr. Speaker.

That's not what this country is about. Mr. Speaker, that's why we have a Confederation, that's why we have provinces, because we recognize the diversity and the differences in this country. And the application of programs in a carte blanche, fiat-like, jackboot fashion is not what this country was built on.

And that's what the member for St. Paul (Mr. Schuler) said the purpose of the move in the program was to make the program identical across the country so that if you're clam digging in—if you want to go clam digging in the—in Summerside, PEI, Mr. Speaker, that's the same as working on a welding project in northern Alberta. Those are different skills. Those are different needs. Those are different immigrants from different places. That's why we have a confederation.

If we followed the logic of the member for St. Paul, we'd get rid of the provinces, Mr. Speaker. We'd get rid of the need to have diversification and the differences between application. Our entire basis of confederation is an exchange and a dialogue, and this country works because of confederation. If we follow what the member for St. Paul said, we'd have one cookie-cut federal government.

And I thought—I thought even the Conservatives across the way—even the Conservatives across the way—recognized both the nature and the importance of a confederation, Mr. Speaker, where different applications were applied to different needs, which is why the government closest to the level of providing the service, generally, as has been stated by most members in this House, is most appropriate—able to provide that type of service.

To hear the member for St. Paul, Mr. Speaker, not only does he have his history wrong, he has his understanding of the country wrong. And if what he says is true, I fear—I fear—greatly if that kind of thinking is what members opposite actually believe in. And, you know, I have a lot of members across the way who I consider friends and colleagues, and I'm convinced that they do not follow that kind of a rigid, centrist, right-wing, top-down kind of thinking. So I just add that that was one of the most extraordinary misunderstandings of both programming and the country that I've heard in this Chamber for some time from the member from St. Paul, who often fondly shouts my name across the floor of the Chamber. *[interjection]* And the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) indicates the member for St. Paul loves me. I—you know, I've been known on occasion in this House as the minister of love. You know, I accept that as a—I accept that. I think we should all follow the golden rule.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I—some of the revisionism of the member for Steinbach I also found a little bit disarming. The member for Steinbach actually forgot about a lot of the co-operation in programming, in personal care homes, in schools that have been built in his constituency in the last few years. He forgot about his former colleague, who I had very high regard for, who indicated that he thought our health care—we had done a great job in health care and had said that to me personally, and I had great admiration for him. But the attempt to follow direction from their political overseers in Ottawa as they sat in the loge forced him into a form of revisionism that just was not accurate.

And it reminds me of the election campaign when the salute went out to the senator and all steps were followed by the senator, Mr. Speaker. And, you know, I just remind the member for Steinbach that we welcomed him when he ran the campaign two campaigns ago, and we welcomed him when he ran the campaign last campaign, and we welcomed the senator when he ran the last campaign, and he's—we're looking forward to running another campaign with the member from Steinbach at the controls. But I digress. I want to focus—I want to do something, Mr. Speaker, that members opposite have some difficulty dealing with. I want to focus on the budget. You know, there's such a thing as being focused and there's such a thing as being obsessive-compulsive. And I'm sorry to use these words, but it's a terminology that I have on a daily basis with my

spouse, who's—talks about these things all the time. A lot of them could refer to me, of course, but the obsessive-compulsive nature of the members opposite with the—with one aspect of the budget, the one aspect of the budget—in fact, they've got that wrong. You know, they talk about nine increases in taxes, Mr. Speaker, and I've heard—and you know what, they talked about things that are not even remotely known as taxes, you know. Fee increases or utility increases that go on a regular basis, members opposite have characterized—has characterized as taxes. So they can't even get that right.

*(11:10)

But, Mr. Speaker, when you look at a budget and when you look on—what the budget says, it says, focusing on what matters most. And the members opposite have this kind of—this inability to look beyond the narrow confines of their fiscally restraining, acute, protracted, restraint mentality that saw in the province during the mean and lean harsh years of the 1990s, the elimination of thousands of nurses jobs. And I've been through that; I'm not going to go through that. And they don't look at the broader context and when I look through the budget papers and the budget documents, I think it's illuminating.

First off, The Manitoba Advantage that was referenced in the House today is also referenced by people like the government of Saskatchewan, in their budget documents. It's referenced by things like *MacLean's* magazine that called The Manitoba Advantage the Manitoba miracle. These are not exactly third party verifiers, Mr. Speaker, that go out regularly to support New Democratic parties, I dare say, or even to attend New Democratic rallies.

But, when I look through the budget documents and I look at credit rating agencies, where Manitoba gets it A-high from the Dominion Bond Rating agency, A-1 from Moody's and AA from Standard & Poor's. I wonder what the heck members are talking about when they talk about this budget, Mr. Speaker. When I look at capital investments of \$1.7 billion, which is real investment in the province of Manitoba, I wonder what pages the members are confining themselves to alone. When I look at Manitoba retail sales going up, when I look at the—us having the lowest personal debt in the country, I wonder what documents the members opposite are reading. It's incredible.

When I look in the budget document and when I look at the amount of power generation, the amount

of power sales, I wonder why members opposite so dislike Hydro, so much want to stop the production of Hydro and so much in the past, I'm—dare say in the future, want to sell off Hydro, Mr. Speaker.

When I look at private and public capital investment, Mr. Speaker, it's higher—projected to be higher this year than any time in the last decade. When I look at total R & D spending in Manitoba, it's higher in the last year reported than any time in the last decade. When I look at the unemployment rate, I see it's the second lowest in the country.

And so I ask members opposite: Have you read this document? Have you looked at this document? Have you focused on what matters most, Mr. Speaker, or are members opposite confined to that narrow, obsessive window that they look at and—which is typical of members opposite. They throw out the baby with the bath water on a regular basis. They take one narrow spoke of criticism and throw out the whole budget.

So that means, Mr. Speaker, the increases to policing will be rejected by members opposite. That means the increased hiring of nurses, doctors and health-care practitioners is rejected by members opposite. That means that the capital investments in this budget, the roads and infrastructure that members pretend to care so much about, will be rejected by them when they vote against this budget.

That means that the free cancer drugs that were just announced, as an election commitment, Mr. Speaker, will be rejected by members opposite. And they'll be rejected because members opposite have a very narrow, very partisan and a very small, narrow approach to the finances of the province of Manitoba and to the future of Manitoba.

And I dare say, that's one of the reasons why their caucus has had some difficulties in the last little while and it's gotten increasingly smaller. Because Manitobans are bigger than that. Manitobans are far more representative of people from all across the regions, all across backgrounds, all across the world and the narrow vision of—exemplified by comments from the members opposite, particularly misinterpretations of history and the constitution of the member from St. Paul who extraordinarily—extraordinarily—missed the boat on what Canada's all about and forgot that Canada's a democracy, not a top-down dictatorship where central government tells everybody what they should do all the time, every time, everywhere. And that's the main reason why people came to this country and have come to this

country in so many millions over the decades and over the past century.

Mr. Speaker, this is a budget that's balanced. This is a budget that recognizes that we are working towards a target of doing what this government did for the first decade, and that is have balanced budgets. This is a budget that recognizes what most governments in the country are doing. It's a planned, staged movement towards balanced return in the economy. It's not an about-face, harsh, acute, protracted, restraint, let's reduce in one year all expenditures and layoff everyone, which members opposite advocate.

Or the other extreme that they advocate that they're not going to reduce and get rid of the deficit for an additional two or three years after we had put together a five-year plan. This is a balanced, focused—that by necessity has recognized a billion dollars in flood expenditures last year and which recognizes \$1.7 billion in infrastructure building and planning in the next year, Mr. Speaker. It's a balanced budget that recognize Manitoba's economy has emerged from a—from recession relatively strong, has emerged with an export market, for example, that is far less dependent upon United States, for example, than it was in the past. In fact, far less dependent on the United States and the rest of Canada and, in fact, has enhanced its export capacity to the Far East, in particular, China, Japan, and South Korea.

It's a budget that recognizes that the farm economy has been in some difficulty for some time, Mr. Speaker, but that the supports that are put in place and the vitality of the rural communities in Manitoba can grow.

It's a budget that recognizes that small towns—it used to be small towns in Manitoba, places that were small communities, are growing and thriving in the southwestern part of the province where you can't even sometimes find a place to live because of the activities in the oil patch.

And communities like Steinbach that during the mean, lean Tory years were stagnating, are growing, are developing and have now reached a status that were unprecedented and unheard of during the lean, mean 'stagnatory' years.

This is a budget that recognized that, builds on that growth, Mr. Speaker, and recognizes that Manitobans have opportunities not just in the cities and in rural Manitoba, but in the north where we

have enormous potential for wealth, where we have enormous potential for a sharing and developing of hydro resources, where we recognize that we have a perhaps once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to bring First Nations, First Nations communities into the mainstream of Manitoba's social and economic life.

Think of it, not only are we fortunate to be able to have programs that bring in immigrants, but that we have the opportunity in the years to come in building in this budget, in building in the roads and the infrastructure in this budget, and some of the supports and some of the actions to be taken place to allow First Nations people, for the first time perhaps ever, to have an opportunity to take advantage of employment, to take advantage of equity, to take advantage of ownership, to take advantage of full citizenship in Manitoba.

And, Mr. Speaker, by rejecting a budget like this, by voting against this budget, the members opposite speak volumes of the tired, old, tired, old Tory ways, the tired, old ways of only looking to themselves and sitting a small, little clique, and saying, you know, what's good for us is good for us and what's—for the rest, it doesn't matter. And for a tired, old group that, when you talk about hydro development, want to stop it just like they wanted to stop Limestone. When you talk about sharing the resources with First Nations that are around the province, are against that.

*(11:20)

When you talk about free cancer drugs, Mr. Speaker, they're going to vote against it. And why? Why is that? Can they not see that the future of Manitoba is in the Manitoba way—the Manitoba way—which is a way of sharing and working together, focusing on what matters most, adapting, working together with each other. That's how this province was built. That's how this province will be built.

It won't be built by narrow-minded, cost-cutting, program-disliking, a central—we're going to run everything out of Ottawa—everything out of Ottawa—thinking, as the member for St. Paul (Mr. Schuler) said that every program out of Ottawa is going to be identical. Even in the northern Manitobas and southern Manitoba, he so misreads this province, Mr. Speaker. He ought to travel outside of this province. He ought to travel and see there's different ways of dealing with people, and programs ought to be—*[interjection]* Oh, I think, Mr. Speaker, I've touched a nerve.

I think I've touched a nerve, and perhaps—perhaps it's been worth, Mr. Speaker—perhaps it's been worth the effort to try to educate members opposite about some of the broader aspects of this budget. And, perhaps, they'll take another look, and perhaps they'll even read some sections of this budget that talk about the advances that Manitoba can make—not just this year, but to the years to come—to make this province an even better place to live and to continue what *Maclean's* called the Manitoba miracle.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): I'm pleased to have the opportunity to rise today in this House and speak to the budget, a budget that I certainly question and I certainly will not be supporting. There are many reasons for that, Mr. Speaker.

But at the outset, because this is my first opportunity to rise and speak this session of the Legislature, I want to welcome all members back to the House that were re-elected and all the new members that were elected to the Legislature. And I'm sure they're getting their feet wet as they get into the debate and are enjoying their opportunity to participate in the legislative process and the political process in this Chamber. And I especially want to make mention of the new members that were elected on our side of the House. They have made significant contributions to our caucus and to our discussion—discussions already, and I know there are great things to come as a result of their election to this Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to congratulate you on your election as Speaker of the House, and I wish you well as you deliberate in a very impartial way the proceedings of this Legislature. I want to recognize and welcome the table officers, the legislative staff, the pages that will be serving us and have, thus far, done an extremely good job of serving all members of the Legislature, and the interns that were chosen to work in the different caucuses in government and in opposition, and wish them well as they gain some very meaningful experience in the political process.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to thank wholeheartedly the constituents of River East that, once again, re-elected me to this Legislature. And I sometimes think it's good and bad to talk about how many elections we've been through, but it has been eight elections in River East that I've had the opportunity to gain the support of the majority of

constituents in River East and I look forward to continuing to serve them in a way that will represent their interests. And, you know, some of the things that we do in this Legislature don't have as much significance as others, but when you look at the individual constituents in a community that have very real needs and real issues, and they bring those forward to their members of the Legislature, some of the most rewarding moments of my political career have been helping one individual in my community access the services and the supports that they so rightly deserve. And those aren't things that gain media headlines or talk about things publicly. Those are things that really warm our hearts as members of the Legislature, when we can, in fact, help individuals gain that access and support that they need.

So I am thrilled again to be here in this Chamber and working on behalf of the constituents of River East and on behalf of all Manitobans. And as we debate the budget document, which is such an important document, Mr. Speaker, I can't help but think how off-base the New Democrat government is today when they put out a budget document that says, we're focused on what matters most. Well, we have seen, over the last week, what Manitobans are focused on most and what matters most to Manitobans, and Manitobans want a government that is honest with them, a government that will, in fact, tell the truth when it comes to making commitments and promises.

And we've seen this week the very disheartening, discouraging actions of a Premier who, seven months ago—I think it was on September the 12th, when he was out in the fine city of Brandon participating in a leaders debate, that, Mr. Speaker, he said—and I just have to find it here, because I want to quote exactly what he said. And this is in the lead-up, some three or so short weeks before an election campaign and he was speaking on behalf of a government that had been in power for 12 years, a Premier that had been newly elected, and he said clearly to Manitobans, I quote: Our plan is a five-year plan to ensure that we have future prosperity without any tax increases and we'll deliver on that. That was a promise he made to Manitobans, that was a commitment he made to Manitobans and Manitobans believed that and voted this government back into power.

Well, fast-forward, Mr. Speaker, to this week when the new Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) presented the budget in this Legislature and we saw

what was in that budget. It was revealed to us that there were significant tax increases and user-fee increases that hard-working Manitobans would have to pay as a result of this budget.

Now, Mr. Speaker, that wasn't what the Premier said back in September. He said he would deliver on his promise not to raise taxes. He can't stand in this House and justify any tax increases with any credibility. And what matters most to Manitobans is that they have an honest and open and an accountable government who will spend their hard-earned tax dollars wisely. We've seen the actions of this government over the last number of years. We've seen the waste and mismanagement when they've received unprecedented revenues from a federal government—a Conservative federal government, and they've used those resources in a way to spend beyond their means and have now had to resort to the kinds of tax increases that we haven't seen for many, many years, as I would say probably not since the days of Howard Pawley and his government.

And, again, we look at the pattern of an NDP government. You know, Howard Pawley, when they set Autopac rates around the Cabinet table, kept those rates artificially low before an election and then, surprisingly to all Manitobans, after the election they hiked those Autopac rates up to a point where Manitobans were absolutely outraged. And that was one of the reasons, probably the most significant reason, that Howard Pawley lost that election and lost the confidence of one of his own members of the Legislature on a budget vote that defeated Howard Pawley and put Gary Filmon into government.

* (11:30)

So, Mr. Speaker, we're seeing that pattern. Obviously the Premier (Mr. Selinger) today must have looked back and admired Howard Pawley for the deception that he presented to Manitobans before an election campaign because he's repeating the same thing over again: tell Manitobans one thing before an election so I can get their vote and then do something different after we're elected. And that is exactly what we're seeing this week in this deceptive NDP budget.

Now, we're not going to let Manitobans forget because the credibility of this Premier is on the line. And, Mr. Speaker, every time he stands up in this House to answer a question, the question is going to be: Can we believe what he is saying? Can we believe anything he says because we know we can't believe what he said about taxes. He said one thing,

spoke out of one side of his mouth before an election to get people to vote for him, and after an election he did exactly the opposite—\$184 million in additional taxation, never mind the user fees and all of the things that we haven't discovered yet in this budget that are going to pick the pockets of hard-working Manitobans.

And, Mr. Speaker, Manitobans, generally speaking, don't believe that government knows best how to spend their hard-earned tax dollars. They believe that the more money you leave in their pockets, the better they are going to be able to make the decisions for themselves and for their families. They don't want a government that's going to gouge them every step of the way and try to ensure that they're among the bottom of the bottom when it comes to living and raising a family across the country.

Mr. Speaker, there's nothing for this government to be proud of in this budget and I feel a bit sorry for the new Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers). I mean, I don't know. I—maybe I'm being a little soft when it comes to him, but you know, he is sitting in the chair next to the former minister of Finance, who is now the Premier (Mr. Selinger). Who's certainly—well, maybe there's writing on the wall. Maybe the Member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) will be the next leader of the New Democratic Party. Who knows? Maybe that's the natural progression, from Finance minister to Premier.

But you would think, Mr. Speaker, that the Premier today would have enough understanding of finances and he would have enough understanding of what is a tax and what isn't a tax. And we already know there are significant new tax increases in this budget. And the residents of River East didn't support that, and I don't believe that any of the residents throughout the province of Manitoba supported the kinds of tax increases and they believed the Premier when he said no new taxes. Now he's fudging a little bit and he, again—I don't know which—obviously he was speaking out of the right side of his mouth when he said no new taxes and he's speaking out of the left side of his mouth today when he's raised taxes by \$184 million—no credibility whatsoever and extreme disservice to the people of Manitoba.

The people of Manitoba that hoped that the Premier was telling the truth. They hoped and they believed him enough to vote this government back into power. And he has, Mr. Speaker, betrayed—

betrayed—the trust of hard-working Manitobans who, right across the board, are going to see significant problems in trying to make ends meet, when you look at a 2.5 per cent increase in the gas tax, when you look at, Mr. Speaker, another \$35 to register your vehicle.

Now, maybe we should let Manitobans know that when this NDP government came into power in 1999, vehicle registration was \$48. What is it today, after 12 years of NDP government mismanagement, unprecedented revenues from the federal government? Mr. Speaker, Manitobans are going to have to dig into their pockets for \$154 today to pay their vehicle registration. That's a 200 per cent increase in a fee as a result of this NDP government not being able to make ends meet and mismanaging the finances of the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, we see many other things, too, in this budget, many other tax increases. But those are two that the residents of River East are really going to hear about and are going to find impact in a very dramatic way—the bottom line and the amount of money that they will have left in their pockets at the end of the day as a result of this government.

And, Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I didn't speak a few minutes on the area when I have critic responsibility, and that is the area of Family Services. We all know some of the tragedies that have taken place under this government's watch. There was Phoenix Sinclair, Gage Guimond, Jaylene Sanderson-Redhead, Dillon Breana Belanger, Heaven Traverse, Venecia Shanelle Audy, Patsy Desmarais, Michael Helgason, Tracia Owen and baby Amelia.

Mr. Speaker, these are names that won't be forgotten by members of this House or by Manitobans. They're just a few of the names of children who have died while under the care of the NDP government's child welfare system.

And we saw then in—shortly after this government took over its mandate, we saw the rush to devolve the Child and Family Services system to Aboriginal agencies that were ill-prepared to take on that responsibility. And without the training and without the supports and the resources, many children fell through the cracks. And we are still waiting for the inquiry into the Phoenix Sinclair death to find out what went so terribly wrong.

Mr. Speaker, I'm still hearing from families in the province of Manitoba that are seeing children

that have been in long-term foster homes that have been safe, that are being moved into unsafe situations. That's still happening today, and we need to get to the bottom of what went wrong with Phoenix Sinclair, and we need to clean up what is happening in our Child and Family Services system today.

And, Mr. Speaker, we know that there are 3,000 more children in care today. And we want to make sure that as children come into care, as they need the protection of our Child and Family Services system, that they're getting the very best care and that the safety of children becomes the first and foremost priority. And we know that many of those children are Aboriginal descent, and we want to ensure that children know their roots and are connected to their culture and their tradition and their community, but not at the expense of safety for their lives and their futures. We want those children to grow up as productive members of our communities and our society.

* (11:40)

So, Mr. Speaker, we're going to make sure that we continue to ask the questions to hold this government accountable for some of the decisions that have been made. And we know that there are many, many out there that do need support and care, that are getting that support and care. But one child that falls through the cracks, Mr. Speaker, is one too many, and we're going to make sure that we hold this government accountable for the decisions that they have made that have put children in unsafe circumstances and have ended sometimes in tragedy.

Mr. Speaker, I think you know that we have an amendment on the table that is going to—that's a very good amendment and we will be voting and supporting our leader with the amendment that he put forward. We will not be supporting a budget that has been dishonest and provided no comfort to Manitobans that they can have any trust or any credibility in a government that puts forward a document that says what matters most, when what matters most to Manitobans is a government that's honest, a government that's open and a government that is accountable for not only the things that they say, but the things that they do.

So, Mr. Speaker, I just, with those comments, would like to say thank you for the opportunity to speak, and I know that we'll have vigorous debate over this in the days to come. Thank you.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): I'm very pleased to, once again, be able to rise to speak on the budget. I've had the opportunity to speak on a few budgets in the past, even a few more than the member for River East, and I always find it—it's probably the most critical debate in this Legislature.

Certainly, the Throne Speech debate is important. It talks about our agenda as a government and it certainly plays a key role in our parliamentary process. But there's nothing that really gets to what government is all about more than the budget, and I do want to—before I speak on the budget—thank my constituents again for the opportunity to represent them in the Manitoba Legislature.

I actually am the rookie MLA for Oxford House. I picked up Oxford House in the redistribution. I do want to say that I look forward to representing Oxford House, but I also will miss representing Nelson House—Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation. I had the opportunity to represent NCN from 1990 through to the last election. It's been a very important time in the community, not the least of which, I think, is probably worth putting on the record, and that is that NCN pioneered the first partnership with Manitoba Hydro for the development of the Wuskwatim Dam which, by the way, is now completed.

And, Mr. Speaker, I do look forward to, obviously, representing my constituents—northern Manitoba. And this, the year that is the centennial of northern Manitoba entering the province of Manitoba. And I think it's important to note, by the way, that I believe we've seen a lot of progress over the last century, but much of the potential of Manitoba—and I do remind everyone that the Golden Boy points north—lies in northern Manitoba, and I'm going to get—in a few minutes—into the many ways in which this budget and our government is really living up to that vision of developing the entire province of Manitoba.

And what I do want to start with, by the way, is, you know, I can't not mention a few things that happened during the election campaign.

Now, you know, members opposite, I've got to say that it's always a sore point to talk about elections. I mean, you know, they're like the generals fighting the last war, actually they're fighting the last election, the previous election, the previous election to that and the previous, previous, previous election. I was actually quite interested the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) was even going back to the

1980s. You know, I will give them some credit. I don't think they're stuck in the '80s [*interjection*]—stuck in the '90s, for sure. I'm sometimes not sure, by the way, whether it's the 1990s or the 1890s. But, you know, you can see the degree to which members opposite really haven't woken up to the reality of what's happening in this province.

And I want to—I do want to put on the record, by the way, that—and I'm not going to spend too much time on it, but I do want to put on yesterday—I really saw the irony with the debate over immigration. And members opposite, I think, should be aware that the—that this province is changing. You know, I watched the many people in the gallery, the many people were visiting outside and, you know, you really saw a contrast—and, by the way, I have a lot of respect for our federal Members of Parliament, but I did find it somewhat strange, some of the—you know—and by the way, I always view my role as being standing up for the province, not standing up for my federal Members of Parliament. Again, I respect our federal Members of Parliament. But, you know, I think the reality, Mr. Speaker, is this province is changing and I know it's difficult for members opposite, members like the member of Steinbach or the—you know, members representing communities like Morden and Winkler, because, you know, it is changing and it's diversify.

Now I do want to put on the record, by the way, that I'm sure when many of those members of the public were in the gallery, they recognize one thing: if they want to see the diversity of this province, they see it recognized in this government. And that's one thing I'm very proud of, the fact we represent every region, we represent a broad range of ethnocultural backgrounds, from our First Nations all the way through to our newest communities.

Certainly you see it in terms of gender in our caucus, and it's not just a matter of reflecting that in who sits in this Legislature, it's reflected in our agenda as well. And I do want to put on the record, by the way, that I do strongly support the Provincial Nominee Program.

I actually had the opportunity to be Minister of Immigration, Mr. Speaker, for a six-month period where we actually made a number of changes. It's a program that's come a long way since the late 1990s, and, by the way, I'm always a believer that you give credit where credit is due. Certainly I know that this was brought in by the previous government. I guess

it's the previous, previous, previous, previous government.

Mr. Speaker, I would also note that the level of immigration in the '90s really reflected what was happening in the economy in this province, which—it was flat, and since that time I am extremely proud that we now have reached 16,000 immigrants and our target is 20,000, and with a little bit of help from the federal government, and I want to put on the record they are looking at capping immigration at 15,000, I think we can achieve it. And I do want to put on the record that I strongly support the provision of settlement services here in the province of Manitoba, by people here in Manitoba. I'd rather have people in Winnipeg and Steinbach and Morden and Winkler and Thompson, providing those services than people outside our province. And I want to put that on the record.

And by the way, for members opposite—and I'm glad I have to put this on the record. I was really surprised when the members opposite were describing our Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism (Ms. Melnick) as the minister responsible for almost nothing. Well, Mr. Speaker, you know what, I—it's a Friday morning so I suggested it, members—if they're still saying that, they wake up and smell the coffee, because I can tell you one thing: the minister of multiculturalism and immigration in many ways is the minister of the future of this province, because the future of this province lies in immigration.

And I want to put on the record that I always found that, you know, there's something unique about Canada. There's something unique about this province. I was never more proud, Mr. Speaker, than when I had the opportunity to be minister—the provincial Minister of Immigration, because I came to Canada as an immigrant. My wife is an immigrant. Thanks to the family sponsorship program, many of our family members came to this province, and I do want to note, Mr. Speaker, there seems to be a shift in terms of immigration policy.

I think the federal Minister of Immigration says he wants to have immigration of the next Steve Jobs and the Bill Gates. Well, you know, what he may want to look at is—I—you know, if you want to talk about innovation, it's—in many cases it is the immigrants are coming, it's the sons and daughters of immigrants. Mike Lazaridis, the founder of RIM, came as a five-year-old, the son of Greek parents, to this country. I could run through numerous success

stories. But what's happening now, Mr. Speaker, is we're losing sight of the fact that what built this country were families and the family-based immigration program, and I want to support that and I want to support our minister.

Now, I want to also talk about the other element that I mentioned earlier in terms of the election. You know, a number of years ago, a member of the Conservative Party in opposition said that they were in opposition and they could have it both ways. The member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) will remember who it was and I won't get into actually who it was, but doesn't it really typify, kind of, what their philosophy is as an opposition party?

* (11:50)

You know, the question period after the budget was brought in, there was the first part of question period what—where it was, you're addicted to spending. Then there was a second part where they got up and said, you should be spending more. Well, you know, and it's not just in question period they do it, and I'm waiting to see here on the debate on the budget, I'm sure you're going to see much the same sort of, you know, spend more, spend less.

But wasn't that their strategy over the last couple of years politically? You know, they had it—they figured they could have it both ways. During budget debate, during—bringing resolutions, they brought in an amendment to the budget, it's part of the public record, that would have balanced the budget in one year. Okay? That would have brought in devastating cuts, \$500 million worth of cuts to progress.

Okay, so they had it one way, right? It was that they were going to cut, cut cut. Now, do you remember what they announced on the eve of the election? I tell you, I—it's a good thing I wasn't driving at the time because, you know, I virtually fell out of my chair when I heard this. *[interjection]* I was not texting, Mr. Speaker, I want to make it very clear, when I heard this, but I couldn't believe it when the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) said, do you know what? We're not going to balance the budget according to the five-year plan. We're going to—was it—I forget, was it 2017, or was it 2018, you know, I mean, 2018 it would have been. You know, if they thought, if they went—you know, if—I'm surprised they didn't go to 2020. I'm surprised they didn't continue it.

And what I find interesting is visiting door to door, and I had the opportunity to campaign in my

own riding, I had the opportunity to work with other people. And I ran into people and I—you know, I don't know if I should be giving this away to members opposite, but I had people say to me, you know, that they were Conservatives, but when it came to the fiscal management of this province, they were not going to vote Conservative. Why? I—one person I remember directly, and I was campaigning here in Winnipeg, he said, I can't believe that my party, which is the Conservative Party, will talk about balancing the budget in 2018. The person described it as fiscally irresponsible.

And, you know, I think it really speaks wonders that, again, even in this debate, that what you are seeing here is, we have a responsible budget that is targeting to bring the province's books back into balance after a very difficult time period with a huge uncertainty across the country, where every jurisdiction in Canada, pretty well, has been faced with significant financial challenges, many more significant than ours. I look at Ontario. I look at other provinces across the country.

But, you know, what's happened here is our Finance Minister has brought in a budget that is targeting the 2014, and when the members get up and give their speeches, if they get into the, it's too much this and too much that and too much the other, I just want to remind them that they ran on a platform of balancing a budget in 2018. That's not acceptable to Manitobans, and it's one of the reasons why we were re-elected for a fourth-term majority government.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I also want to focus in on a couple of areas where, dare I say, members opposite have no credibility. And I appreciate, you know, again, members opposite—I always find it an irony, particularly rural members or the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson), Chief Peguis Trail, I look at, you know, a lot of the infrastructure developments in the province. But, you know, it's got to be pretty tough to get up and ask a question, to get up and debate or even get up and vote against the budget that is going to have an investment of \$589 million in our highway system.

You know, the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) who is always very vocal—you know, I've got the list of projects in his constituency, the paving of Highway 59. But, of course, we all know he's going to vote against it. The member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire), I appreciate his concern about

the rock truck coming from the member for Lakeside's riding. I do want to indicate, by the way, and this is not my line: the member of Selkirk—the member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar) reminded me my real response to the question should have been that we're going to leave no stone unturned until we get to the bottom of that.

But, really, Mr. Speaker, if you look at what's happening in the member's riding, this is the government that's four-laned and paved Highway 1 to the Saskatchewan border. The member for Portage will be aware that this year we're completing the resurfacing of Highway 1 right through—actually, right through the bypass from Portage. And I could run through constituency after constituency where it's this government that is doing the work of rebuilding our infrastructure.

Now, I just want to put it in perspective for anybody in this province who thinks that the Conservatives have anything to say about highways, what their record was, and what they stand for today, and what the NDP budget brings about. Now, yes, we have increased the gas taxes; it's going to be the second lowest in the country still, lower than Saskatchewan, lower than Ontario. But I'm glad the member for River East is getting vocal on this.

Nineteen years ago, the Conservatives raised the gas tax. And I'll tell you what: We had—they then reduced the capital budget and when we came into government, the capital budget was in between about 85 and 90 million dollars. What is it going to be this year? It's going to be quadruple what it was under the Conservatives—four times. And, in fact, when they were in government I'll tell you how bad it was. We came into government; we had to bring in an act to assure—reassure people that money raised in gas taxes would be spent on our highway system. Because what did the Conservatives do? They taxed more than they spent on our highway system.

You know, I could run through the constituencies represented by members opposite and I could tell you their idea of a major project would be like a hundred thousand dollars of grading the shoulders. Okay, so they have no credibility. And, Mr. Speaker, when you were not in the Chair as Speaker, you chaired Manitoba 2020 vision, and I'll tell you what it came out with. It came out with the recommendation for a 10-year, \$4-billion investment in our highways system. And we ratcheted it up, and we've ratcheted it up again and again and again. And I want to tell you what we've done. Have we met that

target? Yes, and in fact, not only that, we've exceeded it the last four years. We're having a record investment in highways. And you wonder why you're seeing the kind of growth in Steinbach and Morden and Winkler. You combine—yes, immigration program, but the investment that's taking place across the province is because you have a government, an NDP government, that's committing to investing in every single area of this province.

I'll tell you why we were flat on growth in the 1990s, because they did—and I got to tell you, Mr. Speaker, you know, I know the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) would love to avoid the reality that the growth in his community is taking place. It didn't take place in the '90s under the Conservatives. It's taking place now under an NDP government. And they just can't stand that. They just can't stand that.

But, you know, I want to talk about how we represent the entire province. I'm really proud of the fact that—you know, when we came into government in 1999 the members opposite, they spent less than 5 per cent of the capital budget; it was a pretty, pretty small budget to begin with—but we got—we get 5 per cent of the capital program. It was pathetic. I want to tell you what we're doing. In addition to all the work we've done rebuilding highways in northern Manitoba—of surfacing 373 and 374, communities Cross Lake and Norway House that are combined population that is as large as Steinbach, large as Thompson, that has some of the worst road conditions you could ever imagine just a few years ago—here's what we're doing. In the centennial of northern Manitoba being part of this province, we are building road access and we're starting to build road access into the 22 communities in this province that don't have all-weather road access. Now, you won't hear a member opposite asking questions about it. And I'll tell you why, and there's been a history of this. When they were in opposition they used to say that, you know, northerners didn't know how to vote right.

But, yes, I'll tell you one thing about this government, by the way. You look at members opposite, the ridings they represent. I have the list of capital projects here. Mr. Speaker, we're investing in ridings represented by members opposite. I can give you the list of capital projects represented by members of this side. I can give you the list of City of Winnipeg projects where we're paying more than 50 per cent of the regional street and bridge budget—that's even before this budget—of the City of

Winnipeg. And the many projects we've seen, including something I'm very proud of, we should all be very proud of. The first rapid transit link in our capital city just opened, again, a week ago. Again, a key initiative of this government.

And, I have to tell you, the big difference is—and, I think, again, it's one of the reasons why we're a fourth term majority government. Members opposite are going to have a really difficult time when it comes to a lot of the elements of this budget, because when they stand up to vote—and I know which way they're going to vote. They've all been negative thus far; maybe there's hope for some of the newer members. I have hope for some of the newer members. But, you know, when they were in government, they ignored anybody in this province that didn't support them. I'm really proud of the fact we represent every single part of this province, Mr. Speaker, north, south, east, west.

* (12:00)

We're putting more into infrastructure in every part of this province, and I would just hope, once, that members opposite would focus in on that reality. I appreciate rock truck issues. You know, it's important to be involved with the, you know, the grassroots level, the—that basic level. But when you got a \$589-million investment in our infrastructure—and by the way, with the gas tax, when the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce a matter of weeks ago before our budget, recommended what? That we bring the gas tax up by 2 and a half per cent to make sure it was sustainable.

You know, you can have it both ways in opposition, but if you want to be in government and you want to have the support of the people of this province, you have to call it the way it is. And we want to maintain spending on infrastructure and transportation in this province. How do we do it? By making sure we have sustainable financing. And I'll tell you, I'm pretty proud of the fact that when you fill up at the gas pump—by the way, you pay—for every dollar you pay to the federal government, you get about 25 cents back. But here in the province of Manitoba, you pay a dollar, you get \$2 back on our highways. That's a pretty good deal, Mr. Speaker.

Now, I also want to note, Mr. Speaker, that members opposite are really stuck in the past in a lot of other areas. They were the architects of RHAs back in the '90s, and one thing we've done and what we're doing in this budget, we've identified that the real issue here has to be provision of front-line

services. You know, when we talk about focusing on what matters to most, that's one of the key elements. What struck me, by the way, is members opposite yesterday, their big concern with the RHAs was that we hadn't consulted with the RHAs. Somebody was heckling in the back—you know, I forget which member. I won't actually embarrass them. I was just kind of struck by the fact that I didn't think most Manitobans would say, if you want to deal with some of the financial challenges, you've got to be innovative and certainly wouldn't it make more sense to go to five RHAs?

I hadn't heard anybody yet, by the way, and I've talked to quite a few people about the budget that thinks it's a bad idea. But you know, I know members opposite want to protect, you know, the '90s legacy not just of the RHAs—I mean, they do some good things—but, you know, Connie Curran and, you know, all the rest of it. But what strikes me about it is they don't get that the innovation that's sacrificed.

I'm really proud, as Minister responsible for Lotteries, that we're moving ahead to combine liquor and lotteries. There's a great history with the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission, a 90-year history. I think Lotteries has been around for much shorter period of time, since 1984. But the bottom line is, Mr. Speaker, this is how you innovate; this is how you improve the bottom line.

I want to put on the record, as well, that what we're doing is very different than what you're seeing in many other jurisdictions, as well. You're not seeing massive layoff notices. You're not seeing, as we're seeing across the country now, we're seeing programs that have been in place for 90 years being shut down. What you're seeing is an investment in maintaining services to Manitobans.

And I, you know, I want to suggest, Mr. Speaker, that when members opposite stand up for their federal counterparts, what they should also recognize, in many ways, is that what we're seeing in this province is a real comparison between cutting and cutting to the bone in terms of services and maintaining the kind of things—not only maintaining, enhancing. And I'm so proud today that we made—our Health Minister has made a critical announcement, something that the members opposite wouldn't—didn't support in the election, clearly won't support in this budget—and that is our coverage of cancer drugs in this province, I can tell you, that's what really matters. You know, they can make fun of

the budget focused on what matters most. I know families affected by cancer; that's what does matter.

And I want to stress, in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I always worry about when I talk a bit about what members of—opposite have done politically, because, you know what? I've been afraid at times that I'm giving them advice that they might actually follow up on. All right, I know that some of them may be sitting there going, yes, he's is right about having it both ways. You know, and it's true. It's on the record. They wanted to cut more and then they wanted to spend more. You know, they'll have it both ways. In question period they'll say, well, you're spending too much, and then at the end, they'll say we're not spending enough. You know, they'll argue every which way on every element of the budget.

Now, I've noticed one thing, Mr. Speaker. I've had the opportunity to be in this Legislature for a number of years. I've been through a number of elections. You know, one of the great advantages we have in the NDP is that the Conservatives never learn; they never learn. They're still fighting the '99 election and the 2003 election and the 2007 election and the 2011 election. The member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) is still fighting the 1988 election. I got one big advantage—I have one big advantage, I actually was part of all of those elections, and I kind of like the result of the '99 and 2003 and 2007 and 2011 election, and it wasn't an accident.

And that's the other problem that members opposite have. They still believe that somehow they should have a divine right to govern. It just sort of oozes through. They just sort of have that sense. You know, I just watched the campaign, all they had to do was sit back. We were a third-term government. They were going to win no matter what. That was their—you know, this whole campaign approach of theirs.

But I tell you how you get elected in government in this province. Again, I'm giving them advice. And how you get re-elected and, you know, you get re-elected after that, and how you get re-elected after that. Number one is you represent all Manitobans; you don't do like they did and divide one region against the other. I think one member is taking notes, so I may be in trouble here.

But the second thing is, you also, on the most fundamental issue that any government deals, which is the budget, you level with people. Our Finance Minister, level with people. Our previous

Finance Minister did, and our previous, previous Finance Minister—now the Premier (Mr. Selinger)—did.

When we were in difficult times across the world, uncertain times, yes, we had a better economic record than any other province in the country, but it impacted us in terms of revenues. And, what we did at the time, we said, look, it's going to take some time to get a recovery program in place and we set in place a five-year plan. You know what happened—the easiest thing for us to do in the election would have been do what members opposite did. We could have said, well, you know, 2014, 2015, 2016, what's the difference? You know what the difference is, in the uncertain world, you're there. If you want to add to that uncertainty in the capital markets, you don't have a fiscal plan that works.

The other thing we've done, we've levelled with people in terms of issues like highways. Mr. Speaker, you drive to Saskatchewan, you drive to Ontario, there's a higher gas tax today. There will be higher gas tax even after the increase is going to take place. But how do you sustain investments in infrastructure and transportation in this province? You make sure that you have the funds to do it.

Now, I could run through the many other elements of the budget that are like that but I want to predict one thing here. Again, I don't think they're taking copious notes here. They haven't learned over the last number of years. And I want to predict one thing, Mr. Speaker. And, maybe I'm just in a mood here, of thinking of, you know, this being the 100th anniversary of this province. I already believe that Manitobans repeatedly are looking to the New Democratic Party and our government as a model of what needs to be done and I'll tell you why. We're a model in terms of understanding that you have to have economic growth to drive the provision of the social services and the health services that we all need. And they know that we've got one of the best economic records in this province—in this country, including this year, we're going to be first or second in terms of economic growth. We've got one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country.

And we're growing again. We're growing, Mr. Speaker, because of immigration, because of our other great asset, our Aboriginal advantage, in terms of the many young Aboriginal people in this province. And yes, it's the 100th anniversary of northern Manitoba becoming part of this province, but I do believe, and I know I'm biased, being from

northern Manitoba, but I do believe there's untold potential in northern Manitoba. We're seeing communities like Snow Lake come back with the second best zinc deposit in the world. We're seeing hydro development again. We finished the dam for the first time in more than two decades and we're moving ahead for Keeyask and Conawapa.

I mean this doesn't just happen. It comes from a government that also understands you need to have a strong public sector. That's why we ran on protecting Manitoba Hydro from the kind of privatization we saw with MTS from members opposite when they governed.

But the bottom line is, what you really need, is you need a government that gets that when it comes to the budgets, you can't get up and you can't have it both ways. Members opposite want to have it both ways, Mr. Speaker. They tried to have it both ways in the election. People in Manitoba are smarter than that. They're voting. They voted in the election for growth, for provision of social and health services, and for a government that was committed to balancing our priorities and balancing our books. And that is why, by the way, I am very proud not only to have been re-elected again to the Manitoba Legislature, to be able to stand up and support the kind of budget that represents the values of Manitobans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): Well, Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure and my honour to be here today, and to be able to address this Chamber, and to be back in session and to address the issues that are important to Manitobans.

And certainly, it's—it was also very interesting to follow the member from Thompson. If not instructive, at least it was animated. And so I hope to be able to give him my response to this budget today, some correction of some of the things that have come out today, and hope to set the record straight in some areas as well.

Certainly, I'm pleased to represent the great riding of Morden-Winkler and the citizens of the town of Morden, the city of Winkler, and much of the Rural Municipality of Stanley, such a strong area of growth in this province, such an important contributor to this province's wealth and economic activity.

* (12:10)

This spring's provincial budget presented this government with an opportunity. It was an opportunity to show Manitobans that they were serious about governing for all Manitobans; that they were serious about tackling out-of-control deficit; that they were serious about controlling expenditures, protecting families, demonstrating to business and industry that they can create the conditions necessary for growth; that they could protect the long-term viability of our social services by restraining the perpetual expansion of departmental administration and operating costs. And the budget on Tuesday clearly demonstrates that the opportunity was squandered, that this NDP government does not have a plan to address their spending problem. They don't have a plan to balance Manitoba's books.

And I'm disappointed in that, and I know that my constituents are disappointed in that as well. And the phone has begun to ring and the emails have begun to come in. And I assure you, Mr. Speaker, that they are not phone calls and emails that demonstrate support for what the citizens of Morden, Winkler and Stanley have heard and seen in the last two days. They woke up on Wednesday morning and opened their *Winnipeg Free Press* or their *Winnipeg Sun*, and they went online to Golden West Radio and they learned of nine new tax increases, all kinds of new fees, and they're not happy. They're displeased. They were looking for leadership. They got more of the same.

While the NDP government said that it would cut spending, the provincial budget for 2012 and '13 still results in a \$504-million deficit. And I have every confidence that they will miss this new target spectacularly, just as they did in this current year where they predicted a \$345-million deficit, only to arrive a year later at an actual number of \$1.12 billion.

So Manitobans are facing nine new tax increases, adding another \$184 million to general revenue, plus various fees and other revenues that are significant for Manitobans. And as the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) has made clear and some of my colleagues have begun to unpack, this is meaning that hydro rates are going up by 3.5 per cent. It means that the education portion of property taxes is going up for many Manitobans, because of the lowest annual increase to education funding in many years. It means that if you have a

child in child care, your fees are going up. And it means for all Manitobans that the price of gas is going up 2.5 cents a litre.

And, Mr. Speaker, it's shocking to think about that one in particular, because it was only April the 4th when the Premier (Mr. Selinger) of this province went on CJOB and indicated that he was shocked by the price of gas going up. And I have that transcript from that interview here with me today, and the Premier says, it's brutal, you've got to wonder what's going on, we're going to write a letter to the federal government, we're going to ask them to review it under the Competition Act. I mean, what's going on? Gas prices are skyrocketing everywhere. And later on, the Premier says again that he's not sure but he believes that they should look into it because they're getting whammed right now.

Well, Mr. Speaker, if we were getting whammed on April the 4th, I assure you that we are getting whammed now with the price of gas going up 2.5 cents a litre. I would suggest to you that that would amount to a double whammy.

In any case, Mr. Speaker, the list goes on because taxation doesn't, unfortunately, stop there. It goes on and it includes tax on home insurance premiums. It involves an expansion of the PST to involve a whole new list of services that Manitobans need and acquire. And it means for all Manitobans that MPI vehicle registration increases of \$35 come into effect, making the total right now on that approximately \$150.

There's increases on tobacco, there's increases on pension contributions, there's new taxes on dividends from investments. And this approach of a little bit here and a little more there and a lot here—it seems to be murky by design. It seems to want to draw attention away from any one area. This Premier (Mr. Selinger) will stand up and say, well, he hasn't raised the PST by one per cent. But he has done everything else. And for him to stand now and say that he hasn't raised taxes, it just doesn't connect. It won't and these multiple tax increases won't obscure for long to Manitobans the fact that living in this province just got a whole lot more expensive. Because if you're a Manitoba family, whether you're registering your car or you're getting gas or you're paying your education property taxes or you're renewing your home insurance or you're dropping off your child at daycare or you're paying your hydro bill, you're going to be paying a whole lot more.

So, Mr. Speaker, I say again that what Manitoba needed at this time, what was required at this time, was a brave approach that would fundamentally alter the trajectory of our province. But instead of rising to the occasion and raising the bar, this government is once again asking Manitobans instead to lower their expectations. And so what we're left with is more of the same: NDP deficit spending, rising departmental costs, increased debt, increased debt servicing costs and dismal budget targets.

The *Winnipeg Free Press* said yesterday that it would take almost near-perfect conditions for the NDP to actually improve on their budget targets even right now. And the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers), a few days ago when he delivered his Budget Address, he cited *Maclean's* magazine and he quoted a headline reading the Manitoba miracle. Well, I want to tell you that I also receive the *Maclean's* magazine, and that same article makes use of the terminology zombie economy, in reference to Manitoba. It levels the accusation that Manitoba has the highest provincial debt as a share of its economy of any of the western provinces, that it relies heavily on the generosity of Ontario and Alberta through the federal-provincial transfers, and that government spending is crowding out private investment and inflicting long-term damage to our economy. They call it a zombie economy. And I want to ask the minister—I hope that he will respond at some point and say is this what he means by the Manitoba miracle? It sounds more like the Manitoba horror story to me.

But I do want to say as a—there's a larger picture that I don't want to ignore, and I thank the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) for unpacking some of this earlier this week. As a newly elected member of the Legislative Assembly, I am aware of how politicians are perceived by the general public, and the public often looks with suspicion and mistrust on what we say and do as elected officials. And increasingly I believe that people both in Manitoba and across this country and perhaps in the western world are losing faith in our system because they perceive that there is a disconnect between what we say and what we do, and that we are not held accountable for what we say and then do not do. And I believe this kind of movement, this kind of shift, it breeds contempt and it leads to disenfranchisement, it decreases the extent to which people will actually exercise their democratic rights and their freedoms and their responsibilities. And I just point to the last election as evidence of exactly that, where the NDP

party propagated myths, and the Manitoba public got disinterested in the process.

And I would suggest that we need to do more as elected members to make sure that what we say and what we do line up, that there's integrity in what we do and what we say, and I sure hope it's the case that as this session goes forward, that not only my colleagues on this side of the aisle but my colleagues on the other side of the aisle will join us with this, that we will raise the level of discourse and debate and that we will—we'll set a new course for Manitoba in terms of doing what we say and saying what we do.

And I want to just mention again that it was the Premier (Mr. Selinger) of this province who said, only a few months ago, only in September, that the plan is a five-year plan to ensure that we have future prosperity without any tax increases, and we'll deliver on that; we're ahead of schedule right now.

Well, what are Manitobans to think when they got up on Wednesday morning, and they read in the paper not one, not two, not three, nine new tax increases equalling \$184 million coming out of their pocket into general revenues for the Province of Manitoba? Manitobans are upset and they're understandably upset and the Premier cannot hide behind a statement that he has avoided raising the PST by 1 per cent when, in effect, he's doing everything but to make it more difficult for Manitoba families to pay their bills, and to get ahead, and to make a future for themselves and for their families. And the Premier needs to be held to account for the disconnect between what he said then and what he is saying now. And, rest assured, Mr. Speaker, that on this side of the aisle we will be working hard to do exactly that, to hold this government to account for the broken promise of saying they would not raise taxes, and now doing exactly the opposite.

* (12:20)

When pressed by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) only a few days ago, the Premier's admission of guilt only came out when he finally allowed, we have broadened our tax base. Well, have you ever, and it has amounted to \$184 million tax hike.

So, what are the facts, Mr. Speaker? The facts are this: Spending is still up in departments by 3.1 per cent, and we're averaging 3.6 per cent spending increases, across departments, over the past five years. Now, the NDP's five-year economic plan

targeted an average of 1.9 per cent increases, and I'm here to tell you today, we're not going to make that target; we're just not there. And yet, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) has continued to say, we are on track to balance the budget by 2014. He has said as well, do not underestimate our desire to balance the budget by 2014. Well, desire alone won't cut it. It takes will, and it takes effort. It takes resolve, it takes determination, it takes hard choices, it takes a team. It takes tenacity, it takes sincerity, it takes forthrightness to balance the budget. It will not be done by desire. And so, my hope is that in the months ahead, that this government will indicate something else, something to indicate to Manitobans that they have a plan, because in one year they expressed that they have a desire to get us to balance.

And we see in the budget of 2012 that we don't have the will, the effort, the tenacity, the team work, the plan, the vision to get Manitoba to that goal.

Colin Craig, who is the prairie director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation said this the day after they delivered the budget. He said, they needed to do much more to address unsustainable spending. High spending is why so many taxes are going up and why our debt is increasing by about \$47 per second. And this government has not done that. They haven't addressed the unsustainable spending levels. And so we have nine new taxes for Manitoba families.

I mentioned that the emails are starting to come in from my riding, and I want to take this opportunity to share just one. A constituent contacted me and expressed outrage that a government could say one thing and do another. And I replied to him and asked if he could quantify the situation for his household, and please express, in concrete terms, what this government's action would mean for he and his family, and he did it. And I received the email, here at my office, and I asked for his permission to share it with the—my colleagues today, and he granted that permission.

And he says this: My name is Garth Vandenberghe, and I manage a manufacturing plant in Morden, Manitoba. My wife is a business owner in downtown Morden. We are not rich by any means, but I consider us middle class. Just doing a little rough math, which may be more than the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) did, this new budget will cost us close to, and he quotes a figure in here that he later goes out—on to amend, at \$750 a year because this government continually overspends. I have two

daughters in university that travel to Brandon, and the fuel tax is a killer, not to mention the extra insurance costs on the vehicle. They do not have the means to handle these extra expenses. I'm very frustrated, and I feel helpless. When a province like Saskatchewan has become more favourable to live in, in terms of income tax, we have really begun to free fall. Please advise.

The next email I got from him quantified the situation, and simply said this: Four vehicle registrations at around \$1,500 a year is equal to a \$300 increase. Ten haircuts with colour, I'm assuming that's for he and his daughters, and perhaps not for Garth, are equal to \$1,000 at 5 per cent, that's 50 bucks more. Twenty-five dollars more on the year for home insurance, and the family's a high user of fuel due to the university travel at 15,000 estimated litres per year at a 25 cent per litre increase is equal to \$375, it amounts to \$750. And then he ends and concludes by saying, the NDP broke their promise and continue to overspend and then take it out on taxpayers when most jobs are lucky to be increasing wages with the rate of inflation. I view this as a direct step backward for Manitoba families—thank you for your time—and I would encourage the Minister of Finance to respond to Mr. Vandenberghe and try to explain the math for Mr. Vandenberghe, because Mr. Vandenberghe makes clear that the math to him doesn't add up. He was promised one thing and a very different thing was delivered.

And so not just there but throughout our economy, throughout Manitoba households, throughout small business, throughout mid-size business and throughout industry we are going to see the effect of these tax hikes reverberate through our economy, through our communities and through our homes. The gas tax alone takes \$44.5 million out of Manitoban's families, and it's money that they can't afford at this time. The PST expanded in more services and insurance premiums. All of that will amount to \$96 million more per year. And so we have to ask what does it mean for Manitoba. What does it mean? Well, it means a \$504-million core government deficit, and we know that they don't hit their targets. Without the flood costs factored in, this present deficit was \$629 million and they're forecasting—and they forecasted that shortfall to be \$345 million.

What does it mean for Manitoba? It means that debt servicing costs are up \$51 million to \$850 million annual. Instead of getting back on track, as the government has said, this train has

completely derailed. To put it in a different perspective, it means that the debt-servicing cost in Manitoba could now be the fourth largest government department behind health care, education and family services.

The opposition leader spoke the other day, and I want to take this opportunity to thank the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) for his response to the budget earlier this week, for his leadership, for his careful and thoughtful analysis of this budget document, and I thank him as well for his incontrovertible commitment to the betterment of this province and to the well-being of the citizens of this province. And I want to say as well that he has been especially helpful to those of us who are new to the PC caucus and new to the Legislative Assembly, and we are grateful for the warm welcome that he has given us.

I also want to take this opportunity to, on that same note, thank my new colleagues here on this side of the bench, and I thank them for their encouragement, for the warmth of their hospitality in welcoming the five new MLAs into the caucus, for their advice, for their patience on questions, which must seem odd to them having gained that experience and that wisdom that comes with sitting in these benches and representing a constituency and representing portfolios and holding this government to account.

But we—it's considerable the welcome that you have given us, and I thank you for that. There's a

tremendous sense of team that is building and growing on this side of the aisle and it's due in no small part to the tone that's been set by the leader and my more senior members on this side of the bench. I thank them for that.

But as the opposition leader pointed out, there's a strong signal that Canadians are—could soon face higher borrowing costs, and economists are suggesting three-quarter-point hikes in the near future, and Mark Carney the Bank of Canada governor has said he wants to discourage more borrowing.

Now I understand that the bank governor was speaking to consumers, and yet the warning is there as well for governments with high debt servicing costs because they are vulnerable to percentage increases. Every incremental increase in interest rates will require funding to be diverted from program spending to paying those financial institutions that are financing our debt. In fact, the media is reporting that with every 1 per cent increase to interest rates it would cost this government 20—

* (12:30)

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

I'm interrupting the debate with the understanding when this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Morden-Winkler will have nine minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, April 20, 2012

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