

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

Official Report
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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, April 22, 2013

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

**Bill 24—The Endangered Species Amendment Act
(Ecosystem Protection and Miscellaneous
Amendments)**

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship): I move, seconded by the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald), that Bill 24, The Endangered Species Amendment Act (Ecosystem Protection and Miscellaneous Amendments), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Mackintosh: In recognition of Earth Day, this proposed legislation sets out to protect from destruction those rare and critical ecosystems on Crown land that nurture species and plants that are at risk. It also requires recovery strategies for endangered species. It allows for prevention orders to be made to stop pending destructive action, and certainly increases enforcement options, including increased fines, the ability to include in a court order the return of a monetary benefit derived from a breach of the act, forfeiture of seized items and extending the time that a prosecution can be started.

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

**Bill 23—The Highway Traffic Amendment Act
(Increased Sanctions for Street Racing)**

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I move, seconded by the Minister for Local Government, that Bill 23, The

Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Increased Sanctions for Street Racing); Loi modifiant le Code de la route (sanctions accrues en matière de courses sur route), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Swan: At present The Highway Traffic Act provides that police may impound a vehicle for 48 hours if they have reason to believe it is being or has been driven on a highway or road in a race. This bill would amend The Highway Traffic Act to increase the vehicle impoundment period for street racing to seven days. It would also give police the authority to impose a seven-day roadside driver's vehicle suspension and driving disqualification as a further consequence for street racing.

The bill would also clarify that the Manitoba Licence Suspension Appeal Board process does not apply to new seven-day driver's licence suspension and driving disqualification.

This bill will add to penalties already contained in the Criminal Code of Canada and other sanctions in The Highway Traffic Act.

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

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

PETITIONS

Provincial Road 520 Renewal

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

The rural municipalities of Lac du Bonnet and Alexander are experiencing record growth due especially to an increasing number of Manitobans retiring to cottage country.

The population in the RM of Lac du Bonnet grows exponentially in the summer months due to increased cottage use.

Due to population growth, Provincial Road 520 experiences heavy traffic, especially during the summer months.

PR 520 connects cottage country to the Pinawa Hospital and as such is frequently used by emergency medical services to transport patients.

PR 520 is in such poor condition that there are serious concerns about its safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to recognize the serious safety concerns of Provincial Road 520 and to address its poor condition by prioritizing its renewal.

The petition is signed by the following people: J. McLachlan, J. Bourrier, D. Sierens and hundreds of other fine Manitobans, Mr. Speaker.

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

St. Ambroise Beach Provincial Park

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

Signed by L. Giesbrecht, G. Goulet, J. McInnes Rouire and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Hydro Capital Development—NFAT Review

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by R. Wiens, J. Kohler, R. Sawatzky and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Highway 217 Bridge Repair

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

Individuals require numerous trips across the river each day to access schools, businesses and health-care facilities. The bridge closure causes daily undue hardship and inconvenience for residents due to time requirements and higher transportation costs.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition has been signed by N. Bissonnette, K. Berard and J. Klaassen and many, many more fine Manitobans.

* (13:40)

Mr. Speaker: Any further petitions? Seeing none—

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Just prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have today 45 grade 9 students from Murdoch MacKay Collegiate under the direction of Ms. Kim Dudek. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Transcona (Mr. Reid).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

PST Increase Referendum Vote

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, last week this Premier and 36 NDP MLAs put themselves above Manitobans by announcing their plans to raise the PST without asking for permission first. They said their opinion mattered more than the opinions of those million Manitobans, and we don't think so.

The government's arbitrary attempts to remove the referendum requirement are a massive contradiction from their position of just a year and a half ago. Then, the spenDP demanded that the federal government hold a referendum on the Canadian Wheat Board. Then, they said that it was important, essential and democratic; now they say the opposite.

So I have to ask the Premier: If it was important just a year and a half ago to have a referendum that affects less than 2 per cent of Manitobans, why would it not be important to have a referendum now that affects each and every Manitoba citizen?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, when we listened to Manitobans, they told us they wanted flood protection around Lake Manitoba, through the

Assiniboine valley, up into Lake St. Martin. They told us they wanted roads repaired. It was just a week ago that members opposite in the House demanded \$112 million worth of road projects in this very House a week ago, and when the budget provided that for them, then they completely flip-flopped against it.

Manitobans told us they need new schools because we have a growing and younger population in this province, Mr. Speaker. They told us they would like to see more personal care homes established. They told us they would like to see more nurses, and just this morning we announced 60 new spots in our faculties of nursing across Manitoba to train more nurses for the province of Manitoba.

Those are the priorities Manitobans have identified for us. Those are the priorities of Manitobans. Those are the priorities of this budget. I only hope the members opposite will support it.

Mr. Pallister: Well, speaking of flip-flops, the Premier said the lack of a Wheat Board referendum was, quote, a violation of democratic rights. The Finance Minister breathlessly exclaimed that it was, quote, heavy-handed. And NDP—and usually very calm NDP Member of Parliament Pat Martin said, running roughshod over democracy. Yet what could be a better example of an undemocratic, heavy-handed and ill-advised approach than the arbitrary actions of this government just last week?

The PC Party's going to fight for Manitobans, Mr. Speaker, with the launch of our website standupmanitoba.com. Unlike the spenDP, we believe in the intelligence and judgment of Manitobans, and this is a dangerous, hard turn to the left for this government.

If they really believed in a referendum for some Manitobans just two years ago, why doesn't the Premier believe in a referendum for all Manitobans today?

Mr. Selinger: Because we—we've heard about pressing concerns for more schools. We heard about pressing concerns for more flood protection. We heard about pressing concerns for improvements to hospitals, and we certainly heard from the members opposite about pressing and urgent concerns to repair the roads of Manitoba.

This budget does that. This budget stimulates the economy. This budget creates jobs, Mr. Speaker, at a time of economic uncertainty. This budget injects another \$367 million into infrastructure, jobs,

economic development and growth for the people of Manitoba.

Mr. Pallister: Seventeen hundred dollars less in every household in this province and a half-a-billion-dollar deficit doesn't sound like a growth opportunity to me.

This Premier likes to claim he has a mandate, but he doesn't. He has a counterfeit mandate. Webster's Dictionary defines counterfeit as an imitation made with the intent to deceive, and that is precisely what that government's about. Think about their NDP promises not to raise taxes; half a billion dollars tells me that they didn't keep their promise, Mr. Speaker. Their promise to balance the books, push that off 'til later. And they didn't have a mandate to tear up the taxpayer protection act, quite the opposite. They asked for a mandate not to raise taxes—not to raise taxes. Maybe the emphasis is on the wrong part of the word.

So I've got to ask the Premier again: Why did he believe so strongly in a referendum just a year and a half ago and now he throws it in the trash at the expense of Manitobans?

Mr. Selinger: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question, because when we toured the province—and we are regularly in touch with Manitobans—they said they want more flood protection.

We just had an independent report come out in the last three weeks that not only identified that we'd spent \$1.2 billion in 2011, for which there has only been 100- to 160-million-dollar recovery from the federal government—we have also have recommendations now that we need to spend in the order of a billion dollars and even more than a billion dollars on further flood protection works in this province, Mr. Speaker. That's dikes, that's channels, that's additional roads that need to be repaired, that's bridges that need to be improved.

All of those things will grow a stronger Manitoba. They will follow our long-standing tradition of taking every significant event, in terms of flooding, and investing in the future of Manitoba. We spent a billion dollars in southern Manitoba in the Red River and around the city of Winnipeg, which has made those communities safer. The people of the Assiniboine valley—

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

Tax Increase Inflation Rates

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, a year and a half ago in the election, this Premier promised not to raise taxes. A few months after that, he broke that promise and he hit Manitobans with the biggest tax grab in a quarter of a century.

Because of that, Manitoba now has the highest inflation rate in all of Canada, so I'd like to ask this Premier to please tell Manitobans: Why should they have to pay for his broken promise?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I do appreciate the question from the member opposite, Mr. Speaker, because never in the history of the province of Manitoba have there been more tax reductions than over the last 11 years, \$1.4 billion—\$1.4 billion.

Taxes for a single-earner family of four earning \$40,000 are now down 43 per cent since 1999. A two-earner family of four earning \$60,000 now pays 25 per cent less taxes than they did in 1999 when the members in—opposite claimed they were the best government in the history of the province. A two-earner family earning \$100,000 now pays 21 per cent less than they did in '99. And a senior couple earning \$60,000 now plays 41 per cent less than they did in '99.

We have reduced taxes \$1.4 billion. Now we're investing in infrastructure that will grow the economy, create jobs and stimulate a brighter future for—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order.

NDP Election Promise

Mrs. Driedger: And we are still the highest taxed in all of Canada, despite that rhetoric from that Premier.

Mr. Speaker, not only has the cost of living skyrocketed in Manitoba, it is more than double Canada's rate, so so much for the rhetoric from this Premier, and all because this Premier broke his promise to not raise taxes. Manitobans are being squeezed at the gas pumps, Manitobans are being squeezed with vehicle registration fees, and Manitobans are being squeezed with home and mortgage insurance.

So I'd like to ask this Premier again: Why should Manitobans have to pay for his broken promise?

Mr. Selinger: I do appreciate the question from the member opposite.

* (13:50)

We have just made cancer drugs free for all Manitobans that are staying home trying to earn a living for their families—trying to stay out of the hospital, trying to earn a living for their families. Members opposite never supported that kind of an initiative.

That is an election promise we made and we delivered on within the first eight months of having come back into office. That election promise helps some of the most vulnerable people in Manitoba not have to worry about where they're getting their drugs. They can make sure that their families are being fed. They can make sure they're going to work if they're able to do that. That's \$10 million of benefits for Manitobans, \$10 million and counting, Mr. Speaker.

This budget, we increased the personal exemption for families by \$250, personal exemption for individuals, personal exemption for spouses and personal exemption for—

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

Inflation Rates

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, what this Premier didn't say is that social programs are now at risk in Manitoba because he's doubled the debt under his watch.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba has the highest inflation rate in all of Canada because of tax hikes that the NDP made a year ago after promising not to raise taxes. Manitobans are now feeling the squeeze because of an NDP government that can't control its spending.

So I'd like to ask the Premier to tell us again: Why has he put the squeeze on Manitoba taxpayers to pay for the fact that he broke his promise?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the greatest risk to people's social programs is from the members opposite. The historical record proves that. When they were in office, they put the PST on children's clothing. That's what they did. They put the PST on things that families needed for children. This budget takes it off children's supplies, takes it off carriages, takes it off bicycle helmets and maintains it off of food and home heating and buying a new home.

Mr. Speaker, our approach is to keep Manitoba affordable. Home heating, auto insurance and

electricity rates are the lowest in Canada last year, and we will maintain them the lowest in Canada for the next four years.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Tax Increase Inflation Rates

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, we've seen a continual decline in Manitobans' abilities to purchase in Manitoba over the 14 years. It's all due to this NDP government.

We've seen a recent increase in inflation in Manitoba, over double Canada's rate. Not something to be proud about. This 'inflation'—inflation has driven—been driven by this government's poor decisions. Increased taxes, huge fee increases, like the vehicle registration fee, and taxes on insurance have all contributed.

The government is on track to do it again. The NDP's broken promise on taxes has the potential to drive it even higher. The Premier talks about protecting the vulnerable, but inflation punishes everyone, especially those with low incomes and with fixed incomes.

Mr. Speaker, this government has lied to Manitobans with a protected—promise to protect them from tax increases. How can we believe anything they say?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member for Brandon West considered a poor decision to be \$1.4 billion in tax relief that we've offered to Manitobans over the last 14 budgets.

I wonder if he thought it was a bad decision over the last number of budgets to provide for \$520 million lower in personal income taxes. Was that a bad decision too? Was it a bad decision to provide property tax relief in the order of \$336 million to Manitobans, Mr. Speaker? And I ask him: Was it a bad decision to reduce business taxes by \$431 million? Oh, yes, maybe he does think it was a bad decision, because you voted against every one of them.

Mr. Helwer: Mr. Speaker, right next door in Saskatchewan, income taxes are \$5,000 lower. That's your retirement. That's Manitobans' retirement that this government is stealing from them.

Mr. Speaker, this government pays lip service to protecting the poor and seniors, but its own policies

are doing the most damage. Record tax increases and deficits are reducing the spending power of all Manitobans. But this spending continues on this destructive path for Manitoba. They hit Manitobans with successive tax increases, drive up inflation, and now they want to take away the right to vote on these issues.

When will this NDP government realize the damage they are doing to Manitobans? This PST increase can damage Manitoba for years, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Speaker, this is the 14th year in a row that Manitoba families have seen a decrease in their taxes. And I suppose I shouldn't predict this or not, but it will probably be the 14th year in a row that you will vote against it.

Mr. Speaker, the member for Brandon West mentioned Saskatchewan. Well, Saskatchewan thinks we live here in one of the most affordable provinces in this country, and they said so again in their budget. In their budget, they said Winnipeg was one of the most affordable cities in which to live.

Our commitment to the people of Manitoba is very clear. We're going to make decisions that protect them when it comes to floods. We're going to make decisions that protect them when it comes to tax increases. We're—

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

Mr. Helwer: How many deficits have we gone through over 14 years? There's your question.

Mr. Speaker, high inflation rates can create problems beyond hurting an individual's ability to purchase basic goods and services. High inflation rates reduce our GDP, increase unemployment and damage our economy.

How long can we wait, Mr. Speaker? This government's PST increase is damaging Manitobans well into the future.

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Speaker, this government 10 years in a row balanced the budget year after year after year. You could pretend that that's not so, but you're entitled to your opinions. I'll put that record up against their record, against the federal government's record, against any record you want.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, this government remains very committed to investing in the things that matter most to Manitobans. We're not going to

do what members opposite showed us last week, and that is to cut deeply into health care and deeply into education, deeply into justice.

They don't want to talk about \$550 million in reductions that they put on the table last Thursday morning. Are you hiding now or what?

PST Increase Election Campaign (St. Norbert)

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): During the past provincial campaign, the member for St. Norbert (Mr. Gaudreau) promised there would be no PST increase. In fact, his NDP Premier called the idea nonsense.

Now with the unmasking of the big NDP PST lie, was the campaign of the member for St. Norbert just a bunch of nonsense?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the member raises the question of whether or not we should have brought in a PST. Two, three weeks ago, a billion-dollar bill was sent to us by the independent committee saying, fix up all of the people in the Assiniboine valley, Lake St. Martin, Lake Manitoba when it comes to flood protection.

We know that there's great economic uncertainty out there, Mr. Speaker. The economic forecast for Canada and for all the provinces shows a decline this year. There is no better time to build infrastructure than right now. It generates jobs. It protects homes. It builds roads. It builds schools. It builds hospitals. It gives the economy a lift during times of economic uncertainty. That's the right thing to do for Manitoba, the right thing now, the right thing tomorrow and the right thing for the future of the province.

Election Campaign (Kirkfield Park)

Mr. Schuler: During the past provincial campaign, the member for Kirkfield Park (Ms. Blady) promised there would be no PST increase. In fact, her NDP Premier called the idea nonsense.

Now the unmasking of the big NDP PST lie, was the campaign for the member for Kirkfield Park just a bunch of nonsense?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, you know, I was so proud to be out in Kirkfield Park with the member from that community when we dug the sod—when we turned the sod on the new access centre at the grey hospital. And I remember that members opposite were threatening to close that hospital. That

was their solution to balancing the books in the '90s: sell off the telephone system, close the hospital.

* (14:00)

We're expanding the hospital. We're providing more home care to the people of St. James and Kirkfield Park. They have a population that needs home care. We have a special team there of doctors and nurses that will go right to the home to help those seniors. We're going to put an MRI in that hospital.

We're going to invest in the future of the people of Kirkfield Park and St. James. That's what they asked for; that's what we'll deliver them.

Election Campaign (Southdale)

Mr. Schuler: The Premier seems a little sensitive on this issue.

During the past provincial campaign, the member for Southdale (Ms. Selby) promised there would be no PST increase. In fact, her Premier agreed with her and he called the entire idea nonsense.

Now with the unmasking of the big NDP PST lie, was the campaign of the member for Southdale just a bunch of nonsense?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, again, I was pleased to be out in the community of Southdale with the member from that community. I was so pleased to be out there when we opened that new daycare centre that the people in that community told us they needed new daycare spots. The former minister of Family Services was there. The MLA was there. The Minister of Advanced Education was there.

And you know what, Mr. Speaker? They deserve a new school in Sage Creek, and they will have it.

PST Increase Prebudget Consultations

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, and at the Finance Minister's prebudget consultation meetings, he had a slide that was entitled "Your advice is needed."

He had four questions and they said: What government services are most important to you? Where do you think we can find efficiencies and savings? How should government improve revenues? What should government priorities be? Mr. Speaker, I fail to see where the question was: Do you think we should raise the PST?

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask this Minister of Finance: At his prebudget consultations meetings, how many people there stood up and asked for a PST increase?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Quite clearly, Manitobans said don't go back to what the Tories were doing before. Don't go back to those values, Mr. Speaker. Don't go back to the days when we made tough, hard, tough-love kind of decisions, where we put at risk families who attend schools, families and their hospitals, families who need roads, families who need flood protection.

Mr. Speaker, Manitobans in those prebudget consultations told me very clearly that they wanted us to invest in Manitoba, not cut back like we saw last Thursday morning with the people opposite who would pretend as if they know what Manitobans want. In those consultations, Manitobans came out and gave me the advice to keep investing in this province, to keep doing the good job that we're doing.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mrs. Stefanson: And again, the minister is refusing to answer the question.

We know that he put some questions before Manitobans at these prebudget consultation meetings, yet not one of those questions was whether or not people of Manitoba wanted an increase in the PST, Mr. Speaker.

So I will ask the minister again: How many people at these meetings—because he's refusing to answer the question—how many people at these meetings requested an increase in the PST, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Struthers: Well, Mr. Speaker, when we were in Brandon, the people in Brandon came out and they said we need money for infrastructure. So we've done that in this budget. I'd be interested to know how the member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer) will vote on that.

Mr. Speaker, when we were in Flin Flon, we had a good crowd of people that came out and talked to us about a number of things, including schools in Flin Flon, and they're very interested in the primary education, specifically, coming out of that meeting.

She asked what went on in those meetings and I'm telling her she may not like the answers, Mr. Speaker, but this is what Manitobans said to us in our

prebudget consultations. They said, keep on investing in our futures.

Mrs. Stefanson: I simply asked the Minister of Finance how many people came up to him at these prebudget consultation meetings and asked for a PST increase. Mr. Speaker, it's not a trick question. Was it five people? Was it 10 people? Or was it, in fact, zero?

Mr. Struthers: Manitobans very clearly came to our prebudget consultations and said we're on the right track in being balanced in our approach. We're *[inaudible]* balanced in terms of the kind of tax credits, the kind of tax relief that we put in place for Manitobans. As you've heard earlier today, we've put together \$1.4 billion in tax savings for Manitoba families, Mr. Speaker.

They were also very concerned about infrastructure. They're concerned about the flood that took place two years ago, concerned about what we were heading for this spring. Manitobans are very perceptive when it comes to that, Mr. Speaker.

We have a history of flood protection. This government isn't going to back away from investing in flood infrastructure that protects Manitoba families, because Manitoba families have told us that that's what they want us to do.

PST Increase Referendum Vote

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, higher debt and more taxes are not the priorities of Manitobans, and Manitobans did not tell this Finance Minister or Premier to do that in their consultations.

Ultimately, this is an issue of respect, and the Premier doesn't respect Manitobans. They ran on a promise not to raise taxes. They hold prebudget consultation meetings and then they ignore the advice of Manitobans. They say to Manitobans that they should obey the rule of the law and then they break the law by not holding a referendum on an increase in PST. Broken promises, breaking the law, phony consultations.

Why doesn't this Premier acknowledge he doesn't respect Manitobans, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I appreciate the question, because when we talk to Manitobans and we listen to Manitobans, Mr. Speaker, they told us—and the members opposite confirmed that just a week ago this Monday—they wanted better roads in the

province of Manitoba. They told us they wanted better flood protection in the province of Manitoba.

And then we had a report come out within the last three weeks that recommended a billion dollars more investments. Members opposite may want to ignore that report. We do not think that is a prudent measure.

We think that flood protection has made a gigantic difference in this province. For every dollar we've invested in flood protection, we've prevented \$30 of damage in the province of Manitoba; \$30 billion has been averted in damage to the province of Manitoba by the billion dollars of investments we've made in flood protection.

That's what Manitobans told us was their priority; that's what we're doing, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, Mr. Speaker, there was once a leader of this party who said that he would govern for all Manitobans, but that was a long, long time ago, because now what we are left with is a Premier who governs for only himself and the members of that caucus. He brings in a vote tax which no Manitoban was asking for. He sets up a retired MLA in a government-paid job that should have been done in the caucus. He holds prebudget consultations, and no Manitobans were asking for an increase in the PST. This is a Premier who doesn't listen, he doesn't represent and he doesn't respect Manitobans.

Why won't he go to the people, Mr. Speaker, and give them the vote they deserve and that they're legally—entitled to?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I want to give some credit to the leader of opposition. Unlike the member for Steinbach, he actually tried to put some constructive ideas on the table on how to reduce expenditure. He said that he would find \$287 million in cuts, and he also said that he would find another \$265 million in promises he made. Unfortunately, putting that all together means 700 teachers would be laid off like they were in the '90s, a thousand nurses would be fired like they were in the '90s, freezing health capital spending would occur like they incurred in the '90s.

We listened to Manitobans—we listened to Manitobans. Manitobans told us this is a critical time for infrastructure at a period of economic uncertainty. The federal government came out with a 10-year plan—

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

Mr. Goertzen: In fact, it was the budget last year of this government that made promises to have those spending reductions. You didn't do it, sir. We'll follow through and get it done, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this is a Premier who just doesn't believe that he should be accountable, but it's not only him. The member for Southdale (Ms. Selby), she didn't run on a PST increase. The member for Kirkfield Park (Ms. Blady) didn't run on a PST increase. The member for St. Norbert (Mr. Gaudreau) didn't run on a PST increase. And the member for Dawson Trail (Mr. Lemieux), well, he led everybody down the rabbit trail during the election because he didn't run on a PST increase.

Every time that a Manitoban is handed a receipt after making a purchase, they will remember the deceit of this government in the last election when they promised not to raise taxes but they did.

Will the government give the referendum to the people that they deserve and that is in legislation today, Mr. Speaker?

* (14:10)

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the member from Steinbach never asked for improvements to Highway No. 1 road or voted for them. We improved Highway No. 1 all the way up to Steinbach. We made dramatic improvements in that. We did approve a federal-provincial-municipal infrastructure program, which is exactly what we're going to do for the next 10 years.

The member from Steinbach never identified or voted for a new school in Steinbach. We built it. The parents, the children, the teachers, they appreciate it. I was there for the opening of it. It was a wonderful announcement in a beautiful school, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, we voted and we supported and we put money into the hospital in Steinbach. And we trained more nurses to work in Steinbach, and we recruited more people to work in Steinbach, all of which the member opposite voted against.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order, please.

Manitoba Hydro Privatization Legislation

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Premier's NDP government brought in legislation to override the need for a referendum which is required in law before an increase in the sales tax is brought in.

The Premier, by his actions, implies that legislation requiring a referendum before privatizing Manitoba Hydro can be treated in a similar cavalier fashion.

I ask the Premier: What safeguards are in place to prevent a similar override of legislation requiring a referendum before privatizing Manitoba Hydro?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): It's a good question, Mr. Speaker, because the member raises the issue of whether it's a good idea to privatize Manitoba Hydro. We're very clear on this side of the House: It's a very bad idea. We said we would not privatize Manitoba Hydro.

We know members opposite were looking at ways to do that. They were looking at ways to do that. They're the ones that said they would not privatize. They said they wouldn't privatize the telephone system. They did. They took the rates from being among the lowest in Canada to being among the highest in Canada. We will not privatize Manitoba Hydro.

Mr. Speaker: Before I recognize the honourable member for River Heights, I just want to caution the House. We're doing pretty good up to this point, so I'm asking for the co-operation of all honourable members just to keep the level down a little bit, please, so I can hear both the questions and the answers.

PST Increase Referendum Request

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, June 2004, Bill 11 was passed, a bill which requires a referendum before Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation could be privatized. The Premier's actions with regard to overturning legislation requiring a referendum before the sales tax can be raised shows the Premier doesn't really value referenda.

Will the Premier show greater respect for Manitobans and for democracy and withdraw Bill 20 and let people have a voice through a referendum on raising the sales tax?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): At a time of economic uncertainty across the country and across the province, Mr. Speaker—and we have seen that, we have already seen the economic forecast—it really helps to look forward to see what's coming at you and prepare for it.

We've seen the economic forecast this year decline quite dramatically. We've seen that uncertainty. We've seen the report come out on the billion dollars required for the flood.

In the midst of that uncertainty, we're driving forward with an infrastructure program which will stimulate the economy, create jobs, protect Manitoba communities, build a brighter future for the province. That's what people have said is important. That's what we're delivering in this budget.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, when the Conservative government privatized Manitoba Telephone System in 1996, the NDP protested that the Conservatives had never mentioned that they'd privatize MTS in the preceding provincial election of 1995.

This year, the NDP government in raising the sales tax, when the Premier said in the last provincial election of 2011 that he would not raise the sales tax.

I ask the Premier: Will the Premier act today to demonstrate credibility by honouring the law and call a referendum on raising the sales tax?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, we will ask—we will act on the priorities of Manitobans at a time of economic uncertainty and the third potential major flood risk in the last five years. Those conditions require us—and, you know, I note the member opposite—the members opposite said in 2011 we were fear mongering about the flood. They said we were doing too much to prepare for the flood in 2011.

We don't take these things lightly. We hope that the events of this year are very moderate. We hope that the events do not cause dislocation, but if they do, we will be prepared because we spent a billion dollars preparing southern Manitoba. In '11, we spent \$1.2 billion protecting Manitoba.

We will prepare for the worse, hope for the best, grow the economy, create jobs and move Manitoba forward.

Nursing Education Additional Training Seats

Ms. Melanie Wight (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, I know the Minister of Advanced Education was out this morning with the Premier and the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) at the University of Manitoba for an important announcement about the future of nursing. Now, I'm guessing that under the previous government, we would not have been discussing the future of nursing but rather cuts in health care.

But I would like to ask the Minister of Advanced Education if she could just share a bit about how we are continuing to protect Manitoba families.

Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy): I thank the member for the question.

I was pleased to be along with my colleagues as we announced more than 60 additional nurse training seats added across the province, Mr. Speaker. We know we have a growing population, we have a aging population, and that's why our budget chooses to protect health care. Manitoba families want to know that a nurse will be by their side when their loved one needs it the most.

And we heard from them last week what they do: they fire nurses. We hire nurses, Mr. Speaker, and that's why our budget pledges to train more nurses, to hire more nurses and protect health care for Manitoba families going forward into the future.

Flood Preparation Government Priorities

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, we all know how a flood can set a community, a province and a country back. What is most important, though, is preparation for those events and the impact before the flood hits. We see very clearly that the 192 spin doctors for this Province don't want to spin things around that cost taxpayers over a million dollars per month. What is more important is preparing for a flood.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like the minister responsible to—for this government—which is more important, spending money on spin doctors or spending money on flood preparation?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): I—you know, I—we are spending significant amounts of money on preparing for the flood. We spent a billion dollars protecting against floods.

But I know this question really is facetious, because even though we've invested in historic flood protection, even though we're working around the clock right now to prepare for the third major flood in five years, we know members opposite are going to vote against that, Mr. Speaker. It's one thing to talk about floods and talk about flood victims, but let's see how they vote, because if they're really concerned they'd be voting to support a historic investment in flood mitigation.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, what's hysterical is 0.018 of the *[inaudible]* budget that they actually spent since they've been in office. That's shameful; if they call that preparation, I beg to differ with this minister.

It's very sad when the priorities of this government is all wrong. One hundred and ninety-two spin doctors protect this government from whatever they say each and every day, spinning around—what's most important is whether or not their priorities are in fact preparation for this flood and mitigation.

Mr. Speaker, the government has barely spent 0.018 of 1 per cent, and they claim this is fantastic. How can our taxpayers take this government seriously?

Mr. Ashton: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, I would suggest that maybe the member enrol in a remedial math course, because a billion dollars speaks to the commitment of this government. A billion dollars in terms of flood protection, and I want to stress again, as I did last week—I know members opposite were celebrating this weekend; there was an event marking the election of the Filmon government, the government the Leader of the Opposition says was the best government in history. I'm not sure—

Mr. Speaker: I'm having difficulty hearing the response to the question that was posed. I ask for the co-operation of all honourable members.

* (14:20)

Mr. Ashton: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if the event featured a hookup from Connie Curran at her mansion featured on HGTV. Perhaps they had a gathering where they discussed how they almost pulled off the vote-rigging scandal. Or I'm wondering if the premier at the time, who spoke, apparently, at this gathering, as yet, 20-plus years later, apologized for insulting flood victims, because that's the big difference between us and them. They said they'd blame people living in—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, zero per cent has been spent on flood mitigation.

Yes, we had a sold-out dinner. We're very proud of that fact, and we will stand with our people each and every day. We're going to represent those people to the best of our ability. We're going to listen to those people.

Mr. Speaker, will this government listen to those people? It's time they took that action.

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Speaker, we on this side give credit to the last Conservative government that ever had a vision for this province, which certainly wasn't the Filmon government.

But, you know, what's interesting is this member knows, and he should know this, that one of the key elements in this bill that we're putting forward in terms of the budget, one of the key elements of this budget, is the fact that the recommendations the flood *[inaudible]* report call for a billion dollars plus in flood mitigation, Mr. Speaker.

And again, and I think that the member might want to talk to the member for Dawson Trail (Mr. Lemieux), because one of the reasons he's here is because the people who were flood victims in his area remembered what the premier at the time said. I want to repeat once again, Mr. Speaker, they blame flood victims; we protect them. That's what our budget is all about.

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

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Fort Garry Senior Resource Council

Mr. Dave Gaudreau (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, I'm excited to tell you about a wonderful opportunity available to Fort Garry, Fort Richmond and St. Norbert seniors. The Fort Garry Seniors Resource Council is an organization that seeks to empower older adults to increase their independence and improve their well-being by accessing relevant service information. The partnership with Age and Opportunity, the council has been arranging frequent bus trips for older adults to St. Vital Centre for almost 10 years now.

For many older adults, this service is essential. It reduces the social isolation and experience—that is often experienced by older adults as they age and become less able to actively participate in their

communities. Many of these same adults are unable to travel by bus on their own and often do not have loved ones to assist them. To ride to and from the mall, as well as the time at the mall, provides participants with social opportunities with others in similar circumstances, resulting in friendship and support.

Additionally, the participants are able to meet some of their other basic needs: exercising by mall walking, purchasing groceries, getting prescriptions filled, purchasing household and personal goods. The members for Fort Richmond, Fort Garry-Riverview and I ride the bus from time to time and very much enjoy spending time with the spirited seniors to participate in these trips.

Thank you to everyone who is involved with the Fort Garry Seniors Resource Council. You are making a world of difference in the lives of many older adults in your community. For this kindness and care that you extoll, I must express my deepest gratitude. I sincerely hope that when I grow older that this support will continue to exist so that I may continue to live my life to the fullest as these seniors are today.

Thank you again to all the members of the council, and thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Pinawa 50th Birthday

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): I rise today in the Assembly to inform the honourable members that this summer, from July 19th to the 21st, the town of Pinawa will celebrate its 50th birthday. Any municipality who has thrived for a half a century is a milestone achievement. However, what makes Pinawa special is the fact that this town has had two birthdays and one funeral.

Pinawa was first founded in 1903 as Manitoba's first big power project with the Pinawa Dam. However, once a bigger dam was built downstream at Seven Sisters, the town saw a steady demise.

It wasn't until 1963 when Atomic Energy of Canada Limited decided to create a research facility less than 10 kilometres away from the old dam that Pinawa was born—was reborn.

At its height, the town flourished in the 1970s and the 1980s, with 900 jobs directly related to the AECL research site. In 1985, a controversial \$40 million underground research laboratory was built to study whether nuclear waste could be safely stored under the Canadian Shield.

With the closure of the research facility in 1995 and then the underground operations stopping in 2010, many feared the second death of the town we know as Pinawa.

Thankfully, this was not the case, and Pinawa is known today for its attractive lifestyle. In the summer months, it has its own public swimming pool, public beachfront, marina, rowing and sailing club, tennis courts, softball pitch, and one of Manitoba's top 18-hole golf courses.

During the winter the usual activities such as hockey, curling and figure skating are present. However, there is also 40 kilometres of groomed cross-country trail—cross-country ski trails throughout this beautiful area. Pinawa offers year-round recreation and some of the prettiest real estate in the country.

To help mark Pinawa's 50th birthday and make it even more special, for the first time ever Lund boats is bringing its fifth annual Lund Mania fishing tournament to Canada. I would like to extend an invitation to all the honourable members to come and join in the festivities.

Pinawa's motto is Live, Work and Play. Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt in my mind that they are here to stay.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Flin Flon Community Choir and Flin Flon Arts Council—Chicago

Mr. Clarence Pettersen (Flin Flon): Mr. Speaker, Flin Flon is a community that thrives on arts and culture. Last week the Flin Flon Community Choir and Flin Flon Arts Council joined together to present the musical Chicago. Chicago's not an easy musical to perform, but with over 100 volunteers of cast and crew the community came together to showcase northern talent and produce one of the best musicals to ever be performed in Flin Flon.

I'd like to commend all members who performed, participated and supported the musical Chicago. The Flin Flon choir is one of only three Canadian groups to receive the rights to the musical for 2013. On April 12, 13 and 14, the R.H. Channing Auditorium was transferred into a prohibition-era Chicago. The story of fame, fortune, crime and jazz showcased the talent of so many people in our community.

At each of the three sold-out shows additional seating was added to accommodate the excitement

the musical created in our community. At the end of the weekend more than 1,500 people had seen the show. From auditions in December to the performance in April, the actresses, actors, dancers, musicians, technicians, stagehands and production crew worked together to perform the performance.

Most of the volunteer cast was new to the musical genre and spent hours practising dance moves and songs along in the basements, as well as together at nightly rehearsals. The community also brought in eight professionals to provide experience and direction to the show. We intricate—or with intricate choreography, charming vocals, outrageous costumes and makeup, stunning sets and great 'theatrical' direction, the musical was a huge success and the audience rewarded each show with a standing ovation.

Mr. Speaker, it was incredible to see so many people come together in dance and song to give the city a once-in-a-lifetime show. All those who witnessed, performed and supported the musical left the auditorium with little more spring to their step. I'm so proud of the family, friends and community involved with the musical.

Congratulations. The bar has certainly been 'rised'.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and all that jazz.

Earth Day

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, today people around the globe are marking the 43rd annual Earth Day. Starting in 1970 in the United States, Earth Day has grown to be the largest environmental event worldwide.

The environmental challenges we face has led to many opportunities to promote, protect and preserve our earth. We have already seen individuals across this province take the lead on various environmental initiatives, both rural and urban, Mr. Speaker. We understand that in order to preserve the environment—the environment, rather—for future generations, we all need to make changes in our lives today.

Here in Manitoba, however, we continue to face environmental challenges with the announcement in February naming Lake Winnipeg as the most threatened lake of the year. We need to take a science-based approach to environmental sustainability and encourage awareness of protecting our lakes and streams and continue to work with

entities like the international institute of sustainable development.

I would like to congratulate the efforts of many members of the business community who have embraced innovative measures such as recycling and green practices within their workplaces.

Also, I would like to applaud the agricultural community who have implemented environmental farm plans and best management practices to provide ecological goods and services to all people in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to encourage all Manitobans to take part in Earth Day and to do their part to help our environment. Furthermore, our actions should not be limited to today, but every day should be treated like Earth Day by limiting our environmental footprint wherever we have the opportunity.

Thank you.

* (14:30)

Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal Recipients

Mr. Gregory Dewar (Selkirk): On April the 9th it was my pleasure to award diamond—our Queen's Diamond Jubilee medals to three outstanding Aboriginal individuals who are working to create positive change in our community.

Brokenhead Ojibway Nation Chief Jim Bear—I think known to many in this room—has spent his entire life working to improve the lives of Aboriginal people. Mr. Speaker, he's served on many federal and provincial boards and committees. He was a co founder of the Southeast Tribal Council and he was involved in the recovery of the Sergeant Tommy Prince's original war medals—who, in fact, was the uncle of Mr. Bear—which were lost for many years.

Marcella Vezina, who lives in the RM of St. Clements, is another long-time volunteer and community leader, as well as highly respected Metis elder. Mr. Speaker, I have many times sought out her wisdom and guidance, and she's currently the chairperson of the Patricia Beach Community Club and the Stoney Point Metis local.

Amy Smith is a community facilitator with the Selkirk renewal corporation, and she's, Mr. Speaker, particularly great, working with young people, running after-school programs that give children and youth opportunities to develop new skills and have fun. She's also very proud of her Metis heritage and

organizes Aboriginal awareness events in our community.

I am very proud to have been able to award these individuals this medal, Mr. Speaker. It's great to see people like Jim, Marcella, Amy and many others working to make our community a better place to live.

Thank you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

BUDGET DEBATE (Fifth Day of Debate)

Mr. Speaker: To resume the adjourned debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers), that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government, and the amendment thereto.

A member of the government had concluded debate at the close of the House last, and so now reverts to the member of the opposition.

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, and it gives me great pleasure to stand up and put a few words on the record in regards to Budget 2013. As far as the budget goes, I will not be voting for it. I will be choosing, on the other hand, to be voting in favour of the amendment, which was brought down by our leader, the member of Fort Whyte.

But, before I get going on the budget, Mr. Speaker, there is a few things that I'd like to put on record with a couple of personal stories.

Thursday, April 18th, my dad had a pacemaker put in. After many months of complications and tests, Dr. Khadem from the St. Boniface cardio ward made the decision that dad needed a pacemaker. This past Thursday, Dr. Colette Seifer put the pacemaker in. Half hour after dad was out of the operating room, he said he had felt better. I don't know if it was the stress relief of making it and living through the surgery or if it actually was actually feeling better.

Time will tell, Mr. Speaker, but on behalf of my mom, my brother, Greg, and his family and my wife Tracey and our boys, from the bottom of our hearts, I would like to thank the receptionists, the nurses' aides, the nurses, the doctors and specialists who took care of our dad through that hard journey at the St. Boniface cardio centre.

At this time, I'd also like to recognize that last week was the—was Education Week, and I'd like to say thank—thanks and congratulations to the people who received the education awards again this past week. All the people, whether it's administrators, teachers, support staff, librarians, bus drivers, custodians, they all have a very important job to do, and that job is to protect our most precious resources, our kids.

Now, back in 2008, I had the pleasure of receiving the teacher of distinction award from Brandon University. Now, I don't necessarily say that to bring accolades to myself, but I just wanted to made mention that the chancellor at that time at Brandon University was none other than our past premier, Mr. Ed Schreyer. And I know that today in the House as we've been talking in question period and other facets of House business that the word respect had come up quite often.

So I had the pleasure on Wednesday, after session, to attend a Retired Teachers' Association event held here in the Legislature, where the Minister of Education (Ms. Allan) was actually emceeding, and so, as she was in the front of the room chatting with the retired teachers and talking about how the event was going to go on for that evening, a gentleman came up and stood right beside me and tapped me on the shoulder and said, hi, Wayne, and I looked over and it was actually Mr. Ed Schreyer. And so I shook his hand and said it was very, very nice to see him, and right at that moment, our little shortened conversation was cut even short by the minister from the front of the room, and she had waved across the whole room and said, hello, Ed, you're here to cut my—to mow my lawn.

And I stood there, and poor Mr. Schreyer was standing there, and as he went to go put—he didn't say a word—he went to put his glasses on his face and he looked up to the front of the room and he looked over to me and said, who's that lady? And I said, well, Mr. Schreyer, with all due respect, that's the Minister of Education. He didn't say another word; he just went about his business.

You know what? The word respect comes to mind. When we've got a former Premier of Manitoba, the fellow that—the school that I had taught at for 15 years, École Edward Schreyer School in Beausejour—comes to a function—he was once a teacher as well—and then is shown that level of respect from a member of the sitting government—not only a member, but an actual minister. Now, as

the rest of the event had gone on, we did see members from both sides of the House go over and shake Mr. Schreyer's hand and wish him well and chat with him, and I thought that was the point of the respect that he actually deserved.

Over the weekend, I know the member from Lakeside mentioned how we had our Progressive Conservative spring gala and it was sold out, and it was—actually it was in honour of Mr. and Mrs. Filmon, and what a fantastic event it was. And I think a lot of Manitobans are standing up, and some possible past non-supporters, I think, decided to maybe attend that function because they're seeing that they're losing faith in the government that they were choosing in the pry—in the previous election.

Now, Mr. Speaker, bills and decisions that are being brought forward and announced seem to be forgetting the grassroots—decisions that affect everyday Manitobans. Now, I know that the Minister for Local Government had announced—or, actually, it was the Premier (Mr. Selinger) had announced in the Throne Speech in the fall that they were going to be going and doing some forced amalgamations of municipalities under a thousand people.

Now, I've had many, many, many phone calls and emails and we've sent on many letters to the Premier's office and also to a—Minister for Local Government. I would just like to bring up one example—there's actually two examples in my riding that's having to go through and talk about amalgamations; one is forced and one is not so much. And, again, I'm sort of on the level of respect and trustworthiness.

So the RM of Victoria Beach—forced amalgamation. Where was the consultation? Where was the collaboration? Where was the choice? They were told they had to amalgamate with the RM that has—with an RM that has different challenges and needs. Victoria Beach has been self-sufficient for 94 years. They have their own fire department, police service, EMO, doctors, nurses, public works, and their very own golf course. Victoria Beach, unlike this spenDP, is trying to bring awareness to their residents. In the upcoming weeks I'm sure I will get the opportunity—and I actually have asked them already, the Minister for Local Government, why take the municipal board out of the equation? So I do know that the Minister for Local Government was down in Ste. Anne on March 15th for an amalgamation—I wouldn't even say it was a

consultation. One of the words that—one of the sentences or quotes or messages that the minister had passed along to the people that were there that day, were that no public consultations would be had because it will cause long-term hard feelings—no public consultations.

* (14:40)

I guess what we should have seen on March 15th in Ste. Anne was what was coming, and that brings respect to the budget, to the PST announcement—but we'll get to there in a few minutes. This government wants to take municipalities that have been around for 94 years and, with no consultation, no proper process, no public voices—matter of fact, because this government takes a great deal of their tax papers—or people—out of the equation, they are trying to squash this and conform these municipalities that are under the thousand threshold to in—within 10 months.

The act reads, back in 1997, that no new municipalities with less than a thousand people would be created. Fact being only one, that would be Headingley, since 1997 that was created. Victoria Beach has approximately 400 permanent residents. So that's exactly what the Minister for Local Government had done. He went on the definition of permanent residents, but, in fact, the municipality of Victoria Beach has 2,200 taxpayers. So they've taken the seasonal residents out of the equation.

Why have they done that? To increase their level of—

An Honourable Member: Accountability?

Mr. Ewasko: Not of accountability, as a member from across the way had said. Thank you, Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers), for trying to finish my sentence.

But it comes down to dictatorship, Mr. Speaker, dictatorship, because it's easier to put something like that into play and remove those seasonal residents so that they don't a voice so that they can bully their way and make this mandatory.

Now, back in 1997 the Ontario government imposed municipal amalgamation in exactly the same way that the NDP government is proposing now. Arya Sharma of McMaster University, in his doctorate thesis, and I quote: These newly 'constituted'—constitute jurisdictions would, in the eyes of the Province, have the capacity and ability to operate on a much more cost-effective basis. Quite perversely, however, the opposite effect has been

observed; municipal governments have been unable to generate substantive cost savings following their restructuring.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the interesting thing is I know that the municipality of Victoria Beach and many other municipalities across the province has asked this government, why exactly and what is the purpose of creating these amalgamations? Now, from our standpoint, amalgamations are not necessarily a bad thing. It's how this was rolled out. It was rolled out in the Throne Speech without any consultations, any chats with the stakeholders and also no plan.

Another couple professors from St. Catherine's, Ontario: Joseph Kushner, professor of economics and a city councillor; and David Siegal a professor of political science, felt that they would assess the amalgamations that had happened in Ontario and ask residents after the fact. Their results showed that three years after amalgamation, most significantly, residents said the value they were receiving for their tax dollars had declined.

So why is the Minister of Local Government (Mr. Lemieux) refusing to listen to the grassroots? There are hundreds of examples where, if you include the people, use it and go through the democratic process, you would be much better off.

Now, I said I had two examples. The other example is our RM of Lac du Bonnet and the town of Lac du Bonnet. Those are two municipalities that have committed to actually creating a dialogue to actually amalgamate the two municipal bodies. Now, the only catch there is they're looking for more information. This government rolled it out in the Throne Speech. There is no booklet as far as how to do this and the process that it was going to take. The booklet finally came out—I believe it was beginning of February of this year—so it was four, approximately four months after the fact, and the so-called consultants were going to be hired the beginning of April.

So here we have a message that was brought down in the Throne Speech, the booklets didn't come out 'til February, consultants at the beginning of April and they're supposed to wrap this up and amalgamate by December of 2013. Now, thank goodness, the RM of Lac du Bonnet and the town of Lac du Bonnet, their amalgamation isn't a forced amalgamation so they can proceed with the process to make sure their i's are dotted and their t's are crossed.

Now, to the budget of 2013. Focused on what matters most to families, that's the title of the budget of 2013. Now, Mr. Speaker, between listening to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) through the budget speech and taking a look at the events that have come out with the—days after that, this to me looks like a free space on a bingo card. They're giving us enough information that is going to help us carry on for the next three years to defeat them in the next election.

Now, when we get to the PST increase and the budget that was brought out, I know that there are some members across the way that are uncomfortable with this budget; they're uncomfortable with this PST increase. As the member from St. Paul and the member from Steinbach had mentioned in question period, there are members across the way that ran in the past election on these promises not to raise taxes. Now a year and a half later, here we are: we've got more increased taxes and nothing has gone to service the debt. If the budget still passes, I just want it on record that it doesn't mean necessarily that the PST hike is a go. There is no way that 37 Manitobans sitting across the House should outnumber or count over a million other Manitobans—let them have their say. They're breaking the law, Mr. Speaker. As it sits today, they're all lawbreakers and people who are unable to tell the truth. People—members across the way are uncomfortable with this budget and Bill 20, because I know in some of them it goes against their own beliefs; it goes against the people they are supposed to be representing in this great place.

Now I'd like to just read a couple quotes from the—our newspapers and various Manitobans who have stood up to basically share their concerns in regards to the budget and also the PST increase.

We have Jim Carr, who's the president and CEO of the Business Council of Manitoba: The provincial debt's going up too quickly; the numbers are getting out of the comfort zone. We're unhappy with the size of the deficit and the slow pace at which the deficit will be reduced.

Mark Sefton, Brandon School Division board chair: Does that mean, then, that the Province is taking five—\$50 million out of financing for public schools? We don't know that. That could potentially have a huge impact on a city like Brandon or in Brandon School Division.

Deborah Poff, Brandon University president: We've been buffered. This is still an increase and

there are provinces that have cut deeply. The challenge for those universities is tremendous; they're laying off significant numbers of people and there's great unhappiness. That's a disappointment because it's fairly significant. The consequence is it's over \$800,000 less revenue.

Doug Dobrowolski, Association of Manitoba Municipalities president: I believe they're taking the tax room away, what we've been asking for to repair municipal infrastructure. They're raising that 1 per cent to fulfill their commitments to the federal Building Canada Fund. We've been asking for more than that, he charged. They've taken our tax room to fulfill their own needs. Are you going to use an event such as spring flooding as an excuse to what they're doing? They're not focusing on what has to be done in this province.

CAA, Mike Mager: Disappointing budget. We're in the middle of our Worst Roads campaign and we've had 4,600 Manitobans tell us that roads are in very bad shape. They're ridiculous; they're atrocious; embarrassing: all kinds of words and accolades to describe the roads. And the reality is, we want the government to hear us and they didn't hear us today.

Richard: The commitment is wonderful, but if you really look at it, I mean, I'm interested. The minister said we've made a lot of progress over the last decade, and the reality is on our roads we haven't. If you look at the numbers, it comes across like 1 per cent is going into infrastructure, but again, it's not very clear. And when you look at the actual numbers within the budget, it looks like the numbers stayed the same from year to year. So we're not getting any added dollars for our roads and that is a big concern as many Manitobans use those roads each and every day and it affects all of us.

* (14:50)

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba sits in regards to the poverty—the child poverty rate—quite low. It's actually atrocious on how poor we're doing.

Winnipeg Harvest, David Northcott, he's disappointed. When asked if he saw anything in the budget to address the needs of those who often do without, Northcott said: No. One per cent in PST, I understand that's to pay the bills. Every low-income family in Manitoba knows what it's like to run deficits and pay bills. They can't do it. They struggle.

I understand getting \$250 to be part of that tax benefit in declaring your personal income. Great, that helps, but it's a wash. Overall, not much there.

Welfare rates have not changed in 20 years. The door was opened by the Conservatives and the Liberals to be able to say, let's go to 75 per cent of the rate of social housing at the private sector—social housing didn't walk through. Again, this government is choosing not to listen.

Lloyd Axworthy, president of the University of Winnipeg: okay, you're going to put us in financial bind. Let's talk about taking the controls off tuition, University of Winnipeg, President Lloyd Axworthy fired back at the Selinger government Tuesday. That is the conversation I want to have, Axworthy said.

Stephanie Forsyth president, Red River College, said the 2 per cent increase for colleges will have Red River College's budget \$6 million short. We were definitely hoping for more, for parity with the universities, she said. Red River went through significant reductions last year, she pointed out. Forsyth said Red River will have to ignore waiting lists, drop new programs planned to meet skill shortages and postpone improvements indefinitely.

Michelle Gawronsky, president of MGEU, she said she's concerned that there doesn't seem to be any money to hire corrections officers. There needs to be more guards because our inmate population is not going down she said. There seems to be increases in the areas of justice, but without more guards what are we doing?

I have an email that was sent and cc'd to myself and it went to the Premier (Mr. Selinger): Dear Premier, I am a hard-working Manitoban and I pay my taxes. I pay more than most other Canadians and enough is enough. Your recent tax grab will force my family to do without things we used to be able to afford. If you want to raise taxes, be honest about it and take it to the people as required by law. Sincerely, David Hnatishin.

And, Mr. Speaker, by the looks of the time, I think I better move on, but I have got many, many, many other quotations from many fine Manitobans that are questioning the acts of this government.

Now, Manitobans are still feeling that last year's massive \$184-million increase to taxes when the NDP has struck again, this time to the tune of \$227 million, Mr. Speaker. Including increases to services last year, it's half a billion dollars less in Manitobans' pockets. Arrogance, entitlement, people who use force or their power to inflict emotional, psychological, physical, or in this case financial are called bullies.

Now, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) stood up and it almost sounded like he was lip-synching to a mouldy, oldie 2011 campaign add in regards to the education tax off of seniors. Smoke and mirrors, Mr. Speaker, smoke and mirrors, giving \$400 but then taking \$800 after the fact. This must be the spendP's way of using the Crocus calculator.

Flood: we hear this every day in the house; the flood is coming. Well, it might be, but why does it always have to be their excuse? The NDP wants you to believe it needs massive funding increases to combat flooding. But this is a government that aside from the Winnipeg floodway has put virtually nothing into flood mitigation in Manitoba in the past 13 years. While in power since 2000 the NDP has spent \$221 million or 0.18 per cent of the total budget on flood mitigation. *[interjection]*

I know that I'm hearing from the member from Selkirk and I'm assuming that he's going to be getting up next to talk and I still have approximately seven minutes, so I'll continue, Mr. Speaker.

Again, this spendP dishonesty with Manitobans, Mr. Speaker, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and today's spendP confirm their plan for Manitoba: tax and spend more and get less. We warned the Premier's only plan was to increase taxes and shovel more money at problems in the hopes they would go away. The problems have only gotten worse, and Manitobans now rank at the bottom of the barrel on many social and economic indicators. Manitobans are paying the price for this spending addiction through higher PST rates, higher property rates—higher property taxes, higher liquor prices and higher hydro rates. In fact, Manitoba had the second highest tax increase of any province this year following on the biggest tax increase anywhere in Canada last year.

Mr. Speaker, I couldn't have said it better than the minister from Thompson. On—last week, Wednesday, the minister from Thompson had said—and it's in the Debates and Proceedings, Wednesday, April 17th, 2013—well, we spend more money than we raise. We're going to spend even more as part of this budget.

Mr. Speaker, it doesn't give much hope for Manitobans. Some of the issues is the fact that—going back to the grassroots and the referendum piece—we need to allow Manitobans to have a say, so we're hoping that this government will see it upon themselves to rescind Bill 20. Our plan is to work

with Manitobans, take suggestions, talk about them and deliver fiscally responsible plans and budgets to move Manitoba into the future.

April 19th, the Canadian Taxpayer Federation had outlined a few savings and suggestions to the government and its Cabinet: reduce the size of Cabinet from 19 back down to 15, the size of the Cabinet when Gary Doer became Premier; reinstitute the 40 per cent pay reduction for Cabinet during times of 'defidit'—deficit funding—spending; cancel the vote tax subsidy; once again have an MLA take over the military envoy role, a job since made full-time and given to former MLA Bonnie Korzeniowski. Again, some solid suggestions that were actually given to the government, but once again falling on deaf ears, Mr. Speaker. They, the spendP, don't want to collaborate. They like this dictatorship.

Just to recap, Mr. Speaker, not a dime of this additional tax revenue is going to balance the budget. This is a tax-and-spend government at its worst. The core government deficit has actually grown 13 per cent this year and now sits at \$502 million. The balanced budget act requires a referendum to raise the PST, and the NDP is breaking that law. The NDP will continue to blame Mother Nature when it's the NDP's nature at fault here. They call the increase to the PST a time-limited measure, but it will take at least 10 years. This is a spend-now-pay-later budget, and my children and grandchildren will have to pay for it.

But there is hope—this Progressive Conservative government with a fiscally responsible plan to move this province forward. Some of the highlights that our labour, that our labour—that our leader put out on April 18th—and again the Premier laid mention to it in question period today, but—total yearly savings, two hundred, eighty-six million dollars, eight hundred—sorry, \$286,840,000; scrap the vote tax would save \$600,000; execute senior civil servant reduction, \$9,240,000; hiring chill in civil—hiring chill at civil service, \$77,900,000 pending a full spending review; communication staff reduction, \$11 million; government advertising spending, \$11 million; improvements in tendering and procurement process, \$35 million; actually getting away from the tax—from the cost-plus way that this government seems to be tendering projects; amalgamation of ESRA, MFA administration with MIT, \$8 million; savings from joining the New West Partnership, \$14,100,000; 1 per cent savings across the government, \$120 million. Now, Mr. Speaker,

this is definitely a plan that we can be helping Manitobans move forward with.

* (15:00)

So at this time, I'd like to thank you for your attention, Mr. Speaker, and I'd just say thanks to my colleagues as we're moving forward and again with this free-space bingo card that the spendP has given us with this year's budget.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Applause so early in my speech; it's a rare and awesome sight, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it's a great privilege to rise in the House today to put some words on the record concerning Budget 2013. We know last week, of course, that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) presented to the Legislature our plan to protect families, to protect businesses and the economy against global economic uncertainty which persists and, indeed, repeated flooding. We believe this to be a balanced approach that does, indeed, focus on what matters most to Manitoba families.

The global economy does remain fragile. A recent flood review prepared by experts external to government released this month make it clear that we need to act very swiftly now to prepare against future flooding. Today, of course, all members of this Chamber are aware that Manitobans face the third major flood risk in five years and we need to be prepared.

Budget 2013 works very hard to protect families and businesses from continued economic uncertainty and from the risk of repeated flooding by investing in critical infrastructure through our 10-year building—or Manitoba Building and Renewal Plan. The plan protects families and our economy from uncertainty.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, making decisions that we did make in this budget did not happen easily. There was great debate, much discussion and it is not easy to go to the people of Manitoba and ask them to pay a little bit more so that we can continue to invest in the kind of infrastructure that's going to protect families, that's going to return families to homes that have been hurt by floods in past. We don't want to have groups like this in the future. It's very, very difficult on families, on their children, on the elders.

And so taking this decision was not an easy one, Mr. Speaker. And at the same that this decision was made, we also worked very, very hard to ensure that we were doing the best that we could in our own

departments to ensure that we found as many ways as possible to find efficiencies, to eliminate waste and to make investments that will ensure that our departments—in my case, in health care—that it can go on to be excellent and sustainable.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, to assist in protecting front-line care and working on eliminating waste, last year we made a commitment to merge our regional health authorities from 11 to five. Now, I would hasten to add that, indeed, when regional health authorities were created by the Conservative government, they began with 13 regional health authorities, including two in Winnipeg. So those regions were merged down to 11, and then last year we merged down to five regional health authorities. We made a commitment to Manitobans that we would find a way to eliminate executive and corporate positions somewhere in the neighbourhood of 30 to 35, and that over the course of 10 years we would find \$10 million in efficiencies.

I am pleased to report to the House, Mr. Speaker, that as a result of these mergers, we've already eliminated more than 100 board and executive positions. And we have, indeed, saved \$11 million in our first year alone; two years ahead of schedule. And those savings are being reinvested to support front-line care.

We also know, Mr. Speaker, that nearly a decade ago Manitoba had among the highest hospital administration costs in the nation, but today we are, according to the Canadian Institute for Health Information, among the lowest in hospital administration costs. We've also legislated that the Winnipeg health region have a corporate cap of 2.99 per cent and, indeed, the Winnipeg region falls below that. This is all part of our plan to protect universal health care, and we know that we had to look within, in order to find as many savings as possible, at the same time that we were asking Manitobans to pay a little bit more.

We were also able to identify an additional \$22.8 million, Mr. Speaker, on productivity initiatives in our health regions and we're getting even better prices for our generic drugs as a result of our utilization management agreements and our aggressive efforts to ensure that we drive down the costs. That translated into a savings of over \$12 million for Manitobans last year.

So—just as I mentioned before, Mr. Speaker, productivity initiatives include applying lean management techniques to improve efficiency. Our

procurement policies are improving. We're working hard to invest to avoid workplace injuries and doing everything that we can to reduce the use of printing and paper and use electronic media wherever we are able to do that.

Budget 2013, then, within the context of the Health Department, does provide a 2.7 per cent increase in funding for health care to ensure that Manitoba families will continue to have access to existing health services in addition to helping more Manitobans find a family doctor by building more clinics, hiring more doctors, nurse practitioners and other health professionals and supporting more clinics to offer same-day and next-day appointments. We made a commitment to the people of Manitoba that everyone who wants a family doctor shall have access to one by 2015, and we're working very aggressively to ensure that there are a variety of options across the system to assist people who are no longer—or who are not yet, I should say—attached to a family doctor. We know that by increasing our workforce we're enabling more Manitobans to have this kind of access, and better access to primary care, Mr. Speaker, very simply means better health. And we know that that will help us down the road in terms of avoiding acute care costs. That's certainly the goal.

We're also committing to hiring additional front-line staff in our personal care homes and providing more home care services for seniors who wish to remain in their homes longer.

We're going to continue, as a result of Budget 2013, to invest in cancer services, to continue to work on our Cancer Patient Journey Initiative, Mr. Speaker, to provide faster cancer testing and treatment closer to home.

Budget 2013 also addresses the expansion of the life-saving STARS helicopter ambulance to 24-7 service, seven days a week, Mr. Speaker. A very, very important initiative particularly for those living in rural Manitoba, and we're very glad that we made this investment and did the training that enables us to expand this particular service.

Expanding training and incentives to hire more doctors and nurse practitioners in Manitoba including for rural and northern Manitoba communities is a centrepiece of the health component of our budget, as is investing in capital infrastructure. We know historically, Mr. Speaker, that when times were challenging the low-hanging fruit seen by members opposite was to freeze, halt

any construction projects for health care, and we simply don't believe that that's the way to move Manitoba forward.

We're going to continue to focus on streamlining administration, increasing productivity and fighting for better drug prices because this is one of the most important ways that we can do this not only locally, but on the national stage, Mr. Speaker. And the efforts that we're making in the Health Department were noted recently by the president and CEO of the Business Council of Manitoba, not traditionally an environment known to bosom buddies of the NDP, but I will cite for you his comments after the budget: We are seeing a continuing improvement on controlling cost escalation in the Health Department. There was a real understanding that health was on a trajectory that would crowd out other important government services and now that trajectory has been flattened, and that's a good thing.

Mr. Speaker, I also think it's very important to note that these investments for health are being made in the context of federal government funding for health that is being eroded in a very, very dramatic way. And this is a point, I think, that members opposite either don't understand or choose to ignore, and it's not a point I think that should be ignored.

*(15:10)

Recently, there was an article in *The Globe and Mail*—an editorial, actually—on April the 11th, written by André Picard, their public health reporter, who has really done an excellent job, I think, in looking at the historical perspective of the Canada Health transfer, and it's worth reviewing what he has to say.

Certainly, he mentions the fact that our federal government at present is taking what he would define as a wash-my-hands-of-it approach to health care, and this is regrettable. We know that there were times early in the tenure of this federal government where there was some vision, there was some commitment to health care, both in terms of its thinking and, moreover, in its funding. And I would cite that the Mental Health Commission of Canada was an example of that, as was the federal government's willingness to fund and develop the Canadian cancer strategy.

But what we've seen recently, Mr. Speaker, is, first of all, a complete and total lack of dialogue between the federal government and the provinces. The health ministers certainly were shut out outright in terms of any discussion of a new health accord, as

this one is coming to a close. And, indeed, the Prime Minister would refuse to meet with the First Ministers to discuss the development of a health accord going forward.

The decisions that, in fact, Ottawa's making these days, Mr. Speaker, have more to do with hurting people, if I may say humbly. Cuts to health-care services for refugees—I hardly know where to begin in talking about the abject cruelty and short-sightedness of a decision like this—muzzling of scientists and researchers, slashing jobs at the Public Health Agency of Canada.

I say this with great respect, Mr. Speaker: it's growing more and more difficult for me to understand what the federal minister and what Health Canada is actually responsible for. The one thing that they actually have a legal obligation to do is to transfer money to the provinces through the Canada Health transfer, and that seems to be about the only thing that they show a modicum of interest in doing, and I think that this is a problem.

You will hear Minister Flaherty make mention of the fact that there are what he would define as record-breaking increases. But, as Mr. Picard would say, if you are going to talk about record amounts, you have to consider the fact that you're defining them in current dollars, and if you're going to brag, you had better know your history. He says, and I quote: Medicare became a national program in 1957 when the federal government agreed to provide funding to all provinces for hospital care if they met certain conditions such as universal access and no user fees.

The agreement was that Ottawa would provide 50 per cent of costs. When medicare was extended to physician fees five years later, Ottawa again agreed to pick up half the tab. In fact, 50-50 was the norm well into the 1970s, when the federal government began to weasel its way out of its commitment by replacing the straightforward promise to pay for half of provincial spending by introducing complex funding formulas. The upshot is that the federal government now covers less than one quarter of publicly funded health spending; \$30 billion of the \$135 billion that comes out of the public Treasury. So, actually, federal funding is at an historic low.

So, Mr. Speaker, when we decide as a province and as a government that we want to go forward and invest in infrastructure, it would be super handy, I suppose I could say, if our federal partners could indeed be partners in this discussion. But a couple of

years ago, during the stimulus exercise, health-capital infrastructure was explicitly excluded from the dialogue. And I know many members opposite know that the No. 1 health capital or—capital project in their community is one that concerns health, whether it's a new personal care home or the redevelopment of an emergency room or what have you.

And so the burden for provinces to go this on our own, and the wash-my-hands-of-it approach, as Mr. Picard would say, I think is something that's worth noting as we go forward, to show that we are holding the line on our health-care costs while we are adding nurses to the health-care system, not cutting them; while we are adding to our workforce with our doctors and other health-care professionals, not cutting them.

And we are pushing forward with health capital infrastructure, some 350 millions' worth in flight this year, Mr. Speaker, a hundred million dollars more the next year because we know that this creates jobs in our communities. We know that employing more health-care professionals stimulates our economy by having people in those jobs. And most critically, it provides the critically important compassionate care at the bedside, in the home, in our front-line doctors' offices when we need it.

So, Mr. Speaker, we can take a moment to reflect on what members opposite would do, and they wrote it down on a piece of paper and they gave a press conference and they said very clearly that they would harken back to yesteryear. They would disregard everything I've said to you in this speech that has been done in the context of health care to eliminate waste and find efficiencies. That work has been done, and it's very clear that the next tranche of cuts come to the tune of actual human beings collecting salaries in the workforce. That is where that money would have to come from. And just like, you know, not so many years ago, when the Leader of the Opposition was in Cabinet and was cuddling up by the fire with Connie Curran, we know that that's exactly the move that he would make. And this is just not on for Manitoba.

We know we have a commitment to Manitobans to spend our precious Health dollars wisely. We're absolutely committed to do that, and we would not balance the budget on the backs of medical students, of nurses on the front line and of those people building our incredibly important hospitals, personal care homes and other health-care facilities.

So, Mr. Speaker, we don't really need to look very far. Perhaps we could, you know, review the policies of what the member of the opposition—the Leader of the Opposition calls one of the finest governments Manitoba has ever had, and we will see that that fine government slashed the nurses, froze the health capital and cut the spaces in medical school. And I ask you, do we really need to look any further than that? No, we don't. Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I rise to talk a little bit on the budget as it's been presented by the NDP. Let me start with what's been the highlight of the 'deficing'-cutting Finance Minister's budget, and that is raising the PST by 1 per cent. It is odd that this government can raise the PST, raise \$300 million more a year in taxes, and still this year have a budget deficit that's just the same as last year's budget. Even—even—if he was dedicating—which we're still skeptical of—all the new taxes to infrastructure, the rest of the budget should come in—have come in with less of a deficit than last year. There's not much of an excuse about this except to recognize that this big deficit fighter has turned into a bit of a pussycat rather than a real deficit fighter.

One thing is noticeable in this budget is that the government is leaving itself little in the way of margin. With a deficit plan this year of \$500 million with a budget which will have taken the fiscal stabilization account, which had \$864 million in 2008-2009, down to \$275 million by the end of this year—that's a drop of more than two-thirds—there's not much room for a major emergency this year.

* (15:20)

The government will raise the PST starting July 1 of this year. I see the Finance Minister's getting his claws out. This increase in the PST is a contradiction to the position that the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and the Finance Minister and all their NDP colleagues took in the last election when they said that they wouldn't raise taxes and when they said that the concept that they might raise the PST was just nonsense. And, sadly, this government is not following through with what it said it would do or not do back in the last election.

It's interesting to look at the similarities between the requirement of a referendum for a sales tax and the requirement of a referendum, similarly, if Hydro were to be privatized or MPIC were to be privatized. Would the NDP now say that the referendum, if Hydro were privatized, would not be needed

anymore? That's certainly what their actions are implying. Would the NDP suggest that a referendum would not be needed if MPIC were privatized? Their actions certainly imply it, and it's a rather bad precedent, I suggest, for those of us who believe that Manitoba Hydro is an important Crown corporation and should not be privatized, and the same thing for MPIC.

Certainly, the laws requiring referenda are laws which are on the books. They're laws I support because I believe there should be public input into major decisions like these. And, particularly, we should have a referendum when a government like this one has campaigned on doing exactly the opposite of what it's doing this week and last week in this budget. It is a slippery slope that this government is on, quite clearly.

Let's look at this referendum. Let's look at this rise in the sales tax. The referendum—the requirement that there be a referendum is a law. It's not a law which belongs to this government; it's a law which belongs to the people of Manitoba. And, if the government, indeed, wants to break the law, wants to change the law and eliminate the referendum, surely it must demonstrate adequately that—the reasons that the law should be changed.

Mr. Speaker, this government has not done so. They have suggested that there is a time requirement. Well, the fact is that this law, Bill 20, it might get through sooner, but probably it won't get through until mid-June. A provincial election only takes 33 days. There's plenty of time between now and the end of June to have a referendum. This excuse that there's a question of time just doesn't hold much water.

Secondly, we should've been given a precise list of the extra spending—where, precisely, this infrastructure is and what it's going to be. This year, of the \$300 million a year, because it's July 1 when it starts, we may have somewhere around \$200 million, but what is the precise list of that \$200 million? Surely, we should have a referendum, surely we should be going to the people of Manitoba for their decision and surely the government should have presented not only the increase but a precise list, so that people could see whether this infrastructure was, in fact, worth being invested and to make sure that it couldn't be covered in some other fashion. Certainly, if one looks through the budget and the budget documents—and I've been through them carefully—there's no such precise list.

Certainly, when we're looking at capital spending and tangible assets, then, in fact, it's not nearly as clear as one might like. Dan Lett pointed that out today in the Free Press, that it was hard to find the numbers. In fact, I suspect that Dan Lett had to go to the government to get the numbers, because the numbers that he used, although they're close to the ones in the budget documents, they're not precisely the same. And so it raises the question, is, you know, what precisely are the numbers and why aren't they laid out precisely in the budget documents as one would expect?

As to the need, Mr. Speaker, for the provincial sales tax, first of all, if the government had kept to its spending budget last year it would have saved \$130 million of the money which the government is now planning to raise using the PST.

There are many areas that this government can save money. As one example, the government has refused to support my efforts to change—make changes in the way we're required to send out householders, changes, which—as I've pointed out—could shave as much as \$500,000 a year. When the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) and his government requires that we mail out letters using Canada Post as opposed to—and they have to be mailed individually in 37 ridings—as opposed to having them distributed in some other way, then, in fact, the cost instead of being, well, maybe a thousand dollars to distribute them, go up five or six thousand by constituency. It's quite an additional expense. And the minister—Finance Minister should be taken to task before not supporting my efforts, you know, to help him spend more wisely. And he should look not only there, but many other places where this government could spend more wisely.

Let's look at this question of managing expenses. It's a curious fact that every budget that the NDP have delivered since 1999, when you look at their expenditure line in the budget, by the end of the year they've spent more than they planned for in the budget. In 2000 and 2001 it was \$235 million more; in their best year, 2001-2002, it was only \$4 million more; in 2002 and 2003 it was \$33 million more; in 2003-2004 it was \$182 million more; 2004-2005 it was \$177 million more; 2005-2006 it was \$210 million more; 2006-2007 it was \$41 million more; 2007-2008 it was \$168 million more; 2008-2009 it was \$216 million overspending; 2009-2010 it was \$420 million overspending; 2010-2011 it was \$135 million overspending; 2011-2012 it was \$823 million overspending; eight—and 2012-2013 the

projected is \$130 million overspent. In total, in the lifetime of this government, \$2.775 billion spending that's overspending more than was planned at the beginning of the year. If this government could manage properly they would be in much better financial state—shape.

One of the first things that I learned in—when I was in Ottawa running a business, or you're doing—running your household, is you got to budget. If you're going to do reasonably well, you need to meet your expenditure targets and this has been a real big problem with this current government.

* (15:30)

There are many options which I've talked about elsewhere which have been done more effectively than this government has done: a program review, reducing spending where programs are not achieving the desired result. The Finance Minister needs to challenge his other Cabinet ministers: show me the results of your programs. But, apparently, he's not done that and the result is that we've got continued spending in areas which are not very effective. We need to have frameworks for managers which encourage responsible spending. We've had report after report which talks about Child and Family Services, for example, and how the whole framework for spending in Child and Family Services is targeted to provide the most expensive solutions and often the worse solutions instead of the best solutions. That is putting children in institutions and in care as opposed to supporting families in their home.

This is a government which has seen, under their watch, the number of children in care go from about 5,000 to about 10,000. We have one of the highest rates of children in care in the world. We are five to 10 times the rates in the United States, in United Kingdom, in Sweden, in New Zealand, in Australia; we're a good 10 times, probably more, the rate of the number of kids in care per population. We're way out of line; we're outlier. We should be supporting families instead of having an apprehension-first approach, and this Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) and his government continue to have an approach which is not optimum for children or for families.

But let us look at areas where there are particular needs. You need to be able to manage the budget, but you also be able to look at areas where you can spend that will, in fact, help you in other places. One of these, I suggest to the minister, is, in fact, increasing the shelter rates, which he steadfastly

refused to do. If you manage so that you're providing to those who are the poorest and the most marginalized in Manitoba support for shelter, for housing, which actually allows them then to have, for example, a social assistance budget for food for the kids, actually go to food for the kids, where you've got a situation where the housing costs are much higher than they're being funded for. Mothers and fathers all over this province are having to take the food budgets for their kids and take them away and spend that money on rent. It's no wonder that when child and family services workers or police come into a home to check things out and they check the fridge, that there's an empty fridge, and you have right away children who are at higher—at risk of being apprehended because they're being accused of neglecting their kids because their fridge is empty. You've got families, particularly in the north, where the housing is such that children are being apprehended because the housing is labeled inadequate. I was told in one community that a third of the kids were being taken into care because the housing wasn't up to the standard that it needed to be.

These things need to be addressed, because in addressing these areas you can reduce the costs to society of taking kids into care, and the problems which come from taking kids into care. The fact of the matter is that it is not a risk-free proposition taking children into care, that the kids who are taken into care are ones, overall, who have pretty poor outcomes in terms of graduation rates; they have pretty poor outcomes in terms of higher proportion getting involved into gangs, into prostitution, into addictions, into problems, into crime—it's been shown quite clearly. In fact, James Turner, put it rather bluntly, having watched the situation in Manitoba for quite a number of years, that there's no doubt that putting a child in care is putting a child too often on the road to becoming involved with gangs and drugs and crime.

We need to be doing far better for the children of this province, and that's one of the reasons that I have been holding forums, talking with many people and pushing this government to change its terrible way. There is an alternative, but it is an alternative which this government has not chosen to take. They have continued with the status quo, which is failing.

Let's talk for a little bit about floods. There should have been in this budget, you know, a detailed plan. There were two reports, but those reports provided some fairly general concepts, the general concept that there should be a channel from

Lake Manitoba to Lake St. Martin. It didn't talk about where. It didn't talk about when it would start, what the timeline would be. That report talked about improving the dike infrastructure and the ability to flow water down the Assiniboine River. And what's curious is that this flood of 2011 occurred now two years ago, and last year, in 2012, the dry year, would have been an excellent year to be doing a lot of extra work along the Assiniboine River. But for mysterious and unexplainable reasons it was not done, and so there's not much difference now than in fact in 2011.

And—but even today in this budget there's not a specific plan. We don't know whether there's going to be any improvements along the Assiniboine River made. We don't know if there's actually going to be a channel built. There's a proposal in there for a dam at Holland. That's half, \$500 million of the one billion that is infrastructure that this minister has been talking about. As the minister well knows, it's going to take probably several years to do the design, the environmental studies and all that. That five hundred million if, in fact, that dam proceeds is not going to be spent probably for three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine years, one would guess. And so a hue and cry about raising the PST because we need it for money which we don't need for five or six or seven or eight years. We don't even know if we will need it.

This is a problem that this minister has got and it's a credibility problem. This government has not only not developed a specific plan in terms of their infrastructure for major infrastructure, but there's not been a plan put forward in terms of changing from the old drain, drain, drain approach to an approach which stresses water retention, restoring and preserving wetlands—the South Tobacco Creek model, the model that was used temporarily and then abandoned in Blanshard municipality with an ecological goods and services approach and no net loss of wetlands approach. I've been calling for a change in this approach since 1999, but this government hasn't been listening and the result is that we have got ourselves into a situation where the risks of flooding are increased, not decreased.

We know from good studies done on Broughton's Creek in southwestern Manitoba that the amount of water coming off the land is 30 per cent or more than it was—30 per cent more—perhaps even more than that now than it was in the 1960s. And when you've got 30 per cent more water coming off the land, imagine what 30 per cent less water would have looked like in 2011, what 30 per cent less water

could look like in decreasing the risk of flooding now.

We have in Lake Winnipeg the most threatened lake of the planet. But there's not in this budget a clear, specific plan of what this government is going to do and how it will meet their target of 50 per cent reduction in phosphorus. In fact, from what I can see from when this government first talked about a 50 per cent reduction target which we have been—in the Liberal party—have been talking about for quite a number of years, they first started talking about this in 2011. But in 2011 when they started talking to now, there's been very little change, very little decrease in the amount of phosphorus going into Lake Winnipeg because this government for the last two years has basically been sitting it out in terms of making progress.

* (15:40)

Let's talk a little bit about diabetes. When this government came to power, there were about 50,000 Manitobans with diabetes. It was known that we had an epidemic then—the epidemic had been identified in 1996—and yet the NDP, now, in 13 and a half years, have never mobilized the effort needed to fight and turn around this epidemic. Today, that number is approximately a hundred thousand Manitobans with diabetes. Daily tragedies—people losing eyesight, losing kidney function, needing dialysis and transplantation, losing legs, having heart attacks, having strokes; there are far too many of these daily tragedies here happening in our province, and they are far too costly. And yet, once again, we had a budget speech which—with no mention of diabetes, of this huge epidemic affecting our province. It is incomprehensible to me that this government could be so out of touch with this epidemic going on. It is unbelievable that we had a Minister of Health talking on the budget and never once in her speech mentioning diabetes and this epidemic and what her plan was for it. I can only conclude that she doesn't have much of a plan in how she's going to turn it around. This savings—had this diabetes epidemic been addressed in 1999 and the increase arrested and started to turn around, we would be saving now hundreds of millions of dollars a year. That would be a savings worth having, because it also is saving lives and saving heartache and saving sickness as well as saving dollars. But it's obviously not a priority of this government.

FASD, which the Minister for Youth Opportunities is now, I believe, looking after, is very expensive. The costs in health care, in foster care, child and family services, justice, education add up over the lifetime to about \$2 million a child it's been estimated. Probably, by the time that child has lived a lifetime it will be higher than that. And yet there is still no evidence that the NDP have actually reduced the incidence of a-FASD or even reduced the consumption of alcohol during pregnancy. Should have been a central feature of this budget aimed at reducing long-term costs, but it wasn't.

There's too much crime in Manitoba. We have the highest violent crime severity index of all provinces, but there's too little here to address the causes of crime: poverty, what's happening in child and family services, other major issues. Jack Calhoun came to present at our Thinkers' Conference, provided a whole series of ideas, but this government doesn't seem to be interested.

There are areas improving urban infrastructure costs, as the mayor has said. Now, I would argue particularly for rapid transit so that we have less wear and tear on our streets and so we have an infrastructure for the future. It's there a little bit, but it's not there with the priority that it should be.

The government has noted, and the Finance Minister's noted in his budget, in his budget speech, that there's been a very modest improvement in the amount of research being done in Manitoba in the last couple of years, but he failed to notice that we could lose this progress. We have lost the NRC institute of biodiagnostics. We're losing the Cereal Research lab. We have lost the Experimental Lakes Area. All things that this government could have involved—been involved with providing some better vision for the future, but this government was not there and was not there adequately in standing up to the federal government to make sure that Manitoba and research in Manitoba was not harmed as it is being at the moment.

So, in summary, Mr. Speaker, I would put it this way, that this is a budget which has far too many shortcomings, and I will not be supporting this budget. Thank you.

Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy): Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of our government's budget as presented by our Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers).

Mr. Speaker, this budget talks about choices and those choices weren't easy. I know I made difficult choices in my department, and I saw my colleagues do the same thing. We were well aware that the decisions that we were making affect Manitoba families, and it's a responsibility that none of us on this side of the House take lightly.

But, Mr. Speaker, we weighed those choices with the alternatives. We've heard those alternatives presented to us last week by the Leader of the Opposition, and we knew we had to protect those things that matter to Manitoba families.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba has weathered the financial storm better than most places. We've had our own storms. We've seen an increase in major floods—three in the last five years. And as I stand here today, I know how lucky I am that my home is protected while I know others around our province are preparing for more water. My home is protected because of choices governments have made. Roblin government made a difficult choice, but a wise choice to build the floodway, and our government, who also made the choice to put more than \$600 million into that same floodway to expand it. We've built dikes around vulnerable communities and been there when people need us. And I know that this budget will ensure that more of our friends and neighbours outside the floodway are protected as well.

There's no way to predict what the weather has in store for us for the next 10 or 20 years and, Mr. Speaker, from the Leader of the Opposition's speech, I'm not entirely sure he believes in climate change. But I'm going to go with the scientific community, and they say we can probably expect more for this and more of this. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. I know right now that my home is safe, and I want others to have that same security.

Mr. Speaker, I missed hearing the Leader of the Opposition's speech in the House; unfortunately. I had to take my three daughters to their annual checkup with their pediatrician, something that proves to me that our support for Manitoba families, in particular, our whip's support for Manitoba families, goes to—right across to all of us.

It's really incredible when you're in the room with your pediatrician and you think about the fact that I don't pay any medical fees. I can see my doctor; my children can see their doctor. We don't pay a health insurance like our friends in the United States to the south of us. We don't pay a health

premium like our neighbours do in other provinces. I get to take my three growing girls to a doctor once a year, just to make sure everything's on track—prevention, like I was talking about. And I have to ask some of my colleagues with children how it is that my little babies now each weigh over a hundred pounds—not quite sure how that happened, but it does explain why my grocery cart is overflowing every single week.

I didn't get to hear the Leader of the Opposition's speech, Mr. Speaker, but I did read it. He talked a lot about instant gratification over long-term delayed costs. He doesn't believe in what he calls instant gratification, and he thinks our budget calls for that.

Well, yes, Mr. Speaker, it does; our budget does call for instant gratification, and I want to give that instant gratification to a cancer patient. I want medical help to be there for people the second they need it. When your grandmother rings the buzzer in her personal care home, I want someone to come to her attention. I want our emergency rooms to be ready when a horrific accident happens in the middle of the night, and I want to know a nurse will come to my bedside and bring the comfort I need at 3 a.m., when I'm not sure I have the strength for the journey ahead.

Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition says old habits are hard to break. I got to tell you, his old habits scare me. Manitobans remember his old habits. They remember those habits he had when he was in government. When times were tough, Leader of the Opposition, when he was in Cabinet, didn't worry too much about front-line services, and fired nurses, he cut medical seats at the University of Manitoba, he froze or cut budgets to the universities for five years in a row but, at the same time, they raised tuition by 132 per cent. Those are some pretty bad habits and, apparently, according to the Leader of the Opposition, they're hard to break.

* (15:50)

Well, we're adding more than 60 new nurse training sets—seats across the country at the same time as he's talking about cutting civil servant jobs. Now, Mr. Speaker, Manitobans know exactly which civil servants he's referring to because, you see, he's got an old habit of firing nurses, and by what he's saying and what he said last week he hasn't broken that bad, old habit of firing nurses yet. He actually wants to cut \$7 million from the budget of the University of Manitoba, and I can tell you, if you do those kind of cuts you're not adding 60 additional

training seats for nurses. In fact, you're cutting the amount of nurses we're training right now. That habit of firing nurses is a bad one and tough to break, apparently.

Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition also talked about people having headaches and cold sweats in the night. Well, I'll tell you, the thought of Manitoba being in the opposition party's hands does make me nervous. I could not sleep at night. I couldn't, I couldn't sleep at night knowing how the cuts the Leader of the Opposition is proposing, what he just proposed last week, and how that would affect people. I wonder what it would mean to children needing the protection of social workers who wouldn't be there under his direction. What would Manitoba schools look like after he laid off those civil servant teachers or didn't replace those retiring ones, as he said he's planning to do? That fine government he was a part of in the '90s, the work that he was so proud of, those old habits of his, well, they do give one the cold sweats.

Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition compared my party and members of this side of the House to dogs. I have to say I'm not surprised that someone who would say something like that isn't supporting Bill 18. Well, I like dogs too. I like my dog. She cares a lot about people. She approaches everyone as if they are good and she believes the best about everyone she greets. I always think my dog seems to see potential in people even if they're not currently showing their finest form, and I hope to have more of that attitude: the belief that there is a greater good in all people, a potential in all people and knowing that everyone has something good to share in them. My dog doesn't give up on anyone and that's not a bad role model for a government to follow.

The Leader of the Opposition also spoke about mining in his speech. The Leader of the Opposition would like us to be more like Botswana. That's what I read he said in his speech, wants to be more like Botswana. So I did a little research, and here's what the US Department of State says about Botswana. Well, they've got some concerns about some serious human rights issues in that country. They've got poor prison conditions, restrictions on freedom of the press and, even scarier, a bad record of trafficking people, severe violence against women, abuse of children. According to the US Department of State, people living in Botswana with HIV/AIDS, people living with disabilities, gay and lesbian people face an incredible amount of discrimination that makes

life very difficult. Child labour is also a problem. Now it didn't say specifically if that was a problem in their mining industry, but child labour is a problem in Botswana. There's a group of people known as the sand people who face restrictions as to where they're allowed to go, where they're allowed to live. There are some areas of the country they are not permitted to go to. And the Leader of the Opposition would like us to be more like Botswana and, again, I think of Bill 18. Botswana's dismal human rights record is his idea of aiming higher.

Perhaps, if the Leader of the Opposition is interested in mining, he should visit the mining academy in Flin Flon because our government is bringing education to the people of the north through the University College of the North. We're empowering people in the north through education so they can reach their own potential not just for the good of the individual, but for the good of the entire province.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition talks a lot about the impact of decisions we make in this House and how it will affect our children, and that is very true. We think about that with every decision we make. I wish the Leader of the Opposition would have thought like that when he cut back the number of doctors that were being trained at the University of Manitoba. Those decisions are long reaching into the future. I wish he would have considered the long-reaching impact of freezing capital development of hospitals and slashing university budgets. It's taken 10 years to dig out of the hole that they put Manitoba in. Mr. Speaker, we won't leave a legacy of fruit flies in the operating room. That's their legacy.

I hope our legacy speaks of support for education, of new buildings at every campus in this— in Manitoba as we have seen over the last few years. We've also seen higher enrolment at our post-secondary institutions and more access for post-secondary studies. I hope that is the legacy we leave behind.

Mr. Speaker, I won't take advice from this Leader of the Opposition when he says we should realign our priorities. The people of Manitoba have told us their priorities are health care, education and knowing that their children will have the tools in place to succeed, and we will keep working for 'manitobeto'—for Manitoba families, to protect their priorities.

The Leader of the Opposition keeps pointing out that his team is different than ours. He says he has a

plan, but I ask my colleagues, why does it sound so familiar? And maybe it's because we know the choices he made when he was in government, and he confirmed last week that he would make those same bad choices, those bad habits, once again. He told us he wouldn't replace nurses who are retiring, that he'd mothball hydro projects, crippling our future economy. And would he accept the HST? Well, we're not sure; he hasn't actually said either way. He thinks we've got too many teachers and I guess he thinks we've got too many social workers as well. Yes, Mr. Speaker, they make different choices than we do, and I'm proud that we're willing to stand up for Manitoba families.

I guess, Mr. Speaker, the thing I take most offence from in the Leader of the Opposition's speech was his callous treatment of the health-care system. You see, we know it's not just a system; the health-care system is hard-working men and women. It is doctors, nurses, technicians, all the support staff that go into running a hospital, but it's also patients, more importantly, and patients are people with families going through some of the most difficult times of their lives, and I find it incredibly disrespectful that the MLA for Fort Whyte would refer to health care as a video game.

Perhaps his colleagues on that side of the House find that funny, but I assure you, the cancer patient, the parent who just lost a child, the woman putting her aging father in a senior care home doesn't find it a joke. And, when our Finance Minister chooses to make health care our No. 1 priority, well, I applaud him.

Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition speaks of his respect for seniors, and I do respect that opinion as well, but words are not enough. Our seniors deserve to live with dignity and that's why we're helping more of them age in their own homes. We're building more personal care homes for those who do need extra support and we're taking the education property tax off the bill for seniors. We're growing our health-care system to better support our aging population. Our seniors deserve more than just our respect; they deserve our support and action as well.

And, finally, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition says, it's time for tough love, but I'm not sure what he means by that. Is his kind of tough love telling a cancer patient that their drugs will no longer be covered? That's pretty tough love. Is tough love telling the bright 12-grade 12-year-old student who—

the grade 12 student who doesn't come from a wealthy family, I'm sorry if you can't afford tuition—because he cut the bursaries when he was in government. Is that tough love, cutting bursaries to students who are bright and ambitious but can't afford to go to school? Or is tough love telling communities that need critical infrastructure to prevent flooding, sorry, can't do that?

Well, no thank you, Mr. Speaker. He can talk about tough love, but on this side of the House we'd rather talk about compassion.

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): Bill two—or Budget 2013 is an interesting study for those of us who've been involved in studying political science, for those of us who have been members of the Legislature for some time. Not just is it a troubling document in that—what it's doing to Manitoba, unlike the kind of wallpapering we've seen from members opposite, but it's a troubling document in the kinds of priorities that it sets and the direction it's taking Manitoba.

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

But the approach that I want to take—I believe more than anything else, that this is a defining moment for a government that's been in office, arguably too long. And I would suggest that it is really about the quote: You're only as good as your word. I'd like to read a few individuals who've written on this, and PattyAnn writes: It basically means that you have to be true to what you say. And I thought, that's a really good way to start Budget 2013.

* (16:00)

In fact, Dorothy Neddermeyer writes: Since humans began speaking to one another they have made promises. The fly in the ointment is, of course, not keeping them. Those who more often than not keep their promises are regarded as people with integrity, while those who seldom keep their promises are regarded as those who at best cannot be taken seriously and at worst are not to be trusted.

In fact, if you look at WithTheCommand, an organization that—and the document is written by Thomas M. Cunningham who's a 15-year veteran of the United States Naval Academy, fire department of Annapolis, Maryland—and he writes about leadership, integrity and your word. And he states there are various factors that affect an individual's performance and the effect that those factors play in becoming a successful leader. Qualities of leadership include, and he lists 14 points. He goes on to say: Of

all the qualities a leader must possess, integrity may be the most important one of them all. In fact, integrity, he says, is defined by Webster's: as a firm adherence to a code especially moral or artistic—of artistic values, which he calls incorruptibility; an unimpaired condition, which he calls soundness; and the quality or state-of-being complete or undivided, which he calls completeness. He goes on to say integrity involves the three r's: respect for self, respect for others and responsibility for your actions. He says there is a common thing—theme among experts who have studied or written about modern leadership: that all leaders must act with integrity at all times. The first reason for acting with integrity is that subordinates are constantly observing the lead figure. He says a leader is the role model by which the group that they command is most influenced. Eventually, this will lead to a modelling—or molding of the group's behaviour. This is why a leader must have and maintain the higher standard of character and integrity.

And, alas, Mr. Speaker, we have a Premier (Mr. Selinger) who has not shown those characteristics. We have a budget that is based, the very foundation is based on misleading the public. And I would like to start and make the case where we have a Premier who is not to be trusted. He is not, as I have just read, he is not an individual who—and I will read—a leader must have and maintain the highest standard of character and integrity. Integrity of one's character will consist of honour, virtue and allegiance.

Mr. Speaker, we do not have a Premier, the member for Selinger, who has shown a history of flaunting the laws, flaunting the rules and I believe—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The member for St. Paul referred to an individual as the member for Selinger. If he would retract that, please. Thank you.

Mr. Schuler: I thank you for that, Mr. Speaker, and it should have been the member for St. Boniface and I—getting myself quite a passionate involved in my speaking notes here.

I would like to point members that—in the 1999 campaign there were, amongst others in this Chamber, 13 MLAs that are still here today, and I will read them—who got elected on a commitment. And I would like to read that commitment to the House. It says: Today's NDP will keep balanced budget legislation and hold taxes down. Today's NDP will balance the budget and continue paying down the debt without raising people's taxes. That was from the 1999 campaign.

In fact, a brochure put out for, amongst other individuals, the candidate for Gimli, the candidate running in Springfield for the NDP and the MLA for Selkirk, in the brochure it says: We will lower property taxes and keep balanced budget legislation. Another version of the same thing: balanced budgets, no tax increases, today's NDP believes government should be committed to both fiscal responsibility and social responsibility.

Here's another one. The candidate running in Lac du Bonnet, in the newspaper article in the Review September 20th, 1999: We'll keep balanced budget legislation and lower taxes.

And here's a quote from then-Premier Gary Doer: It's time for a government that's in touch with the hopes and dreams of Manitobans. We will not raise taxes or eliminate balanced budget legislation.

The five commitments for you and your family put out by the NDP in 1999—we'll keep balanced budget legislation and lower property taxes.

Of those individuals, Mr. Speaker, was the member for Assiniboine, Brandon East, Dauphin-Roblin, Elmwood, Interlake, Kildonan, La Verendrye, Rupertsland, Selkirk, St. Boniface, St. Johns, St. Vital and Thompson. Every one of those MLAs, the 13 MLAs, ran on not touching balanced budget legislation, not touching the taxpayer protection act and what we have seen today is an absolute turning their back on it.

And, yes, the member for St. Boniface, the Premier of this province, who got—initially got elected to this Legislature, became Finance Minister, got elected on the commitment that they would not touch balanced budget legislation. And yet, we have seen the last few years, they have attacked it consistently. And with this latest document, they are gutting what's left of it, it is—there is nothing left of the balanced budget legislation if you strip out that you must have a referendum before you raise taxes, and that is shameful.

And even more so to the member for St. Boniface—and I would like to reference an article and it came from the great writers of The Black Rod and it talks about the 1999 campaign where several, multiple—multiple—candidates running in that election committed election fraud, in which they falsified documents and it lists it here very clearly. Manitoba's Finance Minister then, who's now the Premier, the member for St. Boniface, the man

responsible for ensuring tax money is spent properly, admits he's known for six years of the scheme by the NDP to defraud the Province of hundreds of thousands of dollars. He never went public. Oh, no—no, no, Mr. Speaker, the member for St. Boniface, the Premier, never went public, although he did insist on a letter from the NDP executive in 2003, exonerating him from any blame.

If you go back to some of the quotes we had that talks about integrity, and that leadership—leadership—is based on integrity, and that if you want to lead, if you want to lead the group, if you want to lead the team, if you want to lead a province, that integrity is what you need. And we have in this Premier an individual who has not shown to have the integrity that they talk about in these articles.

And I quote again, of all the qualities a leader must possess, integrity may be the most important one of them.

Well, perhaps the member for St. Boniface should have realized that before he took a letter trying to absolve himself of what was going on in the election in 1999. And the member for St. Vital, she was there as well, got a letter, and then when asked to produce it, oh, they didn't have them anymore, accidentally they must have been shredded. Both members still owe this House an explanation of what happened.

And, if those of you who wish to find out about what that election fraud was all about, I recommend they go and they read what The Black Rod has to say about that.

Mr. Speaker, it was very unfortunate—very unfortunate—and the NDP should have paid more of a price for what went on and, alas, they did not.

And it speaks to the character of the Premier, who is responsible for the finances—ultimately responsible for the finances of this province. In fact, it was former Premier Gary Doer who used to always get up and declare, the buck stops here, and he claimed the buck stopped with the Premier's desk. We assume that's the same for the member for St. Boniface.

If the Chamber and the public isn't quite convinced that our Premier has shown himself to not have the kind of integrity we need to run this province, by pointing out that the election fraud that had been perpetrated in 1999, the fact that they'd committed to not touching balanced budget legislation, then I'd like to point out to the Premier's

role, the member for St. Boniface's role, in the cover-up that took place under Crocus. And I quote from the Winnipeg Sun, February 27th, 2007: Not only did the Finance Minister fail to warn investors of the 'potential'—potential meltdown of the Crocus Investment Fund four years before its collapse, but he withheld key information from the Auditor General during his 2005 investigation.

* (16:10)

Mr. Speaker, when approached about it the Premier (Mr. Selinger) said—then—Finance minister: We have now discovered and failed to disclose the November 2000 Cabinet memo. When asked why he didn't present it, the Minister of Finance said that he felt that somehow he was protecting the investors by not telling them that the fund was collapsing. And what is so shameful about the lack of integrity from the member of St. Boniface, the Premier, is that there was a member of this Chamber who rose, the member for Forth Whyte—John Loewen, the former member—who got up and tried to explain to Manitobans that there was something wrong with the liquidity and where the direction was going with Crocus. And did the now—Premier, the minister of Finance, the member for St. Boniface ever get up and correct the record then and try to save what at that time was the slugging of another member's reputation in this House? Did the member for St. Boniface ever get up and say, actually, John Loewen is right? He never did and he allowed John Loewen to absolutely be lionized in the media and by his own caucus members when he knew that the member for Fort Whyte, John Loewen, was absolutely right. He was dead right in what he was saying, and that would have taken incredible integrity. That would have taken incredible courage of—none of which the member for St. Boniface, the Premier, seems to possess.

We then move on—and there were a lot of very, very troubling times with the Crocus fund. Finally, it did come out what was taking place and John Loewen was exonerated. And I think to this day it still would be becoming of the NDP, particularly this Premier, to explain to Manitobans that he was wrong and that a member of this Chamber, John Loewen, was right, and he should offer an apology to John Loewen. It is a black mark on this Chamber to this day that one of our own was the perennial thrown under the bus when government members knew what was going wrong and what had gone wrong. And it is a typical lack of leadership by members opposite to allow that kind of thing. All the Cabinet ministers

who knew there was a liquidity issue in Crocus and sat—it was the silence of the lambs over there. It was absolute silence. They were mute on the issue and let John Loewen, which they knew—who they knew was right on this issue, they let him just twist in the wind, Mr. Speaker.

We then have the 2011 campaign, and I know that many have referenced that campaign. I was part of that campaign, and there again was a Leader of the Opposition who confronted the Premier and said to pay for all your promises, to pay for what you are trying to do in this province you are either going to have to raise taxes or you're going to have to do business differently than you are. And Hugh McFadyen, the Leader of the Opposition at that time, raised it in a debate and the Premier said basically the old: read my lips, no new taxes. The Premier then left the debate and went on to say that even the discussion the concept of raising the PST was nonsense, and I think it's very telling of a premier. I think it's very telling of an individual who wants to lead this province who can in the back of his mind know that the finances are in such difficult shape.

And I guess we would be probably having a little bit different a debate if this had been the first term, if the Premier (Mr. Selinger), the member of St. Boniface had never been in this Chamber and it was his first time running and he would've gotten in. He would've realized, oh, my goodness, you know, the finances are in appalling shape. However, this is an individual who for 10 years was the architect of budgets or the Leader of the Liberal Party the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) used to call it—call them the fudge-its. He knew what shape the economy was in. He knew where things were going in the economy, and he would've known at that debate that he at some point in time was either going to have to raise taxes or he was going to have to do business differently than they were doing. He knew it, and when he walked out of that debate and he said that discussion is nonsense, Mr. Speaker, may I suggest to you that that was less than truthful; that was less than appropriate for someone who aspires to lead a province.

And he basically—he and his team—and I point to the members across the way who got elected on what you could basically call a false pretence. They got elected on saying that there would be no PST increase, they were not even going to contemplate it. And they went ahead, not even two years later, and brought it in in Budget 2013.

And we've seen consistently, all the way through—and it was surprising; I watched the Premier after the election, talking about voter turnout. And, after he had successfully trashed the Leader of Opposition with his American-style attack ads and with his nasty and untruthful kind of advertising that went on—it was shameful; it was disgraceful; it was unbecoming of this Premier. But it's a pattern that we have seen, and certainly not the kind of leadership that you would want from a leader who would have integrity.

And in the Winnipeg Free Press—and I'll give the date on this one for those who might want to research—April 21st, 2013. And I quote: A week after he led the NDP to a fourth consecutive majority government, the Premier says turnout in the 2011 provincial election was just not high enough. And he wants to do something about it. He—he's quoted as saying: We have to undertake something. We're going to take a look at e-voting. Unquote. Voter turnout in Manitoba last week was 57 per cent.

Well, it's interesting, because the Winnipeg Free Press then went and quoted a professor. Paul Thomas, professor at the University of Manitoba's political studies department, said he doesn't believe e-voting is the magic bullet to increase voter turnout. Thomas said, a pervasive cynicism towards politicians and political parties is a large factor behind the poor turnout, adding he doesn't believe that that can be overcome by Internet balloting. Whether you vote electronically or by paper, it won't affect the cynicism that is out there, Thomas says.

And you go back now, and you read the Premier's quote when he says, provincial election—turnout in the provincial election was just not high enough, and he wants to do something about it. Yes, yes; the member for St. Boniface, the Premier, did do something about it. He went out and systematically trashed his main promise; he trashed his commitment; he basically trashed what he had committed to in the election on finances.

He threw it out the window with his first 'bussel'—budget, and if that wasn't even bad enough, then went and raised the PST by 1 per cent, which he said was nonsense. He categorically—it wasn't—unequivocally—he wasn't sort of beside the point; it wasn't as if he was kind of muddling it. He said the talk of raising the PST is nonsense. And that is the same individual, the same man, who wants to be leader of this province, wants to show himself as having some integrity.

He's the same individual who on one side of his mouth talks about voter turnout being so appalling we have to look at e-voting, and then walks out. And exactly what Paul Thomas said is the reason why we have such low voter turnout, is the cynicism of the [inaudible]—the Premier played right into it again.

I have a suggestion for the Premier: maybe we shouldn't do e-voting, maybe what we need is e-honesty from the member from St. Boniface. That's what we need in this province; we need a leader of integrity.

And I will read again, because I think it bears fruit to be read again. Of all the qualities a leader must possess, says—and I'll quote it directly—Thomas M. Cunningham: Of all the qualities a leader must 'possess,' integrity may be the most important one of them all.

* (16:20)

And the Premier runs around and he talks out of 18 sides of his mouth, wonders why there's cynicism; wonders why there's 'vo loder'—'vo'—low voter turnout; wonders why there's problems in the province. You know, perhaps if the Premier would go back right from day one, from 1999—right from day one and start apologizing for everything he did, maybe then we'd have a little bit of higher voter turnout. That's why young people—that's why a lot of people just get turned off by politics. It's directly—directly associated with the chair in front of the government benches, the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger), the Premier, should wear the responsibility for what he's done in this province. Not just was that an ugly, nasty campaign; it was based on untruth. The Premier ran around pointing to everything everybody else would do and then promptly walked down here into this Chamber and brought in one budget after another that went diametrically against what he had promised he would do in a budget. And that is why we have such cynicism. That's why we don't need e-voting. What we need is men and women of integrity leading this province. And the Premier, the member of St. Boniface, has been weighed and has been found wanting in that category. It is very unfortunate.

We talk about indifference. We talk about why, you know, individuals tune out of what goes on in this Chamber. I've listened to some of the speeches. Is there some contrition? You know, a few members, the more seasoned members, perhaps there's a little bit of contrition. But, by and large, it's all blustering. And, you know, again, Mr. Speaker, if this was a

government newly elected that had come in, had no record of having been in office for some time, I think the public would understand that perhaps things had changed. But it's just the most unbelievable thing. One day one of the members will get up and he'll talk about the province is booming, and then another question comes and the Premier says, oh, it's recession, it's recession. They can't keep their lines straight. They can't keep their stories straight. The message changes from question to question, and then you wonder why there's cynicism.

And, when they talk about flood mitigation, about flood protection other than the floodway which, yes, was built by a Conservative premier and done, rightfully so for the people of Manitoba—other than renovating the floodway, this government has spent less than 1 per cent of their budget on flood mitigation, and yet they consistently hide behind that. You know, if they were truthful and were actually going to take care of the people they would go into Twin Beaches and look at what's going on—and the member who represents the Interlake said to the individuals from Twin Beaches from his area, he said to them as they stood in front of homes and cottages and farms and communities that were devastated, he said: ah, but it could be worse. What could be worse? It was an NDP-created flood. The lake was allowed to be way too high. The government knew that. The government knew ahead of time that they had a problem and then they've fudged around on the issue. Now they have one lawsuit after another coming at them, and that's their idea of flood mitigation: tell people it could be worse and then go and sue your government. That's their idea.

It's disgraceful, Mr. Speaker. They knew what was coming at them. They knew how tough they had left the province when they went into the election in 2011. They knew what they were committing to and they should have known that there was no way that they could live up to their commitments, that they could live up to their spending without a tax increase or substantial changes to the way they were funding the province of Manitoba.

And I would suggest to all members that they go back and they look at the initial balanced budget legislation. It was called taxpayer protection. It was there, actually, to protect the public from their politicians. It was to protect them, to give them something that at least they could look at, they could lean on, they could rely on to protect them from politicians coming through and raising taxes and not

following through with the legislation. And under the member for St. Boniface, this Premier, whether he—when he was minister of Finance or now Premier, we have seen the erosion of the public taxpayer protection act. We have seen them erode it year after year after year, piece by piece.

And I'd like to talk about the referendum. Here you have a government, here you have a party that was evidently founded on grassroots. It was founded on the Prairies and was founded on consulting and talking to people and being open to different ideas. And they are the ones that (a) are going against what they committed to in the last election and then using legislation to try to cover up for what they're going to do.

I would suggest to members opposite, what do you have to fear? You have 37 members. You've got 190-some communicators. You've got all kinds of money and all kinds of things at your disposal as a government. Go into a referendum. What are you scared of? What are you frightened of? Are you actually scared of looking into the whites of the voters' eyes and actually trying to explain to them how (a) you could've gotten it so wrong, that you could've gotten it so wrong in—election and told them that you're not going to raise taxes, that you could've gotten it so wrong that you have to raise numerous taxes, including the PST.

Is that what you're scared of, is going and trying to sell that concept to them? Is it because you think you would be going and selling the unsaleable? Is that the kind of integrity we have on the other side? Is that the kind of leadership?

I look at the backbenchers. Is this—you all got elected on this. You got elected on no tax increase, each and every one of you. Why don't you—why don't you—fight for a referendum for your constituents? And go to them and say, we believe this is the right thing.

Take the opportunity. Tell them this is the way we should go. The member for The Maples (Mr. Saran), member for St. Norbert (Mr. Gaudreau), member for Southdale (Ms. Selby), the member for Radisson (Mr. Jha), go out and sell this.

Why is it that not just are you going to break your promise, not just are you going to break your word, not are you going to show that you don't have integrity, on top of it all, you're going to take away the last thing they have is their protection?

Mr. Speaker, my time is running out and I want to leave this Chamber with one more quote. It's a quote from Eleanor Roosevelt, First Lady, and she said, "One's philosophy is not best expressed in words; it is expressed in the choices one makes . . . In the long run, we shape our lives and we shape ourselves. The process never ends until we die. And, the choices we make are ultimately our own responsibility."

I would say to the NDP: Have a really good look at her words. And the choices we make are ultimately our own responsibility. The choice was, in the last election, for the NDP, I would say, to mislead Manitobans. I believe the NDP party lied to Manitobans. They knew what was coming. And they have a choice to make now. They've said they're going to raise the PST by 1 per cent. Take it to the public in a referendum.

Mr. Speaker, as it stands right now, I could never vote for this budget. I could never vote for the legislation put forward. It is unfortunate, it was wrong, it was deceptive and it lacks integrity. The entire budget, this entire process, is a lack of integrity. And then when we go into an election, I hope we don't hear from members opposite about why there's 'vo loder'—low voter turnout and why there's so much cynicism. They need only look at themselves for what they've done with this budget and this piece of legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Gimli.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade): Well, Mr. Acting—or Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm very proud to stand in the House today in support of the budget and proud to do so on a day where we announce 60 more nursing training positions, where we—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Just a correction. The honourable Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade. My apologies.

Mr. Bjornson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I'm very proud to stand in the House today to speak to this legislation and speak to this budget, speak to the fact that today's the day that we announced 60 more training positions for nurses, that we introduced more legislation to protect endangered species on Earth Day and, of course, introducing

legislation to make our highways and roads safer for Manitobans, Mr. Speaker.

It might come as a surprise to my colleagues in the regressive cut-services party across the way, that I will not be supporting their amendment, and I'm—I'd also like to acknowledge at this time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the fact that we had a great celebration in Gimli over the weekend. I was very pleased to see so many family and friends from the community out to help my dad celebrate his 80th birthday.

* (16:30)

Now, what was rather interesting about that celebration was the fact that we're in the church basement setting up for the party and the power went out. And then we went up to church for the service and we're in—we're sitting there in the dark, the power was still out, but it flickered, so we knew that Manitoba Hydro had determined what the problem was, and it came back on, and certainly they had restored the power in time where the big coffee urn had five minutes to spare when everyone came down after church to celebrate my dad's birthday. But my dad, in his true form, said, well, they didn't have power when I was born, so he took it all in stride, and it was a great celebration of 80 years of a life well lived.

And one of the things that—about my dad, when I asked my mom, in one sentence how you could summarize 80 years of a life well lived, she said this about Dad: that you should not measure a person for his possessions, rather how he uses those possessions for the service and care of others.

And I think that applies to what we're talking about here today, think it applies in many ways to what we're talking about here today. And I know that—like I say, the regressive cut-services party across the way has said what they would do with the resources that are available to them as a government, and they would cut and cut and cut. And we, on the other hand, are saying no, it's not a time for this to happen again, because we saw what happened in the 1990s, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And I know that when we've heard the opposition talk in this Chamber about the budget, it's a déjà vu all over again. We have a Leader of the Opposition who had been in that government which he called one of the greatest governments that Manitoba was blessed to have, in Gary Filmon's government, who is taking back those ideas from the

1990s about how we deal with fiscal challenges in this province of Manitoba.

Now, you know, I do know that the members opposite had been out to Gimli for a caucus retreat. That's very nice that they've discovered Gimli again; they haven't been there for quite some time. But while they were out there, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they would have seen the investments that we've made in Gimli.

They would have seen the new health-care facility, redevelopment of the Gimli health centre, which was over \$13 million, plus a \$6-million investment in dialysis. And it's worth mentioning yet again that during the election, when we had promised to do that, in '07, the opposition manager came over telling me, what are you doing? That's a waste of money. We don't need dialysis unit in Gimli hospital. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was very proud to cut the ribbon with the Premier and with the Health Minister at the time to celebrate the dialysis unit in Gimli hospital, because that makes a difference to Manitobans, bringing health care closer to home. And, of course, a lot of the improvements that we've made in health care in the Gimli health centre and in the surrounding area with Telehealth and all the other supports that we've been providing in the area speaks volumes to our commitment to health care. And that's a very important part of who we are as government.

And, of course, they would have seen that we've invested, just in the town of Gimli itself, over \$9 million in infrastructure to support our learning environment in Gimli with the improvements to the Sigurbjorg Stefansson School, with the improvements to the George Johnson Middle School and with the improvements to the Gimli High School. And bricks and mortar aside, we keep investing in education. Yes, this is a challenging year. This is a challenging year because of the world economic downturn and because of the challenges that we're facing with the flood, but we still invested over \$23 million in education, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The opposition cut education funding when they were faced with similar challenges. So I think it really speaks volumes to who we are and the choices that we're making and the choices we're making on behalf of Manitobans.

Now—so when they were in Gimli and they saw all these wonderful things that we've done, it reminded me of the last time they were in power when they cut the funding to the Gimli hospital by

25 per cent. That's the last time they were in power. And, of course, we've said it before about the zero, zero, -2, -2 funding announcements—or lack of funding announcements for education that we saw while they were in office, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now, another thing that they would have seen if they were in Gimli was the fact that we've invested a lot of money in the south basin diking system and drainage systems in our community to address the challenges that we're about to face with the flooding. And it's rather curious, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that members opposite will say they only spent this percentage of the budget, only spent this percentage of the budget on flood protection. I think we only spent \$1.2 billion in flood protection, so in my view there's never the word only when it attached to public funds. These are public funds and we take the stewardship of those public funds very seriously, and \$1.2 billion in investments in flood preparation speaks volumes to our commitment to supporting Manitobans who find themselves at risk of being flooded. And we, of course, are looking at more budgetary considerations through this budget to find more supports for Manitobans on the prevention side and making Manitoba a safer place for all those who choose to live along the rivers and lakes of this great province, and it's a good number of people, as we know.

So that's our commitment is to stand with Manitobans, to support Manitobans who have faced this crisis time and time again, but they say, it's only a certain percentage of our budget. Well, again, we heard, and it's been reiterated by my colleague the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Ashton), what Premier Filmon had said during the flood: That's what you get for living on a flood plain. And that was absolutely disgusting that that was the premier of our province's position on this.

And, you know, it's kind of interesting because I think yourself, Mr. Deputy Speaker, spoke to the position of one of our federal colleagues when it came to how we worked to address the flood situation here in Manitoba, and I was at a meeting when he said, well, cottage is a luxury item, so we shouldn't be providing any support for cottagers. Manitobans own more cottages per capita than any other jurisdiction in Canada because it's important for us for our recreation and the quality of life we enjoy when we do eventually get summer in this province. We do enjoy the lake. We do enjoy the cottage, and we should be there to support Manitobans, as we have been, when it comes to

supporting their cottages and finding ways to get them back on their feet after that devastation of 2011. But, yes, that was the words of our federal Member of Parliament. They're luxury items. We shouldn't be providing support for cottages.

Now, of course, we also know that we have come up with a number of different programs to support agricultural community and the challenges that they face because of the flood, and we know that we'll continue to be there to support our agricultural producers in light of what we're expecting to see in this next flood, yet our third largest—third flood episode in the last five years.

Now, members opposite will put their head in the sand. Aw, it's a flood. We don't need to worry about that. They're not worried about it. Clearly, they're not worried about it because what was the first question the Leader of the Opposition asked the very first question period of this session. He got up in this House and said, I think it's important that you call a by-election in Morris and consider doing so in an urgent manner. It's—there's some urgency. I think—I wrote it down. He said, and I quote: Consider with some urgency the need to call a by-election in Morris.

Well, I don't know if anyone has pointed out to the Leader of the Opposition that Morris often is flooding, and he would rather have us running a by-election in Morris than dealing with the flood. I think it was shameful that the Leader of the Opposition stood and said that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now, now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'll go back to the fact that the opposition was at Gimli for a retreat, and it was really something and telling for me because the only sound bite that I heard in the local media that came out of that was they were going to stand up and be champions because of a tax on liquor. And I thought that was pretty telling because that night that they were in Gimli I was at a hearing at on poverty and getting community groups together to talk about poverty issues. So, quite a contrast, I might suggest to you in terms of having their sound bite coming out of their meeting in Gimli, dealing with one issue when I'm there dealing with my constituents and talking about how we can work together to address issues of poverty within our community, and hearing from the advocates and talking to the advocates.

But, you know, I know it's pretty clear why the opposition wouldn't be wanting to talk about poverty with the constituents in Gimli because we remember

what happened in the 1990s, and, you know, I don't have problems going back. I mean, the previous speaker kept harping on the 1999 election, but you remember what happened in the 1990s. Single persons, non-disabled, were reduced by \$40 in '93, reduced again by \$14 in 1994, reduced again by \$95.60 in 1996, cut nearly \$150 per month, and the benefits of people that need it are helped the most.

* (16:40)

And, of course, the Universal Child Care Benefit, as we've said, they clawed it back at a cost of \$48 million per year, and we, of course, reversed that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so, and they came up with, of course—[interjection] Yes, thanks for reminding me, the snitch line, the snitch line. That's another classic example. Workfare. We know what they did with workfare. So, clearly, that's why they wouldn't talk about poverty when they're in Gimli.

Now, you know, another thing that I keep hearing from members opposite when they talk about only \$1.2 billion, well, let's put some context into one of the other favourite issues that the members opposite like to talk about, and that's public financing of political parties. Now, if you were to take it and use their mathematics and talk about a percentage of budget, the amount of money dedicated to public financing of political parties is 0.00004286 per cent. I'm not going to say only, though, because, as I said, we are stewards of the public purse, and there is no only in any amount of money that we're going to talk about.

But why is it that we have public funding of political parties? Well, I think you would know that all too well, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The fact is that there are rules in place where we have to be accountable to the public for how elections are conducted, and we know that these rules have become more stringent and transparency comes at a cost, and why do we have these rules in place?

Well, of course, we know that during the 1990s members opposite tried to hijack an election, vote rigging, all of these issues that were brought to the public with the Monnin inquiry, talked about how they tried to sabotage the electoral process, and I know yourself, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you were very much a victim of campaigns that completely lacked in integrity and challenged the integrity of the electoral system. So, yes, there is a cost to democracy. There is a cost to being accountable. There is a cost to finding a way to make sure that all political parties are playing fair. So that

0.00004286 per cent is money well invested in support of democracy.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

So—and it's also something that one of my colleagues has referred to—the fact that we were referred to as a kind of a dog, referred to our party as a dog. So it got me thinking what type of dog would the Conservative Party of Manitoba be, and I thought of a few, and I know there's a lot of dog owners here. I'll be very careful. But there are some dogs that have a different reputation than others, and some of that's because of unfortunate the way the owners have trained those dogs. And, you know, pit bulls and Rottweilers come to mind. On the surface you can trust them, but, until you really get to know the dog, you don't know what's going to happen with that particular dog because of the way that dog's been treated or trained. So members opposite remind me of pit bulls in many ways. They have a—pit bulls have a rather questionable reputation, and it's because of a few of them that will come out and be very violent and aggressive. Now members opposite, of course, they have a bit of a reputation as well, and, fortunately, the pit bull party across the way has demonstrated that in some ways by their leader stepping up and talking about he will hack and slash and cut services that are important to Manitobans, Mr. Speaker. So it was, you know, though I didn't take offence when he categorized us as such, I thought, okay, fair is fair. If that's the case, if he wants that analogy, then I think the analogy will—I can come back and use another analogy as well that would suggest that to members opposite.

So another area that I'd like to talk about, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that they talk about our government as we've never cut taxes. I mean, we have had a history of finding ways to make Manitoba more affordable and competitive in our tenure in office, and I always loved this: that the gurus of business across the way have talked about their support for small business. Well, we're the government that went from 9 per cent to zero. We're the government that's increased the threshold so more small businesses are not paying any taxes. We're the government that has cut corporate—capitalization tax, cut the corporate tax, and we continue to find ways to support small business but also at home supporting the homeowners with the Education Property Tax Credit, supporting Manitobans by increasing the base personal exemption rate. All of these things that we've done,

and not once have members voted in favour of any of these tax cuts.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm looking at the clock realizing that there are a lot of members on this side of the House who would like to speak as well, so I'll be winding down my comments shortly. But, again—and I appreciate the support from members opposite, but again I will not be supporting the amendment as proposed by the regressive cut-services party, and I will be standing with my colleagues to vote in favour of a budget that support what matters the most to Manitobans, that is, to continue to build Manitoba. It's not the time to take your foot off the gas when it comes to building this province. We'll continue to do so, and Manitobans all over the province will see the benefits of this budget in due time, and I again would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak today and conclude my comments as such.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Of course, it's an honour to stand in this House and bring forward some of the views that we have in regards to the budget of 2013. First of all, I'd like to welcome you back, Mr. Speaker, and, of course, the table officers and all members of the House and, of course, our pages that look after us so well, and certainly want to welcome them back as well. Also, the people of Lakeside. What an opportunity to be able to come to this beautiful building each and every day and, of course, represent their views to the best of my ability. Sometimes I know that we may not agree on all sides of the House, in particular, on some issues, and I will get into what my views are and some of the things I've heard from my constituents.

Before I do start, I want to just reference the member from Gimli, and when he was talking about his father's 80th birthday. If he would be good enough—I missed the invitation, I guess. I didn't get the invite, but I used to work with his father as a colleague, as an administrator, when I was with the Interlake School Division, so certainly wish him a happy birthday. He's a great individual and I certainly respect him, and I think that is a great achievement in his own.

But there's other things the member from Gimli did say that I did not agree with. In fact, he talked about the flood and the lack of questions. While I can tell you that during the flood of 2011, along with a number of members of my House, that we asked all kinds of questions in regards to the questions what compensation was going to be looking like, how it was going to roll out, and now we can see that a

number of those promises that were made were, in fact, not kept, Mr. Speaker.

Whenever we heard other members of the House talk about the health-care system, the member from Southdale and the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald), I can tell you that health care is far from being fixed, Mr. Speaker. In fact, this morning I had a member from my constituency, went into the hospital in Teulon this morning at 9 o'clock, was in tremendous amount of pain. I got an email note from her about 12 o'clock, so she'd been waiting three hours for somebody to see her. Unfortunately, the system's backed up.

Also, I had a family member just a couple of weeks ago that had to use the ER system. In fact, they went to the Victoria Hospital on a Sunday morning, happened to be the Easter weekend, and I can tell you they got there around 8 o'clock in the morning—quarter to—was 11:30 before they actually saw a doctor. They did admit her later that afternoon. They went through the testing the best that they could for the time and diagnosed that there was definitely a serious problem with her health. They said because it's an Easter weekend, we need to have you stay in and tomorrow we'll have things back to normal. We'll have things kind of going back in the direction that we need them to go in order to make sure that something's not going to get overlooked.

Well, they forgot it was Easter Monday. There was nobody around to do a CT scan or MRI. So they needed the bed, they said. You know, we don't know how severe you are, but we're going to send you home. Come back tomorrow and we'll do some more tests. Well, the patient went back the following day and, sure enough, there was a gall bladder problem that needed to come out, so they said: Look, this is a little more severe than what we thought. We'll make arrangements to have you go over to St. Boniface to have surgery.

Well, the individual went over to St. B. They got there and the eyes kind of glassed over and said: Why are you here? They said: Well, we were referred here by the people, the staff at Victoria. They says: Come on in; we'll make sure that things are going to be okay with you.

So they did admit her. They said: We have a super-bug out in our hospital. We need to make sure that you're not carrying that bug. So they did a swab down and got her ready for surgery. And so then they also started her on IV.

* (16:50)

Then, what happened next was that I'd visit them, and her husband came, and I said, well, you know, look, there's not enough room for everybody. Let's just keep this kind of quiet, low-key. Well, 20 minutes to nine, what happened? I get a text message from him—they're released. They don't have enough beds in the hospital; they could do the surgery, but they don't have enough beds in the hospital to actually have her stay overnight, which is unfortunate. So they sent her home, saying, look, we're going to put you on a list, and as soon as there's an opening, we'll be able to come back and get that gallbladder out. Well, that went on for almost two weeks.

Last Monday, that individual had their gallbladder out, which is unfortunate. Also, I just got another email this morning from another lady saying it took 14 months for her son to get panelled for surgery; that seems a bit long. Just—also, it took nine months just to get an echo test. Something's really wrong.

I mean, we're spending half our budget on health care. And yet, I remember very clearly in 1999 that we were going to fix hallway medicine. It couldn't be any better than what it was back then, Mr. Speaker. Maybe they just changed the numbers around. Maybe they did some magical math. But the end of the day—and I know all members of the House want to make sure we have the best health care for all Manitobans—and I can tell you that what we've seen from this side of the House is more and more hospital closures, more and more delays. And it's unfortunate that whenever we look at issues like this, we don't have answers for them; we won't have answers for them.

But, Mr. Speaker, the other thing that I've been getting lots of emails and calls on—and that's in regards to the budget, Budget 2013. What does it really say? In fact, the small biz of Manitoba put out a press release on their views on the budget. And they state: with chronic deficits, mounting debt and 1 per cent increase in the PST, will cost Manitobans \$277 million a year. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business says that 2013-2014 budget delivers a body blow to the Manitoba economy.

Eight per cent—86 per cent of small-business owners do not support a PST to pay for infrastructure, said their Janine Carmichael, their executive director. They also went on to say investing in infrastructure is obviously important.

But, instead of making tough choices to fund priorities, the government required taxpayers to pay more. This is without a referendum as law requires. This government has a spending problem, not a revenue problem, added Carmichael.

During the election, we knew exactly—it's been stated by various members on this side of the House—that they would not raise taxes. But in fact, today's budget, she goes on to say, confirms that the budget will not be balanced until 2016, and we've had nearly half a billion dollars in tax hikes over the next two years. Two broken promises, says Carmichael.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, what we look at whenever we're hearing from the public is their interpretation, their take, on really what is right for those individuals and how it's going to affect their families and affect their households—how their ability to be able to balance their own budget in order to meet the growing demands from government. The government has to look within for ways to find cuts, ways of which they can have the priorities of their spending.

And I know that I got another email, which I'll go into as well, from a particular individual. And it says, can this government be trusted? The spin government seems to have logical reasons for increasing tax, such as infrastructure, city streets, provincial highways, roadways, and now, for flood 'fighting'—fighting. They also base the need for this tax, blame its necessity, on \$1.2 billion being split—spent on flood of 2011. It matters not what the issue. This government—administers like this government like to hide behind the flood of 2011. Not once did they point out, in that time, the federal DFA program is spending 90 per cent—90 per cent—of eligible monies, will be not—will not be clawed back from the federal treasury.

In fact, we all know that even the flood of 20—or, 1997—those settlements never came through until 2003. So we know that that's part of the cost. And, also, I've heard several members in this House get up and talk about how the flood—and the federal government's not doing their share. But let's be very clear. DFA has strict guidelines. Those guidelines are laid out by all provinces, agreed to by all provinces.

Yes, there can be changes made to those only if all provinces agree. I remember very clearly in 2011 when the member from St. Boniface went to a first-minister meeting in British Columbia, and I was appalled at the fact that whenever he made these announcements, him and the Minister of Finance, the

then-minister of Agriculture, did not, did not once ask for changes to DFA. They had ample opportunity; they did not once.

So then the following six months later they met again. What happened? They didn't ask for changes again, yet they have the audacity to stand up in this House and blame the federal government for lack of funding. It's shameful.

If they really, truly wanted to make a difference in the DFA program, whether it's the cottages that the member from Gimli talked about, or the member from the Interlake talked about different programs, or the multi-year programs that then-minister of Agriculture talked about, whether they would have ongoing programs, these are changes—these are changes—that have to be agreed to by all provinces. So, whenever we have a government that goes out and makes commitments, they can't go running to federal government and say: Hey, uncle, uncle, I need some help. That's not how it works. We have to make sure, we have to make sure we dot our i's, cross our t's, and when we make a commitment as a government, those people expect us to own up to that commitment.

In fact, I have got several, several emails, and I get calls each and every day from people that was expecting fair and adequate compensation from the flood of 2011 to, in fact, be carried on in a way of which this government said they would. Unfortunately, this government is—has decided not to do that. In fact, what they talked about in this budget of 2013 is the fact of what they said they wanted to spend this 1 per cent extra sales tax, from 7 per cent to 8 per cent was, in fact, going to be spent on infrastructure.

When we look at the infrastructure budget, the infrastructure budget, according to the government's own budget, it's up by \$28 million—\$28 million. The 1 per cent sales tax again, according to the government's own numbers, is \$198 million.

An Honourable Member: For three-quarters of the year.

Mr. Eichler: That's a—and that's right, as the member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire) said, that's only for three quarters of year.

But then reality is they're saying, well, it's about flood mitigation. We welcome flood mitigation. I can tell you very clearly that we have not seen those

numbers. They've made announcements, but yet nothing concrete about what they're going to do. I mean, we have—not only the municipalities are upset. Yes, they called for the 1 per cent on the assumption that it was going to go back into actual infrastructure dollars.

But what we've seen is that's not the case. The RMs, AMM is not happy. The City of Winnipeg is not happy. The 'brate' payers of Manitoba are not happy. What we should have seen from this government—and they said: Oh, we can't have a referendum. We don't have enough time.

I'll tell you what. We called for this House to come back in February. Where was the government? We have lots of time to sit in this House, debate this budget, debate the issues; we don't need to be sitting here at the eleventh hour saying: Oh, all these dollars are going to lapse if we don't have an opportunity to force this tax down the throats of every Manitoban, every family member in this province. In fact, families are struggling, Mr. Speaker. They're struggling each and every day to make ends meet.

We look to government to be able to give us good advice. I'm sure that if there was a disaster out there tomorrow, I know every community, I know every family member, stands together. In fact, I remember very clearly in the flood of 2011 where we went, we helped sandbag, there was family members there, there was community members there, there was people from outside the province, there was some people from all over Canada coming to help us. And we thank those folks. That's the type of country we live in, the type of country that we can be so proud of to call home, Mr. Speaker.

And I notice that also, in regards to the budget, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation they said, part of their—in their news release is fact what they could do to cut some of these costs is reduce the size of Cabinet back from 19 to 15. In fact, that's what—when the Gary Doer at the time first became the leader of the—

Mr. Speaker: Order, order.

When this matter's again before the House, the honourable member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) will have 16 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 22, 2013

CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS			
Introduction of Bills		Manitoba Hydro Gerrard; Selinger	657
Bill 24—The Endangered Species Amendment Act (Ecosystem Protection and Miscellaneous Amendments)		Nursing Education Wight; Selby	658
Mackintosh	649	Flood Preparation Eichler; Ashton	658
Bill 23—The Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Increased Sanctions for Street Racing)		Members' Statements	
Swan	649	Fort Garry Senior Resource Council Gaudreau	659
Petitions		Pinawa 50th Birthday Ewasko	660
Provincial Road 520 Renewal		Flin Flon Community Choir and Flin Flon Arts Council—Chicago	
Ewasko	649	Pettersen	660
St. Ambroise Beach Provincial Park		Earth Day Maguire	661
Wishart	650	Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal Recipients Dewar	661
Hydro Capital Development—NFAT Review			
Pedersen	650	ORDERS OF THE DAY	
Highway 217 Bridge Repair		GOVERNMENT BUSINESS	
Graydon	650		
Oral Questions		Budget Debate (Fifth Day of Debate)	
PST Increase		Ewasko	662
Pallister; Selinger	651	Oswald	667
Schuler; Selinger	654	Gerrard	670
Stefanson; Struthers	655	Selby	673
Goertzen; Selinger	656	Schuler	676
Gerrard; Selinger	657	Bjornson	681
Tax Increase		Eichler	685
Driedger; Selinger	652		
Helwer; Struthers	653		

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