

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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authority of
The Honourable Daryl Reid
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, April 23, 2012

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

Good afternoon. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 7—The Community Renewal Act

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Housing and Community Development): I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan), that Bill 7, The Community Renewal Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Neighbourhoods Alive! celebrated 10 years of supporting community development last year. We have seen communities where Neighbourhoods Alive! is active become places where residents are more engaged and active in making their communities healthier places to live. The purpose of this act is to support community-based planning and renewal initiatives in designated communities. Thank you.

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

Bill 206—The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment Act (Licence Plates for Volunteer Firefighters)

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): That Bill—I move, seconded by the member from Morris, that Bill 206, The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment Act (Licence Plates for Volunteer Firefighters), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Eichler: What this bill does is amend The Drivers and Vehicles Act to allow special licence plates bearing the word "volunteer" and the

firefighter 'matese' cross for all volunteer fighters—firefighters.

What this does—Mr. Speaker, firefighting is one of the most essential services in the community that protect its citizens from danger. Large urban centres have paid fire departments that respond to emergencies, but smaller rural communities is a volunteer department that carries that responsibility. So this was some small way to recognize those volunteers.

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

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

PETITIONS

Personal Care Homes and Long-Term Care—Steinbach

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I wish to present the following petition.

These are the reasons for the petition:

The city of Steinbach is one of the fastest growing communities in Manitoba and one of the largest cities in the province.

The growth has resulted in pressure on a number of important services, including personal care homes and long-term care space in the city.

Many long-time residents of the city of Steinbach have been forced to live out their final years outside of Steinbach because of the shortage of personal care homes and long-term facilities.

Individuals who have lived in, worked in and contributed to the city of Steinbach their entire lives should not be forced to spend their final years in a place far from friends and family.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Health to ensure additional personal care home and long-term care spaces are made available in the city of Steinbach on a priority basis.

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by D. Plett, E. Enns, B. Plett and hundreds of other Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: In accordance with our rules 136–132(6), when petitions are read they are deemed to have been received by the House.

Cellular Phone Service in Southeastern Manitoba

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

During early October 2011, parts of southeastern Manitoba were hard hit by wildfires. Thanks to the swift action of provincial and municipal officials, including 27 different fire departments and countless volunteers, no lives were lost and property damage was limited.

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

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

And this petition has been signed by K. Price, D. Remillard, and M. Chubaty and many, many more fine Manitobans.

PTH 5–Reducing Speed Limit

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:

Concerns continue to be raised about the number of motor vehicle accidents at the intersection of PTH No. 5 and PR No. 276 and at the intersection of PTH No. 5 and PR No. 68.

The Rural Municipality of Ste. Rose and the town of Ste. Rose have both raised concerns with the Highway Traffic Board about the current speed limit on that portion of PTH No. 5 in the vicinity of Ste. Rose du Lac.

Other stakeholders, including the Ste. Rose General Hospital, Ste. Rose and Laurier fire departments, East Parkland Medical Group and the Ste. Rose and District Community Resource Council, have also suggested that lowering the current 100-kilometre-per-hour speed limit on a portion of PTH No. 5 may help reduce the potential for collisions.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to consider the importance of reducing the speed limit on PTH No. 5 to 80 kilometres an hour in the vicinity of the town of Ste. Rose from the west side of the Turtle River Bridge to the south side of the access to the Ste. Rose Auction Mart to help better protect motorist safety.

This petition is signed by R. Letain, B. Rambow, L. Pebevekeloese and many, many other fine Manitobans.

* (13:40)

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the Speaker's Gallery where we have with us today from Toronto Anupam Khotari and his father Norton and his brother Vishal, Mr. Nizar Mawani and his wife Rafika and their sons Rahim and Aryn. They are the guests of the honourable Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade (Mr. Bjornson).

And on behalf of all honourable members, we welcome you here today.

And also, in the public gallery we have from two rivers country school eight grade 4 to 6 students under the direction of Mr. Gerald Toews. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for La Verendrye (Mr. Smook).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Budget

Government Record on Election Promises

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Just this morning, the government put out a news release and it's filled with really terrific-sounding rhetoric. It targets cellphone companies and it says that the legislation requires companies to provide a copy of the contract to consumers before the contract begins. It requires companies to fully disclose and explain all charges, fees and terms, and it goes on and it restricts companies from making unilateral changes to contract terms.

Mr. Speaker, it all sounds pretty good. If it's good enough for cellphone companies, why not 'opply' it to his promise-breaking NDP government?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I look forward to the—I look to the—forward to the Leader of the Opposition supporting the legislation, and I look forward to the legislation protecting him from additional charges on his cellphone.

And we'll enforce that contract, and we'll work to make sure that our commitment to Manitobans to protect front-line services and the things that matter—our commitment to ensure that they have a good quality health-care system, our commitment to ensure that they have a good quality education system at a price which is affordable to all Manitobans—will be honoured, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McFadyen: In the course of the election campaign only seven months ago, the Premier made some promises directly to the people of Manitoba.

He said, if you sign up with our party, here's what we're going to deliver: no tax increases and a balanced budget. Seven months later, just like those cellphone companies that he's concerned about, his government backtracked on that commitment. They unilaterally changed their promise and they deserve, Mr. Speaker, to be held to account in the same way they want to hold others to account.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier agree that he deserves to be held to account in the same way that anybody else who makes a promise and then breaks it?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I think the consumer protection legislation is excellent. I look forward to proper debate on it in the Legislature. There's other measures we've taken to protect consumers, which we'll announce later on this weekend.

And the member opposite will know that we've exceeded our promises on farmland education tax rebates and reducing personal income taxes and eliminating the education support levy on Manitobans and increasing the education property tax credits to \$700, a total value of tax reductions to Manitobans of \$1.2 billion, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McFadyen: He, since the election, has raised nine taxes and counting. He's hiked up hydro rates. He's increasing the gas tax. He's increasing the cost of families who want to buy insurance. He's increasing a range of other costs and taxes for the people of Manitoba. There's a tax on volunteers. There's a hike in the vehicle registration fee.

None of this, Mr. Speaker, was disclosed to the people of Manitoba before the 4th of October. In fact, he said the opposite. He said we're going to balance the budget without raising taxes.

Will he today acknowledge, Mr. Speaker, that he's broken his contract with the people of Manitoba?

Mr. Selinger: The \$1.2 billion of tax reductions which we have put in place during our time of office has exceeded what we originally promised, and we have the second lowest provincial sales tax in the country, the second lowest gas tax in the country.

We identified for the member last week that for every dollar raised in gas tax in Manitoba, \$2 will be invested in infrastructure, roads and bridges all across this provinces. We will continue to keep Manitoba an affordable place to live while we rebuild our infrastructure, strengthen the quality of our education system, and ensure that Manitobans have access to health care and can contribute to a better quality of health care.

Just this morning, the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) and myself were able to do an announcement on what we call signupforlife.ca, where Manitobans can get involved in organ and tissue donation to allow other Manitobans that need those vital items to be able to have a longer life. It's a tremendous advance using the latest technology, which we are protecting consumers on, as the member identified.

Budget

Government Record on Election Promises

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, in the budget introduced by this NDP government on April 17th, the NDP broke its promise to Manitobans. They broke their promise to seniors when they increased taxes on dividends. They broke their promise to women by introducing a sales tax on products and services that primarily affect women. They increased—they broke their promise to homeowners by introducing a sales tax on property insurance. And the list goes on and on and on.

Mr. Speaker, why did the government break its promise to Manitobans? Will they just admit that they did this because they've got a spending addiction and they needed someone else to pay for it?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): The seniors will benefit by an education property tax credit, which is the highest in the history of the province of \$1,025.

New drugs have been added to the formulary, drugs for people experiencing cancer. Oral drug treatments will now be available free to Manitobans, men and women and children all across Manitoba, including seniors. They will be able to stay in their homes without having to be in hospital, without having to take IV treatments in order to avoid costs.

These are things that are improving the quality of life of Manitobans. We're committed to following through on those, and we will, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Stefanson: You've committed to lots of things that you haven't followed through on, Mr. Premier, so we'll believe it when we see it.

Mr. Speaker, seniors, women, property owners, volunteers, group life insurance holders, casualty insurance holders—the list goes on and on. And all of these people, the NDP broke their promise to.

Will the Minister of Finance just admit that he broke his promise to Manitobans and apologize today? And if he won't stand up and apologize to Manitoba, will at least the Premier, who I know will take the answer to his question, apologize?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): The—very clearly, we said that we would move forward in terms of balancing the budget by 2014-2015. That was a commitment that we made to the people of Manitoba, and Budget 2012 sets us directly on track to make sure we come through on that commitment.

Mr. Speaker, we don't need to take lessons from people across the way, who came into this very Legislature, not just talking about deep cuts to health and to education and to other parts of what we do here that people care about. They brought a resolution forward saying, this is what we're going to do: we're going to cut deeply. On the eve of the election, they had a little change of mind. On the eve of the election—the very eve of the election—they said, oh, we're not going to budget to 2018. They can't give anyone any lessons on—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. You're out of time.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, on September 2nd, 2011, the NDP government issued a press release that stated they will not raise taxes and accused our leader of fear mongering when all he stated was the truth. I guess the truth hurts. Unfortunately, it hurts all of those Manitobans that trusted that this NDP government would follow through in their promise not to raise taxes.

Seven months later, Mr. Speaker, at the first opportunity, the Premier and his colleague the Minister of Finance had to raise taxes. They jumped to it and with little regard for Manitobans.

Will the Minister of Finance apologize to the hundreds of thousands of Manitobans today for breaking his promise?

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Speaker, what a lack of credibility. Here we are—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I'm sure all honourable members will want to hear the answer to the question posed by the member for Steinbach. I ask for the cooperation of all honourable members to allow the Minister of Finance to respond.

Mr. Struthers: I can understand why they'd be so sensitive, when they come into this—in this Legislature with a resolution cutting deeply to health and then they have the member for Steinbach stand up and say, give me more money for my personal care home.

Mr. Speaker, last week the Premier very correctly predicted that it would take no time at all, but through all the complaining of members opposite about spending, that they would stand up and ask for

more money, and, you know, the—there were already requests last week for more spending—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

* (13:50)

Budget

AgriInsurance Programs Sales Tax Application

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): Rural Manitoba residents, entrepreneurs and the agriculture industry have been hard hit by tax and fee increases from this NDP government. There have been hikes in gas taxes, motive fuel taxes, vehicle registration fees, the addition of PST to property, casualty insurance, to group life insurance, increased daycare fees, and the list goes on and on.

Producers have asked questions about the PST expansion and how it applies to the agriculture insurance contracts they purchase.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Kostyshyn) assure producers today that the PST will not be charged on a complete suite of programs offered under AgriInsurance?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Acting Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, the member for Midland would know that one of the things that was talked about in the speech was further support from this government in terms of AgriInsurance. I'm sure he knows that producers, farmers in Manitoba, first of all, want to sell their product on the open market so they can get a fair price for the work that they do.

If that does not work out, Mr. Speaker, then they want to be able to know that both the federal and provincial governments have in place very robust insurance programs that can help them as the first line of defence.

Mr. Speaker, I thought a very important part of that budget was that commitment to the top-up that takes place, that we work with farmers on to be able to offer that through AgriInsurance, something that farmers I know pay a lot of attention to and they're very supportive of.

Impact on Agriculture Industry

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, I take that as a—answer as a no. Agriculture just warranted two short paragraphs in this budget, but producers and rural entrepreneurs were hard hit with a long list of increased taxes and fees.

The Premier (Mr. Selinger) promised not to raise taxes, but the tax on gas and motive fuels is going up. People will now pay the PST on property, casualty, group life insurance, \$35 jump in vehicle registration fees. The NDP broke another promise by not increasing the farmland school tax rebate.

Mr. Speaker, why should Manitoba farm families believe anything this minister or any other minister has to say? Why is the industry being punished by this NDP government's inability to manage its own finances?

Mr. Struthers: I believe that tax credit that is referenced by the member for Midland was about 20 per cent when we came into office, and we've worked it up to the 80 per cent level, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, in their usual way, they don't give farmers enough credit, because I believe farmers understand that we need to continue investments in infrastructure, in roads and in bridges. I believe farmers understand that through the flood last year much of our infrastructure was damaged, and I think you were paying attention—I hope you were—when my colleague and the Premier announced last Wednesday a further support to infrastructure in rural Manitoba.

And, Mr. Speaker, \$589 million towards infrastructure, roads and bridges guaranteed by law through The Gas Tax Accountability Act, I think that's pretty good support for rural Manitobans.

Livestock Price Insurance Support

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture has just returned from the Ag ministers meetings regarding Growing Forward 2.

We know the provincial budget gave scant mention to the—to agriculture. The minister was quoted as saying—prior to leaving for the meeting, the minister was quoted as saying: Livestock price insurance was not mentioned in the NDP budget because this conference was coming up so close to the budget.

Mr. Speaker, we know the Premier broke his promise and raised taxes and it's hurting the agriculture sector.

Did the Agriculture Minister in fact pursue livestock price insurance, or was it just another broken promise from this NDP government?

Mr. Struthers: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said very clearly, farmers look towards insurance programs as that first line of defence when they, for whatever reason, can't get their product to market or they can't get a fair price for that market for whatever reason.

This government, over the years and in 2012's budget, has shown support for these producers. We've shown that we're willing to work with producers, whether they're grain producers or livestock producers, Mr. Speaker.

He doesn't—he needs to look no further than some of the comments from KAP President Doug Chorney, who essentially said that this budget was good for Manitoba farmers and that he very much noted that early in the year, early in the budget year, we did come through with the commitments that we've made, Mr. Speaker.

Manitoba Hydro Economic Review of Capital Projects

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): The past CEO of Manitoba Hydro said in 2008, right now is definitely a bad time to build anything. Apparently this government can control Hydro, but they can't control WikiLeaks.

So, what has occurred since then? Since then, we've had a global economic downturn, Hydro's export market is all but disappeared and Manitobans are paying ever-increasing hydro rates.

How can this minister stand up in this House and defend increasing rates to Manitobans? When will you admit that we need an impartial economic review of Hydro's capital spending?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): And despite some of the faces changing on the opposite side, the Tory-mothball party continues to exist. They build nothing.

If we would have listened to them when we tried to build Limestone, it would not be built. It's paid its way six times over, Mr. Speaker.

We're building Hydro for the future of Manitobans, and if we listened to the Tory party, there'd be no dams, there'd be no transmission lines and we'd probably be burning coal in this province like they do in Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta and the North.

Mr. Helwer: Manitoba's oil patch is booming and investment is flowing into the southwest corner of

Manitoba. This is Manitoba's real oil. Investment is flowing there except for Manitoba Hydro.

Hydro's mandate is to provide safe, reliable electrical power to Manitobans. How about timely power? Companies are being told by Hydro that they will have to wait until next year or later to get electric power in that area.

This government has handicapped Hydro's ability to deal with this expansion by raiding Manitoba Hydro to the tune of \$2.3 billion and cutting Manitoba Hydro's ability to serve its customers.

How can this government defend projected rate increases above the rate of inflation? How much more will Manitobans be forced to pay for this government excess spending?

It's time for an economic-impartial economic review of Hydro's capital plans so Manitobans can see the true effect on Hydro's operations.

Mr. Chomiak: I think most Manitobans know, Mr. Speaker, that we have the lowest hydroelectric rates in Canada, in fact, in North America.

I think most Manitobans know that we equalized hydro rates across the province, Mr. Speaker, so that people in rural Manitoba have the same rates as people in urban Manitoba, but members voted against.

Hydro's capital plan has been reviewed by the Crown council—investment council, put in place, I might add, by members opposite, Mr. Speaker, and the building of Hydro to provide a future at \$18 billion investment so we can have the lowest hydro rates in the country, the lowest rates for auto insurance in the country, and that'll be bundled together with our lowest natural gas rates so in Manitoba can continue to be affordable and we'll keep having companies come here. Like places like—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Any further questions?

Mr. Helwer: Manitoba Hydro has plans for, well, he just said \$18 billion in expenses in capital costs, but now we also hear \$20 billion, so let's pick a number here, but I know that's not important to the other side. Manitobans are tired of subsidizing the export market. Mr. Selinger promised no tax increases.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I regret having to interrupt the member, but just to refresh memory of all honourable members, when we're referring to members of the Chamber, it's by the constituency

names or by the portfolios with respect to members of Cabinet.

* (14:00)

Mr. Helwer: The Premier (Mr. Selinger) promised no tax increases. His candidates promised no tax increases. An emergency 2 per cent hydro rate increase, \$23 million in overcharges that Hydro won't return to Manitobans despite a ruling by the PUB, and a planned 3.5 per cent increase will all hit Manitoban's into pocketbooks when we can least afford it.

When will this minister conduct a full independent economic review of Hydro's capital spending to ensure Manitoban's pocketbooks are protected?

Mr. Chomiak: If the member would open up the recent budget book, he would see that Manitobans pay the lowest price for electricity in all of Canada. And that, Mr. Speaker, that's because of foresight and planning and that's why we're planning well into the future. That's why we're looking for export markets: clean, green, renewable hydroelectricity. Those dams last a hundred years and they pay back and they pay back, and that's why we have the lowest rates in North America, because of the former building that we had done when we were governments. We'll continue to do that in the future.

We will not shortchange Manitobans by doing things like privatizing Crown corporations. We'll not shortchange Manitobans by not having vision, like we did when we helped build the MTS Centre the members opposite opposed. We won't shortchange Manitoba because we'll be producing all across Manitoba 50,000 barrels of oil a day built in—every day, Mr. Speaker, in this province. And it—and Rolls-Royce said this is the best place in the world to do business; not me, Rolls-Royce said that.

Budget Tax and Fee Increases

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): Mr. Speaker, local governments in Manitoba are being bombarded with new regulations and program downloads from this NDP government. Many municipalities are at the maximum level of borrowing under The Municipal Act, and are to the point where any further increases of property taxation will curtail business development and cause hard-working Manitobans to

lose their homes and businesses. The 2012 budget does nothing to address these serious issues.

Mr. Speaker, when is this NDP government going to recognize how serious the infrastructure situation is in municipalities, set aside the empty rhetoric and take action to address this growing problem?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the member for Agassiz needs to take a good look at this budget, and take a look at it in terms of the kind of support that we have continued in this budget that started a number of years ago under this government of working with municipalities to address things like the infrastructure gap that has been there for quite a few years.

Mr. Speaker, we've committed \$589 million in terms of support for road—building roads and building bridges. We've worked with small businesses that he has talked about to eliminate small business tax, the only government in the country to do that.

I wish the member for Agassiz would open his eyes and see those kinds of benefits that are impacting his constituents and mine out in rural Manitoba, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Briese: Mr. Speaker, education tax on property continues to escalate because of legislation, regulation and this NDP's government failure to address the ever-rising cost of education in Manitoba.

The provincial planning department has being gutted, resulting in a downloading of cost and responsibilities to local government. Along with that download comes a host of new rules and regulations which further increase property owners' costs. There is a tipping point where property owners, families and businesses will not be able to carry the load and we are very close to that point.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier: When is he going to take meaningful action to avoid the impending crisis in property taxation?

Mr. Struthers: It occurred to me that as they listen to the preamble of the member for Agassiz, that every one of those points that he made, from education to property taxes to support for small businesses, we've moved on in this budget, and that adds to the benefits that we put in place over the last 12 years. We put another \$25 million into the—into

education. We put that kind of support into our public schools. We—we've dedicated another \$4 million to work on the small class sizes, Mr. Speaker, things that Manitobans want us to be moving forward on.

Mr. Speaker, I would reiterate again that this is the government—not some other government, not the previous government that—when the Conservatives were in power—but this government worked the small business tax down to zero. That's zero. That helps small businesses create jobs in places like Neepawa and Ste. Rose and other small communities that him and I represent.

Impact on Municipalities

Mr. Briese: Promises made, promises broken. Mr. Speaker, under this NDP government's watch, we have seen increased education tax on property, downloading of provincial responsibility, such as planning and water management, infrastructure that is way beyond its best-before date, increases of fees, licences and permits, a hike in gas tax paid on municipal fleets. These actions negatively impact local governments, property owners and businesses, large and small, across Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, when will the Premier admit his government's failings, take some responsibility, take some action beyond empty words to address these serious challenges?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): A 9 per cent-plus increase in revenues to municipalities this year, unprecedented in the history in the province—members opposite never even got close to that in all the time they were in office—\$262 million more for infrastructure to municipalities, on top of the \$589 million that we're spending on provincial bridges and roads: unprecedented level of commitment to infrastructure.

When it comes to education, finance, Statistics Canada said that Manitoba had the lowest rate of increase in property taxes related to education of any province in Canada. No matter which measure you look at—education, contributions to municipalities, infrastructure—Manitoba is doing among the best in the country in supporting municipalities.

Child Exploitation Cases Court Delays and Sentencing Concerns

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I can think of few crimes more hideous and horrible than the exploitation and sexual abuse of children.

Compounding this horrific crime is the fact that far too frequently the consequences that come through the justice system for that crime simply don't meet the crime.

Today it was again reported that justice officials in Manitoba are concerned about the inappropriate sentences that are being handed out in our courts because of provincial plea bargains that are coming from this department and this Minister of Justice because it takes too long for these cases to get to trial.

What action is this Minister of Justice going to take to ensure that these recent troubling revelations don't continue and that there are real consequences for this horrible crime, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Certainly the issue of the exploitation of children, I think, is something that everybody in this House takes very seriously. And that's why, as a government, we've made major investments, and we've passed laws to strengthen the ability of police and our Crown attorneys to take on individuals who choose to exploit children and to, unfortunately, distribute pornographic images.

Back in 2009, Manitoba enacted first-of-its-kind legislation in Canada to make the reporting of child pornography mandatory. That's an example of what our government does to take on that fight. Certainly, in terms of police resources, we know there's a lot of disclosure. And I know the member opposite and myself have both had a chance to tour the ICE Unit with the Winnipeg Police Service. We can only imagine how terrible the job that these police officers have. We know that in many cases the disclosure is thousands—tens of thousands, even hundreds of thousands of images. That's why, of course, we're always responsive to requests by the police to give them more resources.

We work closely with the City of Winnipeg and also with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to make sure we give them resources, and that's why I'm very pleased that Budget 2012 will include more resources to help police to do their very important work, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, the minister talks about announcements, but we're not getting the results. In fact, I have tired—toured the ICE Unit, along with the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen), and what we saw on our tour, there were so many more individual potential predators who could have

been caught, but they don't have the resources within that unit because they're not able to put the case together to ensure that it can go through trial in time. They're worried about losing those trials because of long delays because they don't have the resources.

So the minister talks about a variety of different announcements over the last 10 years, but the result is, there are still predators who the police know are there, who they could catch, but who aren't caught and who are victimizing children because their attention hasn't been brought to this particular unit in the Winnipeg Police Service.

I want to ask this Minister of Justice: Why isn't he doing more to ensure that this horrible crime is eradicated and lessened in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Swan: And since this government formed power in 1999, we have a great relationship with police across this province, to make sure that we're responsive to items that the police put forward as their priorities. And that's why, since '99, we've added more than 150 new police officers for the Winnipeg Police Service alone, not to mention those outside of the Perimeter Highway. And, generally speaking, Mr. Speaker, we haven't put strings on where that money should go, where those officers should be used.

* (14:10)

Certainly, the police have the ability to make decisions of where to put the investments, and we believe that if this is an issue for the Winnipeg Police Service, certainly there can be more steps taken and put in more resources into that unit.

We are shoulder to shoulder with the police in taking on the scourge of child pornography. That's why we've included more officers by every budget since I've had the chance to be in this Legislature. And that's when Budget 2012—we'll be adding more police officers, to give them more ability to take on people who take advantage of children.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, those words sound fine, but the fact is in Manitoba there are plea bargains, plea bargains happening out of the provincial Crown's office that are not appropriate for the cases that are coming forward, for the very serious child exploitation cases. And the reason there are plea bargains is because it would take so long for these cases to get to trial that the Crown is worried about losing those cases as a result of the long delay.

The minister's known that for a long time. In fact, we passed in this very Legislature last year the victim—The Justice for Victims of Child Pornography Act, brought forward by this caucus, and it's never been used, even though there have been cases where it should have been used.

I want to ask this Minister of Justice why there are inappropriate plea bargains, why legislation has been sitting idle for a number of months when there are very, very serious cases which aren't getting the appropriate sentences that they deserve.

Mr. Swan: Well, if the member from Steinbach wants to talk about actions, not words, 2004—or, rather, 2005 was my first chance to vote on a budget in this House. And I voted for a budget that added more resources for police and more resources for Crown attorneys. The member from Steinbach voted against it.

Every year since then, from 2006 until 2011, I was proud to stand up for a budget that added resources for police across the province, added resources for Crown attorneys and support staff across this province, because we know that more resources could get better outcomes in our court system. And every year the member for Steinbach and every year every single member of Progressive Conservative caucus has stood in this House and has voted against the budget.

Mr. Speaker, we're now debating Budget 2012. We are preserving front-line services. There will be more resources to help our police, to help our Crown attorneys do their job. I'll be voting in favour of those things. What is the member for—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

The honourable member for River Heights has the floor.

Flooding (Lake Manitoba) Rebuilding Information for Residents

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, there've been incredible delays and uncertainty in the actions taken by the Premier to help victims of the flood around Lake Manitoba, and some people are here today in the gallery.

Now, some people have been given up to three different levels as to how high their homes must be raised: some by five feet as written in—by Bruce Owen of the *Free Press*, but others by different amounts. Money to help has flowed so slowly, however, that it's making the situation worse.

How can the Premier be so quick and so certain when making a decision to sacrifice people around Lake Manitoba and yet move with such delay and such uncertainty when acting to help those who've been so hurt and so victimized by his initial decisions?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, we acted extremely rapidly to build the additional channel in Lake St. Martin, which has brought down Lake Manitoba by an additional three feet if the channel were not there, and by at least a couple of feet on Lake St. Martin itself. And that was to relieve the pressure on Lake Manitoba.

At the same time, to date, we've flowed \$600 million in compensation, and we have put additional resources in place to deal with compensation requests and to do the appraisals necessary to award compensation. So the member is wrong. We have moved with a great deal of speed to provide support to people, first of all on the prevention side. We've put flood tubes out there. We did everything we could to prevent damage.

But in the case where damage has occurred, additional resources have been put in place for compensation and additional structural changes have been made for the lakes to allow more flow which has occurred all winter long, which has made a tremendous difference in the levels of the lake. And now we will move to make further investments that will allow the lake to stay down lower in the future, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, even today the Premier is wrong. There's tremendous uncertainty in what the government's plans are for Lake Manitoba. And this is causing uncertainty as to whether it is worth rebuilding.

Now, the government recently sent a letter to municipalities, which I tabled, indicating it expects the water to rise again to around 818 feet above sea level. Instead, last August the government should have made it very clear it was going to make the changes so the lake level could be lowered to around 810.5 and kept there for two years so the lake itself can heal, people can recover and rebuild.

Why has the Premier, not even today, made clear his long-run vision for Lake Manitoba so that property owners, lending institutions, rural municipalities can make decisions and rebuild?

Mr. Selinger: The whole purpose of proceeding with the emergency channel as rapidly as we did was

to bring the lake down as quickly as possible without putting anybody else at risk of flooding. And, as I said earlier, we've already flowed over \$600 million in compensation. We have struck an independent committee chaired by a very respected engineer, who has been involved on flood matters for well over two decades now, to give us recommendations on any additional measures that we need to take, including making the emergency channel permanent.

We have put in place additional measures to protect people as early as last summer and in the fall, and we are very interested in finding permanent solutions to give people greater comfort about what the range of the lake will be, bearing in mind that that was a once-in-400-year event never seen before on Lake Manitoba. Now we have to look at how to rebuild both cottages and homes and additional public works that will ensure the lake no longer floods out people on either Lake St. Martin or Lake Manitoba. That's our objective, is to stabilize people's lives around that lake and to do it as rapidly as possible.

Mr. Gerrard: The Premier obfuscates instead of providing a clear plan. Delays and obfuscation, that's what we get.

Yesterday, I was at Big Point on Lake Manitoba. The devastation there is unbelievable. The front of whole homes have been torn away, and because people were not given enough warning that their homes to be—were to be sacrificed, prized possessions are lying around or buried in the sand brought in by the waves. It is heartbreaking just to look. And yet this government is moving so slowly, with such uncertainty, that the hurt goes on and on and on.

When will the Premier provide a clear vision so that people will be able to make decisions and decide whether it is worth rebuilding or whether they are going to be sacrificed by this Premier again?

Mr. Selinger: The lake is already down four feet from the peak that had occurred last year. It's around 813 feet. The channel has been able to make a gigantic difference in how rapidly the lake has come down. We will—we have put in place an independent body called the Lake Manitoba regulation committee, with experts on it. They will give us advice as to other long-term measures that we need to put in place. And in the meantime, we are continuing to put compensation out there for people—\$600 million paid out to date. We think that—we know there has been frustrations, we know there

have been people that have suffered, and that's why we've put additional resources out there to ensure that compensation flows even more rapidly.

It has been an extremely traumatic time for all the families, businesses and cottagers along that lake, which is why we've made an unprecedented commitment, of about a billion dollars, to deal with the Lake Manitoba problem. And we will continue to find long-term solutions to allow people to have greater security of what the lake levels will be, barring further unforeseen events of Mother Nature. The event that occurred was the worst we've ever—

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

Youth Mentoring Programs Government Initiatives

Ms. Melanie Wight (Burrows): Our government's budget focused on what's important to Manitoba families.

Can the Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities please describe a recent exciting announcement made by our government to help Manitoba's youth have access to successful role modelling opportunities?

Hon. Kevin Chief (Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities): I want to thank the member for the question.

I am pleased to report to the House that on Friday the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and I announced that thousands more Manitoba youth will have a chance to connect with positive role models through new funding in Budget 2012. We are expanding two innovative programs, Manitoba Mentors and Artists in the Schools. They provide young people with outlets for their creativity and open doors to explore careers in business, non-profits and the arts through hands-on experience and one-on-one mentoring.

One of our many partners, Manitoba-based Protegra, was recently ranked one of Canada's best employers. This government is committed to making investments that help our youth achieve their full potential and provide positive opportunities that they can keep them on the right track.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to working with all members of the Chamber for Manitoba's children and youth. Thank you.

* (14:20)

Home Care Services Program and Care Level Reductions

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): I pointed out on April 17th that Keith Bergen, who suffers from cerebral palsy, has not had a proper bath in three and a half months. Mr. Speaker, even more troubling is that the minister still has not addressed the fact that Mr. Bergen has remained unbathed for three and a half months. He's been informed for some reason that there's no trained staff available to provide this service.

Mr. Speaker, there is an option. The minister could allow Medox Health Services to bathe him until her staff is properly trained.

What does it take to get a bath from this Health Minister or her department?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): And when the member raised the issue with me in the Chamber, we immediately set to work with the individual and his family to work toward providing the kind of care that he expects. We would look very closely at the facts as they were presented in the House, and we would indeed discover alternative facts as we went forward in pursuing this particular case.

I want to assure the member that we will endeavour to act swiftly whenever it is that he brings issues to the House and, indeed, when he gets information about a person for whom he has concerned, if he can bring that to my attention at the earliest possible convenience, because I believe, Mr. Speaker, that caring for people is a little bit more important than scoring political points.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: And prior to members' statements, I wish to draw the attention of honourable members to our public gallery where we have with us from the Philippines Dr. Emmanuel Cleto and his wife, Nelia.

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

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

National Organ and Tissue Donors Awareness Week

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Human tissue and organs intended for transplant improve the

quality of life for thousands of children and adults, and in many cases, their lives. Donating tissues and organs is an immensely generous gesture on the part of the donor and a sign of great courage on the part of their family.

It thus gives me great pleasure to stand and acknowledge these individuals by recognizing National Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week, which begins today and concludes on April 28, 2012.

Canadians have a long tradition of organ donation. In 2010, 557 living organ donors and 465 deceased donors contributed to 2,103 solid organ transplants. Still, the need for organs and tissues often outweighs the demands. The living donor rate fell to 16.3 donors per million population in 2010 from 17 per million donor–donors per million population four years earlier. The deceased donor rate was 13.6 donors per million population in 2010 compared to 14 donors per million population in 2006.

The need for kidney donors has been particularly acute; 3,362 people were on the waiting list in 2010, while 1,248 individuals received a kidney transplant.

Some of you know a bit about our family's history. Our daughter, Jessica, fell ill with a kidney disease that progressed to the point where she was placed on dialysis and the search for a donor began. We are very fortunate that my lovely wife, Aynsley, turned out to be a good match and Jessica was able to have a successful transplant. They are both healthy and doing well.

Today not only marks an opportunity to celebrate those both living and deceased who have donated human tissues or organs to someone in need, but reminds us that we, too, can easily become a donor by providing our consent. When you receive a donor's licence, you also receive this card, this blue donor card. Please take time to read it, and please find it in your heart to sign it. Signing a donor card ensures that our organs, in the event we pass, will be given the chance to breathe new life into someone else. In addition, please make your wishes known to your family. It can be a difficult conversation, but it can save a life or several lives.

Today also marks the launch of Transplant Manitoba's online Sign Up For Life registry. They launched this site at an event this morning at the Millennium Library. It will enable Manitobans to make a record of their wishes with respect to organ

and tissue donation. I urge you to visit the website through www.signupforlife.ca and sign up for life.

Mr. Speaker, I stand together with all honourable members of this House to celebrate the truly amazing contributions of all organ and tissue donors in the Manitoba and Canada. Thank you.

Westwood Collegiate Hero Month

Ms. Sharon Blady (Kirkfield Park): Mr. Speaker, Manitoban students are increasingly engaging with the wider world during their high school years. Many students now take part in a remarkable amount of international aid work and humanitarianism. They're looking beyond their own borders to educate themselves and forge new partnerships worldwide.

It is with this in mind that I admire the inspired work of Westwood Collegiate students during their Hero Month fundraising campaign, which occurred from March 19th until April 21st. Hero Month arose from a partnership between Westwood Collegiate and the group, Growing Opportunities International, in order to raise money to build a Hero Home, a home for street children and orphans in Tanzania. The logo chosen for Hero Month is a hand, which symbolizes that everyone can be a hero to someone else just by using their hands.

With this symbol in mind, the students at Westwood have organized some innovative and engaging fundraising events in order to meet their goal. For instance, throughout the month students have been able to leave their mark on the school by paying \$2 to have their hand printed on the ceiling tiles.

Students were also asked to tag five family members and friends to donate \$10 to the Hero Month campaign. Students and volunteers sold T-shirts and held a bake sale, and Hero Month wrapped up this past weekend with a soccer tournament and a barbecue on the school grounds. The participants in Westwood's Hero Month were able to raise nearly \$1,400 towards a hero home in Tanzania.

Mr. Speaker, students that reach beyond their own country to aid the disadvantaged are to be commended for their unselfishness and for their leadership. I hope that all members of this House applaud the effort and commitment of all participants in Westwood Collegiate's Hero Month.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Camp Hughes National Historic Site

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in honour of Camp Hughes being designated a national historic site by the Government of Canada in March. It is one of 10 newly recognized national historic sites, persons or events that define significant moments in Canada's military history.

Camp Hughes is a former military training camp located 10 kilometres west of Carberry. It was first established as Sewell Camp. This site was deemed suitable for training artillery, Calgary–cavalry and infantry units for combat in Europe. In 1915 it was renamed after Canadian defence minister Major General Sam Hughes.

The site is recognized as Canada's most intact First World War battlefield terrain, created for training purposes. Only a few such sites exist in the world. Returning World War I veterans trained soldiers at the site in the latest techniques of European trench warfare.

The camp's scale was impressive. At one point in 1916 it was the largest Manitoba community outside of Winnipeg. The site housed an administrative building, kitchens, a veterinary hospital, post office, three moving picture theatres, a pool and a general store. During World War I, more than 38,000 members of the Canadian Expeditionary Force trained here.

Today, the property is largely undeveloped, but the remains of approximately 10 kilometres of the main battalion trench system are still visible on the landscape. Also present is the camp cemetery. Camp Hughes serves as an important reminder of the call to the citizens of Canada to serve for King and country. Accordingly, on the gate of the property, a plaque reads Their Name Liveth Forevermore in honour of the fallen.

Camp Hughes represents a critical moment in the history as a nation, where many Canadians were sent to training camps in order to support the Commonwealth war effort at the outbreak of World War I. We will never fully appreciate the magnitude of the efforts those Canadian soldiers who served at Vimy Ridge or any number of battlefields of Europe.

It is a profound honour to rise today to talk about Camp Hughes and its role in Canadian military history.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hapnot Collegiate Kopper Kweens Basketball Team

Mr. Clarence Pettersen (Flin Flon): Mr. Speaker, as a resident of Flin Flon and former coach of school athletics, I was proud to attend the Manitoba High School Sports Hall of Fame induction ceremony on Saturday, April 21st, put on by the Manitoba High Schools Athletic Association, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. Many great Manitoba athletes, builders were honoured for their skill and their contributions to sport.

* (14:30)

I wish I could speak all about the inductees, Mr. Speaker, but I would like to use my time to praise the Hapnot Collegiate Kopper Kweens basketball team, who were inducted in the team category. The Kopper Kweens are legendary in Flin Flon and throughout the province for their basketball 'prowness' in the early days of organized Manitoba high school sports.

From 1949 through to the 1954-55 season, the Kopper Kweens won the provincial girls high school basketball championship an astonishing seven straight times. In fact, no basketball team in Manitoba has come close to matching this remarkable achievement since. After a short layoff, the Hapnot Kopper Kweens won the championship again in '57-58, '59-80 seasons.

Mr. Speaker, I dare say that nine championships in 12 years is a feat that is near impossible to match anywhere in sport. *Winnipeg Free Press* reporter Nick Martin has said the Kopper Kweens of the 1950s rivalled the Toronto—I mean the Montréal Canadiens in terms of dominating the sport.

The induction of this basketball dynasty into the Manitoba High School Sports Hall of Fame holds a special place in my heart, as my daughters, Michelle, Hilary and Mary, who were all Kopper Kweens themselves while they attended Hapnot Collegiate.

I was proud to attend the induction reception and be part of the celebration of Flin Flon sports royalty and of high school sport in Manitoba. I urge all members to join me in applauding the 50 years of organized high school sport in our province, and the 'unprecedented' string of championships won by the Hapnot Collegiate Kopper Kweens.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Plast Ukrainian Scouting

Ms. Melanie Wight (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Plast, an international organization of Ukrainian youth that fosters personal development, love of the Ukrainian community and the willingness to work for its well-being. Begun in 1912 in Lviv, Ukraine, Plast is based on the model of boy scouts international. Its founder, Oleksander Tysovsky, envisioned a scouting organization that incorporated Ukrainian symbols and vocabulary related to Ukrainian history.

In the past 100 years, Plast has served as a form of cultural transmission for the Ukrainian diaspora around the world. The aim of the organization is to raise youth to be conscientious, responsible and valuable citizens of their communities at the local, national and global level. Plast was officially banned under the Soviet Union, and after World War II it established branches in Canada, the United States, Australia, and Argentina.

Today, Canadian branches of Plast operate in Montréal, Ottawa, Toronto, St. Catharines, Edmonton, Calgary, and here in Winnipeg. Interestingly, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Canadian divisions played a big role in re-establishing Plast activities in the Ukraine.

Mr. Speaker, since the first Ukrainian immigrants began to settle in Manitoba in 1891, this community has added immeasurably to our province. Plast is one of the many proud traditions the rich Ukrainians in Manitoba and throughout the world have been able to pass along their culture and their history to young and future generations. The high point of Plast's yearly activities are the summer camps, where young people learn outdoor skills, go hiking and develop a sense of teamwork and self-discipline.

I hope all members will join me in celebrating 100 years of Plast, in acknowledging the over 167,000 people of Ukrainian descent who live in our province and in supporting a free and democratic Ukraine.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

House Business

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

I would like to announce that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts will meet at 7 p.m.

on Wednesday, April 25th, 2012, to consider the following reports: Auditor General's Report—Audits of Government Operations—November 2009; Chapter 2: Personal Care Homes Program; Auditor General's Report—Follow-up of Previously Issued Recommendations—dated March 2011; Section 1—Audit of the Pharmacare Program; Auditor General's Report—Follow-up of Previously Issued Recommendations—dated January 2012; Section 10—Monitoring Compliance with The Ambulance Services Act; Section 11—Pharmacare Program—Part 2; Section 12—Personal Care Homes Program; Section 13—Winnipeg Regional Health Authority—Administration of the Value-Added Policy.

The honourable Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) and Mr. Milton Sussman, Deputy Minister of Health, will be called as witnesses during the consideration of these reports.

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And the honourable Minister of Health and Mr. Milton Sussman, the Deputy Minister of Health, will be called as witnesses during the consideration of these reports.

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

BUDGET DEBATE (Fourth Day of Debate)

Mr. Speaker: To resume debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers), and the proposed motion of the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) in amendment thereto, standing in the name of the

honourable member for Morden-Winkler, who has nine minutes remaining.

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): And a few moments earlier, I remarked that the member for Burrows (Ms. Wight) mentioned that this budget is focused on what's important to Manitoba families. And I would suggest that not only are they focused on it, they're painting a target on the backs of Manitoba families, in the form of \$184 million in new taxes.

In any case, what's important, Mr. Speaker, is that we feel that this isn't a budget for all Manitobans. As a matter of fact, I was disappointed in a January the 9th news release by the minister of finances that trumpeted six prebudget consultation meetings, yet none of those meetings took place anywhere near the constituency that I represent, not near places like Steinbach, Virden, Portage la Prairie, Altona, Glenboro, but also not in places like Morden and Winkler.

And, Mr. Speaker, so as a response, we held our own prebudget consultation, the members for Emerson and Midland and myself, along with local government and Chambers of Commerce and community development officers, and with our special guest, the PC finance critic and member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson).

And that consultation provided a context for local leaders to express concerns and provide examples of the challenges they face in delivering services and working with government. And it's obvious from those discussions that the challenges of local leaders are compounded by this government's colossal failure to match spending with revenue. And so I'm disappointed that that prebudget consultation process could not have more accurately reflected the needs of all Manitobans. In any case, I was so fortunate to have such a good response from local leaders to come out there.

Any case, that provides a good segue to talk about infrastructure. One of the main issues that came out at that preconsultation budget was—or meeting was, infrastructure. And, even in the city of Winkler, it continues to be an issue for Provincial Road 32 south, where the traffic counts and population now indicate that more than 17,500 cars travel that road every day.

And recently, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) stated publicly and on the record, that while the traffic counts and population certainly justify moving

forward, the flood was holding the project back and that the Province had no choice but to reprioritize its highway projects, although Winkler would remain on his to-do list. Mr. Speaker, I have read the highway renewal plan and I assure you that there's no mention of Highway 32 south on that list. I, quite frankly, would assert that that highway is not on the Premier's to-do list, even though there are more than 17,500 cars that travel the road daily.

And even now, the latest StatsCan figures report that the percentage increase in population in those communities are at 22.4 per cent. And that same principle applies to other local priorities area: in education, in health care, in social services.

* (14:40)

The government has choices. The government has opportunity. The government has discretion, and they have obligation. And this government is making choices that overlook us.

And, Mr. Speaker, I take strong exception to the Premier's suggestion last week in this Chamber, and again repeated today by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers), that somehow, for an opposition MLA to advocate for local infrastructure is inconsistent, or incongruent, that we can't both press the government to take its fiscal responsibility seriously and, at the same time, tell them to fix a bridge that's missing for a municipality. I reject that argument outright. It's baseless; it's fallacious. This government must get its fiscal house in order, and they must take a reasoned and fair and equitable approach to funding infrastructure across the province.

The fact is that there are monies that are allocated for that. What we want to see is the meting out of that funding in a way that takes projects and measures them against stated criteria, measures them and adjudicates them according to need, and allow the civil service to do their job and not interfere in that process.

So, Mr. Speaker, last week was Education Week and it's—and that's an appropriate time to consider the challenges facing Manitoba in education, and I'm very pleased to have the role in my caucus as education critic. And there are important challenges that are facing Manitoba education at this time, and I hope to work hard to be proven equal to the task of shining a light on this government's record on education.

In short, we see that this government is failing Manitoba youth in K to 12 education, and the outcomes tell the story. Since 2001, this province leads the nation with the highest or second-highest high school dropout rates. When it comes to test scores, we're aware that Pan-Canadian Assessment Program, which measures the performance of grade 8 students in math, science and reading, have shown that Manitoba ranks among—last among all Canadian provinces in science and in reading, and second last in math. And the OECD Program for International Student Assessment report, which tests 15-year-old students, also found that our students need help with the basics. Manitoba ranked second last among the Canadian provinces in reading, science and math and well below the Canadian average in all tested areas.

Meanwhile, the Minister for Education is ignoring calls from math ed professors who are raising concerns about both the K to 8 math curriculum and low university education math requirements for our future teachers. These are important issues to Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, and we intend to shine a light on this government's record in that regard.

I would just also mention that when it comes to province-wide report cards, there are still important unanswered questions about that. The government said that this would be in place for this coming school year, and yet now they've announced they're going to push that back a year. And the rationale for the move to the standardized format is so that reports would be clear and meaningful, but we have questions related to what teachers who participated in the pilot project are actually saying about it, and there's been no information forthcoming on that.

When it comes to the government's initiative on class size cap, well, this is a \$105-million initiative, and yet there are still important questions remaining in terms of not just class size but class composition. And I would just want to point out that going back even to 2002, this same government, they undertook a broad-scale study of class size but also of class composition. And that study was actually broad and it was tabled to the Minister of Finance at that—or the Minister of Education at that time. That was the member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell). And those findings indicated that while class size is important, that class composition is at least equal, if not greater, in importance. And yet that study has been parked on a shelf for just over 10 years. We have yet to hear this Minister of Education (Ms. Allan) talk about class composition as well, and I assure you, Mr.

Speaker, if you talk to Manitoba teachers, they are as concerned for class composition as they are for class size, and I hope that the Minister of Education will turn her attention to this important area of that same study.

So we have important challenges facing us in education, and there are more, and I look forward to continuing to represent the interests of Manitoba teachers and of students and of other stakeholders in the system as we go forward in this session. In any case, though, Mr. Speaker, I'd make this statement in closing that, as I mentioned earlier, budget is a missed opportunity for our great province of Manitoba, and my colleagues and myself have already articulated a plan to get Manitoba back on solid ground, but the one that this government has articulated so far is not that plan.

And we will continue to work hard this spring session to hold this government to account for the budget that fails so miserably to inspire confidence, that doesn't help our economy grow, that doesn't address our competitive challenges and fails to get Manitoba back on track and restore prosperity and hope and pride and optimism to our great province.

And, in closing, I look forward as well to just discussing my own great riding of Morden-Winkler, and there's so many good things that are happening with respect to growth, with respect to local stakeholders taking the initiative and moving agendas forward, and getting things done for the area of Morden and Winkler and the RM of Stanley. And I'm so proud to be able to represent this riding and I will continue to be proud to do so in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): I start my speech by saying that I was anticipating this: that I'll be asked to speak, but I forgot to take down notes and, right now, I was still writing my notes. I was supposed to say something too partisan and I'll try and not to be.

But some observation that I have regarding the speeches that came from the opposite side—*[interjection]* I said opposite side—was that there was never a mention of the word "flood." It's as if the flood never happened; it did. And there is a good reason for it. I sandbagged for Christ.

But the main point of my speech is about the budget. This budget is a historic document that propels Manitoba forward. It is a document which was produced because of the mandate that this

government got from the people of Manitoba with 37 MLAs. We are honoured by that mandate and, as a government, the election is over.

This is government and the government makes those hard choices. Those hard choices in the budget is whether to impose taxes or cut spending or do nothing. This government has chosen to do something about the situation we find ourselves in. We are moving forward. There's a lot of people who are happy in Manitoba than any other place on earth.

Tyndall Park, Weston and Brooklands, I represent those people, and those same people tell me that my government, meaning the NDP government, is doing quite well. It is doing quite well considering the circumstances we found ourselves in.

The flood did occur, and we are doing the best we can to compensate the victims of the disaster and the disaster is still ongoing. Our government has been moving despite the criticism and despite the opposition of some quarters.

*(14:50)

Just this morning, the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald), together with the honourable member from Brandon West, went to the Millennium Library to celebrate the important occasion of initiating an organ donation registry, which will cost some money. And the government has decided, also, to finance some of the auxiliary medical devices that extend the lives of those who cannot get the transplant right away. And this government knows its priorities.

Now let me talk about the PNP, because I'm an immigrant and the Provincial Nominee Program has been a successful program that has allowed the Province to allow people from around the world to come in—16,000 last year. And I have to acknowledge that most of those who came were from my country and they have settled in Tyndall Park, The Maples, Burrows, Logan and Minto. And most of these people are thankful to this government and, of course, to the one who initiated it—the honourable member from River East. We acknowledge that.

It had been a non-partisan program that was successful and the delivery of the support services had been very, very efficient. And suddenly the carpet was pulled from under us and I don't know why. Why tinker with something that successful? Why take the money away from Manitoba and take it to Calgary? Why? There is a suggestion that maybe

the federal Conservatives are too vindictive; that they don't like the immigrants who become successful in this province, because most of them vote for the NDP anyway. It is not true. Most of them settle in areas where they are influenced by the policies that they see that work.

Those people, who are living now at The Maples represented by our member from The Maples, and those from Logan represented by our member from Logan, and those from Minto represented by the Attorney General (Mr. Swan), and many others who have settled in Steinbach, Altona, Morden, Winkler, even Thompson, even Elmwood, have been buying homes and stimulating the economy without being told that that's what they're supposed to do. They're settling down in Manitoba because of the support services that were given them at the initial stages of their arrival. They were taken care of, and we were taking care of them the right way.

The initial response is get angry and tell them off. I am more than willing to join the call on the part of the member from River Heights that maybe we should go beg, go to Ottawa and beg for money, for the money that they took out from our settlement programs. I'm willing to kneel down to get it back. I don't know if any other member will do that, but it is very important that we promote and not take away a program that's working.

The program, the Provincial Nominee Program, I am pleased to let you know, Mr. Speaker, I have sponsored at least 20 families myself. And all of these 20 families, of almost 60 members who became immigrants, are now very successful. Why, because of the Success Skills program that was initiated by the government and the START program and the immigrant centre? And why are we taking that away? I still ask that question, and I need that answered. Why, because of politics? Why was the resolution of the honourable Minister of Immigration (Ms. Melnick) opposed by the opposite side, because it does not make sense or is it because of partisan politics?

We are—I am not trying to politicize the program, I am just trying to say to everyone that it is successful. It is successful, and we are doing it together as a province, not as the NDP or the Conservative. We are doing it as a province. The economic advantage that we have been getting, the benefits that we have been getting from the program is tremendous. The economic stimulus that's there for

us to keep on using is there; it's there for us to take advantage of, it's there for us to maintain, it's there for us to respect as a non-partisan program.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): And the member from Tyndall Park said he didn't have notes. I could have supplied lots of notes for him, but I imagine he may not have wanted to use those.

Mr. Speaker, in speaking to the budget and to the amendment brought forward by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen), this—the comments coming forward are based on either the budget or the amendment. And—but really when you stand back and look at this budget and look at this government, the word legacy comes to mind. And I was thinking, as I was driving through my constituency, that the term legacy—and when I got a hold of a dictionary I looked up the definition of a legacy, and according to Webster's dictionary legacy means anything that has been handed down from one's predecessors. So that's fairly straight forward.

So, when I think of this government or—particular I was thinking of past governments, and the greatest Manitoban, the honourable Duff Roblin, former premier of Manitoba, and the legacy that he left Manitoba. And many people, when they hear Duff Roblin's name the first thing they think of is Duff's Ditch. But, if you were to read his book, which I did over this past winter, while he is credited with the struggle to get the ditch built and to get approvals for the ditch to be dug, his—to him, his greatest accomplishment was building the schools across rural Manitoba, or across all of Manitoba, and my hometown has one of those schools that was built in 1963 as a result of Duff Roblin.

* (15:00)

And one of the other great things was the rural electrification that brought electricity to rural Manitoba. And how ironic that it is now, that while Duff Roblin bought—brought electricity to rural Manitoba or made it possible for the construction of that, and it was a huge undertaking to get that brought in, how ironic it is nowadays that we have farms that are putting in diesel generators to run their grain-handling equipment because Manitoba Hydro refuses to upgrade the power lines coming into their farms. And we're not talking about 15 and 20 miles off the grid; we're talking—I have one particular area south of Carman which is two miles off of the main power line, and there's four farms on that and there

are—all four of those farms are looking at putting in electric—or diesel generators because Manitoba Hydro refuses to upgrade their service. So how things change over the years.

But going back to the legacy, when I think of this government and what their legacy will be after they're out of power, and of course they probably believe they'll be in power forever, but that's their problem, but when I look at this I think of record revenues coming in. There has been a growing economy in Manitoba, record transfer payments out of Ottawa—thank you to the federal government for those record transfer payments. And with all that money coming in, what's happened is they've spent it all and more, and the words "squandered" and "wasted" come to mind on this, and then they say one thing and they do the complete opposite—promises made, promises broken.

When I was first elected in May of 2007, the provincial debt, the core debt of the provincial government was \$10.6 billion—\$10.6 billion—which we thought was substantial at that time. This year it's going to be \$16.3 billion. That's a 65 per cent rise in debt in just basically five years. If they continue with their legacy of spending, using that type of mathematics, by 2015 our provincial debt will be \$25 billion, and that's just the core government debt; that's not including Crown corporations. That's a staggering number, and what they're doing is they're shackling our future generations, our kids, our grandchildren—I have children and kids in this province. I also have some that are out of province that feel they're doing better in other provinces. But I have grandchildren in this province, too, and I can just see them having to pay increased taxes in order to pay for this massive debt that this government is running up.

They've changed the balanced budget legislation three times—probably be more changes yet, because they have no intention of balancing the books. They talk about 2014—when I just read off these debt figures, there is no way that they will ever be able to balance the budget, given their penchant for spending, and that's unfortunate that while other provinces are realistically dealing with debt and problems and services, yet this government continues to not even attempt to realistically deal with these.

There is the promise that the Premier (Mr. Selinger) made during the election campaign. He promised not to raise taxes. He promised that. And yet what do we have here in this budget? We're

raising taxes on just a whole host of items, and we don't even know yet how many other fees are buried in this budget. We won't know until we get into Estimates and able to analyze this—the fine print, even more. And when you see that many tax increases on just the rough numbers, you can only imagine how many hidden fees and taxes that they've imposed on here.

And it's about ethics. It's about being ethical, and for you to promise one thing and seven short months later—this is after the flood has already happened—you knew that the flood was there, or the flood costs were there. You knew that—what your revenues were going to be and you still—you promised not to raise taxes and then you turn around and raise taxes. That—that's just unethical. It is very unfortunate and Manitobans are going to pay the price.

And I think that whole basic premise of word and lack of credibility came through, and it came through last Thursday when we saw this on the debate on the immigration resolution, and to use the civil service as a tool for your propaganda, I think, that undermines. I believe, I firmly believe that undermines the integrity of the civil service and it's politicizing the civil service in a way that they don't ask for. We have so many good civil servants in this province, and yet they are going to be painted all with the same brush on this one. And it's just an unfortunate use of power by this government, that they have stooped so low to do that.

We know that there are many new taxes in this budget; hydro rates are going up, child care fees, insurance on property, liability group insurance. We're still not sure—I asked today, I asked a question in question period today, do these—does PST apply to AgriInsurance? Does it apply to private hail insurance? And yet we're not getting these answers. And, when you don't get answers, you only become more suspect as to what the real intention is here.

Gas taxes are going up; motive fuel taxes are going up. This is a huge hit on rural Manitoba and all Manitobans, but particularly rural Manitobans. Vehicle registration—when we were in MPI committee last week, we asked the minister, so what is the implementation date for this? And this is all in *Hansard*, you can check to see—but we asked early in the evening, and asked what the implementation date would be for vehicle registration. We were told it was May, and then two hours later we were told it's July. And then when we asked, well, what vehicles does it—which plates does it apply to, because there is

a whole host of different plates that are out there, whether it's not just cars and trucks, but your trailers, your large trailers, your small trailers, snowmobiles. We asked what applies—what will apply for this vehicle \$35 registration fee? We were told, well, we don't know. Well, how can you not know when you just brought out your budget? You've put—you put income projections out there for this, and yet you're—now you're telling us you really don't know how much this is going to bring and what it applies to. It really doesn't lead to credibility at all when you can't answer those very basic questions.

We see volunteer fees going up 50 per cent. And the child registry is vitally important, so that our children are safe in their sporting and community activities. I've been involved in 4-H for many years and I came in just at the end of that—or just at the beginning, I should say—the end of my 4-H leaders career was right at the beginning of the child tax—or child registry—Child Abuse Registry, and we had to fill out the forms and nobody had a problem with it because we knew it was for the good of the organizations. But now you've turned around and you are taxing the very volunteers that are doing this.

And it—many people now, given the delays that are happening because of the demands on the system, are choosing not to volunteer now, and this is becoming ever more difficult for our communities to find volunteers that are involved with young people. We don't dispute the fact—we encourage the—people to do the Child Abuse Registry, to make sure that our children are safe, but don't turn around and tax them for being good citizens. This is just wrong to be doing that.

We have the property taxes, and most people just think of their house in terms of property taxes. In the rural areas this is going to be huge hit on us because this includes all farm buildings, whether it's just used for graining—grain farming, but also the livestock industry with their intensive livestock units. And, yes, we still do have a few intensive livestock units left in this province despite this government, but this is a huge—this is a 7 per cent tax on them. And what are they getting back for it? All we get back is more regulations and more bans and a distrust of the farm community.

* (15:10)

So—and the pretence for raising the gas taxes and the motive fuels was for infrastructure, and we hear the Premier (Mr. Selinger) constantly talk about this, that this—these gas taxes and motive fuels will go for

infrastructure. I take that assertion that it'll go towards there like I do the promise not to raise taxes.

We knew—we know what happened when it comes to raising taxes. They can do that. While they say they're going to spend more money on infrastructure the capital funding has been decreased by \$99 million, 13.4 per cent. So you're going to take in more taxes and you're going to spend less on infrastructure.

And, when you cut back on a capital program, it's not just the roads and the bridges, it's also the water and sewer projects that our towns and communities across the province need so badly. And our—and when you talk to our municipalities, our local municipalities, they have this frustration, intense frustration when you meet with them. They have this frustration at the Province because of the stalling, the demanding study after study.

Some of the municipalities want to do the studies, the structural studies for a water and sewer project, but they're told they can't bring in an outside engineer. The engineering studies, they have to use Water Services engineers and Water Services engineers refused to do it until the project is approved, and that will be too late for many of our smaller communities because when infrastructure funding is announced it's taken—it's picked up right away.

There's a duplication of services all across this province, and I heard—you know it would almost be a humorous story, but it's not—I heard about one municipality, a culvert had collapsed and it was on a provincial road and it was just right inside one of our communities, actually. It was the Province's—Province-controlled culvert. The municipality sent their people out to fix it, and the highways department came along saying, well, you can't do that, that's ours. But this was after four months of pleading with the Province, with the highways department to fix this culvert, and the bottom line is the culvert got fixed by the municipality. The highways department just had to go home because this was taken care of, and yet why should it take four months to fix a simple culvert?

We have dangerous roads out in our communities, and I can tell you from first-hand experience. I was driving on Highway 13 north of Carman last week. The drop-off on the shoulder is anywhere from four to eight inches and a—I met a 3-ton truck who happened to hit the shoulder, fell off the edge of the pavement, swerved back on and he

managed to catch his truck just before he smacked into me head-on. And I wouldn't be here to tell you the story about that if that driver hadn't been able to pull that truck back in.

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

And that's the shape of our roads out there, and you can talk all about the roads that you fix, but there is more roads that need to be fixed. They're in terrible shape out there. We've had two rollovers on this particular highway so far. Fortunately, no one's been killed yet on that from the rollovers, but this is the type of situation that we're facing on there.

And, in terms of my own critic responsibilities, agriculture and this budget. There was two scant paragraphs in this budget and—mentioned, and it was basically just a recap of programs already in existence and promises to do more. But then we know about promises from this government, that they're really—promises don't mean anything to this government.

This budget is a direct attack on rural Manitoba, on all Manitobans, but, in particular, rural Manitoba. The gas tax and the motor—motive fuel taxes, with the distances faced by our rural communities, rural and northern communities, that the distances that we're—we have to travel, this is—cost of fuel is a huge item in our budgets, in our household budgets, in our business budgets and the farm vehicles, equipment that are using this—these—we'll have to pay these extra taxes.

Agriculture is transportation dependant. Our products, whether they be grain or livestock or further manufactured products, all depend on the transportation industry to get them to market, and whether that's by truck or by rail, it doesn't really matter. It's going to cost us more because that transportation cost is directly going to be—the increased costs will be related directly back to our products.

Even our rural municipalities are going to face huge costs, because fuel is a large item for the municipalities in the maintenance of their municipalities.

The vehicle registration fees—and farms have many vehicles. Many people in the city might have one or two or three vehicles—although we're still trying to figure out what exactly qualifies for the \$35 registration, whether that's trailers and et cetera—but you look at the number of trucks, trailers and other equipment that's registered through MPI on a farm,

and this becomes a substantial cost. And I think that they have deliberately lowballed what this revenue will be in their budget just to make it—to try and hide what the true cost will be to the agricultural community. We hope that, you know, soon we can know what actual vehicles will apply to this registration fee, and from there then maybe we can really figure out how much revenue they are going to tax out of our communities.

They've raised child-care fees, and child care and farm families—it's important to a lot of our farm families. We have a lot of our farm families that use our local daycare so that the children are in a safe environment while both parents are working on the farm. And we need to encourage this, and yet you've turned around now and you're going to charge some more.

And where is this extra money supposed to come? Many families are not like this government. They really don't care to borrow more money. This government thrives on borrowed money, but that's not the way most household budgets work. So we see this—it's going to cost us a lot of money in there.

In terms of agriculture, there are many other items such—which we would have liked to have seen included in this—at least made mention in this budget as to—in terms of the—we have the hog moratorium across all of Manitoba. There's 3,000 jobs at stake in Brandon and Neepawa; that's direct assembly-line jobs, good paying jobs, too, and it's been a real boost for both Brandon and Neepawa, never mind the rest of hog industry, the amount of jobs that are out there. This—and yet there is no movement from this government to help the hog industry rebuild and update their facilities. There is talk about credits for manure treatment. There is a 2013 ban coming in place in terms of manure treatment, and yet there's no information coming out of there.

Also, in this budget there's no mention of the centre of excellence in the budget; Saskatchewan's going ahead with their centre of excellence, and yet this Province has just thrown up their hands and said, it's not going to happen. No mention of support for research and development in agricultural products. No mention of a federally inspected beef slaughter plant in this province, in spite of years and years of promises and many, many thousands, hundreds of thousands of dollars spent by this government.

There is no mention—or no plan—there was mention in the budget about forest–forage restoration, pasture restoration, flood—and yet flood

compensation was not even mentioned in this budget. They—the—from what we're hearing is that some of the small claims are being paid, but they're holding back on the large claims. We've got real cash flow issues out there on—for many of these people, and there's been nothing addressed on there.

No mention in terms of what their commitment will be to Growing Forward 2, preparing for the future. We see all our other provinces around us preparing for Growing Forward 2, and yet where is this Province?

And, of course, I couldn't possibly go and mention budgets and money without talking about Bipole III, the billion-dollar boondoggle by this government. This—the NDP now thinks it owns and controls Manitoba Hydro, and that's wrong. The last time I checked Manitoba Hydro was still owned by the taxpayers of Manitoba, and yet it's the NDP that owns and controls this—or thinks they own and control this.

*(15:20)

We have serious financial issues facing Hydro. We have rate increases. We have rock-bottom rates in the US. The natural gas industry has really driven rates down. We have skyrocketing construction costs on Wuskwatim; it's doubled in costs. We still don't know—we can only guess what the real generating costs are coming out of that dam and, yet, here we have this government raiding any surpluses that Manitoba Hydro is going to do.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I still have five written questions that show up on the Order Paper. I have five written questions that show up regularly on the Order Paper about landowner issues regarding Bipole III, and yet this government refuses to answer them. They refuse to even take them into consideration.

My landowners—and I call them my landowners because Bipole III comes directly through my constituency—they're very frustrated with this whole process. They're not getting any answers. They're shut down and yet they are told that they—this is going to happen to them without any input from them, and that, I can assure you, is not going to happen. They are not going to take this laying down. They are not at all in agreement with having these—this line go across their land, and I can tell you that we're in for some interesting times should Manitoba

Hydro, under the direction of the NDP government, decide to push through on this line.

So, summing up, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this—I would certainly support the amendment brought in by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen). It at least attempts to offset some of the negatives that are happening from this government and their inability to control their spending and their inability to look out for our children and our grandchildren and the generations to come in Manitoba.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Drew Caldwell (Brandon East): I appreciate the opportunity to put a few words on the record for this 2012 budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Before I begin those comments, I want to thank the people of Brandon East for continuing to place their confidence in me in the representation of this government. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're a government that believes in investment in Brandon, investment in western Manitoba and investment in this province to build a better province and a more prosperous province for all Manitobans, whatever their station in life. And I'm very, very proud to stand with members on this government side of the House in our—united with them in our work to make a better province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's a couple of points I should—before getting into the body of my remarks, I should make mention of just following the member who spoke previous to me. He made reference to a couple of issues. One was the prosperity in Brandon and Neepawa—which is my part of the province, western Manitoba—around the hog industry. And in this case, Maple Leaf Foods in Brandon and Springfield in Neepawa because that particular issue that the member makes reference to is, in fact, a growing area of the economy in western Manitoba that's directly jeopardized by the stance that members have taken—that members opposite have taken on the issue of Manitoba immigration policy which is—puts those two businesses in western Manitoba in a great deal of jeopardies.

The largest challenge, in fact, that they've faced in the—since they were initiated in the province of Manitoba immigration has fuelled the growth of Maple Leaf Foods in Brandon and the Springfield processing plant in Neepawa. And immigration to this province is directly threatened by the federal Harper government's undermining of the Manitoba immigration agreement that has served this province

well. In fact, it's the best immigration policy in Canada, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and its benefits has—have been seen very acutely in the city of Brandon and the city of Winnipeg.

So from the vote last week, where members opposite chose not to stand up for Manitoba but chose to instead stand up for policy foisted upon this province by Ottawa, and which would directly and negatively impact the economy of the province of Manitoba, I found, first, to be reprehensible, as a Manitoban but secondarily, worth mention of in this budget speech, given the members opposite's remarks in his comments a few moments ago.

The second issue, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I want to make mention of, further to the member's remarks previously, was on the issue of the UNESCO World Heritage Site and the bipole down the east side of Lake Winnipeg. I find it reprehensible as well but also ironic in the day after Earth Day, that the member opposite would choose to, again, after losing the fourth consecutive election on this particular issue, the fourth consecutive election that the issue of the UNESCO World Heritage Site and the preservation of the western hemisphere's largest tract of intact boreal forest, a tract of boreal forest that comprises endangered species, a tract of boreal forest that's the largest carbon sink in existence in the western hemisphere, a boreal forest that provides the only clean, undisturbed source of water left in this province into the Lake Winnipeg.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I find it very disconcerting that the members opposite would continue, through their antagonism and hostility and opposition to the creation of a world heritage site and the preservation of the western hemisphere's largest intact tract of boreal forest. I find it very disconcerting the day after Earth Day, that the members opposite would continue to adhere to the—kind of the Flat Earth Society view of the world, the climate-denying view of the world—climate-change-denying view of the world and to advance a—in stark opposition to the best interest not only of Manitoba but the planet Earth for the development and destruction, ultimately, of the last intact tract of boreal forest in our hemisphere, the largest carbon sink in our hemisphere, and the greatest source of clean water and clean oxygen in our hemisphere.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know I will stand on the side of Manitobans and the health of Manitobans and this planet and the health of our planet every time, in

opposition to those who would deny climate change, to those that would destroy and continue to destroy our planet by policy and by practice. So those two issues I wanted to just comment on because they were raised by the member opposite in his speech, and I thought they were worthy of following up on with a few remarks.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in regards to the budget that we're debating today, I'm very, very proud to stand with the government that, through the record flood waters of the 2011 year, through the global recession that we've been experiencing across this planet since 2008, this New Democratic Party government in Manitoba has chosen to protect jobs and the services our families count on in this province. We've had choices to make. We could have had—we could have made the choices members opposite advocate on their cutting days—sometimes they have spending days, as well—but on their cutting days, to advocate—[interjection] And, sometimes, as my colleague from Southdale says, some days they're both in the same day, you know.

Most days they are but, predominately, members opposite are all about cutting and impacting negatively Manitobans. We had a choice to make when we were addressing the budgetary challenges that faced us—face us in 2012. We had a choice with the record flood waters from last year and the global recession. We had a choice that we could have cut services to Manitobans. We could have cut funding to health care in the province of Manitoba. We could have cut funding to our post-secondary institutions and our public school systems. We could have cut funding to our highways, roads, bridges, and infrastructure, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And, incidentally, I should say, the Minister of Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation, I should acknowledge, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that he's right now, in terms of infrastructure, presiding over the largest investment in infrastructure in our roads, bridges, and dare I say streets in the city of Winnipeg, the largest investment in the province's history, over \$400 million this year investing in infrastructure throughout our province, compared to \$60 million in year that we came into office.

* (15:30)

So we had a choice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to cut health care, to cut education, to cut family services, to cut justice, to cut infrastructure, as the members opposite are advocating, or a choice to, in a very balanced and prudent way, to avoid reckless and

extreme cuts and to embrace prudent investment and a balanced approach, continuing to provide Manitobans with the front-line services that, not only they deserve, but that they expect, and they expect our government to defend Manitoba and build this province on their behalf.

Budget 2012 is finding responsible ways to reduce spending, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Most departments, in fact, will see a reduction in their spending this year, which means more money going directly into our schools and in our hospitals. We are committed to continue to building Manitoba, to building our health-care infrastructure, to building our educational infrastructure and to building our road-bridge infrastructure that was so badly affected by last year's flooding.

We're committed to protecting what matters most to Manitobans in a balanced, responsible and responsive manner. We're ready and prepared to tackle change in circumstances and challenges of today. We are providing, in this budget, a commitment to return to balance by 2014, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we—in this budget, we've provided for a 3.9 per cent decrease in spending. I know members opposite would probably like to take a hatchet as they did in the 1990s.

And in fact, in my time, I was politicized—actively politicized in 1978 when Sterling Rufus Lyon, in this Chamber, took a blowtorch—in fact, you know—only, say, a blowtorch—a flamethrower, to health-care investment in this province, to education—educational investment in this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It took us a decade to recover from the ill-chosen decisions of the 1970s. In fact, it's noteworthy that Premier Lyon's government was a one-term government—a four-year government, which is very unusual in the province of Manitoba. He was turfed out immediately upon being elected and I expect that the same will happen somewhere down the road when the extreme right-wing, mean-spirited, parsimonious, churlish policies of members opposite, when they do again come in to government in this House, I fully expect that the right-wing reaction will be so intense that it will be a four-year interregnum in Manitoba's growth, when members opposite finally do get returned to this office, which I expect will be many, many, many years—may I say terms, from now.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this budget, as I said, we've provided for a 3.9 per cent decrease in

spending overall, which amounts to \$128 million in savings within year. That's balanced with modest increases in areas that don't include provincial sales tax, that don't include provincial income tax, that do include a levy on a litre of fuel which hasn't been touched for over 20 years, that do include other modest measures, increasing the PST to the areas that it affects in the province of Manitoba, very, very balanced and moderate measures that relate to consumption—speaking of birthday yesterday, but—does it in consumption, which is a balanced and reasonable approach to dealing with the expectations of Manitobans, that we continue to build this province while being fiscally responsible.

We are on target to come back into balance at 2014. We already have a record in our 12 years in office as the most frugal and fiscally responsible government in recent history, Mr. Deputy Speaker, 10 consecutive balanced budgets, with the largest growth in the provincial economy in the history of this province. And it's everywhere to be seen; in Brandon, the endangered species that disappeared during the 1990s, the building crane, is back; you could see it at the Brandon family YMCA downtown; at the Brandon University where the wellness centre—Healthy Living Centre, is going up; at Assiniboine Community College and Brandon Regional Health Centre over the years; in the city of Winnipeg, we see the once endangered species, the building crane, on our city streets, a very, very prominent hotel is arising as we speak, across Portage Avenue from the MTS Centre, something—MTS Centre, incidentally, something members opposite voted against when we were trying to bring the Jets back.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, members opposite talk a lot, and they swagger about proclaiming their—you know, their prowess, in terms of those who seem to feel like they've got a self-entitled sense to govern. But we on this side of the House don't take anything for granted in terms of our responsibility to the people of Manitoba. We work hard, each and every day, to deliver for Manitobans and provide an opportunity for all Manitobans to succeed and prosper in a province that cares for their interests, that builds and supports their educational facilities, that builds and supports their health-care facilities, and that builds and supports the infrastructure investment needed to ensure that this province carries forth with prosperity into the future.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, overall this was a—the toughest budget that I've seen in my time here, given

the global recession and given the impacts of that recession, combined with the 2011 flood. It was certainly the most challenging budget. It was an interesting roll out, I have to say, for a budget of this nature, because no sooner had we introduced the most challenging budget in a provincial history that members opposite decided they were going to support the federal government cancelling the most successful immigration program in the—in Canada. Therefore, removing the budget completely from public debate and focusing attention, quite rightfully where it belongs, on the fact that members opposite do not stand up for Manitoba, have never stood up for Manitoba and continue to not stand up for this province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in Brandon, as I said, this has been the most challenging budget that I've seen in our time here, and I give credit to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) for crafting a very fine budget. And I give credit to all my colleagues who are in Cabinet for supporting the Finance Minister in doing the heavy lifting, in doing the hard work that provides for such a document in such challenging times; a document that, as I said, provides for Manitobans to continue prospering and not, as members opposite would have it, punishes Manitobans for a flood last year or for a global economic recession.

In Brandon, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this budget continued to provide for the growth of my home community and continues to—a record of providing historical levers—levels of investment in the City of Brandon, in the infrastructure of the City of Brandon and the community of Brandon at every level. And I would note, in particular, two investments that were articulated specifically in this budget for Brandon.

The first one is very significant, given that we experienced the flood of the millennium in western Manitoba last year and continue to suffer from the impacts of that particular flood event in the deterioration of infrastructure and as particularly roads and bridges in that region. This budget provides for the first tranche of a \$20-million investment in Brandon's levees, the dikes that protect Brandon from flood waters. Five million dollars were—was articulated in this budget to go towards the permanent construction and reinforcement of a one-in-300-year levee system around the City of Brandon. In fact, it will be 100-in-350-years—one-in-350-years, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by the time it's completed.

I know we built—last year at this time, we were completely under the gun in Brandon. I want to give credit to Brandon firefighters, Brandon Police Service, employees of Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation, particularly, which—who worked tirelessly last year to prevent Brandon from going under the floodwaters, members of the Armed Forces and, of course, all volunteers and community members who supported us in our efforts to fight the flood last year, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This \$5-million investment in this year's budget recognizes their commitment to saving our city—their commitment to ensuring that Brandon grows into the future—and supports our belief that every community in this province deserves to have the support of the provincial government when they are impacted in a negative way by any event, whether it be natural—as in the case of the flood—economic, social. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're a government that believes in investing in our communities and the \$5 million, the first tranche of a \$20-million investment that was in this budget, will serve Brandon forever into the future. And I'm grateful to the Finance Minister and my colleagues for ensuring that that particular investment in Brandon made it into this budget.

*(15:40)

The second one, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I want to make specific mention of is the addition of four new firefighter-paramedics, another—an additional unit in Brandon. This unit will save lives from the day it is implemented. It was an election commitment that we made last fall. I—of course, election commitments are made to—we make—can make election commitments. A promise made is a promise kept. When we made this election commitment in last year's election campaign I was very insistent and—as were my colleagues—that a life-saving commitment of this nature would make it into our base budget sooner rather than later, because lives will be saved from the moment this investment is made.

So I'm very thankful and, again, I would like to thank the Finance Minister for ensuring that the new EMS units were in our first budget following the election because this will save lives from day one, and I'd like to acknowledge that. It's a \$400,000 investment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a fairly modest investment in the great scheme of things, but it is an investment that will save lives in Brandon and western Manitoba. And for that I'm very grateful that

this election commitment was fulfilled immediately as opposed to at some point during our term.

My friends at the *Brandon Sun* tell me that Brandon was mentioned 11 times in this particular budget, which was up from 10 times last year and up from nine times the time before. So, you know, I'm glad that the *Brandon Sun* keeps track of these things, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because it gives me some speaking points to speak to the 11 areas in which Brandon was referenced in the 2012 budget and to talk a little about the investment that is associated with those mentions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the—I've already mentioned the \$5 million for the enhancement of the levies, Assiniboine River Valley levies around Brandon, and I've already mentioned the new firefighter-paramedic EMS unit, but this budget continues our investment to support business in downtown Brandon through a 50-50 funding partnership with Renaissance Brandon. And I know that the business community in Brandon—the chamber of commerce is on Rosser Avenue and 11th Street—the chamber in the downtown business community has been very, very supportive and aggressive on their work to develop the economic potential of the city of Brandon and, in terms of the downtown area, develop what is a very large historic asset that can be developed for cultural, tourism and ongoing, economic development opportunities into the future. Our government's very proud to continue our support of the downtown business community through the 50-50 partnership with Renaissance Brandon.

We also, Mr. Deputy Speaker, referenced the tax increment financing program that we put in place and, in Brandon, the most significant one to date is with the historic McKenzie Seeds tower and complex in downtown Brandon. The McKenzie Seeds complex is one of Canada's largest industrial, agricultural-based, industrial complex from the last century. It's something that you don't usually see in a city the size of Brandon. It's something you'd—more often would see in the Exchange District of Winnipeg, or in Toronto, or in Canada's larger cities. In fact, the owners of McKenzie Seeds building are from the lower mainland of British Columbia and they are well in process for creating 150-odd apartment units and condo units in that very large industrial space in the downtown of the city of Brandon, the core area of the city of Brandon.

And I want to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that that project is going to be an extraordinary boon to

Manitoba, and to Brandon as it continues towards completion. And I'd like to also acknowledge the strong support of the business community in developing this particular project and encourage other business people in Brandon to take advantage of the tax increment financing program that the province of Manitoba has to encourage and to support them in developing larger, older buildings not only in Brandon, but also in Winnipeg and elsewhere in the province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we also referenced our continued investment in affordable housing in the city of Brandon. We have nearing completion the Massey-Harris warehouse building on Pacific Avenue in downtown Brandon, another historic warehouse, a turn of the century vintage that is a partnership between the Canadian Mental Health Association, the Brandon Friendship Centre and Habitat for Humanity. That particular warehouse conversion will have 54 units including emergency shelters, and I look forward to it. It's opening this year.

At Brandon University, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I've made reference to the fact that we have a visit from the once endangered species, the building crane at Brandon University, the Wellness Centre and the Healthy Living Centre at Brandon University is going up and I look forward to its completion during this fiscal year. It's going to be an extraordinary facility for the Brandon University Bobcats and the larger community, with a field house that will seat 3,000 people on completion, so it's a— it will be a very, very welcome addition to the athletic world in western Manitoba.

The downtown YMCA in Brandon also has one of those once-endangered building cranes on its site right now as it goes up in downtown Brandon, providing for a complete renewal of aquatic facilities in the downtown core through the completion of the Dood Cristall downtown family YMCA. And I know that many, many people in our community, Mr. Deputy Speaker, particularly families, are looking forward to the completion of that facility.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, continuing a theme about recreation facilities and healthy living centres, the sportsplex pool, Canada Games Sportsplex Pool, was also referenced in the 2012 budget and, as members may know, Brandon is making a bid for the 2017 Canada Games and this sportsplex pool will be a central part to the successful hosting of the Canada Games in Manitoba and in Brandon in 2017.

And I want to thank again the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) for ensuring that the Brandon University Healthy Living Centre, the downtown Brandon family YMCA and the Canada Games Sportsplex Pool are all referenced and supported by this budget and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, indeed, last year's budget. And, dare I say, as we move forward into the Canada Games, future investments will also be made in these areas to support not only the Canada Games bid and a successful Canada Games, but also athletics and healthy living in western Manitoba.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to, in closing—I just want to make mention of a couple of items that remain on our agenda moving forward in Brandon.

Of course, we continue to invest in Assiniboine Community College and the transformation of Brandon's North Hill campus, which has the largest concentration of outstanding monumental architecture in western Canada. That particular site is being transformed into a world-class, post-secondary institution and Assiniboine Community College is, and all Manitobans are going to be, a beneficiary of this legacy investment in rural Manitoba, to provide for skilled training for generations of young people and also to allow us all something to aim for whenever we take on a project, to aim high, to seek the best in the world and to try and achieve the best in the world. And I'm very, very proud to stand with the government that has made consistent investments in Assiniboine Community College and in this vision for an institution that will give, and provide, Manitoba with, along with our outstanding development of Red River College in the Exchange District, and our investments at Keewatin—college—University of the North, to provide for world-class training opportunities and world-class educational opportunities here in Manitoba.

Also, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the Brandon docket, moving forward, during the 2011 election, we also committed to a restoration of the bed tower at the Brandon Regional Health Centre. And we continue to work towards achieving that commitment during the course of our mandate, at which time the entire campus of the Brandon Regional Health Centre, formerly the Brandon Hospital, will have been completely transformed, from a 1950s facility to a world-class, cancer care headquarters, to a world-class surgical suites, to world-class neonatal units, to the complete redevelopment of the Westman Laboratory.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that bed tower commitment, when it is achieved, will have seen the complete and utter transformation of health-care services in western Manitoba to a world-class level, something that's never been seen in that part of the province ever before. And I'm very proud to be part of a government that believes in investing in health care in my home community but also around the province.

I drove by the Misericordia hospital earlier today on my way to work here at the Legislature and I'm very, very happy to see yet another one of those endangered species that disappeared during the 1990s, a building crane at the Misericordia Health Centre, rebuilding that very important health-care infrastructure.

* (15:50)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, incidentally, I should mention there was only one hospital ever closed in this province over the last 20 years. It was Misericordia Hospital. It was closed by members opposite during their time in office. Today, we are rebuilding that facility and creating world-class infrastructure in the city of Winnipeg, in the city of Brandon and, in fact, elsewhere throughout the province of Manitoba, wherever we make investments in health-care infrastructure.

Last but not least, it's a global issue—major commitment during the last election campaign to remove property taxes for seniors in this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We made a step towards fulfilling that commitment in this budget by increasing the seniors' tax credit to \$1,075. That is a very helpful step moving forward.

We are a government that believes in fulfilling our commitments when we make them; we're a government that believes in investing in this province and investing in Manitoba; we're a government that believes in providing all Manitobans with equal opportunity to achieve what they most desire in life; to provide Manitobans with a province that's second to none in this country, with a province that's second to none to live, work and play in the world. And I'm very proud to stand with the government that believes in investing in Manitoba, in supporting Manitobans, to—investing in families, to—investing in communities and not to ideologically be blinkered by tax cuts and churlish, mean-spirited policies that serve to punish Manitobans.

I believe in supporting Manitobans, building Manitoba, and as my colleague, the honourable Minister for Local Government (Mr. Lemieux), reminds me, when members opposite were confronted with the decision about budgets, they sold the Manitoba Telephone System to the Charleswood-Tuxedo family compact.

We're a government. We're not selling Manitoba Hydro, we're investing in Hydro, we're building this province and we're going to continue to build this province for as long as we're in office.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Before I get into the pith and substance of my response, I want to say to the member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell), you know, I was disappointed when he was not named the military envoy for the government. I thought he would have been a natural, of course, representing Shilo, and I thought it strange that his own government, his own caucus, had such little faith in him to be able to take on that role that they decided to give it to somebody who wasn't even in government anymore, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But then after hearing his speech, I guess, I'm not surprised, Mr. Deputy Speaker, why that is. After all those emergency rooms in western Manitoba, not far from where he lives, were closed down, and then he has the audacity to stand up and say that nothing had been closed down. I wonder how that'll play with the many western Manitobans who don't have an emergency room to go to because this government has closed it down.

So, I stood up—or I came into the Legislature this morning, sympathetic to the member for Brandon East, disappointed that his government would overlook him for that role, that everybody on the backbench was overlooked for that role, that they had to go to somebody who had ostensibly retired, and—but I'm not so sympathetic anymore. Perhaps the Premier (Mr. Selinger) actually saw that there wasn't the kind of capacity in there, and I think that that speech just confirmed the Premier's lack of confidence in the member for Brandon East.

I do want to welcome all the members back. You know, every time we give our, sort of, first speech after the session begins, you always feel like it's a brand new session, because we don't sit very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's tough to get this government to come back into the Legislature, and so you feel like you should welcome all the pages

back and welcome all the table officers back and commend the Speaker, and I'll do all that, but you sort of wish that we sat more often so you wouldn't always have to say hi to people like they're long-lost family friends, because we sit so infrequently here in the Legislature. *[interjection]* But I'm not surprised that my friend from St. Paul refers to the fact that perhaps the government is lazy. I certainly believe that—*[interjection]*—that's—I stand corrected. He indicated, lazy socialists. I would say that being lazy is probably a part of it. I think a bigger part of it is the unwillingness to be held accountable for things that are done.

And then that brings me to the issue, you know, of the budget and the lack of accountability, the lack of keeping your word, a fundamental thing that I think, you know, all Manitobans—wherever they live in the province of Manitoba, whether they're rural or urban, whether they're new Manitobans or whether they've been here their entire lives—Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think all of them would fundamentally agree that we should all keep our word. That that would be one of the things that is a base principle that society generally would be better off if you could trust a person for what they were saying.

In fact, I've heard some of my colleagues, I think the member for La Verendrye (Mr. Smook) indicate that when he was in business, and he was for many years, that he did many deals by a handshake, that simply by shaking an individual's hand and saying we've got a deal and my handshake is good enough. I think the old expression, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is my word is my bond. What a great saying that is, right? My word is my bond. It sort of takes all the legalities that you have with issues of bonds and trying to have securities for things in contractual situations, but it says all of those legalities are unnecessary because my word is, in fact, that bond. That's as good as anything on paper. It's as good as a contract.

But here we have this government in contrast to that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, who, before the election on numerous occasions on the airwaves, on radio, in print, on their own government website said I want to assure you—this is the Premier (Mr. Selinger) speaking, I want to assure you that we're not going to raise taxes. In fact, he said that the financial plan was right on track, nothing to worry about. He went even further than that. He was—had disparaging remarks about the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen), was upset that the Leader of the Official Opposition would ever question his word, would

ever say anything that—in fact, the suggestion was that the Premier wasn't being truthful.

Well, now we find out some seven months later—after the news release was issued, after the words went across Manitoba via the airwaves, Mr. Deputy Speaker—that the Premier was not a friend of the truth, in fact—that he was a stranger to the truth—because he told Manitobans—he gave them their word. He gave them a metaphorical handshake, like the member for La Verendrye used to do with his business partners, and said this is my word and I'm going to stand by it. That's what he did by the election.

And by extension with that—and the member for La Verendrye, if I could continue on with the business analogy a bit, when he gave his word, any of his employees, who were under his employment at the time, by extension they were giving their word. They were committed, because they were part of the company and the business. And it's no different in politics. When the Premier gave his word that there would be no new tax increases, each one of those MLAs sitting across the way, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by extension gave a promise as well. And that promise was to each of the people that they went and knocked on the doors with and handed out brochures. Everybody that they spoke to and said we are not going to raise taxes to balance the budget, they issued their word to those individuals. They essentially stuck out their hand and they said my word is my bond, we're going to do this on a handshake.

Now, they may not care, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that they've broken their word, that they've essentially lied to each one of their constituents. That might not bother them at all. They'll go back, I suppose, to their meetings and they'll try to explain it away and say, well, yes, we said one thing, but, you know, circumstances change and, you know, fragile economy and all this. All of those things were, of course, known at the time that they made their promise, but they'll try to explain it away and they'll probably think it's too cute to be half. And I'm sure that when the different members—the member for Dawson Trail (Mr. Lemieux) and the member for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson) and the Finance Minister—when they huddle together after the Legislature is done, they pat themselves on the back and they say: Well, that was pretty slick, wasn't it? We told them one thing and they voted for us and, whoa, we're back in government. We still got the government cars. We got the government office. And, well, what

a good trick we turned on the people of Manitoba. We told them something that wasn't true, and they bought it hook, line and sinker. Well, you know, they might feel quite proud about themselves about that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but there's a bigger issue at play here.

And one of the things—and I was talking to one of my colleagues, the member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon), about this just a few minutes ago. As I said, one of the things that concerns me is the overall impression that people have about politics and, by extension, politicians in general, that there's already an unfortunate belief out there that politicians, when they say something, that they aren't telling the truth. That's a negative thing that reflects on all of us, regardless of which political party we've run for, regardless of which riding we live in, regardless of what we've done before.

* (16:00)

When we sign up for the role of politician, we all have to, unfortunately, bear that broader perception. And by doing what the government done, by doing what the Finance Minister and the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and each one of those members of Cabinet and each one of those members of caucus, by doing what they have done by being dishonest with the people of Manitoba, they have fed into that perception.

And maybe it met the needs of the member for Riel (Ms. Melnick) and the member for Dawson Trail (Mr. Lemieux). Maybe it got them back to where they wanted to be in terms of government, and they're all very smug and they sort of slap each other on the back and, oh well, the ends justify the means. But I'd like them to think at a—maybe a bit of a higher level, a little bit beyond themselves, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in terms of what they've done to this institution, the institution of politics.

You know, and I thought that the campaign itself, when it comes to the negative advertising, the desire to try to drive down voter turnout through a—misleading and negative ads, that I thought was troubling enough and I won't go into a large dissertation on that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I spoke about that in the very brief sitting that we had back in November, but I thought that that was concerning enough, that that kind of American-style politicians—or politics would be brought here to Manitoba.

But now they've added on to that. They've gone one step further. Not only are they—were they

engaged in the negative smear-and-fear campaign that they ran in terms of the advertising, but now they've added on to that by lying to every Manitoba in this great province by telling them that we weren't going to raise taxes and then increasing it by some 180–\$586 million. In fact, it'll probably be larger than that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I suspect they're lowballing the numbers and they'll actually come in significantly higher as time goes on.

And it served their purpose, but did it serve a broader purpose that all Manitobans now just feed into this understanding—ah, well, you know, politicians, that's sort of how things go. I'm sure that's what the government is hoping that Manitobans will believe.

But I actually think, Mr. Deputy Speaker—and time will bear this out—but I actually think this might be a little bit different, because I think at some point, you know, you can only fill the glass so full and then things start to spill over and there are actually repercussions, and I think we might actually be at that point. Certainly, when I talked to Manitobans over the last number of weeks, we've seen great concern. Many of them have expressed their outrage and, sure enough, there are some who say, well, you know, what do you expect from the NDP? What do you expect from politicians? They'll say one thing before the election and then do something else.

But there is an underlying, I think, deeper concern—and I don't know if I want to use the word "anger," Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think Manitobans can speak for themselves on that. But there's something else that's going out on there and you may have heard it. I suspect some of the members opposite have heard it. They probably don't want to say it. But there are people who are quite upset about the fact that not only were they not told the truth, but that it's going to impact them so negatively in their pocketbooks, that it's going to hit them so hard in their pocketbooks.

So I think that maybe the NDP actually overplayed their card this time, and while they are quite smug and arrogant, some might say, and happy to have deceived Manitobans because it resulted in the electoral result that they were hoping for, I think they may have overplayed it and that they should be very concerned about that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I know that in this particular budget there are a lot of things that were overlooked, that weren't discussed, that didn't get the attention that they deserve, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and some of them

relate to the justice area that I'd like to speak about more broadly.

I do want to address, before we get further into that, just some of the comments by the member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell) on the issue of immigration and the fact that they refused to support the Provincial Nominee Program in the 1990s. In fact, that each one of the New Democrats at that time in government, they stood up and voted against the Provincial Nominee Program, that they didn't have the foresight that the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) and many other members of the then-Filmon government had, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to know that this would be one of the engines that would drive growth in the province of Manitoba—that they didn't understand the consequences of how important that program was.

And it wasn't easy, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to get back the—some of the control over the issue of immigration from the federal Liberals at the time. They didn't give it up easily, and they wanted to keep control completely regarding immigration and who could actually come to the province of Manitoba. But it was the foresight of the member for River East and other members of the Filmon government at that time, who saw, in advance, many years in advance, how important this would be.

And this is a government, I think, that lacks foresight. They don't look ahead. They sort of live for the day, and that is symbolic of the fact that they say one thing when it comes to taxes and balancing the budget, and then turn around and do something completely different. They were living for the day on September 2nd of last year when the Premier (Mr. Selinger) issued a statement and said, we're not going to raise any more taxes, we're not going to do that to balance the budget. They were just living for that day. They weren't looking forward any further than that, thinking, you know, what impact this might have on the general feeling of politics in the province of Manitoba. They weren't looking any further ahead about what impact it would have on the pockets of Manitoba. And they weren't looking further ahead about the impact of the growing debt that each one of our children and our grandchildren are someday going to have to pay back, because they simply live for the day.

And so, whether it was them voting against great programs like the Provincial Nominee Program and not supporting those new Canadians or making statements prior to the election, they simply don't

look far enough ahead. They have an inability to see five or six moves ahead. And I would say that great governments are defined by that. Great governments are not defined by the living in the moment or the living in the day. Great governments are those that can look ahead and see what the trends are, what's going to be changing, what's going to be happening, and respond to it well before the impacts of those trends actually happen. And we certainly saw that in many ways with the former government in relation to the Provincial Nominee Program. But this government simply doesn't have that sort of foresight. They just live for the moment, and, ultimately, in the long run, each and every Manitoban pays as a result of that lack of foresight. And this is a budget that simply lacks any sort of foresight.

When we talk about the area of justice, so little in the budget in the area of justice, I tend to think maybe that—I don't think it was forgotten. I think it's difficult to forget the fact that we are the murder capital of Canada, that we're the violent crime capital of Canada. None of those things are positive. None of us like to say those sort of things, but they're facts. They're reality. You can't ignore them. You have to deal with the issue.

But they didn't deal with the issue in this budget. They hardly talked about the issue of law and order at all. There were no new initiatives. The Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan) pulled out his old dusty briefing note and read—even today, he dusted off the cobwebs and he said the same thing he's been saying for two years, and the same thing that the former attorney general, the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak), was saying for three years before that, and the same thing that the member for St. Johns (Mr. Mackintosh) was saying for five years before that.

And yet nothing has changed. We still have this growing gang problem—street gang problem. We still have an incredibly—in comparison to the rest of Canada—violent city and violent province. And yet nothing was talked about. It's as though, and I don't know if this is the case or not, that the government has essentially given up, that they've thrown up their hands and said, you know what, we don't have a solution, we don't think that there is anything that we know, in terms of our own ideas, that's going to improve this situation, so let's not talk about it at all; let's not raise it as an issue in the budget, because if we do, it will draw attention to it, and we really don't have any solutions.

And so I tend to think that that's probably what happened when they were sitting around and determining what would go in the budget and the different priorities that would go in the budget—that they simply said, we don't have any idea, let's not really talk about it at all.

And that's quite upsetting, because without any solutions, I simply don't think that things are going to get better. This is not a situation that's going to improve on its own. Doing a little bit of research—or I should give credit where credit is due, I think one of my staff members checked to see that there was—since the NDP came into government, there's been about 550 murders in this province—550—it's an astounding number, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And if I went and I looked at the number of assaults, and if I went and looked at the number of violent crimes, I mean, the number would be absolutely stunning. And when you compare it to other provinces on a per capita basis, it's even worse. And yet the government seems to have said, well, there's really nothing we can do. We're sort of out of ideas and so we're not even going to talk about it, we're not even going to discuss it anymore; maybe if we don't talk about it, people won't even notice it and then their concern about it will go down.

But of course it won't, because every day we see different actions that are—hit the papers or go on to their radio airwaves or—you know, I was with the member for St. Paul (Mr. Schuler) a little bit earlier on and saw a bunch of police cars blocking off a street. And you go, oh, you know, it's sort of how it is, you know. Every day there's a police car blocking off a street, you know, who knows what was happening? Maybe it was serious, maybe it wasn't. Doesn't even surprise us anymore.

*(16:10)

Didn't even surprise us anymore, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And perhaps that's the government's strategy, to try to get people to become immune to it and not be feeling concern about it anymore, to think it's just how things are everywhere; it's a society thing. And it's not. Because when you look at other jurisdictions, when you look at some of the things happening in Saskatchewan, our neighbour to the west, there are a number of different communities and areas of crime which are being reduced.

When you look in British Columbia, they've done a very good job in terms of certain aspects of violent crime that have been reduced. In fact, Manitoba is the exception; it's not the rule, Mr.

Deputy Speaker. We are the exception that things are actually getting worse, not better, on a relative basis when it comes to crime and violent crime.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I suspect that's why the government has simply threw up their hands and decided not to speak about the issue of justice within the context of their budget. And I think that all of us would be very concerned by that.

In fact, I would say that this is a government that is essentially on cruise control. You know, every time a budget comes up, they go around and instead of doing any sort of program review or things such as zero-based budgeting, where you look at the different programs and try to make sure that they're running effectively and efficiently, they just sit down on a department-by-department basis. They line up those departments and they say, well, we're going to increase this budget by 2 per cent, this one by 3, this one by 2. Here's one, we'll hold the line on this one; this one by 2; one by 3.

But there's no logic to it. There's no rationale for it. They simply line up the departments like a deck of cards, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and just assign an arbitrary number in terms of what the increase or what the—or, in rare cases, what the decrease might be, to that particular department.

Well, that's no way to run anything. I mean, you certainly wouldn't, in your home, sit down every year and say, well, you know, we're just going to, on a percentage basis, raise how much we spend here and raise how much we spend there. I think that most families, when they look at their budgets, they sort of go through and say, okay, what of our needs? What's working well? You know, what are the unexpected expenses we're going to have this year? And they sort of work through it that way.

This government takes the lazy way. And I go back to the member for St. Paul when he said that they—they're a lazy government. They just simply sit down and randomly appoint how much expenditures they're going to do. There's no logic to it. There's no rhyme or reason to it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and then they get themselves into situations where, in fact, they have to increase the taxes and break their promise.

And so that is what is concerning to me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the issue of the budget. It simply lacks any common sense. You know, I would describe it as a phrase I'm going to take from somewhere else, but we simply have to return to

reason. We have to return to reason. It is not reasonable to continue to expend and to run deficit in the half-billion-dollar range or the billion-dollar range and to continue to go back to Manitobans and expect them to pick up the slack. It is not a reasonable way to run a home, it's not a reasonable way to run a business and it certainly isn't a reasonable way to run a government.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it'll come as no surprise to members opposite that I've decided to vote against this budget. Had a number of thought about it, you know, and decided that I won't be supporting the budget.

I would have liked to have seen a prebudget consultation meeting in the city of Steinbach. Members opposite might not know that the city of Steinbach is now the third largest city in the province of Manitoba. By my calculation—and it's not hard math to figure out—but by my calculation, since the NDP were elected, there's been one prebudget meeting in the city of Steinbach since they were elected.

Now, you know, I'm—[*interjection*] and the member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire) indicates that I'm lucky, and perhaps I should, you know, just take what I get and be satisfied, but, you know, I'm not quite satisfied because the city of Steinbach is one of the most financially prosperous communities, because people are hard workers. They know what the, you know, how to watch their funds, you know, that things are growing quickly because this government brought in the Provincial Nominee Program, even though that government voted against it; the NDP members all voted against the Provincial Nominee Program.

And so you'd think that this government would rush out to the city of Steinbach to have a prebudget meeting and want to hear their views, you know, what is it that you're doing that works so well. Maybe we could emulate some of that in different parts of the province, you know, take some suggestions. They don't want to hear it at all, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because they know what they're going to hear. They're know what they're going to hear and they're not willing to do it. They're too lazy to do it.

The member for St. Paul (Mr. Schuler), I think, crystallized it right at the beginning of my remarks: they are simply too lazy to do the hard work of budgeting. They're simply too lazy to go and look at what is working and what isn't, where can we do

things more effectively, where can we do things more efficiently. That's a hard thing to do, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There's a much lazier way to do it, and that's the way that this government does it every time.

So, for those reasons, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the fact that it's a lazy approach to budgeting; it doesn't have the foresight, it doesn't look forward in terms of how things are going to change in the future how Manitobans are going to pay for things, but most critically because it was disingenuous with Manitobans. The fact that this government lied to Manitobans six months ago—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order. Just to advise the member for Steinbach, we're all honourable members here. I would ask him to choose his words carefully and bear in mind that we are all honourable members. The word “lying” is somewhat inappropriate.

Okay, the Clerk has advised me that the use of the word “lying” was actually brought up as a point last week and that it is under advisement. So we'll let it rest at this point until we have a ruling from the Speaker in that regard.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, on a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Point of Order

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Opposition House Leader, on a point of order.

Mrs. Taillieu: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that statement last week on Thursday was taken under advisement and then another statement was made very similar, and the Speaker let it go. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member speaking did not accuse anyone in this Chamber of lying. He simply said, in general, lies were being said to Manitobans. So I would think that this certainly should be something that the member should be allowed to proceed without further—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes, on the point of order of the Opposition House Leader, she is correct that this issue was raised before. But, as I said, the Chair took it under advisement as of last week and I would hope that we could remain as is until such time that the Chair has made a ruling on the call last week.

* * *

Mr. Goertzen: I think it's fair to say that the concept of the truth does not live in the NDP caucus and that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it simply doesn't exist within the four walls of the NDP caucus. And Manitobans will be the ultimate judge of that, as they often are, and we certainly will let them pass judgment on it. Because, I mean, I know that there are certain rules and I want to adhere to those rules. I never want to run afoul to the rules here in the Legislature.

* (16:20)

But, you know, Manitobans, they don't sort of live by the colloquial rules of the Legislature, you know. They're plain-speaking folk; they tell it like it is, and I suspect that the word that you are cautioning us not to use here in the Legislature, in the coffee shops and in the community centres and in different parts of Winnipeg—we certainly hear that word, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You may have, too. It's hard not to come back and reflect what Manitobans say. When Manitobans say to me that, you know, the member for St. Vital (Ms. Allan) told them something that wasn't factual—and, of course, they use different language, and so I want to come here and reflect—reflect the words and the attitude of Manitobans, but until you or your—the Speaker rules on that, we'll be cautious.

But it doesn't change the fact, and it doesn't change the fact that there were things that were said prior to the election, things that were said during the election that don't line up with what we see in this budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is indisputable fact. Regardless of the rules of this Chamber, the rules of *Beauchesne* or Marleau and Montpetit, those are simply the facts that this government did and said something different before the election than what has shown up in this budget. And for us to actually vote for this budget would be saying that that's okay, that we no longer believe in the handshake concept that the member for La Verendrye (Mr. Smook) used to run his business on, that we no longer believe in the old axiom that my word is my bond, that we no longer believe that people shouldn't be held to a standard of truth.

And I still believe that Manitobans expect us—still expect us to believe and to adhere to the old axiom of truth, that they want to believe that when we say something that we mean it, and that we're going to carry through; that they want to deal with a business person like the member for La Verendrye—when he gives you a price he shakes your hand, then he says that's going to be the price and you can trust

me. I think that that's what Manitobans expect from business leaders, from politicians, from those in the community centres, from their neighbours, from their friends, from everybody they deal with. Why would they expect less from their government? Why should they expect less from their government, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

And I say that any member on that side who votes for this budget is essentially saying that they will no longer adhere to the feeling that Manitobans can simply trust their word, that Manitobans can believe what they say, that Manitobans can take them at face value. And I say that that's a sad day for Manitoba; it's a sad day for democracy, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you can no longer trust those who've been entrusted with so much. Thank you very much.

Hon. Flor Marcelino (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism): Mr. Deputy Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of the budget tabled by the honourable Finance Minister last Tuesday, April 17th. It is an honour and joy for me to add a few words in support of the 2012 budget, along with my colleagues from this side of the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this budget supports families who are the core of our province. It builds a strong, innovative economy and strengthens communities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please allow me first to offer to you my congratulations in your election as Deputy Speaker and also congratulations to the Speaker of the 40th Legislature. I also wish to welcome the new pages and interns and to thank all the officers of the Legislative Assembly. I thank Patricia Chaychuk and Rick Yarish, Clerk and Deputy Clerk, and the table officers and committee clerks, as they ensure proceedings in the Chamber and in committees are orderly and proper.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would also wish to congratulate all the returning members and to welcome and congratulate the newly elected colleagues from the government side and the opposition. It is truly an honour and a privilege to receive the trust of the electorate, whom we all intend to serve in whatever capacity is given us, be it in opposition or in government.

At the last election, the New Democratic Party, which I am so proud to represent, was returned to govern Manitoba for the fourth consecutive term and each term with more plurality than the earlier one.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you would remember in the 1999 elections, it started with 31 elected NDP members out of 57, followed by 35 in 2003, 36 in 2007, and in this past election, 37 elected members.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm honoured and grateful to be given the chance to serve my constituents anew, this time in the newly named Logan constituency. I would like to express my gratitude to the constituents of Logan for the opportunity to serve them and the province and you through my constituency office and through the portfolio I hold of Culture, Heritage and Tourism.

My staff and I see each day as an opportunity to serve my constituency in the province of Manitoba. These opportunities will not be possible without the help and support of so many people, foremost of which is my husband, Orlando, my children, Malaya, Diwa, Mayon, Awit and Lualhati, the many members of Broadway Disciples United Church, relatives, friends, my constituency executive and the many supporters from the Filipino, First Nations and Aboriginal, Chinese, Vietnamese, Portuguese, South and Southeast Asian, African, Caribbean communities.

I'm so thankful to the many volunteers, young and not so young, who tirelessly offered their time and talents during the campaign period. My church minister, Reverend Dr. Raymond Cuthbert, and his wife, Grace, were among the many phone canvassers at the election campaign office. Many of the volunteers have full-time jobs and will go straight to the campaign office after hours to do the important tasks as phone canvassers, sign crew or going out and distributing campaign materials.

I will need several minutes to enumerate all the volunteers who contributed to the success of my election campaign. I will just mention a few names: Roy *[phonetic]*, Reesa *[phonetic]*, Sousa *[phonetic]* and Jean *[phonetic]*, Joemie *[phonetic]* and her mother, Marlene *[phonetic]*, Joelle *[phonetic]*, Danny *[phonetic]*, Michael, Al, Rene *[phonetic]*, Gerry *[phonetic]*. There are many, many more, including those who donated precious funds to keep the campaign going. I'm so grateful for their generous contribution.

There was a constituent who sent me a cheque and indicated it was not a big amount since she did not have much. With the cheque came a note that expressed her trust in me and her belief that I will do my best in fulfilling my duties. She also wrote that she was praying that I and my party will win the

election. I'm so indebted to her and the many supporters.

At the announcement portion during the Sunday worship service at my church following the October election, I publicly expressed my gratitude for the support given by my church family and the renewed trust given by the electorate, and I reaffirmed my commitment to serve my constituents and the province to the best of my abilities.

On October 5th, the day after the elections, I reported for work at the Legislative Building. The first MLA that I saw at the front steps of the building was the member from St. Boniface, the Premier (Mr. Selinger). When I first—when I was first elected in 2007, the first MLA I met on the front steps was the MLA for Rossmere (Ms. Braun), who was also a newbie like me. I will always remember these small moments. Also, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on Friday morning, October 7th, our constituency office reopened its doors to the public. I would also like to thank my staff at the Legislative Building and the constituency office for their hard work, dedication and utmost competence in performing their work.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Budget 2012 brings much good news to my constituents in Logan. I started going out and visiting constituents starting this January two to three times a week until the second week in April. I will resume these visits again, even once a week, when in session. The new Logan constituency contains many medium- and high-rise dwellings, in addition to single residential homes. It is my goal this term to visit the whole area and connect with as many constituents as possible. I was able to meet many constituents and am heartened by these visits. Since this is a new constituency, I'm meeting many for the first time. Some expressed surprise to see me so soon after an election. A few had asked if there is an election coming up again. Many said they voted for me although they have not met me. Going out, meeting my constituents, be it for the first time or not, I'm able to create stronger connections and form deeper relationships with my community.

* (16:30)

In the course of visiting constituents, I encountered many issues and concerns and, thankfully, my constituency office is able to provide assistance. It feels so good to learn that one constituent, who experienced problems at work and had been without a job for a year, was able to return

to work thanks to the advocacy work done by staff. With assistance given to a constituent who needed additional medical resource, it did wonders for his speedy recovery. Another constituent was helped with MPI issue.

This visits, for some, turned out to be sharing of tips and knowledge in job hunting. For others, it became a brief session in positive thinking to help in their medical healing. For many, it was a joy to learn things are well at work and in their children's schools. I was touched by the appreciation expressed by many for the visits. This visits also led to community action. For instance, to respond to widespread need for a meaningful employment, our constituency office is embarking on a job fair, which will be held this coming Saturday, April 28th from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the gymnasium of the Hugh John MacDonald School on Bannatyne Avenue. I'm thankful the—for the many employers like Manitoba Hydro, civil service, Canad Inns, Manitoba Lotteries, Safeway, HyLife farms and a few more that will participate in this event. I hope and pray it will be a worthwhile event for both employers and job seekers.

Constituency work has rewards and challenges. Whenever positive case-work results are obtained, it compensates for the new—few instances when our expended efforts did not result in the constituent's expectations.

Hearing the honourable Finance Minister read to us the Budget 2012 last Tuesday, I felt great pride and joy that this budget embodies the core values and principles our government adhered to and what my constituents mentioned to me, such as strengthening universal health care, accessing education and training, stimulating the economy, adding housing units and child-care spaces, increasing minimum wage, providing resources to make communities safe and supporting institutions and organizations that contribute to the quality of life of Manitobans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government has remained faithful to the vision and ideals of the likes of J.S. Woodsworth, Tommy Douglas and Stanley Knowles, who worked long and hard to build a just, safe and prosperous society. It is for those ideals, and the committed effort in achieving those ideals, that noted historian, writer and broadcaster Pierre Berton spoke out about the NDP legacy when he posed the question, quote: Where would we be without the NDP? It and its predecessor have been the conscience of Canada. End of quote.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I fully appreciated the immense wealth Manitoba possesses when I was entrusted the position of Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism. I have heard in the past how well regarded Manitoba's artists and cultural institutions were outside the province, but to be confronted with this reality daily is such a joy to behold.

Most often when abundant beauty is right beside you, it can be taken for granted. I think when the Creator opened up the heavens and poured the blessings of life, liberty and happiness, there was an overabundance of happiness poured to Manitoba in the form of excellent musicians, dancers, writers, visual artists, stage performers, filmmakers, cooks, bakers, to name a few. And we are hearing more and more outsiders extol, recognize and acknowledge Manitoba's beauty and talents.

What a rich heritage Manitoba received from the traditions and customs of First Nations, Métis and Inuit, followed later by European settlers, and now immigrants from across the globe.

Manitoba is enhanced by breathtaking flora and fauna, geology and landscape. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is, indeed, a great delight to have all this rich heritage and culture as they all make for a compelling and enviable tourist destination. When you add the warm, friendly people and the many festivals year round, Manitoba offers international and out-of-province tourists top-notch, memorable experience, and many more Manitobans are seeing that for themselves.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is true that there is so much to rejoice and be thankful for in Manitoba. At the same time, we are aware of the many challenges Manitobans face, all the governments of the world were affected by the economic downturn which started in 2008, 2009. Although Manitoba was not as hard hit as other places, nevertheless, there are sectors in industries that are facing difficulties. Of course, natural calamities when they come, such as last year's unprecedented flood-related damages, caused grief and pain and hit resources hard.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

It is often heard that when the going gets tough, the tough get going. That is Manitoba's 2012 budget. It is a budget that protects what matters most to Manitobans. Mr. Speaker, it is a balanced, responsible—and ready to respond to the challenges of the day.

Mr. Speaker, through record flood waters and the global recession our government has protected jobs and the services Manitoba families count on, and Budget 2012 is finding responsible ways to reduce spending. As Manitoba moves forward through uncertain times, Budget 2012 is protecting the things that matter most to families, including improvements to health care, education, apprenticeship, job training, infrastructure. Budget 2012 will tackle today's challenges the way we always have, with a balanced approach that protects the priorities of families and keeps our economy growing. When the global downturn hit, we took action.

Mr. Speaker, our responsible—responsive, balanced approach has kept Manitoba moving forward through record flooding and a global financial crisis. Our balanced approach has produced steady economic growth, an unemployment rate that—amongst the lowest in Canada and strong growth in our population.

There are people, some of whom are seated across the way, who have called for deep cuts to balance the budget. Others have called for major cuts to new spending on new programs. We have chosen a balanced approach that protects the things that matter most to Manitobans. Mr. Speaker, during uncertain times family look for creative ways to cut expenses; so is our government. We are seeking out administrative savings to make sure more money goes directly into schools and hospitals.

My constituency, Logan, along with all other constituents in the province will be heartened that health care is a foremost concern for our government. Budget 2012 will provide faster care—faster cancer testing and treatment and provide free cancer drugs for all patients, allowing more patients to remain at home. It will hire more doctors, nurses, physician assistants, nurse practitioners and health technologist. It will increase the tobacco tax by 2.5 cents per cigarette to reduce smoking rates. It will provide all Manitobans access to a family doctor by 2012. It will invest in QuickCare clinics. It will build and open new health-care facilities. By the way, Mr. Speaker, there is another huge project under way in my constituency: construction of the new women's hospital at the Health Sciences complex, which will benefit not just residents of Logan, but all of Manitoba. Also, constituents of Logan will be delighted to learn that Budget 2012 will continue to invest in downtown Winnipeg.

* (16:40)

For several days now our colleagues from the other side of the Chamber spoke of doom and gloom as a result of 2.5 cents increase in gas prices per litre. Mr. Speaker, Budget 2012 is raising new revenues fairly to protect the things that matter most to families. For every dollar collected for increased gas taxes, \$2 will go towards building of roads and bridges, support road and highway improvements, including repairing flood damages. Budget 2012 will allow the renewal of over 2,400 kilometres of roads, improve flood-protection measures in Brandon and along the Assiniboine River and Lake Manitoba, and we'll proceed with Manitoba's 10-year highway renewal plan to spend \$4 billion over 10 years on Manitoba's highways.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2012 is finding responsible ways to reduce spending. Manitoba's an affordable place to work, live and raise a family, and we're focused on making sure that that doesn't change by ensuring all Manitobans can access the lowest bundle of utilities anywhere in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba has many advantages. We have one of the most affordable costs of living in the country and a high quality of life that makes our province a great place to live, work, invest and raise a family. Just a brief example: it costs \$40 to take a road test in Ontario; in Manitoba, only \$30.

Manitoba Hydro's low electricity rates and reliable service makes an attractive place for businesses and consumers alike. Mr. Speaker, it is worthwhile to compare how much Ontarians are paying for their hydro bills compared to Manitobans. I know, in the early 2000s, my son paid way more for his very small apartment's monthly hydro bill in Toronto than to our Winnipeg house with a much bigger space. We are richly blessed with abundantly clean and renewable hydro that provides affordable power for Manitoba families and businesses. Hydro is our oil. We are building on this affordability advantage with legislation guaranteeing that Manitoba families will pay the lowest combined bills in the country for electricity, home heating and auto insurance.

That assurance of affordability comes with a commitment to fund 6,500 child-care spaces this year, as well as increasing funding for affordable and social housing, and hiring more firefighters, police officers and cadets to keep families safe.

Mr. Speaker, those living outside of Winnipeg will be glad to know that Budget 2012 contains support to improve excess moisture insurance, forage establishment insurance and the forage restoration benefit. It will create new housing in Brandon and five—and find ways to better use buildings in the downtown Brandon area, build or expand 54 child-care centres across the province, invest in new parks, community centres and provide infrastructure, build and open new health-care facilities.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba has grown by over 100,000 people in just over 11 years and we had an increase of nearly 16,000 Manitobans in 2011, the second highest growth in past 40 years, just behind 2010. Many of these new immigrants, who came from over a hundred countries worldwide, have contributed and continue to contribute to Manitoba's economy through the skills and many talents they possess, their positive attitude, desire and readiness to work. Moreover, they bring with them resources, connections and relationships that have proven to be advantageous to Manitoba in many ways. The door knocking to constituents I have done earlier this year, along with acquaintances developed during the last few years, attest to these things. I know of so many new immigrants who are gainfully employed, some already practising their professions after going through various hurdles. Several of the non-practising professional friends and acquaintances have bought their homes in the first two years of arrival.

Mr. Speaker, since 1999, our government has delivered personal income tax savings for Manitoba families that will total over \$500 million this year, and these savings will rise to \$539 million in 2014.

Mr. Speaker, Statistics Canada indicates that Manitoba has the second lowest college tuition fees and the third lowest university tuition fees in the country. We're going to ensure that tuition remains affordable with legislation that freezes university tuition fee increases at the rate of inflation and expands eligibility for student aid.

Mr. Speaker, Statistics Canada has also identified Manitoba as the only province in the country to see property taxes to remain relatively stable since 2000. We saw a 7.4 increase overall, while average Canadian property taxes increased by 37.9 per cent, a rate more than five times higher than ours. We are going to continue to work to keep properly—property taxes affordable, by eliminating

education property taxes for seniors and on farmland, within our mandate.

Mr. Speaker, since 1999, our government has delivered personal income tax savings for Manitoba families that will total \$500 million in 2012. All Manitoba taxpayers are benefiting from a \$1,000 increase to basic personal exemption for over four years, as well as to the spousal amount and the eligible dependent amount. It increased by \$250 last year and will increase by \$250 again this year and for each of the next two years, rising from \$8,134 in 2010 to \$9,134. In fact, when they are fully implemented in 2014, an additional 22,000 Manitobans will no longer pay any income taxes at all. Higher exemptions means savings for all Manitoba taxpayers.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2012 also includes further tax savings through increases to the seniors' maximum Education Property Tax Credit, which increased by \$150 last year and will increase by another \$150 this year, for a total of \$1,100. We've also pledged to eliminate education property taxes for seniors during our mandate.

Mr. Speaker, you have heard and will continue to hear details about the 2012 budget and how it keeps Manitoba on track as it moves forward in addressing the many challenges and opportunities ahead. This budget contains a workable plan, focused on priorities of Manitoba families. Likewise, Budget 2012 will find responsible ways to reduce administrative spending, which means more money going directly into things that matter most to families. Moreover, it is a budget that, with a balanced approach, will result in steady growth and positive results for Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents in Logan can rest assured that this government will protect front-line services to ensure service Manitoba families value most. Budget 2012 targets spending increases to key front-line services: health, education and training, infrastructure, public safety and services for our families. It will also balance expenditure reductions with modest, fair measures to increase revenues without raising any major tax rates: it will reduce a number of regional health authorities to five from 11 to streamline services; merge Manitoba liquor commission—control commission and the Manitoba Lotteries Corporation; and work with municipalities to support regional co-operation; reduce the number of government-appointed agencies, boards and commissions by 20 per cent; defer wage increases;

and reduce offer expenses for members of the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, small and big businesses in Logan constituency, as well as the rest of the province, will be delighted to learn Budget 2012 will continue to cut red tape for businesses by reducing how often small businesses have to file sales tax.

Budget 2012 will also create Energy Opportunities Office to help Manitoba businesses plug into the opportunities from Hydro investments. As well, Budget 2012 will loosen the restrictions on Sunday shopping in consultation with labour and business, and will invest in the Métis Economic Development Fund, the First Peoples Economic Growth Fund and the Communities Economic Development Fund to serve northern and Aboriginal businesses and leverage private investments.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, in this budget we won't risk many things that we have built together with short-sighted cuts. We chose to put families first and said no to calls to take apart our public services. With smart, positive solutions, we're on track to return to balance by 2014. We balanced 10 budgets in a row. We know how to do it, but when times get tough, our priority is families. Our five-year economic plan is working in keeping Manitoba on track, climbing out of the economic downturn.

* (16:50)

There are numerous investments happening to keep Manitoba's economy growing. We are creating jobs. Manitoba led the country with the lowest unemployment rate in the past year. The population is growing and more young families are building their future here. Manitoba still remains the best place to live, work and raise a family.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, I feel very privileged to have the opportunity to stand in this House and put some comments on the record about Budget 2012. And I also feel very privileged to be the elected representative for Charleswood and I am grateful for the incredible support so many people have given me in my constituency, and I just want to say thank you to them again for all of the things that they do every day to make Manitoba a better place.

Mr. Speaker, this was a terrible budget for Manitobans and it's one I cannot support. In fact, one of the first words that came to mind is that it's an

ouch budget because it hurt in so many ways, and then it became a double-ouch budget after we learned that this Premier (Mr. Selinger) seven months ago in the election promised, read my lips: no tax increases.

And what did we see in this budget, Mr. Speaker, nine tax increases. And it's troubling because I'm sure we would've seen income taxes, payroll taxes and PST in many other areas increased if this government thought that they could get away with it. And certainly when it comes to income taxes and payroll taxes, thank goodness that the previous Tory government did put a referendum in place which the government would have to take before the public in order to see those taxes increased. But I'm sure if there wasn't that referendum in place in the legislation, we would have seen this NDP government move forward and try to change things in those areas and try to get their mitts on some of that money.

I do want to say that I am really glad that this NDP borrowed one of our election promises to fund pediatric insulin pumps and that they finally did announce it. I think that was a good thing, and I'm also glad to see them move ahead and do what other provinces do in funding cancer drugs at home. That will remove a terrible financial burden for many people. But I—what I find absolutely deplorable, Mr. Speaker, is the abuse of power by this government on this issue, because they refused to fund cancer drugs and support drugs in that area for years and years and years, and then out of the blue, during an election which they thought they might lose, they agreed to fund these cancer drugs.

Mr. Speaker, how many people were hurt by their refusal over many, many years to not fund them? How many people lost the quality of their lives because this government year after year after year refused to pay for those cancer drugs?

Mr. Speaker, and we wonder why people are cynical about politics. This shameful display by this NDP government on this issue is a good example of that.

And I want to read into the record comments made by Deveryn Ross from Brandon. He made some excellent observations about this, and I want to read into the record what his observations were, and I quote: The announcement—and this is about cancer, the NDP funding cancer drugs, Mr. Speaker—raise troubling questions about the NDP government's

motivations and the extent to which they are willing to play politics with the health of Manitobans.

Unreasonably long cancer treatment wait times have been an issue during the NDP's entire 12 years in power, as has the high cost of new cancer medications.

Until this week, however, the NDP stubbornly resisted pleas and petitions by cancer patients and their families to cover the cost of cancer drugs that other provinces have provided to their citizens for several years.

How many low-income Manitobans went without life-saving cancer medications they could not afford, simply because our government refused to provide them? How many would still be alive today if the government had made the commitment earlier in its mandate?

If the promise to pay for the cancer drugs had been made in the provincial budget six months ago, cancer patients would be receiving the medications right now. Instead, those patients are being told that they must first vote for NDP candidates in order for this to happen. If that isn't emotional blackmail, what is?

After 12 years of saying no to cancer patients and their families, did it take the palpable process of electoral defeat to convince the NDP to finally agree to give all Manitobans, not just the rich ones who can pay for it themselves, access the medications that many Canadians take for granted? Or did they save this announcement for their re-election campaign, deliberately depriving cancer-stricken Manitobans of the life-saving medications they desperately needed, just so the Premier could play the hero before the election?

The last word goes to another *Free Press* reader who wrote: It's promises like this that show electioneering for what it really is. They didn't think it was a big enough deal to bring forward a year ago. Unless they only thought of it two weeks ago, it's pretty cynical to make it part of a campaign platform. End quote of his comments.

And, Mr. Speaker, I think that those comments put forward during the election by Mr. Deveryn Ross from Brandon, really says a lot about this government and how they have deliberately gone into an election and used people in a very, very politically deplorable way.

And I just—I know that the Cancer Society many times asked this government, year after year after year—they came here and asked this government to fund cancer drugs for people at home and this Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald), year after year after year, said, no. And then during an election, where this government thought that they might lose, they decided that they're going to fund these cancer drugs. Well, Mr. Speaker, I find that pretty despicable on what it's done to Manitobans and it just shows you how low people can go, and some parties can go, in order to try to win an election. And I just—I find that really, really deplorable.

Mr. Speaker, in 1999 there was no deficit. Today, we see a \$1.1-billion deficit. In 1999, the debt was \$13.5 billion. Today, that debt has doubled to \$27.6 billion. In fact, it increased by \$2.5 billion from Budget 2011, an increase of 10 per cent, and it is absolutely astounding to watch this kind of spending going on by a government.

I just do not understand how they can, in 12 years, take spending to such record levels that they recreate a situation where Manitoba is now in deficit and they double a debt in this province. And they really stuck it to Manitobans again by leaving this province with another half-a-billion-dollar deficit. So now, Manitoba taxpayers have to pay \$858 million a year more in debt servicing costs. Mr. Speaker, what does this add up to? It's a big spending problem. It's a big spending addiction. It's a very poor understanding by the NDP of arithmetic and I think it shows great disdain for Manitoba taxpayers.

And the NDP treat us like we're all stupid and try to blame the whopper of a deficit on flooding. Well, it's not working; too many people are now paying attention to what this government is doing in terms of spending and people are really tuned in now to the fact that this Premier, and every one of those NDP MLAs over there, broke a very, very serious campaign promise, and that promise was not to raise taxes. And it's not just the Premier that that rests with, Mr. Speaker, it is now every single one of those MLAs over there who are part and parcel of that election campaign and they will all have to wear that broken promise, because they are all responsible for it.

This deficit disaster, however, had far more to do with wasteful spending practices of this NDP government than it had to do with the flood or anything else. I guess that they thought that the federal gravy train was going to go on forever and

that they wouldn't have to do much to try to rein in their spending. In fact, Mr. Speaker, outside cash, cash that comes from other provinces through the federal government to this province—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) will have 20 minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, April 23, 2012

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