

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, April 26, 2013

The House met at 10 a.m.

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

Good morning, everyone. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

**Bill 27—The Highway Traffic Amendment Act
(Charter Bus Service)**

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): I move, Mr. Speaker, seconded by the Minister of Education (Ms. Allan), that The Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Charter Bus Service); Loi modifiant le Code de la route (services d'autobus nolisés), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Ashton: I had originally planned on introducing this yesterday, but I was a bit delayed because I was at the official opening of the Oscar Lathlin Research Library in The Pas, UCN.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is part of our modernization of our regulations—regard to bus service in this province. As members will know, we were faced with a very significant change in bus service when Greyhound, a number of years ago, indicated it was leaving the province. We brought in a new system of regulation for scheduled bus service, and what this does, this also provides for greater flexibility for charter bus operators to operate throughout the province. It maintains safety provisions, provides greater ability for operators to enter and exit the market.

Once again, it's about modernizing our bus service.

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

Further introduction of bills?

**Bill 28—The Health Services Insurance
Amendment and Hospitals Amendment Act
(Admitting Privileges)**

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I move, seconded by the Minister of Family Services and Labour (Ms. Howard), that Bill 28, The Health Services Insurance Amendment and Hospitals Amendment Act (Admitting Privileges); Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'assurance-maladie et la Loi sur les hôpitaux (privilèges d'admission), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Oswald: The changes we're introducing today authorize nurse practitioners and midwives to admit patients to hospitals. Nurse practitioners and midwives provide a wide range of high quality care to patients and families in Manitoba, and these changes will help to further their contribution to our health-care system, streamline the admissions process, save time for patients and make the health-care system more efficient.

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

**Bill 204—The Manitoba Human
Trafficking Awareness Day Act**

Ms. Melanie Wight (Burrows): I move, seconded by the member from St. James, that Bill 204, The Manitoba Human Trafficking Awareness Day Act, be now read for the first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Wight: At present, Stop Child Sexual Exploitation Awareness Week takes place during the second week of March every year. This act would designate the Thursday of that week as Manitoba Human Trafficking Awareness Day. Such a day will bring much needed attention to this serious human rights violation which occurs both at home and abroad. Thank you.

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

No further bills? We'll move to petitions.

PETITIONS

St. Ambroise Beach Provincial Park

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

And this are the reasons for the petition:

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This signed-petition's signed by T. McKay, P. Belard and C. Chartrand and many, many more fine Manitobans.

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

Municipal Amalgamations—Reversal

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by R. Rempel, C. Heinrichs, M. Martens and many, many more fine Manitobans.

*(10:10)

Highway 217 Bridge Repair

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

And 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 of 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 that 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 normal activities.

And this petition has been signed by L. Beaudette, K. Gilmore and D. Bruneau and thousands of other fine Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: Any further petitions?

Seeing none, we'll move on to—

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Day of Mourning—Employees Killed or Injured in the Workplace

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Family Services and Labour): Mr. Speaker, I have a statement for the House.

April 28th is the Day of Mourning for workers killed or injured on the job. As April 28th falls on a Sunday this year, Friday, today, will be observed as the Day of Mourning by workers and governments around the world. On this day we remember the men and women who did not return home safely from work last year.

Today's Day of Mourning is especially poignant as the world is witnessing the horrific aftermath of the collapse of a garment factory in Bangladesh. As we remember the Manitobans who lost their lives to workplace injury, we also pray for the victims in Bangladesh, their loved ones and those that remain trapped.

Last year, 10 workers died on the job in Manitoba and 29 more died as the result of illness related to their work. Many more were injured significantly, enough that they required extensive treatment and rehabilitation, and some may never return to work.

The gravity of these workplace incidents is enormous, and their toll on families and communities in Manitoba is all the more tragic because they are preventable.

The Day of Mourning is a reminder to us of the ongoing challenges we face in eliminating death, injury and illness in the workplace.

This year's annual Workers' Day of Mourning Leaders' Walk, organized by the SAFE Workers of Tomorrow, will consist of a walk from the Union Centre to the Manitoba Legislative Building, followed by a media event at the grand staircase.

At the event I will be announcing Manitoba's Five-Year Plan for Workplace Injury and Illness

Prevention, the result of a series of reviews conducted in 2012 of Manitoba's approach to workplace safety and health, and drawing on the input of hundreds of Manitoba workers and employers.

Today, as we remember and honour those workers who were killed and injured on the job, we must strengthen our commitment to work together to put an end to these preventable tragedies.

I would ask that following the statement from other members of the House that we stand together for a moment of silence to honour the memory of the men and women who were injured or killed in the workplace this past year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): Today I stand on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus to acknowledge the international Day of Mourning for employees injured or killed on the job, which takes place on April 28th each year.

The Day of Mourning was first marked in 1984 by the Canadian Union of Public Employees, and in 1991 the Day of Mourning was officially recognized by the Canadian Parliament under a Conservative federal government.

And today, the Day of Mourning is marked around the world with 80 countries celebrating April 28th as the day to remember those who have been injured, become ill or died due to workplace conditions.

As mentioned, it's probably very appropriate for us to pause and think about Bangladesh where almost 300 people were crushed doing what they have to do, what they need to do to support their families, and died in the process. Our prayers go out to them and their families.

Over the past 20 years in Canada, over 15,000 people have died from work-related causes. There are approximately 800 preventable deaths each year caused by work-related causes. There are approximately 800 preventable deaths each year caused by workplace issues. These people had families, friends and loved ones. They would have been volunteers active in their communities and making our country a better place to live. The unfortunate thing about these deaths is that most of them could've been prevented by changes to the workplace and better worker awareness of dangerous conditions.

Today we recognize and remember the people who have been injured or killed in the workplace. Let us all work towards making workplaces safer and preventing tragedies from happening in the future.

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

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

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I join others in this Chamber in recognizing the Day of Mourning, nationally now and internationally. It's very important that we recognize what has happened to those people who have died or been injured on the job. It's very important that we dedicate ourselves to reducing this annual toll not only here in Manitoba but, indeed, around the world.

We are, of course, with a population which is many people who've come from different parts of the world, including from Bangladesh. It's particularly important that we are paying attention to what's happened in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, where at last count there were more than 300 people who have died working, primarily garment workers, although that building had some other offices—a bank, a shopping mall and other offices within it.

And, certainly, making sure that we have strong building standards and doing what we can to make this—people are aware of these major issues and major problems and, of course, reaching out to people in our community who have come from Bangladesh who may have friends or relatives there, as well as to people around the world to say, look, let's do what we can to end this toll, to improve things in our workplaces here and help others around the world to improve theirs.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave to observe a moment of silence? *[Agreed]*

I ask all honourable members to please rise.

A moment of silence was observed.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the loge to my right where we have with us the former member for Flin Flon, Mr. Jerry Storie. On behalf of all

honourable members, we welcome you here this morning.

And also, seated in our public gallery, we have from Lunder School 18 grade 3 and 4 students under the direction of Patty Goranson. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for the Interlake. On behalf of all honourable members, we welcome you here this morning.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Tax Increases Government Promise

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): What a week it was, Mr. Speaker, and a busy week for the 192 NDP spinners.

It's one thing to go to the IBAM, the insurance brokers' wonderful annual meeting, and tell those brokers not to mention the 7 per cent hike on home insurance and, please, whatever you do, don't say anything about that Autopac plan to get involved in speed bump production, but it's quite another when you get Burton Cummings there, which is a wonderful thing, and you tell a Canadian icon that, you know, he's restricted in his playlist. That's not good, Mr. Speaker. You know, because of all the broken promises of this government, they told him not to play Undone. And the fear of higher taxes, I mean, obviously, Shakin' All Over is out.

* (10:20)

But, when you get into this thing about Saskatchewan trying to recruit all our people away and you tell them you can't do Running Back to Saskatoon, that's just—that is too much. Now, with all the spinners' overtime this week, I just want to urge the Premier, on behalf of our caucus, in solidarity, I hope, with his members, to let the spinners get off at noon today.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Well, I'm—it's too bad that the Leader of the Opposition didn't actually ask a question there, Mr. Speaker. It's quite novel that he just made a statement. I do have to say it's—it was great to see Burton Cummings last night, coming back to Winnipeg. And Burton Cummings said this is the greatest place to live in the world, right here in Manitoba.

And he saw the improvements—he saw the improvements—in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker. He saw the improvements to the downtown; he saw the improvements to the health-care system; he saw the

improvements to the education system. He saw the improvements that we've got all around this province, and, you know, he said this is the place to be for the future. And we agree with him.

Taxes Future Increases

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Yes, Mr. Speaker, but when he said share the land, he didn't mean with the NDP government.

What a week for the spinners, Mr. Speaker. Monday's message: Doubling the debt is good and an emergency PST hike is needed for flood works now, today, right away.

Tuesday's message: We don't have a list of flood works. Wednesday's message: We didn't really mean flood works, we meant schools and hospitals and splash pads, which we've been planning for years.

And yesterday's message: With the demise of the taxpayer act imminent, the Premier says he's not going to rule out more tax increases next year. So the communicators say, okay, well, that means tax hikes if necessary, but not necessarily tax hikes, great.

Is the Premier making it up as he goes along, or are the 192 communication spinners the ones in charge?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the only person that's left any doors open to future tax increases is the Leader of the Opposition, who's a strong supporter of a harmonized sales tax, not only in Manitoba but all across the country.

He would like to impose another \$400 million worth of harmonized sales tax on all Manitobans. He's never repudiated that position. He's a strong supporter of that. It's a Conservative position for the whole country. That's his view of the world. He knows full well—he knows full well—that the debt in Manitoba, as a portion of the economy, is lower than it was when he was in office.

He knows that personal income taxes are lower now than when he was in office. He knows that Manitoba has the largest tax-free zone for small business in Canada. And he knows that that 1 cent increase on the dollar for sales tax will protect Manitobans from floods. It will indeed provide them with schools. It will indeed provide them with better roads, and it will grow the economy and employ young Manitobans.

PST Increase Call for Referendum

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): He's no Dancing Gabe. Richard Nixon claimed he wasn't a crook, and the Premier claims he's not a dictator, but of 200 municipalities how many of them gave approval for a forced amalgamation? Zero. Of all the major social and business activist organizations in this province today, how many of them support a hike in the PST?

Some Honourable Members: Zero.

Mr. Pallister: Okay, in all these prebudget consultations they did, how many Manitobans came forward and said: Jack up my PST?

Some Honourable Members: Zero.

Mr. Pallister: Okay, evidence of the tin ear of this government and this Premier just continues to mount. So I want to ask the backbenchers on the other side right now: How many of them were asked if they wanted to raise the PST?

Some Honourable Members: Zero.

Mr. Pallister: Seeing none, I rest my case.

Listen, there's a simple question for the Premier. Don't be a dictator. Put the power where it belongs, where it really belongs. Why not call a referendum on the PST?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I thank the member from Fort Whyte for the question because Manitobans do appreciate the schools we're building, Mr. Speaker. Manitobans appreciate the NorWest acc centre that we opened just yesterday in north Winnipeg. They were out in large numbers to express their appreciation for more doctors, more nurse practitioners, more nurses being available in their community to provide the services they need.

It was just a week ago, Mr. Speaker, that the Leader of the Opposition said we should indiscriminately cut spending in Manitoba. That would mean less money for health care, less money for education, less money for infrastructure, less money to support families. That's the vision of the Leader of the Opposition. He's not running back to Saskatoon; he's running back to the '90s.

PST Future Increases

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, when a reporter asked the Premier

yesterday whether he would rule out a PST increase next year, he said no. He refused to rule out another PST hike.

So I'm going to ask him the question again just so that we're all clear: Will this Premier rule out a PST hike next year?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I know the members opposite want to shift off the plan we put in front of the Legislature. We have said a 1-cent increase on the dollar of provincial sales tax will provide for a 10-year plan that will then lapse. That 10-year plan will generate over 100,000 jobs. That 10-year plan will allow us to match the federal infrastructure money to ensure that we do what's needed in this province.

Manitobans have said very clearly they believe in flood protection. The billion dollars we spent in the Red River Valley and to protect the city of Winnipeg has paid off. Every dollar we have spent, Mr. Speaker, has saved us \$30 in damage. The Leader of the Opposition, he wanted to put a halt on expanding the floodway. He wanted to put a halt on ring dikes around southern Manitoba communities. We do not want to put the brakes on Manitoba. We want to build it—

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

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, the Premier did not answer that very, very simple question.

Mr. Speaker, a Manitoba taxpayer, a Winnipegger upset about the PST contacted the Minister of Finance's office. She was told that she was entitled to think as she pleased, but it meant nothing. She was also told that the government could do whatever it wishes, regardless of what the populace thinks.

So I'd like to ask this Premier once again because he didn't answer the question: Will he tell this Winnipegger that he will rule out another PST hike next year?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, we've been very clear that we've put forward legislation that sets out the plan, that sets out the rules to be followed. It sets out the kind of economic benefit that we will see. It sets out the kind of protection that Manitoba families can protect upon, and very clearly it sets out a 1 per cent PST increase that will expire at the expiration of the Building Canada plan. That's very clear. They can—

members opposite, you know, they're entitled to their opinions, but they're not entitled to their own facts.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, the person that doesn't know the facts is this Finance Minister.

Mr. Speaker, nobody believes this government anymore. They have lost all credibility. This NDP government has lied to Manitobans. This Premier makes promises; he breaks promises. His government tells taxpayers that it doesn't matter what they think when they phone into this government to express their concerns. That is why 15,000 Jets last night booed this Premier when his picture came up on the screen at the MTS Centre. They did not like what this government is doing.

So I'm going to ask this Premier now if he will listen to 15,000 Jets fans, and will he rule out another PST hike in next year's budget?

* (10:30)

Mr. Selinger: I appreciate the question from the member opposite because, again, the legislation that will be in place for the next 10 years—1 cent on the dollar for a provincial sales tax, which will generate revenues to repair roads, to build the schools we need, to protect Manitobans from flood protection—you know, Mr. Speaker, all of those things will make a big difference going forward. Over a hundred thousand additional jobs will be generated in this province over the next decade. Members opposite want to put the brakes on everything. We believe that building Manitoba, employing young people is the best way forward. We believe that we need leadership at a time of economic slowdown and risk to Manitoba families. That kind of leadership will pay dividends today. It'll pay dividends into the future. It will ensure—

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

PST Increase Election Promise (Assiniboia)

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): And the fact of the matter is before the—during the last election there, this Premier said he would not raise taxes. In fact, he called the thought of a PST increase nonsense.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure the member for Assiniboia (Mr. Rondeau) took his marching orders from the Premier and went door to door telling his constituents that the NDP government would not raise taxes.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the member for Assiniboia: What does he have to say to his constituents now that his government has broken their promise?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): I think it's appropriate, Mr. Speaker, because I know one thing that all members on this House are saying is that, because of the initiatives of this government, the fact that we've invested a billion dollars in flood protection, the people in the city of Winnipeg and throughout the Red River Valley are in far better shape than they were a number of years ago.

And I would note, by the way, Mr. Speaker, that when the Leader of the Opposition was a key Cabinet minister in the Filmon government, he was actually minister of Emergency Measures.

I've read with real interest what the mayor of Emerson, Wayne Arseny, said recently. Pre-'97, you know what they had in the way of flood protection? He said, we maybe had about five sandbags. And what did the mayor of Emerson say now that we put in place ring dikes to protect every community in the Red River Valley? He said there's been a big change since 1997, Mr. Speaker. That's because of this government.

Election Promise to Seniors (Assiniboia)

Mr. Cullen: The fact of the matter is this NDP government has lied to Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker, the member from Assiniboia, who's also the Minister responsible for Seniors (Mr. Rondeau), was at the Cabinet table when the decision to raise the PST was made.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the member for Assiniboia and the Minister responsible for Seniors all across Manitoba: Did he stand up to them and say no to the PST hike or was he more interested in protecting his job?

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that the member opposite talked about seniors. Many of them will remember the 1950 flood. In 1950 there were a hundred thousand people that were evacuated in Winnipeg and the Red River Valley. There were 10,000 homes destroyed.

And because there were governments that took initiatives to flood protect in 2009 with a greater flood, we had one home impacted in the Red River Valley from water seepage.

And, as we again look at spring flooding, Mr. Speaker, hopefully we'll get a break in the weather this year. I think those seniors would be saying thank goodness that there have been governments that have taken that foresight, including this government. We've invested a billion dollars in flood protection, and with this budget and the leadership of this government, we'll be there for the further investments in flood mitigation that many other areas of the province need.

Mr. Cullen: It'll be interesting to see which minister shows up to answer questions in Estimates on seniors next week.

Mr. Speaker, the fact remains this government has lied to Manitobans. Clearly, seniors on fixed incomes will see their buying power significantly reduced by this tax hike.

Mr. Speaker, the member for Assiniboia, the Minister responsible for Seniors, was at the table when this PST hike was discussed.

Did the member for Assiniboia, the responsible for seniors, did he stand up for seniors in his riding and seniors around Manitoba and say no to this PST tax increase?

Mr. Ashton: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the members opposite, you know, should have a better appreciation of the fact our seniors know what a difference it makes when you have a government that invests in protecting their communities. And it doesn't matter whether you're in the city of Winnipeg; doesn't matter if you're in the Red River Valley.

Yesterday, I was in The Pas. I was so proud to be there at the opening of the Oscar Lathlin Research Library, Mr. Speaker. But I also got to meet with the mayor of—from the—the reeve, pardon me, from the RM of Kelsey. And after 2011, we not only put in a temporary dike to protect Roseisle, we've now made it permanent.

So, in addition to Melita that we protected over the last number of years, we are taking on the challenge of flood protection throughout the province, Mr. Speaker.

And I'll put one thing on the record: if it was up to these members opposite, we'd be back to what it was in the mid-'90s, Mr. Speaker.

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

* * *

Audio system failure

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): —and the people in his riding that we would not raise tax, and he did.

Mr. Speaker: I'm looking for an indication of whether or not the microphone had been turned on for the member's comments. Have they been recorded?

My apologies to the member for Lakeside, I just want to make sure that all members would have had the opportunity to hear the question posed by the honourable member. I'm going to ask the honourable member to start his time over and to repeat what he's just put on the record.

And we'll add time—and for the information of the House, we'll add that time on to the end of question period.

PST Increase Impact on Rural Families

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, the political parties are expected to lay out their platforms before the election, and when this government went out and laid out their program, they said they would not raise taxes.

Every member on that side of the House went out and campaigned they would not raise taxes. When asked directly, would they raise the PST, they all said no. Yet they went up in this House during the election—Mr. Speaker, the member from Swan River promised he would not raise taxes for those farm families.

I ask the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Kostyshyn): What's he going to tell those families today, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): We have a substantial amount of support for farmers in this budget, in the previous budget, in all of the budgets that we've put forward as a government, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, members opposite have a very tough choice to—that they have to make. They can go to the people of Manitoba and they can tell the people of Manitoba about the cuts that they have proposed as of last Thursday. If they do that, my

advice to them, in the spirit of Burton Cummings last night, if I was them, I would break it to them gently.

Mr. Speaker, their other choice, again, may be to stand tall and tell Manitobans exactly what you're going to do to them with the cuts to health care and education that you've been talking about in this House.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, the former member from Swan River wouldn't have took the advice from this minister; she would have stood up and answered the question.

Mr. Speaker, several days we have debated the budget in this House. We have heard from hundreds and thousands of people across Manitoba. People in towns and cities and communities, from rural families—they've all said this government has misled them.

I ask the Minister of Agriculture again: Will he not stand up to this First Minister, the Minister of Finance, and say, we do not want the PST price increase in this province, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Speaker, we have put very clearly in front of the people of Manitoba our Building and Renewal Plan. We're going to vote for that plan because it shows foresight and it shows a commitment to investing in flood protection. It shows foresight and commitment to critical infrastructure.

This Building and Renewal Plan will move us forward in terms of our economy, Mr. Speaker. It will create jobs, as opposed to members opposite, who will cut and hack and slash and burn their way through a budget. That has real implications for Manitoba families when you fire nurses and when you fire social workers and when you lay off teachers. That has an impact on Manitoba families, and you should have considered that before you put your position out in your platform.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

* (10:40)

Mr. Eichler: Obviously, this government cannot be trusted. Whenever they go out and tell people one thing and do another, why in the world would anyone believe what this government has to offer and what they say in this House, Mr. Speaker?

I will ask the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Kostyshyn) again: What's he going to tell those folks when he goes back into his riding? He was bullied by

the Minister of Finance—his First Minister or is he going to stand up and make his voice heard in his own riding, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Speaker, in the 2011 election, the members opposite all went out into the province of Manitoba. In that election, did they tell the people of Manitoba they were going to cut deeply into health care? Did you tell the people of Manitoba you were going to cut deeply into education? Did you tell the people of Manitoba that your backwards, regressive cuts would slow down the economy? Did you tell them that?

Of course, you didn't tell them that, and now you're here in the House saying that's exactly what you'll do. You're telling people now, after the election, that you're going to cut health care and education, that you're going to lay off civil servants, that you're going to lay off people who do critical functions that protect Manitoba families. Don't talk to me about being hypocritical.

PST Increase Impact on Municipalities

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): Mr. Speaker, last year, this NDP government expanded the PST to insurance premiums. The cost to Manitoba municipalities just for their insurance coverage alone was \$764,000. This year, with the proposed hike in PST, that cost will rise to \$873,000.

Why is this NDP government so desperate for money they choose to download even more costs to local municipalities and ultimately local ratepayers?

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Local Government): Just to ensure that the record is clear with regard to funding the municipalities, you know, over the last six or seven years, Mr. Speaker, we've increased funding municipalities by \$200 million, and in discussions and consultations with those municipalities they've told us their priorities and we're addressing those priorities. We're talking about protecting citizens of Manitoba with regard to flooding. We're talking about the infrastructure needs that they're talking about. Many of their main streets are our provincial highways, so we're working closely with them on many, many, many infrastructure projects. Indeed, yesterday I was in Neepawa, talking about a water treatment plant, \$7-million investment between the Province of Manitoba and the Town of Neepawa.

Those are the kinds of things, real infrastructure—

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

Mr. Pedersen: Yes, Mr. Speaker, and they will pay PST on that, also.

Mr. Speaker, on—I would like to quote from Hansard, on May 24, 2012, Local Government Estimates, the Minister of Local Government, and I quote: "and, we are not, as a government, prepared, certainly at this time, to be increasing the PST to 8 per cent, and we've told municipalities this, and we've acknowledged that over and over." End of quote.

Mr. Speaker, another flip-flop from this minister, the Premier's acknowledged he's not going to rule out more tax increases. How are municipalities supposed to cope with this increased tax load from this government?

Mr. Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, no matter how you cut it, municipalities are getting a huge whack of cash, quite frankly, and, you know, members opposite for years and years they—there's talk about infrastructure, how we have to invest in infrastructure. We're doing it.

And when I hear members opposite talk about flooding—what flood—as the member responsible or at least elected by members south and citizens south of Winnipeg, I represent Grande Pointe. In those communities remember 1997, when we're carrying out furniture out of living rooms, and the premier of the day and the current Leader of the Opposition standing beside each other, member responsible for emergency measures at the time, said, oh, you're to blame because you live in a flood plain.

Is that leadership? I would argue no.

This government—

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

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, that's less than a fifth of 1 per cent that they spent on flood remediation.

Mr. Speaker, the municipal budgets have been set for this year. They're balanced again for this year, unlike this government. Now, with the increase in PST, local governments must redo their budgets again at considerable cost to the—to local ratepayers. Why does this NDP minister and his government continue to make municipalities pay for this government's spending addiction?

Mr. Lemieux: You know, Mr. Speaker, the investments we're making in Manitoba—and I know

the members opposite are going to have an opportunity to vote on that and to stand up and show Manitobans—show rural Manitobans exactly where they stand with regard to huge amounts of funding that's going investing in infrastructure in Manitoba.

You know, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, it's almost double, quite frankly, over the last number of years, from \$215 million to \$415 million in funding in this budget. That is real money, real dollars being invested in rural Manitoba, growing Manitoba, growing the jobs in Manitoba, and that—those—that impact is going to have huge impacts on Manitoba over the next number of years.

We've talked about how difficult the decision was, Mr. Speaker, and the decision we made to raise the PST, and indeed it was. But, you know, Manitobans have a clear understanding that money needs to be invested in this—

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

Taxes Future Increases

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): You know, this NDP government just doesn't seem to get it, Mr. Speaker. Nobody asked for this PST hike, it seems, except the Premier and maybe the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers), who needed it for their own spending addiction. They are out of touch with reality, and if this PST hike wasn't enough, now the Premier was out talking yesterday about a potential other increase in taxes next year.

I ask this Premier directly today, Mr. Speaker: Does he rule out a tax increase for Manitobans, hard-working Manitobans, next year? Yes or no?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, all the members have to do is look at the bill that's been presented to the Legislature to see that there's a 1 cent increase on the sales tax to invest in a hundred thousand jobs, to invest in roads, to invest in schools, to invest in personal care homes, to invest in the priorities that Manitobans have told us are important to them. They've said we need those facilities. They said they need those schools; they've said they need those roads; and Manitobans have told us that they see it as a priority to protect communities from floods. That's exactly what this increase does; it will protect Manitobans for the next 10 years.

We will build out the kinds of things that will ensure for future generations Manitoba is better off.

Children in Care Tracking

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, it seems that the Premier is reluctant to answer a very simple yes-or-no question. That's unfortunate for all of those hard-working Manitobans, and including the most vulnerable Manitobans in society.

A headline in the Free Press today says, "Kids in care not tracked as well as cash," from the Auditor General. And she went on to say, and I quote: "If they can track every dime at Lotteries why can't we track every kid?"

I ask the Premier: He has said time and time again in this House that he would—and outside the House that he would not raise taxes, Mr. Speaker. These are the most vulnerable people in our society. Why is he more concerned about lining his own pocket than protecting the most vulnerable children in our society?

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Family Services and Labour): Of course, we all have been listening to the testimony at the inquiry, taking it very seriously. I take the words of the Auditor General very seriously.

When we were faced with those reports into the murder of Phoenix Sinclair, we took immediate action. We took immediate action to hire more front-line social workers to reduce the caseloads so that they could do a better job. We have taken action to increase staff, to do things like work with families in crisis before it gets to a point where their kids have to come into care. And we have enhanced the computer system and given social workers new tools to assess the risk. Those were the actions that we took. Those were the priorities that we had.

We are also looking at what more we can do as we listen to the testimony in the inquiry, and we will take action on those recommendations as well, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Tuxedo, with a final supplementary.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, Manitobans can no longer afford this NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, kids are falling through the cracks in our child welfare system as we speak, and this government is doing nothing to help them. What they are more concerned about, it seems, is around their Cabinet table, around their caucus table, they're more concerned about how they're going to put money in

their own pockets than protecting the most vulnerable people in our society.

* (10:50)

Why are they more concerned about lining their own pockets with a vote tax, Mr. Speaker, than they are with protecting the most vulnerable kids in our society?

Ms. Howard: Mr. Speaker, I am able to put on the record what we have done in the rate—in looking after vulnerable children. We have doubled funding for child welfare to \$425 million a year. We have hired more than 250 front-line social workers, and I've been in those agencies and seen the result of those investments. That means there's social workers in place who can work with youth who are coming out of care and are now able to go to high school and go to university.

I have seen the plans of the members opposite. We saw it just last week. They would, in this budget, cut the budget for Family Services by over \$10 million. They would fail to replace social workers who are leaving or retiring. They would—that would result in the cut to over a hundred front-line workers. That's their plan for vulnerable children, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to vote for ours today.

CFSIS

Implementation Plan

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, yesterday at the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry the gaping holes in the Child and Family Services Information System, CFIS, were exposed by Auditor General Carol Bellringer.

The NDP have known since they came to power in 1999 of the major shortcomings in CFIS. The point was hammered home by Ms. Bellringer in her shocking 2006 report which called for a replacement of CFIS or implementation of a new database. Ms. Bellringer said yesterday that as late as a few months ago she'd asked for the NDP plan to replace CFIS, and there was nothing.

So I ask the Premier (Mr. Selinger): With so many children in the care of CFS regularly being lost or missing from the system, why, for the sake of children in our province, in 13 years has this government not acted?

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Family Services and Labour): As I said, we're all listening intently to the testimony at the inquiry. We will take

action on the recommendations as they come forward.

I want to assure the member opposite that we have been acting on improving the information system. We have seen enhancements to that information system that make it easier for workers to track what they are doing, make it easier for workers to track those kids that are in care. We've increased training for staff who are now better able to work with that computer system. We're working with the federal government to improve issues of connectivity in rural and remote areas of the province. We've added staff positions to do data entry so social workers can do what they need to do—visiting kids—and not be waylaid by doing more and more paper work.

So we have been taking action, Mr. Speaker. We will continue to take action and we'll continue to make investments in this area.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, but the government has known for 13 years that this is an issue and it's still not there in place where it's needed, and in that time this government has expanded their gambling empire. They've invested hundreds of millions, billions of dollars in all sorts of other things, but they've forgotten about children. And, as Ms. Bellringer said yesterday, we can track every dime at Lotteries, but we can't track every kid. Why not?

I ask the Premier: By what specific date will the Premier have every single CFS office connected by broadband to an efficiently operating and up-to-date CFIS system so that children in care can have at least as good a priority for this government as gambling does?

Ms. Howard: Mr. Speaker, I would invite the member opposite to look at our budget to see the priority that we place on children.

When you look at this budget, Mr. Speaker, you will see continued investments in departments like Family Services and Labour, continued investments in the child welfare system. At a time when we are having to make difficult choices about where we can put the money of Manitobans, we're continuing to invest in front-line social workers. We're continuing to invest in programs like the programs that I have visited which help families stay together. We're continuing to invest in the ability of youth who are turning 18 to stay connected with the supports in the child and family services system so they can complete their education and get employment. And

those are the investments that we will continue to make.

We have more work to do, absolutely, Mr. Speaker, and we will continue to work every day to improve the lives of children and families in this province.

* (11:00)

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, just a short time ago at a legislative committee dealing with Manitoba Lotteries we were told that the government was putting absolute top priority to get broadband for gambling and video lottery terminals to over 30 sites in rural and northern Manitoba.

And, yet, now, almost every day in the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry—from reporters like James Turner, Carol Sanders, Lindor Reynolds, Katie Nicholson, Steve Lambert, who are reporting all of the problems, the shortcomings, the risk that this NDP government has put 10,000 kids in care at—they've called for this up-to-date information system which should have been in place long ago.

I ask the Premier (Mr. Selinger) to reveal how many millions he spent to implement his provincial gambling empire and commit this year to spending what's needed to complete the modern, up-to-date CFIS system that's needed.

Ms. Howard: There are organizations and agencies all over this province who are working to improve their connectivity so that they can take better advantage of information technology.

But, you know, Mr. Speaker, today, very soon, the member for River Heights will have a chance to show us which side he's on. He can stand with us; he can stand for investments in child—in the child welfare system. Or he can stand with the members opposite and their promise to cut over \$10 million from that system this year. The choice is his.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Burrows—the honourable member for Burrows has the floor.

NorWest Access Centre Opening

Ms. Melanie Wight (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, our government made a commitment to ensure all Manitobans can access a family doctor by 2015, including hiring more doctors and nurses and building 22 more clinics across the province.

I've heard from families living in my constituency that are looking for a doctor or nurse

practitioner, looking for help to find daycare or access to mental health services. And I'm proud to be part of a government that is not cutting health-care services—oh, or education or advanced education. Oh, sorry, I digress, Mr. Speaker.

But I would like to ask the Minister of Health about the big step forward we took recently for families living in northwest Winnipeg. Thank you.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): It was my great privilege to join the Premier and the member for Burrows and many, many others yesterday at the official opening of the NorWest Access Centre. This access centre, of course, is a one-stop shop, Mr. Speaker, for those that are seeking health care and indeed those that need assistance in other areas of their life—the social determinants of health, if you will.

We know that in the first two weeks of its operation, Mr. Speaker, that folks at the NorWest Access Centre have identified 200 new clients—new patients and attached them to a family doctor—a doctor they've never had before.

It's part of our plan. We're very glad to help build that relationship. The bombast and bluster opposite doesn't buy a single nurse or doctor; investment does.

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

Highway 206 Flooding Concerns

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): Mr. Speaker, on May 12th of last year, I brought to the attention of the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation the concerns of Bob and Leanne Parker of Springfield, Manitoba.

As of 2011, the culvert which had recently been placed underneath Highway 206 at Hillside Road had buckled and raised the pavement of the highway, making it dangerous to drivers. What's more, the culvert itself has been raised so significantly, the local residents are currently at risk of having their homes, property and wells artificially flooded.

It has been over a year since this NDP government has heard about these concerns and the residents have still heard nothing back. What is the minister doing to address these urgent issues?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Well, Mr. Speaker, I actually

do appreciate the member opposite raising concerns such as this, and I certainly pass on any and all concerns in terms of our infrastructure to the department.

And I really want to thank him for giving me the opportunity to also point out that we've got record spending on infrastructure on our highways in the budget.

So I'll undertake, Mr. Speaker, as I have in the past, to make sure the department follows up on this. And I just ask if the member opposite would undertake to do one thing, as well: support that investment by voting for the budget.

Bill 20 Committee Presentations

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, we were all sad that the Jets didn't make the post-season yesterday, but I'm told that the MTS Centre was like a post-budget meeting yesterday as 15,000 Manitobans had their say on the PST increase as they booed the Premier (Mr. Selinger) on the screen. Now, maybe that's the reason why the Premier doesn't want to come to the Bill 20 hearings; he might get the same reception, and Dancing Gabe won't be there to save him.

But it was him; it was the Premier who invited those Manitobans, now the more than 125, to come to that committee and have their say.

I want to ask the Premier: Will he come to committee, to Bill 20, to hear all of those presenters have their say on the PST increase?

* (11:00)

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Acting Premier): I know that we are all looking forward in this House to getting to the point where we have bills coming to committees, so we can all sit together and listen to what Manitobans have to tell us. I can assure my honourable friend across the way that he and I will have lots of time to spend together in the coming weeks and months, and we will be there to listen to what Manitobans have to say as we are there all the time. And the Premier is out daily listening to Manitobans, whether it is in the northwest part of Winnipeg when we're talking to them about the new access centre, whether it is in the constituency of Southdale where we're talking to them about a new school or whether it is in Steinbach where we and myself and the Premier and others—were pleased to attend the opening of the new school in Steinbach.

So we are listening, I assure you, Mr. Speaker, and I will look forward to spending much quality time with members—

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

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I know the Premier is getting an earful, Mr. Speaker. I know that. I wasn't sure if the booing was louder for the Minister of Education (Ms. Allan) or louder for the Premier. It might have been a tie. We didn't get a win yesterday, but it might have been a tie for the booing between the Minister of Education and the Premier.

But, you know, it was the Premier who said he wanted to listen to Manitobans at committee. More than 125 have now registered. He has an opportunity. He can come and listen to them or he can run and hide. It's going to be his decision.

I want to ask this Premier, there's going to be more than 125 when the committee comes, will he show up to that committee? Will he show up with an open mind? Will he show up with his ears open so he doesn't have to just get booed at the MTS Centre. Come and listen to Manitobans, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Howard: There are many bills that are showing that Manitobans have a great deal of interest in that will come to this Legislature to share their thoughts with us. We will be there to listen to Manitobans. Members opposite will be there to listen to Manitobans. We'll be there to listen to them on Bill 20 and we'll be there to listen to them on Bill 18 and we'll be there to listen to them on Bill 24. We'll be there to listen to what Manitobans have to tell us, and I look forward to spending many, many evenings with my friends across the way listening to Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Southdale Community Centre

Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to recognize an amazing facility in Southdale. The newly expanded and renovated Southdale Community Centre is busier than ever since the addition of our new hockey rink and pleasure rinks. Thanks to the dedication of the staff, board and community members, residents of Southdale have been enjoying the recreation, competition and healthy, active lifestyle that community centres foster.

Mr. Speaker, the community of Southdale wasted no time in putting their new rinks to use. This past hockey season, Southdale Community Centre played host to 10 tournaments, among which were the 2013 Manitoba AA Voyageur Ringette Tournament, which brought 30 teams and over 500 players, aged 5 to 16; the March Meltdown Tournament in which 40 players and a total of 498 5- to 8-year-olds participated; and the Southeast Aboriginal Tournament, which boasted a whopping 80 teams and 1,200 and more players from all over southeastern Manitoba.

Although Southdale Community Centre welcomed over 3,000 athletes for ice sport tournament this past season, ranging in age from 5-year-old Timbit hockey players all the way up to the 130 players in the old timers league.

Of course, none of these events would be possible without the hard work of the dedicated staff of the Southdale Community Centre as well of the tireless efforts of the board of directors. Without these dedicated volunteers, the thousands of Southdale residents who make such great use of the community centre on a daily basis would not be able to make use of this spectacular facility.

Mr. Speaker, the Southdale Community Centre is a shining example of the outcome of hard work, passion and commitment to the activity and sport, and I am immensely proud of my community's newly expanded recreation facility and look forward to see what is in store next year for our community.

Thank you.

James Ferguson

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): Mr. Speaker, it is my distinct honour to rise to pay tribute to a community leader, a former MLA and a dedicated farmer, James Ferguson.

From birth, James was part of a farming family and officially began his farming career in 1940 with his brother Lawrence. Through mutual friends and local dances, Jim met his soon-to-be wife June Collins. They were married on June 2nd, 1946.

Civic engagement was something that was very important to Jim. He was one of the founding members of the Gladstone Auction Mart, president of the Helston and Gladstone curling clubs, trustee at Preston School, president of the Gladstone Progressive Conservative Association.

It was shortly after that, in 1969, that Jim was elected to this House as an MLA for the former Gladstone constituency where he served under Walter Weir, Sterling Lyon, Sidney Spivak and Gary Filmon. Jim served as the party whip and as the legislative assistant to the Agriculture minister at that time, Jim Downey.

Upon his retirement from the legislature, Jim began work as a director with the Farm Debt Review Board, assisting families facing financial problems and farm closures. Once he started taking on less in the day-to-day operations of the farm, he was able to focus on gardening, as well as travelling to Texas, golfing, swimming and socializing. His favourite way to end the day was going for a drive with June to look at the crops and the cows.

Jim was a keen sportsman, playing hockey, curling and baseball for much of his life. He loved hunting big game and waterfowl with his family and friends. He also enjoyed fishing trips, many of which were to remote areas. In 2009, Jim and June moved off the family farm, living in Gladstone until his health forced him to move to a personal-care facility.

Jim unfortunately passed away in February at the age of 87. Jim was a dedicated farmer, a great MLA for his constituency, but above all, Jim was a family man. Jim was the patriarch of a large extended family that he was very proud of, and all one has to do is talk to his children and grandchildren to realize how much he was loved and respected.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my constituents of the Agassiz constituency and on behalf of this House, I would like to thank Jim for all he accomplished for all of us. Thank you.

Earth Day

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): Mr. Speaker, earlier this week, hundreds of millions of people from across the world came together to celebrate Earth Day 2013. As usual, our Conservative counterparts in the opposition benches missed Earth Day completely by not asking a single question about the environment during question period. The Tea Party in the United States must be so proud.

Our government understands that every day is, in fact, Earth Day. On April 22nd this year, we honoured our planet by introducing the first legislation in all of North America to protect endangered ecosystems. I was very proud to serve as emcee for this announcement and hear great organizations like the Nature Conservancy of

Canada, Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation and Ducks Unlimited applaud our government for this important initiative.

Just last week, the Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship (Mr. Mackintosh) signed a unique agreement with Ontario to support First Nations-led efforts to protect and manage the proposed Pimachiowin Aki UNESCO World Heritage Site.

This proposal covers over 33,000 square kilometres on the east side of Lake Winnipeg and includes the traditional territories of five First Nations communities.

Also earlier this month, we celebrated the environmental efforts of just some of the many wonderful people, organizations and businesses in our province at the Manitoba Excellence in Sustainability Awards ceremony. Assiniboine Credit Union, the Winnipeg Folk Festival, East Interlake Conservation District, the Green Action Centre and CEDNet, were just—and many others, were recognized for their invaluable contributions to a cleaner, greener and more ecologically literate society.

Mr. Speaker, individual actions play a crucial role, too, no matter what our age, background or life circumstances might be. A few weekends from now, close to a hundred people will join me and several of my colleagues at our annual spring cleanup of three different creeks right here in Winnipeg.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, allow me to join with citizens the world over who are frustrated with governments and political parties who continue to trash the planet and permit others to do the same. On this side of the House and in my community of Wolseley, we understand that activism is like taking a shower—if you don't do it every day, you start to smell. Thank you.

Oak Park Raiders Varsity Girls Basketball Team

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I rise today to congratulate the Oak Park Raiders Varsity Girls basketball team who won the varsity girls' provincial championship on March 18th. They came to the provincial final with an enviable record—32 wins and zero losses. Could they top that and make it 33—zero? That was their goal to end a perfect season and one they accomplished in a nail-biter that they won against defending champions, Glenlawn Collegiate.

Kerilynn MacLennan, who was named MVP and finished with a team-high of 28 points, led a final run to win the game. MacLennan, Colleen Moyer and Jerilyn Monton and others led their teammates through an exciting and demanding season.

* (11:10)

Coach Murray Brown just celebrated his 25th anniversary coaching the Oak Park Raiders Varsity Girls basketball team last year. The Raiders had been close the previous three seasons, but each time lost in the final game. The last provincial championship that they won was in 2004. Murray was joined by assistant coaches, Holly Kitchen, Joon Monton, Alyssa Grant, and manager Serena Bevilaqua.

Oak Park excels in girls and boys basketball, at both the varsity and junior varsity levels. It has been a common sight over the last 20 years to see all four teams ranked in the MHSAA top 10, often occupying one of the top five spots in the weekly rankings.

Through basketball, the student athletes learn many life skills which will serve them well moving forward in life; time management, individual and team goal setting, dedication to a task, the development of positive character traits, as well as the commitment and sacrifices necessary to be successful as an individual and as a team member.

Congratulations to Oak Park on winning this provincial championship and once again validating their motto of excellence in the arts, athletics and academics.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask leave to have the names of the team members included in Hansard.

Mr. Speaker: Is there a leave to include the team names into the Hansard of today's proceedings?
[Agreed]

Serena Bevilaqua; Kaylee Hondubura; Danielle Hanlan; Jenilyn Monton; Emma Chase; Emma Ridd; Meagan Masterton; Erica Nixon; Jordan Tully; Kerilynn MacLennan; Lexie Johannson; Payton Gomes; Colleen Moyer; Shawn Pallister; manager Serena Bevilaqua; coaches Murray Brown, Holly Kitchen, Joon Monton, Alyssa Grant.

PST Increase

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): It was nice to see the students from Lundar here today, and I also have a letter that came from that same area.

And it starts off:

Can this government be trusted? The Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) has brought the hammer down, a 1 per cent tyke-hike in our PST, the Minister of Finance to the Premier both. Both seem to have logical reasons for increasing this tax, such as infrastructure, city streets, provincial highways, roadways and now for 'fud' flighting-fighting.

They also have based this need, and blaming the necessity for the \$1.2 billion spent on the flood of 2011, that matters not what the issue, this government and ministers like the minister of MIT hide behind the flood of 2011.

For sure, infrastructure will receive two Band-Aids or three from the PST. However, as time passes, money will fall useless from this government in waste and more waste and more waste. Like the flooded area destroyed businesses surrounding Lake Manitoba, infrastructure will also be forgotten.

This same government promised a multi-year program to Lake Manitoba flood victims for lost revenue caused by lingering effects to the 2011 flood. Victims of this flood saw some compensation in 2011; however, because the flood's lingering effects, its result of huge losses of income for 2012 were forgotten about in spite of all those promises.

Many people surrounding Lake Manitoba have in 2012 suffered income losses over 70 per cent of their normal income. Many people don't think it'd be right for people to give up their entire income for a year or two to fix infrastructure, no one does.

Why, then, should Lake Manitoba businesses give up their income because it was deemed necessary to send them the water that nature intended to go somewhere else? The only thing natural about the Lake Manitoba flood of 2011 is that over time government and everyone directly will forget and leave us once again, Mr. Speaker.

Not once in the budget did we hear about business owners around Lake Manitoba that we receive compensation for lost income in 2012. Because of the aftermath of being deliberately flooded in 2011, flowing the Assiniboia water north to Lake Manitoba by the man-made Portage Diversion was necessary to save the province billions elsewhere.

Remembering when water was diverted is—in this man-made—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. We're considerably past the member's allowable time for his member's statement.

An Honourable Member: I ask leave to continue to read the rest of the letter.

Mr. Speaker: Is their leave to allow the honourable member for Lakeside to conclude—quickly conclude his member's statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Eichler: Remember, when water was diverted by man, it was no longer natural. The only thing natural about 2011 flooding of Lake Manitoba that over time our government has conveniently forgotten.

Still trying to recover, signed John *[phonetic]*.

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I'm rising to table the Estimates order agreed to by the government and opposition House leaders.

BUDGET DEBATE (Eighth Day of Debate)

Mr. Speaker: We thank the honourable minister for tabling the sequence of Estimates, and will now proceed with the further government business, 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, standing in the name of the honourable member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart), who has 11 minutes remaining.

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, I'll just summarize briefly.

I would like to return for a moment to focus on the treatment of those on income assistance, and in particular the lack of support in housing allowances. Examples like HOUSINGFirst pilots across the country have clearly demonstrated that this is a successful model to help the disadvantaged get back into society. Stable housing provides them with opportunities to get their life in order. Many are fighting the demons of addictions and the problems of mental health. Suitable, secure housing helps them deal, especially when done with proper supports.

An increase, as we had proposed in housing allowances, will mean—would mean a reduction in numbers at the food banks, as families no longer have to use food money to pay rent, and hopefully lead to a reduction in child poverty.

I just wanted to include a quote from Gandhi to make us all think about what we are doing as members of society: Society is measured by how they treat their most vulnerable members.

How will this government be measured?

Just in conclusion, then, Mr. Speaker, I will not be supporting the budget but I will be supporting my leader's amendments.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, it's a great pleasure to be here today to rise in support of Budget 2013, and to encourage all members of this House to vote for this budget.

Monsieur le président, le budget représente nos principes, nos valeurs. Le Budget 2013 vise à bâtir le Manitoba que nous voulons aujourd'hui et le Manitoba de demain. Nous avons mis l'accent sur la protection de ce qui compte le plus pour les familles et nous avons trouvé des façons innovatrices d'économiser de l'argent.

Translation

Mr. Speaker, this budget represents our values and our principles. Budget 2013 is aimed at building the Manitoba that we want today and the Manitoba of tomorrow. We have put the emphasis on protecting what is most important to families, and we have found innovative ways of saving money.

English

Budget 2013 is about building Manitoba for today and the long term by protecting what matters to Manitoba families while finding innovative ways to save money.

Like the rest of the world, Manitobans are facing economic uncertainty that comes from outside our own borders. Even though our province has fared better than most through the recession, the global economy remains fragile.

This budget protects families and businesses from global economic uncertainty by investing in critical infrastructure. Doing so will create jobs in the short term and the long term. It will protect health and education, and keep us on track to return to balance by 2016, unlike the members opposite whose

reckless election promises would have seen them balance the books by 2018.

Our economy has done better than the Canadian average over the last five years, and we will continue to grow the Manitoba economy, to grow our labour force and to ensure the young people have greater opportunity to have jobs in Manitoba, while we shrink our deficit and protect front-line services. That's our commitment and we'll follow through on that.

In the past, economic uncertainty meant deep cuts to the services that Manitoba families depend on. All this made us a poorer province, a province where there were more gaps between the rich and the poor, a province where young people left the province in droves because they couldn't find a job. We're protecting those services while we continue to manage expenditure and grow the economy.

I'm pleased to say that we've added between 25,000 and 29,000 new jobs in this province since the '08-09 recession. And, Mr. Speaker, that is an indicator of robust economic circumstances in this province. At the same time, we know we're dealing with global economic uncertainty. We will deal with that in a responsible way, unlike the members opposite.

Mr. Speaker, we will continue to ensure that those essential services that Manitobans need will be there when they need them, whether it's cancer care, whether it's an opportunity to get training for a job, whether it's an opportunity to get an education as an apprentice, whether it's the ability to ensure Manitoba stays affordable by the proper use of our Crown corporations and the way we invest in those Crown corporations and the way they invest in Manitobans.

* (11:20)

And, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite will know that this government balanced the budget 10 times, unlike when they were in office. The members opposite will know that the only way they balanced the budget was by selling our assets. They sold the telephone system and they took telephone rates from being among the lowest in Canada to being among the highest in Canada. They privatized the telephone system to balance the budget. We won't do that; we'll grow the Manitoba economy.

Uncertainty is a challenge facing all provinces, but there is another source of uncertainty that is uniquely Manitoban. In 2011 Manitoba saw record

flooding. Manitobans, volunteers, local officials, provincial offices and our Armed Forces all pulled together to ensure that the waters were held back and that communities were spared from an even worse fate than they experienced that year. And since 2011 your provincial government has worked with City of Brandon and other communities throughout the region to improve flood works with permanent dikes and other controls.

Despite our progress, this spring we are facing the real threat of the third major flood in five years. Over the past 15 years flood fighting and protection costs were more than four times greater than over the previous 15 years. Those bills would have been much, much, worse if previous generations had not the foresight to build the floodway that protects Winnipeg today.

The Red River Floodway expansion cost \$665 million and brought protection for homes to Winnipeg to one-in-700-year levels. Since the floodway was first built it has since saved over \$35 billion in damages, and the security and peace of mind it offers our families is priceless, Mr. Speaker. Unlike the flat-earth, climate-change deniers on the other side of the House, we know that the extreme weather events such as floods and droughts have a great probability of being more common in years to come. The detailed flood reports prepared by experts and released this month make it clear, we need to act and we need to act now. We owe it to all Manitobans and to future generations of Manitobans.

The only question is, when? Do we await and allow more homes, farms and businesses to be damaged or destroyed? Do we ignore the experts and roll the dice, hoping against reason that we will somehow manage to avoid future flooding? We must not be short-sighted. Just as we benefit from the wise investments made by Duff Roblin's generation, the responsibility now falls on us to build the next generation of flood protection.

At the same time, we must not allow the threat of floods to lead us to cut services Manitobans rely on or to stop building. That's why we have created a 10-year Manitoba Building and Renewal Plan. This plan protects families and our economy from uncertainty. Every dollar that goes into this plan will be spent on Manitoba's critical infrastructure needs like flood protection, schools, health centres, roads and highways. The Building and Renewal Plan ensures that we build as effectively as possible by matching every available dollar in the federal Canada

fund. The revenue measures that we are bringing into this fund will expire automatically when the Building Canada Fund expires 10 years from now.

Other provinces are increasing income taxes, business taxes and health premiums. We do not have health premiums in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker. Others have imposed the harmonized sales tax and others are threatening to impose it in Manitoba. Others have cut recklessly into core services and others are promising to cut core services in Manitoba.

We have made a more responsible choice. Our Building and Renewal Plan raises modest revenues in the fairest way possible and guarantees accountability and transparency for how that money is spent. Through the Manitoba Building and Renewal Plan Manitoba is investing new money to improve municipal streets, \$21 million more, two times the provincial investment to \$42 million in total over the next three years is targeted at repairing potholes and improving residential streets in the city of Winnipeg and \$21 million more over the next three years for a new Municipal Roads Improvement Fund to which municipalities outside Winnipeg can apply for up to 50 per cent of the cost of new incremental municipal road projects. This is part of a historic investment of more than \$3.5 billion in funding for municipal infrastructure, including roads and bridges, through the Building Manitoba Fund.

The Manitoba Building and Renewal Plan also includes a record \$622 million to invest in provincial bridges and highways, including those damaged by the 2011 flood. So, if the member from Brandon West wants Victoria Avenue in Brandon fixed, he should stand up and vote for the budget. If the people of Charleswood want Wilkes Avenue twinned, but their MLA will not support it, she should make her mind up to support the budget today, Mr. Speaker. If the member from Morden-Winkler really wants to stand up for his constituents to support Highway 32 south upgrades, will he stand up and support this budget? And we've also heard from the people of Spruce Woods, who need improvements to Provincial Road 340. If the member wants to represent his constituents, he should stand up and support this budget.

Our plan will help Manitoba meet critical infrastructure needs without putting the services families count on at risk. At the same time, we continue finding ways to deliver government services more efficiently and redirect those savings into front-line services. How have we done that,

Mr. Speaker? We've reduced the number of regional health authorities from 11 to five. We've merged the Liquor Control Commission and the Manitoba Lotteries Corporation, saving \$3 million in administrative costs. We have reduced an additional \$120 million in year from government spending. We have saved money by consolidating more government offices and modernizing government service delivery, making greater use of online services. We have reduced the budgets or froze budgets in 10 departments. We have realized \$75 million in savings through the licensing of government assets. We've expanded lean management practices to more departments to improve efficiency and realize savings, and we have extended the 20 per cent reduction on ministerial salaries. And we have initiated a program, efficiency, value for the money review, as we go forward. But we've done that to improve services.

Manitobans want to know, for example, that their health care is there for them when they need it, especially in times of uncertainty. That's why we're building on our critical infrastructure like flood protection, roads and schools and health care. That's why we opened the access centre in northwest Winnipeg yesterday.

While the members opposite were asking for \$550 million in cuts to vital services, I was standing shoulder to shoulder with our health-care professionals and providers and educators to commit to an additional 60 seats for nurse practitioners and licensed practical nurses in the province of Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, and another six spots in the faculty of nursing for Ph.D. students to become the instructors and educators of tomorrow.

Instead of cutting core services, our plan invests in even better health care by hiring more doctors, nurse practitioners and other health professionals and expanding the lifesaving STARS helicopter ambulance service, which in Manitoba is free to the people that need it when they need it. Our priority is ensuring Manitoba families have access to the health care they need when they need it, and nurses play an essential role in making that happen. With a growing population and an increasing number of seniors as well as more and more nurses reaching the retirement age, we need to invest and train more nurses to meet the needs of patients today and for years to come.

Yesterday I was proud to open that access northwest clinic, just this week, with the Minister of

Health (Ms. Oswald) and the members from Burrows and Maples constituencies. We spent the last decade undoing the damage from short-sighted cuts the Conservatives made in the 1990s to our hospitals and health centres. Now is not the time to turn back in spite of how desperately the members opposite want to do that with their announcements to cut last week.

But, Mr. Speaker, we want to create more opportunities in this province for young people. Our plan creates opportunities by making smart, responsible investments in schools, colleges and universities, and it continues to make it easier than ever before to train as an apprentice or hire an apprentice in this province.

* (11:30)

Budget 2013 will give families across Manitoba access to better recreational, cultural and learning opportunities by renewing infrastructure in our communities. We're investing in non-profit community organizations to build, upgrade or expand or acquire new projects. This year the program will invest \$2.9 million in 241 community projects and help leverage over \$17 million of funding from other sources. The Community Places Program, Mr. Speaker, is a program that we value and we do it in partnership with local communities.

And, Mr. Speaker, our plan is intended and will keep Manitoba among the most affordable places to live in Canada. Our plan builds more rental housing across the province, including affordable housing. This budget also keeps life affordable. This is a budget that protects families, businesses and the economy from uncertainty. We're going to keep building this province, and that includes building Manitoba Hydro for future generations instead of cancelling projects like some have pledged across the way.

It gives young families a break by taking the PST off of baby supplies: diapers, car seats and strollers. And the members opposite, they imposed taxes on things that families needed for young children. That was their solution. We've gone in a better way; we're protecting families in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker.

It raises the small business income tax threshold so that even more small businesses will pay no income tax, Mr. Speaker. We're the largest tax-free zone for small- and medium-sized business in the country, 425 thousands tax-free for small businesses in Manitoba.

It increases the seniors' education property tax credit to a maximum of \$1,100 and it confirms that by 2015 seniors will pay no school tax, a commitment that we will phase in starting next year.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition just doesn't get it. While we're facing these challenges head-on, the member from Fort Whyte would prefer to turn a blind eye. He still believes in the same failed policies that he was here representing in the 1990s. Faced with that uncertainty, the member from Fort Whyte and the government of the day chose to cut health care that families still rely on. They chose to cut education. It makes a promise even as recently as last week to indiscriminately cut all across government. That will hurt families; that will hurt the economy; that will hurt the future of Manitoba.

And that's why our new Manitoba Building and Renewal Plan over the next 10 years will move the province forward by creating 100,000 new jobs, Mr. Speaker. We will protect the economy. We will protect our families from uncertainty and 'repeated' flood risks.

And Budget 2013 is about building Manitoba not only for today, but for future generations. Governments across the country have found different approaches to manage spending while increasing revenues. In Manitoba our approach will be transparent. We will report to the Legislature every year on the investments we've made under the Manitoba Building and Renewal Plan.

We will show Manitobans real results. We will increase employment opportunities in Manitoba. We will educate more young people. We will look after our seniors, and we will see the province thrive as we go through these uncertain times and we will see Manitoba families protected from flood risks. That's the promise of this budget, Mr. Speaker, one the members opposite will not support as they try to drag us backwards with cuts and putting the brakes on everything that will grow the economy in Manitoba.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, this is a budget that was nothing more than a tax-and-spend manifesto. In fact, 90 per cent of the budget related to spending and only 10 per cent was about economic development. This is a budget that is going to cripple Manitoba, and we cannot support something that will do that.

It will create an even bigger mess than what the former NDP, the last NDP government, did to Manitoba. They left the Filmon government a mess

to clean up, and all the hard work by the Filmon government and by Manitobans themselves took Manitoba out of a mess that Howard Pawley left them, and out of the disaster of federal cuts of the mid-'90s. And while this NDP government likes to continually look at the back—you know, look at the back picture and look at and make comments about—negatively about a former government. It was the Filmon government that had to clean up an incredible mess left by the Pawley government of the '80s.

Mr. Speaker, where the federal government in the '90s also unilaterally decided to withhold about \$900 million from Manitoba, also left a huge challenge for the government of the day. Even Gary Doer recognized that the amount of money withheld by the federal Liberals equated to the closure of about two dozen hospitals. But Gary Filmon did not close those hospitals; he kept funding health care and he never cut it. He found ways to make sure that the valuable programs and services of Manitoba were protected. Even the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) praised the good work of the Filmon government in health care once he became the minister of Health.

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

Mrs. Driedger: The members don't like to hear it from across the way, but actually when their member for Kildonan became the Health minister, he said that 90 per cent of what the Filmon government did in health care was good and he had no complaint about it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Gary Filmon was dealt a rotten hand by a big-spending NDP government and by the federal Liberals. Despite those challenges, he brought Manitoba out of deficit; he worked to decrease debt; and he left the province in pretty good financial shape. And all the while, interest rates were high, much higher than what they are today under this current government.

But what did this NDP do with this legacy? They inherited one of the best legacies any incoming government could ever inherit, but what did they do? They squandered it. They took a deficit-free Province and they brought it back into annual deficits. In 1999, there was no deficit. Now they have been running half a billion—or billion-dollar deficits every single year. Mr. Deputy Speaker,

they've doubled the debt in just 14 years. I think they've even beat Howard Pawley's record. They doubled the debt in just 14 years, two and a half billion dollars just this year alone. That debt has now gone from \$15 billion to \$30 billion. The NDP debt has grown faster than the economy for five years in a row.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It's getting very difficult to hear in here. I'm sure we would all like to listen to the honourable critic respond, and I would ask the co-operation of all members of the House.

Mrs. Driedger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A lot of sensitivities, obviously, on the other side. They're so used to just spinning the truth over the last number of weeks that when they do get a chance to hear the truth, they don't want to hear it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to repeat that they have taken Manitoba back into a debt that is growing exponentially. It's gone from \$15 billion to \$30 billion in just 14 years. Can anybody say grease? They've buried Manitoba under a mountain of debt. They've gutted the taxpayer protection legislation just so that they can keep spending more.

And income taxes, Mr. Speaker—something they don't even want to talk about, but they have created a situation where Manitobans are the second highest income taxpayers in all of Canada. They've taken Manitoba to the edge of a precipice because they don't know how to rein in their spending, and now Manitobans are stuck paying for the spending spree of the last 14 years.

This NDP government has also lived grandly off the largesse of transfer payments from the federal government—38 per cent of the money they get and spend in this province comes from other provinces. They have not even tried to stand on their own two feet. They don't care that the money has come from other provinces—other hard-working provinces that have tried to better manage their money. Not these guys. These guys, all they care about is taking whatever money they can get from wherever they want—38 per cent of Manitoba spending comes from taxpayers in other provinces.

* (11:40)

These people across the way don't know how to carefully manage their own resources. In fact, a number of them have even said they wanted and demanded every cent they could get from the federal government. They said—and it was a former member

that was running for leadership—they were entitled to it.

Well, Mr. Speaker, what a pathetic attitude for a government to have. How can Manitoba ever reach its potential when they have an attitude like that where they're so happy to go cap in hand to the federal government and beg for money rather than trying to do what they can here and grow the economy and get Manitoba on the good track to stand on its own two feet? They have never tried to help Manitoba reach its full potential. They never looked at how to grow the economy to its full advantage. It's much easier to go cap in hand to Ottawa and demand what they wanted. They were addicted to federal—to the federal gravy train because that was easy money. That is lazy socialism.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Mr. Speaker, in the last election they promised not to raise taxes. That should have been their bond with the public. People believed them. People voted for them and that was their mandate, a mistake that many people can now see, especially the 15,000 Jets fans last night, who, I understand, really booed this Premier (Mr. Selinger) when his picture was shown on the big screen in the MTS Centre. I can't even believe that this Premier will not even listen to the 15,000 Jets fans last night who were pretty clear that they don't like that this government has lied to them and has broken a promise not to raise taxes.

Mr. Speaker, within a few months of promising not to raise taxes, they did what they promised not to do: they raised taxes, and it was the biggest tax grab in Manitoba in a quarter of a century. And a year later they went even higher than that and raised the PST another point from 7 per cent to 8 per cent, and now we are the highest in western Canada. It was the biggest tax grab in 26 years.

Mr. Speaker, in raising the PST, they have decided to break the law. They have decided to break the law and not take this tax hike decision to the people for a referendum. We have legislation in place right now that says they have to have a referendum on increasing taxes. They've gutted the rest of that legislation that actually protects taxpayers. They gutted the part where they don't have to pay debt every year. They gutted the part where they can run deficits whenever they want. But there still is an aspect to that legislation that says they have to take a tax increase to a referendum so that the people of Manitoba can decide if they want this government to run deficits. That law is still in place

and it's there to protect taxpayers. However, in the arrogance of this government and in their contempt for taxpayers, they have decided to break the law and bring in a PST hike on July 1st, no matter what the public outcry is against it.

In fact, in my question earlier today, I was commenting on a woman from Assiniboia that had actually tried to raise her objections on the PST hike with her member from Assiniboia. He did not return her call. She then called the Premier's (Mr. Selinger) office and the Minister of Finance's (Mr. Struthers) office, and the Finance Minister's office told her she could have whatever opinion she wanted, but they didn't have to listen to it. Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely unbelievable—[interjection]

And the member for Riel (Ms. Melnick) is sitting there saying, nonsense. We are getting so many emails and so many calls on this issue. And this woman is actually from Assiniboia, and she is now ready to go out and help work so that this government does not bring in the PST hike. So shame on them for telling her that and shame on the minister for not even returning the call of his constituent.

Mr. Speaker, what is that 1 per cent PST going to be used for? Nobody's quite sure because this government is all over the map on what they say it is used for. One day it's about floods; the next day it's about hospitals; the next day it's about schools; the next day it's about splash pads. They don't know what it's going to be used for. People are asking them and they cannot come up with an answer.

It's becoming more and more obvious that what they have done is they have decided they are going to take full control of all of this money that is coming their way in Manitoba and they're going to turn it into a slush fund that they can use on a go-forward basis for the next election, and that is exactly what they're going to do. They've taken the ability away from municipalities to make the decision about what they can spend their money on. It is so clear what this government is intending to do, and it's despicable.

This is a government that lied to people in the last election, and they continue to lie on a daily basis. They're so brainwashed by their own rhetoric, they can't even tell when they're not being truthful anymore, Mr. Speaker.

And, to go beyond the tipping point, yesterday, Mr. Speaker, the Premier of Manitoba said that he is

leaving the door open for a future PST increase. He had a chance yesterday to say, no, that he will not raise the PST another point. He did not do that. He left the door wide open to future tax increases. If he does that, it is going to take generations for this province to get back on its feet. He is going to cripple Manitoba even more than he already has.

Mr. Speaker, this tax-and-spend-manifesto budget broke last year's record for the biggest tax grab in a quarter of a century. In just two years, the NDP have sucked a half a billion dollars out of Manitoba's pockets for taxes and fees, and it appears that it is not going to satisfy their spending addiction. They are leaving the door open for even more asks of the public for—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, there's such sensitivity on the other side. It seems a little bit astounding that there is so much chirping coming from the seats opposite.

Mr. Speaker, big spending by this government has become Manitoba's big tax problem. No wonder the Premier of Manitoba was rated dead last in Canada for financial management. We can see that. Manitobans deserve better than what this government is doing. Nobody on this side of the House will support a budget that is going to cripple Manitoba further and bring Manitoba to its knees. We're going to stand side by sides for a better province and we are going to ensure good service for Manitobans.

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): I'm very pleased to stand and address all of my colleagues in the Legislature on what I think is a very important matter and that's the debate over a budget, the 2013 budget. Budgets, Mr. Speaker, are very important documents. Budgets are where Manitobans can see where people in this Legislature actually stand.

These are important things that we do in this House. We all do that. All 57 of us do important things on behalf of the people of Manitoba. It's a job that I think every one of us in this Legislature, despite which side of the House we sit on, I think we all take that very seriously. Mr. Speaker, that's why I'd like to try to raise this debate out of the din of what I just heard.

Mr. Speaker, we need to talk about positive solutions to the challenges that face the people of our province because, as I said, this is important.

Manitoba families count on us in this Legislature. They count on us to make good decisions, to protect them when we face such calamities as floods. And for people, whoever they may be in this province, including members opposite, for people to underestimate the damage, to underestimate the stress that flooding has caused in this province, that's inexcusable. To pretend as if the flood of '09 or the flood of '11 did not exist or to think we can't get ready for the flood of 2013 and, I will say floods of the future, to not do that would be irresponsible. I will not ever forget, and I know members opposite, it—can call it fear mongering if they like, but I don't know how many people in Grand Forks or Minot would call it fear mongering if their leaders had stepped forward like ours have and protected their families in those communities. Mr. Speaker, I will take the criticism, the slings and the arrows, from members opposite all day long and stand with the people of Manitoba and invest in those protections, because this is important work that we all do.

* (11:50)

Mr. Speaker, this budget, Budget 2013, faced some very real, very large challenges. Members opposite make light of the fact that the world is facing some big challenges. They try to pooh-pooh the idea that there's an economic downturn that has taken place. They ignore the advice of such people as Mark Carney of the Bank of Canada. They ignore the own—their—advice of their own buddy, Prime Minister Harper, who has been very clearly saying that this is the new norm, economic uncertainty is. This government—this government—will not stick its head in the sand as members opposite have done on that issue. And, yes, we have taken steps in Manitoba to protect Manitoba, to buffer Manitoba as well as we can—as well as we can—that threat, that economic threat, that is facing us from across the world. And we have taken measures, as the member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson) has pointed out, with the—through our prebudget consultation documents, that we have taken measures to keep our employment strong, that we have moved to make pensions strong for Manitobans, that we have moved to invest and keep people working and invest in infrastructure that not only has a positive short-term impact, but long-term benefits for the people of Manitoba. She can talk all she likes about Manitoba, and she can—and I encourage her to talk about all the good things that are happening in Manitoba. This government in co-operation with the private sector is moving forward in Manitoba despite—despite—the economic downturn

that has taken place in this—worldwide. We will continue to have a positive approach to that despite members opposite's negativity.

Mr. Speaker, the other very real threat that this budget addressed, that this budget faced, was a report that came forward saying you need to invest over a billion dollars in flood infrastructure—over a billion dollars. Members opposite, again, for a while stuck their heads in the sand on this. And I say for a while because at the initial outset, for a few days, they pretended as if we didn't ever have to pay for that. They were going to leave Manitoba families in the lurch. That's not the approach of this side of the House. No way are we going to not stand with the Manitoba families and work and invest and make those improvements in flood infrastructure, but the members of the opposition were willing to do that until last Thursday, I suppose, when the Leader of the Opposition boldly stepped forward. I guess he kind of admitted that maybe we do have some challenges in terms of floods and economic outlooks.

But what was his solution, Mr. Speaker? You know, we talked a lot—we've talked a lot—about the 1990s approach of the members opposite. And there is nobody in this House that likes to talk about the 1990s more than the Leader of the Opposition—except maybe the Finance critic, who rivalled him here in her speech just a few minutes ago. But we don't have to look back even to the '90s to see what the Conservatives would do. We can look to last Thursday to see what the Conservatives would do. They were very clear. They were going to cut—cut, hack and slash—\$550 million worth of cuts. That is on top of the work we did last year to reduce administrative costs in health care, to reduce administrative costs at—in the Crown corporations, to reduce administrative costs at municipalities. We've been taking on those issues because we understand that if we are going ask Manitobans to contribute to the challenges that we face, then we as a government need to do that as well. And we have been doing that, Mr. Speaker.

Do you know how I know we've been doing that? Because every time we've moved forward in squeezing administrative costs out of our systems across government, members opposite have complained. You know what I—you know what—but this fits into what they do. They want to do all these cuts, and maybe they want to put some money into infrastructure, too—they haven't really said. They want to do that, but you know where they want the cuts to come from—somebody else's constituency,

Mr. Speaker. You know, I guess they're transparent, all right. The people of Manitoba see through that; the people of Manitoba know what you're all about.

Mr. Speaker, time and time again, members opposite have underestimated the people of Manitoba—time and time again, and they're doing it once more. People of Manitoba have been very clear; the people of Manitoba have said, protect health care, protect education, invest in infrastructure, protect our kids.

Mr. Speaker, I need to point no further than a budget brought forward by Conservatives when they were in government, where they extended the PST to include baby supplies. That was the choice that they made at the time. It's well documented, it's in black and white, it's a fact. And I know members opposite—like I said earlier, they're entitled to their own opinions but they're not entitled to their own facts. They extended the PST to baby supplies. Budget 2013 undoes that mistake that you made. This is your chance to say, oh, we made a mistake, we're sorry. You can do that in just a few minutes by voting for a budget that re-in—that takes the PST off of baby supplies. What are you going to do?

It's very clear members opposite support a plan of indiscriminate across-the-board cuts—that is clear. Mr. Speaker, they haven't said they wouldn't put the HST in place. You know, they were laughing about the Jets here earlier. If the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Pallister) had his way and put an HST in place, everybody buying a Jets ticket, everybody buying a Blue Bombers ticket would be provided—would be providing a GST that he would extend to them. And they have the nerve to stand up in the House and talk about that here—it's unbelievable.

Mr. Speaker, our approach and our budget is a building budget—it's a building approach. Our approach invests in Manitobans; our approach to this budget protects Manitoba families; our approach says that we're putting forward a piece of legislation that guarantees in law that everything we've—that we raise on the PST, this 1 per cent increase, every nickel of that decision goes in for infrastructure. And I want to underscore the absolute need, the absolute urgency—the urgency of moving forward quickly with this.

We know what we face in the next several weeks, in the next months, Mr. Speaker. We know what Manitoba families could be going through in this province. We are going to stand with those Manitoba families. We're not going to ignore them

and we're not going to cut their hospitals and their schools in order to pay for it, and we're not going to lay off nurses and we're not going to lay off teachers in order to get this done.

This government put forward an honest, straightforward, transparent, accountable approach, Mr. Speaker, that Manitobans can depend on.

* (12:00)

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order. Order, please. The hour being 12 noon, pursuant to rule 32(6), I am interrupting the proceedings to put the questions necessary to dispose of the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers), that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government, and all amendments to the motion.

Therefore, the question before the House is the proposed—the question before the House now is the proposed amendment moved by the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Pallister) to the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance

THAT this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

Do the members of the House wish to have the amendment read?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: It was proposed that the main motion be amended—by the Leader of the Official Opposition

THAT the main motion be amended by deleting all of the words after "House" and substituting:

therefore regrets that this budget fails to address the priorities of Manitobans by:

- (a) ignoring the taxpayer protection laws that safeguard Manitoba families; and
- (b) saddling Manitoba families with crushing and unnecessary taxes that don't allow them to prosper and save for the future; and
- (c) failing to tame a \$500-million structural deficit created through 13 years of overspending; and
- (d) failing to promise a full and transparent review of all government spending; and
- (e) failing to control growth of low-spending priorities such as advertising and vote taxes; and

(f) stifling economic growth and prosperity through excessive red tape and unwarranted taxation.

As a consequence the provincial government has thereby lost the confidence of this House and the people of Manitoba.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

Mr. Speaker: All those in favour of the amendment, please signify by saying aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

Mr. Speaker: All those opposed to the amendment, please signify by saying nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Speaker: In the opinion of the Chair, the Nays have it.

Recorded Vote

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, could you call in the members for a recorded vote.

Mr. Speaker: Recorded vote having been requested, call in the members.

* (12:10)

Order, please. The question before the House now is the proposed amendment moved by the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Pallister) to the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers):

THAT this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

Division

A RECORDED VOTE was taken, the result being as follows:

Yeas

Briese, Cullen, Driedger, Eichler, Ewasko, Friesen, Goertzen, Graydon, Helwer, Maguire, Mitchelson, Pallister, Pedersen, Schuler, Smook, Stefanson, Wishart.

Nays

Allan, Allum, Altemeyer, Bjornson, Blady, Braun, Caldwell, Chief, Chomiak, Crothers, Dewar, Gaudreau, Gerrard, Howard, Irvin-Ross, Jha, Kostyshyn, Lemieux, Mackintosh, Maloway, Marcelino (Logan), Marcelino (Tyndall Park), Melnick, Nevakshonoff, Oswald, Pettersen, Robinson, Rondeau, Saran, Selby, Selinger, Struthers, Swan, Whitehead, Wiebe, Wight.

Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk): Yeas 17, Nays 36.

Mr. Speaker: I declare the amendment lost.

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House now is the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers):

THAT this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

Mr. Speaker: All those in favour of the main motion, please signify by saying aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

Mr. Speaker: All those opposed, please signify by saying nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Speaker: In the opinion of the Chair, the Ayes have it.

Recorded Vote

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, could you call in the members for a recorded vote.

Mr. Speaker: Recorded vote having been requested, call in the members.

Order, please. The question before the House is the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance:

THAT this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

Division

A RECORDED VOTE was taken, the result being as follows:

Yeas

Allan, Allum, Altemeyer, Ashton, Bjornson, Blady, Braun, Caldwell, Chief, Chomiak, Crothers, Dewar, Gaudreau, Howard, Irvin-Ross, Jha, Kostyshyn, Lemieux, Mackintosh, Maloway, Marcelino (Logan), Marcelino (Tyndall Park), Melnick, Nevakshonoff, Oswald, Pettersen, Robinson, Rondeau, Saran, Selby, Selinger, Struthers, Swan, Whitehead, Wiebe, Wight.

Nays

Briese, Cullen, Driedger, Eichler, Ewasko, Friesen, Gerrard, Goertzen, Graydon, Helwer, Maguire,

Mitchelson, Pallister, Pedersen, Schuler, Smook, Stefanson, Wishart.

Madam Clerk: Yeas 36, Nays 18.

Mr. Speaker: Declare the motion carried.

* * *

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Government House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker, would you canvass the House to see if there is will to call it 12:30?

Mr. Speaker: Is it the will of the House to call it 12:30? *[Agreed]*

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, April 26, 2013

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