

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

*Published under the
authority of
The Honourable Daryl Reid
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, August 22, 2013

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Mr. Speaker: Seeing no bills, we'll move on to—

PETITIONS

Hydro Capital Development—NFAT Review

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by R. Godard, L. Kerr, M. Kerr and many more fine Manitobans.

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

Provincial Sales Tax Increase— Cross-Border Shopping

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Manitoba has a thriving and competitive retail environment in communities near its borders, including Bowsman, Swan River, Minitonas, Benito, Russell, Binscarth, St-Lazare, Birtle, Elkhorn, Virden, Melita, Waskada, Boissevain, Deloraine, Cartwright, Pilot Mound, Crystal City, Manitou, Morden, Winkler, Plum Coulee, Altona, Gretna, Emerson, Morris, Killarney, Sprague, Vita, Reston, Pierson, Miniota, McAuley, St. Malo, Foxwarren, Roblin and many others.

Both the Saskatchewan PST rate and the North Dakota retail sales tax rate are 5 per cent, and the Minnesota retail sales tax is 6 per cent.

The retail sales tax rate is 40 per cent cheaper in North Dakota and Saskatchewan and 25 per cent cheaper in Minnesota as compared to Manitoba.

The differential in tax rates creates a disincentive for Manitoba consumers to shop locally to purchase their goods and services.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To acknowledge that the increase in the PST will significantly encourage cross-border shopping and put additional strain on the retail sector, especially for those businesses located close to Manitoba's provincial borders.

To urge the provincial government to reverse its PST increase to ensure Manitoba consumers can shop affordably in Manitoba and support local businesses.

This petition is signed by P. Clark, P. Sudermann, V. Penner and many other fine Manitobans.

Provincial Sales Tax Increase—Referendum

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

(1) The provincial government promised not to raise taxes in the last election.

(2) Through Bill 20, the provincial government wants to increase the retail sales tax, known as the

PST, by one point without the legally required referendum.

(3) An increase to the PST is excessive taxation that will harm Manitoba families.

(4) Bill 20 strips Manitobans of their democratic right to determine when major tax increases are necessary.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to not raise the PST without holding a provincial referendum.

This petition is submitted on behalf of D. Allarie, G. Gozda, J. Jones and many other fine Manitobans.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

(1) The provincial government promised not to raise taxes in the last election.

(2) Through Bill 20, the provincial government wants to increase the retail sales tax, known as the PST, by one point without the legally required referendum.

(3) An increase to the PST is excessive taxation that will harm Manitoba families.

(4) Bill 20 strips Manitobans of their democratic right to determine when major tax increases are necessary.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to not raise the PST without holding a provincial referendum.

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by M. Toews, B. Kziening, E. Braun and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

(1) The provincial government promised not to raise taxes in the last election.

(2) Through Bill 20, the provincial government wants to increase the retail sales tax, known as the

PST, by one point without the legally required referendum.

(3) An increase to the PST is excessive taxation that will harm Manitoba families.

And (4), Bill 20 strips Manitobans of their democratic right to determine when major tax increases are necessary.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to not raise the PST without holding a provincial referendum.

And this petition is signed by S. Sveinson, M. Livingstone, D. Ashton and many, many others, Mr. Speaker.

Provincial Sales Tax Increase— Cross-Border Shopping

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

Manitoba has a thriving and competitive retail environment in communities near its borders, including Bowsman, Swan River, Minitonas, Benito, Roblin, Russell, Binscarth, St-Lazare, Birtle, Elkhorn, Virden, Melita, Waskada, Boissevain, Deloraine, Cartwright, Pilot Mound, Crystal City, Manitou, Morden, Winkler, Plum Coulee, Altona, Gretna, Emerson, Morris, Killarney, Sprague, Vita, Reston, Pierson, Miniota, McAuley, St. Malo, Tilston, Foxwarren and many others.

Both the Saskatchewan PST rate and the North Dakota retail sales tax rate are 5 per cent, and the Minnesota retail sales tax rate is 6 per cent.

The retail sales tax rate is 40 per cent cheaper in North Dakota and Saskatchewan and 25 per cent cheaper in Minnesota as compared to Manitoba.

The differential in tax rates creates a disincentive for Manitoba consumers to shop locally to purchase their goods and services.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To acknowledge that the increase in the PST will significantly encourage cross-border shopping and put additional strain on the retail sector, especially for those businesses located close to the Manitoba's provincial borders.

And (2), To urge the provincial government to reverse its PST increase to ensure Manitoba consumers can shop affordably in Manitoba and support local businesses.

This petition is signed by S. Martel, D. Schmidt, K. Bergman and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Reopen Beausejour's Employment Manitoba Office

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

(1) The RM of Brokenhead and the town of Beausejour are growing centres with a combined population of over 8,000.

(2) Employment Manitoba offices provide crucial career counselling, job search and training opportunities for local residents looking to advance their education.

(3) The recent closure of Employment Manitoba's Beausejour office will have negative consequences for the area's population who want to upgrade their skills and employment opportunities.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to reopen Beausejour's Employment Manitoba office.

And this petition is signed by L. McDonald, K. Bisk, E. Harper and many, many other fine Manitobans.

* (13:40)

Provincial Sales Tax Increase— Cross-Border Shopping

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

(1) Manitoba has a thriving and competitive retail environment in communities near its borders, including Bowsman, Swan River, Minitonas, Benito, Roblin, Russell, Binscarth, St-Lazare, Birtle, Elkhorn, Virden, Melita, Waskada, Boissevain, Deloraine, Cartwright, Pilot Mound, Crystal City, Manitou, Morden, Winkler, Plum Coulee, Altona, Gretna, Emerson, Morris, Killarney, Sprague, Vita,

Reston, Pierson, Miniota, McAuley, St. Malo, Tilston, Foxwarren and many others.

(2) Both the Saskatchewan PST rate and the North Dakota retail sales tax rate are 5 per cent, and the Minnesota retail sales tax rate is 6 per cent.

(3) The retail sales tax rate is 40 per cent cheaper in North Dakota and Saskatchewan and 25 per cent cheaper in Minnesota as compared to Manitoba.

(4) The differential in tax rates creates a disincentive for Manitoba consumers to shop locally to purchase their goods and services.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To acknowledge that the increase in the PST will significantly encourage cross-border shopping and put additional strain on the retail sector, especially for those businesses located close to Manitoba's provincial borders.

(2) To urge the provincial government to reverse its PST increase to ensure Manitoba consumers can shop affordably in Manitoba and support local businesses.

Signed by A. Wiebe, F. Doerksen, A. Doerksen and many other fine Manitobans.

Applied Behaviour Analysis Services

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The provincial government broke a commitment to support families of children with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder, including timely diagnosis and access to necessary treatment such as applied behavioural analysis, also known as ABA services.

(2) The provincial government did not follow its own policy statement on autism services which notes the importance of early intervention for children with autism.

(3) The preschool waiting list for ABA services has reached its highest level ever with at least 56 children waiting for services. That number is expected to exceed 70 children by September 2013 despite commitments to reduce the waiting list and provide timely access to services.

(4) The provincial government policy of eliminating ABA services in schools by grade 5 has caused many children in Manitoba to age out of the window for this very effective ABA treatment because of a lack of access. Many more children are expected to age out because of a lack of available treatment spaces.

(5) Waiting lists and denials of treatment are unacceptable. No child should be denied access to or age out of eligibility for ABA services.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Family Services and Labour consider making funding available to address the current waiting list for ABA services.

This is signed by B. Lumsden, L. Wiens, D. Chan and many other Manitobans.

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The provincial government broke a commitment to support families of children with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder, including timely diagnosis and access to necessary treatment such as applied behavioural analysis, also known as ABA services.

(2) The provincial government did not follow its own policy statement on autism services which notes the importance of early intervention for children with autism.

(3) School learning services has its first ever waiting list which started with two children. The waiting list is projected to keep growing and to be in excess of 20 children by September 2013. Therefore, these children will go through the biggest transition of their lives without receiving ABA services that has helped other children achieve huge gains.

(4) The provincial government has adopted a policy to eliminate ABA services in schools by grade 5 despite the fact that these children have been diagnosed with autism which still requires therapy. These children are being denied necessary ABA services that will allow them to access to the same educational opportunities as any other Manitoban.

(5) Waiting lists and denials of treatment are unacceptable. No child should be denied access or

eliminated from eligibility for ABA services if their need still exists.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Education consider making funding available to eliminate the current waiting list for ABA school-age services and fund ABA services for individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

And this petition is signed by P. Lachance, R. Perrier, R. Perrier and many more fine Manitobans.

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Manitoba Legislature.

And the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The provincial government broke a commitment to support families of children with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder, including timely diagnosis and access to necessary treatment such as applied behavioural analysis, also known as ABA services.

(2) The provincial government did not follow its own policy statement on autism services which notes the importance of early intervention for children with autism.

School learning services has had its first ever waiting list which started with two children. The waiting list is projected to keep growing and to be in excess of 20 children by September 2013. Therefore, these children will go through the biggest transition of their lives without receiving ABA services that has helped other children achieve huge gains.

(4) The provincial government has adopted a policy to eliminate ABA services in schools by grade 5 despite the fact that these children have been diagnosed with autism which still requires therapy. These children are being denied necessary ABA services that will allow them access to the same educational opportunities as any other Manitoban.

(5) Waiting lists and denials of treatment are unacceptable. No child should be denied access to or eliminated from eligibility for ABA services if their need still exists.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Education consider making funding available to eliminate the current waiting list for ABA school-age services and fund ABA services for individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

And this petition is signed by A. Lang, K. Broda, G. Lowry and many, many others.

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

And the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The provincial government broke a commitment to support families of children with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder, including timely diagnosis and access to necessary treatment such as applied behavioural analysis, also known as ABA services.

(2) The provincial government did not follow its own policy statement on autism services which notes the importance of early intervention for children with autism.

(3) The preschool waiting list for ABA services has reached its highest level ever with at least 56 children waiting for services. That number is expected to exceed 70 children by September 2013 despite commitments to reduce the waiting list and provide timely access to services.

(4) The provincial government's policy of eliminating ABA services in schools by grade 5 has caused many children in Manitoba to age out of the window for this very effective ABA treatment because of a lack of access. Many more children are expected to age out because of a lack of available treatment spaces.

* (13:50)

(5) Waiting lists and denials of treatment are unacceptable. No child should be denied access to or age out of eligibility for ABA services.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Family Services and Labour consider making funding available to address the current waiting list for ABA services.

And this petition is signed by E. Larsen, J. Anderson, C. Torres and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Provincial Sales Tax Increase—Referendum

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

(1) The provincial government promised not to raise taxes in the last election.

(2) Through Bill 20, the provincial government wants to increase the retail sales tax, known as the PST, by one point without the legally required referendum.

(3) An increase to the PST is excessive taxation that will harm Manitoba families.

(4) Bill 20 strips Manitobans of their democratic right to determine when major tax increases are necessary.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to not raise the PST without holding a provincial referendum.

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by M. Taillieu, M. Richards, K. Lee and many other fine Manitobans.

Provincial Road 433 Improvements

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Provincial Road 433, Cape Coppermine Road, in the rural municipality of Lac du Bonnet has seen an increase in traffic volume in recent years.

(2) New subdivisions have generated considerable population growth and the area has seen a significant increase in tourism due to the popularity of the Granite Hills Golf Course.

(3) This population growth has generated an increased tax base in the rural municipality.

(4) Cape Coppermine Road was not originally built to handle the high volume of traffic it now accommodates.

We petition the legislation—the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To request that the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation recognize that Cape Coppermine

Road can no longer adequately serve both area residents and tourists, and as such consider making improvements to the road to reflect its current use.

This petition is signed by R. Herlick, G. Herlick, G. Peselcvitch and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Applied Behaviour Analysis Services

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

The provincial government broke a commitment to support families of children with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder, including timely diagnosis and access to necessary treatment such as applied behavioural analysis, also known as ABA services.

The provincial government did not follow its own policy statements on autism services which notes the importance of early intervention for children with autism.

School learning services has its first ever waiting list which started with two children. The waiting list is projected to keep growing and to be in excess of 20 children by September 2013. Therefore, these children will go through the biggest transition of their lives without receiving ABA services that has helped other children achieve huge gains.

The provincial government has adopted a policy to eliminate ABA services in schools by grade 5 despite the fact that these children have been diagnosed with autism which still requires therapy. These children are being denied necessary ABA services that will allow them to access—allow them access to the same educational opportunities as any other Manitoban.

Waiting lists and denials of treatment are unacceptable. No child should be denied access to or eliminated from eligibility for ABA services if their need still exists.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Education consider making funding available to eliminate the current waiting list for ABA school-age services and fund ABA services for individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

This petition is signed by A. Urasy, T. Jenner, D. Scabo and many more Manitobans.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister charged with the administration of The Liquor Control Act): Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table the Quarterly Financial Report for three months ended for the Manitoba liquor commission for 2013.

Mr. Speaker: Any further tabling of reports?

Seeing none, ministerial statements. None?

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today representatives of the Canadian Czech-Slovak Benevolent Association, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada, the Ukrainian Canadian Congress and the Manitoba Parents for Ukrainian Education, who are the guests of the honourable member for Burrows (Ms. Wight).

And also in the gallery we have with us today Orysia Tracz and family, representatives from the Osvita Foundation and the Manitoba Parents for Ukrainian Education, who are the guests of the honourable member for Rossmere (Ms. Braun).

And also in the public gallery we have with us today Ms. Avis Gray, the former member for Crescentwood, and in the loge to my right, the former member for Burrows, Mr. Doug Martindale.

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Consultation Process Government Record

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, this week, the Hydro Minister commented to the House that he was suffering from consultation fatigue, with respect to the bipole west project. This is particularly ironic given the recent Clean Environment Commission report which condemned the government's approach to consultation, saying they set up meetings for farmers during harvest season, that they consulted First Nations only after the fact and said that the meetings were more about talking than they were about listening.

Now, consultation means asking the advice or opinion of others, and this government has failed to listen to Manitobans on many issues. They've shown no respect for the opinions of Manitobans.

Will the Premier admit that his government couldn't possibly be suffering from consultation fatigue? They have not been listening to Manitobans.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro corrected the record yesterday. I'm sorry the member missed it, but the concept, the phrase that he used of consultation fatigue, was actually a phrase that was in the report. It did not in any way speak to the enthusiasm of this government to ensure that people get listened to when we build major pieces of infrastructure.

And as the member will know, there is a real possibility that Manitoba will be out of power within the next 10 to 12 years, and unless we proceed to build these additional transmission lines and additional dams, Manitoba will become a net importer of power, and that's when we would see the rates climb through the ceiling. Right now, the rates are lowest in North America. The plan that Manitoba Hydro has to build additional transmission is for reliability purposes. The plan that Manitoba Hydro has to build additional dams is to ensure that we retain our capacity for exports, which allows us to keep the lowest rates in North America.

2011 Election Election Promises

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, the NDP's plan to Americanize Manitoba Hydro proves that they're not listening to Manitobans. The reality is the Hydro Minister also claimed this week that he had a mandate, that he has a mandate, he said repeatedly, to actually waste a million—a billion—I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker—a billion dollars on the bipole west line, which would be 500 kilometres longer, which would be 25 per cent less effective at delivering power and which would be constructed in an area of unsafe environment for transmitting the power in tornado and ice storm alley.

So we don't believe he has a mandate. The NDP did not run for election on the bipole west line. They ran on a fear-based campaign centred on fears about privatization. Now, the Hydro Minister claims a phony mandate.

Manitobans vote for various reasons, Mr. Speaker: Will the Premier admit that the most significant issue for Manitobans in the 2011 election was his promise not to raise taxes?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the member may have missed it, as he wasn't a candidate in that election, but the major issue that the official opposition put forward was a purported number of thousands of dollars for building additional bipole capacity in Manitoba. They completely skipped over the fact that when they were last in office in 1997 to 1999, that there had been a major inability to provide power in Manitoba because 17 poles had been knocked down by serious weather conditions in the Interlake, and there was a long-standing requirement from Manitoba Hydro to add additional reliability to the system, which protects the domestic economy.

*(14:00)

That economy now is \$62 billion. The loss of power for a week would be over a billion dollars in the Manitoba economy. The members opposite want to push that hydro line down the east side of the province after 88 public consultations where the communities said, no, we do not think that is a good idea. The reputation of Manitoba Hydro is critical to the price that they get in the markets that they sell it to and pushing it down the east side, against the will of First Nations people would only damage the reputation of Manitoba Hydro—

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

Consultation Process Government Record

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): We all know here in this province, apart from those members opposite, that those weren't consultation meetings, they were tell meetings not ask meetings.

But the NDP cannot have it both ways. They claim they have a mandate to build bipole west; they do not. They were given a mandate to not raise taxes and they propose to and they haven't backed up, Mr. Speaker. They have it crossed up, and now they propose an illegal PST hike without holding the required referendum and that isn't consultation, that's the absence of consultation, that's zero consultation. That is undemocratic. It is dictatorial. It is disrespectful, and this government has replaced listening with ribbon cutting.

Will the Premier admit that this consultation fatigue myth couldn't possibly be his because it isn't from listening, he's just simply out there selling bad ideas and that's why he's so tired.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I actually didn't hear a question. He blew his opportunity to ask a question today.

But when it comes to listening to Manitobans, they have held up 47 bills in this Legislature for months now and have a complete unwillingness to listen to the representations that people want to make on those bills. We in Manitoba have a very unique tradition, unlike any other Legislature in Canada. When second reading of a bill occurs, members of the public have a right to come down in delegation and speak to the bills. The members opposite have refused to allow those bills to advance in this Legislature. That is the ultimate arrogance: to refuse to follow the traditions of the Manitoba House and listen to Manitobans when they want to speak to the bills.

The Leader of the Opposition is the leader of that resistance against listening to the Manitobans on the bills which will make them safer, which will grow the economy and protect our young people. That is the ultimate disgrace.

Cattle Enhancement Council Financial Statement Update

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, talk about arrogance, this is a Premier that never showed up for one hearing, never listened to one presenter at all the hearings on Bill 20.

Mr. Speaker, \$7.1 million is a lot of money, money that has come from cattle producers in the form of a checkoff collected by MCEC. This money is the difference between the 2011-2012 financial statements. I've asked this NDP government six times where the money has gone with no answer.

I ask again: Will the Minister of Agriculture tell this House where the \$7.1 million went?

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): I'd like to thank the minister opposite that's asking—or the member opposite asking this question.

As I indicated yesterday, beef industry is very key to the province of Manitoba. But I wanted to make it for the record that the MCE's investment, the number that the member opposite is bringing is totally inaccurate. The dollar investment of the—was

\$5.7 million for the record. So I would like to straighten that out in the record.

But you know what? The sad reality is that there was a partnership developed, but there has been some problems when that partnership was pulled out of the development of the MCEC program.

Thank you so much.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, when you drive down Marion Street in St. Boniface you will find a weed-infested site, which I will table pictures of for the wall of shame for this NDP government. This is a site the NDP government promised over and over again to build a state-of-the-art processing plant.

I'll ask the Minister of Agriculture: Where is the \$7.1 million of producers' money? Where did it go, with nothing to show for it except a weed-infested lot that this member is in charge of?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Let me just put it for the record it's—it was \$5.7 million that was invested by the producers of the province of Manitoba towards a slaughter facility. Everything was ready to go. The lot was cleared, fully developed for it, and all of a sudden the federal government, in their wisdom, has chose to pull out \$10 million in the partnership that was agreed to and all of a sudden we have nowhere. So the challenge for the MCE organizations was to find additional funding to go back to the original blueprints as we move forward for a federal slaughter facility in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, this government couldn't run a lemonade stand.

It's unfortunate. This is cattle producers' money. It was put into this government's hand to increase processing capacity for their product to make it world-market open. We're open for business in the province of Manitoba. They trusted this government to do the right thing, invest their money. Now, \$7.1 million is a weed-infested site.

Shame on this government. Stand up and apologize to those hard-working Manitobans for their mismanagement of this fund.

Mr. Kostyshyn: Again, we have—if the members opposite choose to have a breakdown, I'd gladly share some of the documentation with the members opposite.

Let's begin with the purchase of the site of \$1.2 million, the renovations to run a cut plant of \$761,000. Building and demolition of the building

was \$237,000, a long-term investment of \$450,000. Mr. Speaker, what we have here is a breakdown of what it cost us. Unfortunately, when the building was cleared, ready to move forward, their cousins chose to pull out \$10 million on behalf of the Manitoba cattle industry in the province of Manitoba. That's the truth. That's the question they should be asking their federal counterparts: Where did the \$10 million go to?

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

Cattle Enhancement Council Plains Processors Facility Update

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, the minister's idea of renovations is destruction. That's all that's on that site—is destruction.

In 2006, the Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council started collecting the levy from farmers in this province on the cattle in an effort to set up a processing plant. This plant is currently under—there is a plant currently under construction in Carman. MCEC has committed \$940,000 to this project.

Mr. Speaker, has the cheque been issued to Plains Processors?

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): As the member opposite knows, the MCEC is the agency that is appointed or is suggested to be the agency to investigate the business plan as we move forward. Now, the member opposite is referring to the plains processing. As he knows, I was there at the sod-turning ceremony and was very happy to see, as we move forward.

But let's be honest with one another. The intent of the plant is to have a business plan in place, and I'm not sure where it's at, but I'm sure members opposite are quite familiar where it's at, to have a solid business plan as we move forward.

Mr. Graydon: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we know where the business plan is at because the plant is being built, and the people that are financing it would not finance it unless there was a business plan. We know that the cheque won't be in the mail for some time. MCEC has only \$535,639 in their bank account. They have a debt of \$940,000 to Plains Processors.

Mr. Speaker, the question is simple: Where did the money go?

Mr. Kostyshyn: As—we believe in slaughter facilities in the province of Manitoba, and we have

for some time since the BSE. I have to be very honest; I was in the cattle business, and I'm still in the cattle business. I do see the importance of federal slaughter facilities in the province of Manitoba. We have invested in BJ Packers in Beausejour. We have invested in a number of other institutes that 'mistains' the viability of provincial but also federal slaughter facilities in the province of Manitoba.

But we want to move forward in a partnership with the federal, provincial and plains processing, but we need to work forward in a common denominator for the betterment of the cattle industry of the province of Manitoba and the investment that has been made.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Honourable member for Emerson, final supplementary.

Mr. Graydon: Well, Mr. Speaker, if he's so anxious to invest in it, why hasn't he forwarded the cheque for \$940,000 to Plains Processors? And why can he not account for why there's only \$535,639 in his account? This government has been collecting a lot of money from farmers for seven years with nothing to show for it but rubble and weeds.

Why did this government break another one of their promises to the cattle producers of this province?

Mr. Kostyshyn: Thank you, Mr. Minister, and, obviously, the member opposite's referring to the vacant lot. Let me be very clear again, and I'll speak a little bit slower so the member opposite could maybe understand the situation.

* (14:10)

There was a plan in place for Marion Street. There was a partnership that was being developed, and when they decide, the federal cousins decide to pull out the \$10 million, it's a—challenge is to try and get additional dollars to put forward with the blueprints that were developed already to move forward.

But, yet, they choose to play politics and not consider sending a letter of concern to their federal cousins in the partnership that was developed for Marion Street, for the betterment of the beef producers of the province of Manitoba, Mr. Speaker. That is my commentary as we move forward in a partnership, regardless who it is.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

Emergency Services Case Concern

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): Mr. Speaker, six days ago, the family of Edgar Mather suspected that the 83-year-old might be having a stroke, so they rushed him to the emergency room at Grace Hospital. At 6 p.m., after four hours, Mr. Mather was brought to an exam room and the family was told although X-rays were necessary, there would be further delays. At 11 p.m., after nine hours, Mr. Mather wanted to leave, and family members advocated for him, and at—finally, at 1:25 a.m., he had a test and only saw a doctor the next morning.

My question for the minister: Why was this individual made to wait 12 hours in ER for a test?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I thank the honourable member for the question.

Certainly, we want to ensure that anybody who is attending with a loved one to an emergency room gets as rapid assessment and care as possible. This is what Manitobans expect, and this is what we want to deliver.

Certainly, I am quite prepared to learn more about the specifics of this case from the member or from the family or from any correspondences I may have received on this. He has my absolute commitment that we will investigate that matter. We want our medical professionals to be able to attend to emergency situations as swiftly as possible, Mr. Speaker.

Physician Shortage

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Speaker, we're happy to provide more information to the minister. It seems like more of the same when, earlier this spring, there was a woman who, similarly, suspected stroke, presented all the symptoms, and was made to wait in an ER for five and a half hours.

So, in this case, after 12 hours of waiting, the family made inquiries, and they said why the long wait, and they were told doctor shortages. The family wrote, on a weekend and a hot weekend when emergency rooms are full, that screams of management issues.

Mr. Speaker, ERs across Manitoba, rural and urban, are experiencing closures and reductions. Why can't this minister ensure that Manitoba ERs are properly managed so they have doctors and can stay open and respond to emergencies?

Ms. Oswald: The member is quite right, as is the family, to expect that they get timely access to emergency care. Certainly, that is the goal of all of our regional health authorities, to ensure that our emergency rooms are staffed up as best as possible, not only with physicians, Mr. Speaker, but with doctors, with registered psychiatric nurses, with lab clinicians.

We want to ensure that there's a full complement of staff, and that's why we've made the commitment to continue to invest in educating, to continue to invest in recruiting.

We have seen successes with net increases across the board. Clearly, if the facts as presented are true, that did not happen in this case, and he has my commitment to investigate why.

Government Record

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Speaker, in January, this same minister outlined a paper on a five-point plan to unclog emergency rooms in city hospitals, and where are the results off paper in real life? Big promises, no results.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Mather spent the night in ER and was treated by a doctor the next morning. The family reports seeing other patients frustrated, angry and walking out after hours of waiting. I remind the minister 25,000 people left ER last year without being seen by a physician in the WRHA.

Mr. Speaker, doctor shortages, 12 hours of wait times, patients leaving in anger and no patient follow-up from relations department for six days. Manitobans are dialing 911 on this minister's record on emergency measures. Why?

Ms. Oswald: Again, as I said to the member twice, he has my commitment to investigate this particular case.

What I can say broadly, Mr. Speaker, of course, is that we're working to ensure that we drive down wait times in our emergency rooms. We know that we rely on our medical professionals to apply their medical knowledge and judgment in providing triage to patients. We know that they can do a better job of that when there are more hands on deck, which is why we've increased staffing in our emergency rooms, not only doctors, but nurses and lab personnel as well.

We're going to continue to invest. Recruitment, of course, is a challenge across the nation, but we're showing success with a net increase of over

500 doctors since being elected, and we're committed to do more.

Organized Crime 911 Access

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Well, investigations don't help that individual that waited for 12 hours.

Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police had a session discussing how organized crime is able to tie up 911 lines. We know in Manitoba that we have a number of organized crime organizations. The Minister of Health has told Manitobans if you go to an emergency room and there's no doctor available, you might be able to access the services of a nurse practitioner. If there's no nurse practitioner available, the nurse or receptionist will help you dial the 911 line to report the emergency.

Mr. Speaker, what is the minister's plan if there is no access to the 911 service because the lines are tied up by criminal organizations?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I thank the member for the question. I just want to clarify. On a couple of occasions now, members opposite have not presented what I have said about the ability of nurses to handle care in an emergency room. I want to be extremely clear, Mr. Speaker, that in cases where individuals attend to an ER that is under nurse-managed care, that nurse, a great percentage of the time, can apply her medical knowledge and solve the issue that the family has presented with. If not, she can consult with a physician. If she uses her medical judgment, which is excellent, and consults with the family to determine that a 911 call must be made, she will assist the family in doing that. She's using her medical assessment, not being flippant like—

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

Mr. Helwer: Mr. Speaker, there's nothing flippant about not being able to access the 911 services.

We know that Manitoba has a problem with organized crime, a problem with gangs that this government has not been able to deal with, other than creating yet another new gang strategy after the failure of the last one. Mr. Speaker, the CACP is concerned about the impact of organized crime on 911 access.

Why isn't the Minister of Health concerned about 911 access for Manitobans in emergency rooms with no doctors and no nurse practitioners?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Acting Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to be able to rise today to talk about all of the work that's been done in this province with respect to gangs.

Mr. Speaker, we introduced The Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act that has seen the shutdown of 584 drug dens and other prostitution sites, something that wasn't in place when we came into office. We've hired an additional 200 police officers to deal with crime and violence on the streets, and every single one of those officers has been opposed by members opposite. Just this year, in this budget, when we've increased the budget for police officers and Crown prosecutors to deal with gangs, the members said they wanted to cut out those people—

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

Mr. Helwer: Mr. Speaker, in an emergency, every second counts. If Manitobans do not have access to the 911 system because it has been hacked or compromised by gangs or other organized crime organizations, it could be a matter of life or death.

Why is the minister not concerned about this? How can this government ensure Manitobans that they will have access to the 911 system when they need it?

Ms. Oswald: Well, Mr. Speaker, to imply that individuals on this side of the House do not care about providing good emergency care is just wrong.

I can say to the member very clearly, infrastructure is in place to monitor 911 calls. When 911 calls are placed, Mr. Speaker, we have now the most well-trained workforce of EMS personnel—paramedics—that we have ever had in the history of Manitoba.

Further, Mr. Speaker, I can say that we now have as a tool the STARS helicopter ambulance, which Manitoba has never had before. We also have very highly trained registered nurses and nurse practitioners that not only can work in our emergency rooms very well, but also are part of the emergency medical system.

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

* (14:20)

**Paul Walker Quote
Article Reference**

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): I'd like to take a moment to congratulate the NDP on getting a big Hollywood movie star like Paul Walker to provide a quote at a recent ribbon cutting. The picture in the Canstar paper, The Times, shows the Premier (Mr. Selinger), the Health Minister and the member for Burrows (Ms. Wight) at an event. Missing from the picture is Paul Walker. In the article, Paul Walker is quoted talking about the importance of their announcement and health care in general. He says, you know, quote: "You know, all that really matters is that the people you love are happy and healthy. Everything else is just sprinkles on the sundae."

How was the Health Minister able to attract such a big star to this event and able to get him to provide this quote?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Well, Mr. Speaker, I can say humbly I'm not familiar with the article the member's referencing.

But I can say that we are delighted that every single day our workforce is providing excellent care, whether it's primary care, emergency care when necessary, Mr. Speaker, palliative care. We know that our professionals on the front line are doing the very best they can every single day to provide the kind of care that Manitobans need, whether it's care for their children or very specialized care for seniors who have complex illnesses. Our commitment is to ensure that we're increasing care for our families and we're going to continue to work on that every single day.

Mrs. Rowat: It strikes me a bit of a coincidence that Paul Walker's quote was identical to the one he provided to another publication in 2001, word for word, exactly the same. Well, you know, when something appears to be too good to be true, it probably is.

A journalist in Alberta spotted this, googled it and was shocked to see this quote was not about the recent health announcement in Burrows at all. It's a stolen quote.

Maybe the minister would like to explain how this is appropriate.

Ms. Oswald: I'll say to the member, I'm not familiar with the article that she's citing today, but I'd be delighted to read it if she wants to provide it to me.

But on the subject of health care, Mr. Speaker, in Burrows and in all of our areas in Manitoba we want to ensure that excellent primary care is being provided whenever possible.

And I want to reiterate, Mr. Speaker, that we believe that this excellent care can happen by physicians, of which we now have a record number practising in the province of Manitoba. It can be provided by nurse practitioners, again, a record number practising in Manitoba, and it can also be provided by registered nurses who members opposite believe can't provide any care at all.

Mrs. Rowat: I realize that it may be increasingly more difficult to find anyone to say nice things about this NDP government, however, that is no reason to scour the Internet for applicable quotes and pretend they are legitimate about your announcement. This is intellectually dishonest, and in the newspaper industry they call this plagiarism. A hundred and ninety-two communicators this NDP has, and that's the best that they can do.

I'd like to offer the minister or anyone from the NDP side an opportunity to apologize to Manitobans and, of course, to the nice man, Paul Walker, who appears to have been misrepresented.

Ms. Oswald: I'll reiterate for the third time, I, with anxious anticipation, await a copy of this document. I'd be happy to look at it; I'm not familiar with it.

But, certainly, I would go on to say that, really, just this morning I received a letter from one Gordon Damon out in Niverville, who wanted to commend our government for the partnership in which we engaged in the building of the PCH. They were familiar with some rather unfortunate tweeting that was going on, slagging that partnership. They wanted to clarify and, of course, offer us their congratulation, just a titch different from what I'm hearing from them today.

**Nutritional Deficiencies
Call for Task Force**

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, when we in Manitoba can ensure the provision of cancer-care drugs to anyone who needs it, when we can—with relationship to water flow—deflect nature's plans and harness the water for our own benefit, we must show the same determination to improve the

health of our children. I call on the Premier today for a firm commitment to eliminate the major nutritional deficiencies that are so prevalent in our province, for example, vitamin D.

In the spirit of co-operation for the children of our province, will the Premier agree to call an all-party task force, including nutritional experts, to build and implement an effective plan to eliminate nutritional deficiencies in Manitoba by 2022, starting with vitamin D?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I thank the member for the question. We did, actually, have a food security component and continue to actively promote a food security component in our poverty reduction plan, which is now provided as part of every annual budget. Just yesterday, there was an announcement of a new program in northwest Winnipeg, where there is the capacity to work with local residents on healthy food, healthy preparation of food and healthy production of food.

And, as the member knows, a decade ago there were virtually no community gardens in northern Manitoba; now there are 900 community gardens in northern Manitoba. Those gardens are done in partnerships with local schools, local community organizations, local leadership. It provides fresh vegetables to people in the north. There is a revolving fund which allows people to buy fridges and freezers to store vegetables for the winter, and we are promoting in all of our schools many programs that allow young people to have access to breakfast programs and other forms of food security.

And I'll be happy to elaborate in my next question on other things we're doing, as well.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, there's virtually no vitamin D in vegetables and, in fact, what the Premier is doing is not sufficient to address the critical nutritional deficiencies that exist today. You know, even though we're in the 21st century, low levels of vitamin D are far too common in our province, including being found in up to 80 per cent of expectant mothers in the inner city of Winnipeg. What is needed is the decision by this government to eliminate vitamin D deficiency and other nutritional deficiencies in Manitoba and to have effective plan to do this.

I ask the Premier: Will he support and endorse my call for the elimination of major nutritional deficiencies in Manitoba by the year 2022?

Mr. Selinger: I think it's a laudable objective to ensure the proper nutrients are made available to young pregnant mothers, children, families throughout their entire lifecycle. That's something that we're doing some very groundbreaking research on at an international level, including how to prevent FASD.

The member opposite was on an all-party task force in the past. After the task force concluded its work, he refused to sign the document. If he's seriously about-interested in finding ways we could advance research on things like vitamin D, as well as other nutrients—and we do have some of the best nutrient research going on on the planet, at the 'richinson'-Richardson nutraceutical centre, at the St. Boniface Hospital, at the Manitoba Food Development Centre in Portage la Prairie.

There are some very worthwhile research coming out of Manitoba on the value of flax, on the value of vitamin D, on the important role of vitamin A in preventing FASD and we're very interested in advancing a research agenda which allows all families in Manitoba to have the nutrients they need to have a healthy lifestyle.

Mr. Gerrard: We provided, back at the healthy kids task force, a better alternative. We're doing so again. You know, every year, for more than a decade, over 1,500 children under the age of 5 in Manitoba undergo painful dental extractions. Children with dental pain avoid eating, causing an obvious nutritional domino effect because vitamin D deficiency is one of the causes for the dental caries and the early childhood tooth decay. It's time to end the dental decay and the pain in kids. Let's act together.

I ask the Premier: Will he come on board and work co-operatively across party boundaries to ensure major nutritional deficiencies are eliminated in Manitoba by the year 2022?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I was actually recently in a northern community of The Pas, and I met a dentist who was travelling to a variety of remote and northern communities. We were supporting him in doing that, to do the kind of dental work that needs to be done in some of these communities. Most important, as the member knows, as a pediatrician, it's very important to actually prevent these things by having a healthy diet, by discouraging people from drinking soft drinks and other sugary products which destroy their teeth, and that is something that we're encouraging through school curriculum, through the

kinds of food and food security programs we make available.

We're very pleased to work with the member opposite on his ideas in this regard. We ask, simply, that when we actually work together he support the reports that are developed and there's a consensus position on it, and not say that he's part of something and at the last minute reverse his position.

We're pleased to go forward, we're pleased to consult him on any matters that will advance nutritious opportunities for young people and families in Manitoba.

*(14:30)

Medical School Graduates University of Manitoba

Ms. Sharon Blady (Kirkfield Park): This government has made the training, recruitment and retention of doctors a top priority, something that my neighbours in Kirkfield Park appreciate. Today, Manitoba has 2,599 more doctors than in 1999.

I understand that the Minister of Health was at the University of Manitoba's faculty of medicine inaugural ceremony yesterday to welcome the medical class of 2017. I was wondering if she could please update the House on why this medical school class is not only important, but also unique.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I felt sure I was going to get this question earlier from members opposite, but at last.

Mr. Speaker, it was a great privilege to attend the white coat ceremony yesterday for another full class of 110 medical students. I'm very pleased to report that this class is that close to being 50-50, male and female, and many of those students have rural roots. We also have many members from our cultural communities as part of that class, is a class of diversity, a true representation of Manitoba, and I know that they're going to have marvellous careers and we want them to work hard in—here in Manitoba.

I would add for members opposite that I blew a special kiss to students 71 through 110, who wouldn't have existed under your watch.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. The honourable member for Tuxedo has the floor.

PST Increase School Supplies

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Earlier, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) mentioned children and schools, and it reminded me, Mr. Speaker, that for the next couple of weeks, Manitoba families will be busy preparing for their children to go back to school. And, of course, on their list of things to do will be to pick up school supplies. But, unfortunately, as a result of this NDP's illegal PST hike, those families will be forced to pay more this year for their school supplies.

Mr. Speaker, why is this NDP government forcing school kids to pay for their spending addiction?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): That's quite something, coming from somebody across the way whose government, the Conservative government of Gary Filmon, which included her own leader, Mr. Speaker, put this—the tax on the school supplies in the first place, back in 1993. You know, we've seen some strange things from members opposite; that may be the strangest of all.

Of course, these same families, because of a decision that we made, Mr. Speaker, won't be paying the PST on bike helmets either and, overall, safety equipment, clothing, school supplies. This is the government on this side of the House that stands up for Manitoba families, that makes tough decisions that aren't easy—

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

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that as a result of the NDP's illegal PST hike, Manitoba families are being forced to pay more for these necessary school supplies for their kids.

My question is very simple for this minister: Why is he forcing school kids to pay for his spending addiction?

Mr. Struthers: Maybe, Mr. Speaker, the honourable member for Tuxedo wasn't listening the first time. Her government put that tax on school supplies that is impacting Manitoba families.

Mr. Speaker, this side of the House, our—clearly, our focus has been to relieve the tax burden on Manitobans, \$1.4 billion worth of tax relief for Manitobans over the last 13 years. We're the government that has had tuition rebate, tuition tax relief, for students. We don't need to take any lessons

at all from members opposite, in terms of supporting Manitoba families when they're sending their kids back to school.

Mrs. Stefanson: I'll remind the minister that he is the one that has increased the taxes on these school supplies for kids in Manitoba; he is responsible.

Mr. Speaker, will this NDP government reverse their decision to hike the PST, or are they content to force kids to pay for their spending addiction?

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Speaker, we've been very clear on this side of the House that we'll take full responsibility for the one-cent-on-the-dollar increase that we introduced in Budget 2013. What's absent is members opposite not understanding that they put 7 per cent on school supplies to begin with.

Mr. Speaker, we'll take credit and we'll stand up and defend our 1 cent on the dollar. We will ensure that that 1 cent on the dollar goes directly into building schools, into building hospitals, into building roads and bridges. We're not going to back off on funding schools and funding kids in this school, like you did back in the 1990s when your leader—

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

I know I've cautioned the honourable Minister of Finance on this before and, in fact, all members of the House, but on this particular case, during the minister's answer, he was very specific in pointing out members of the opposition with respect to his comments.

And I have said to all members of the House and to the Minister of Finance before, direct your comments through the Chair, please. We don't want to turn this into a personal debate, we want to talk about the ideas. So I'm asking for the co-operation of the honourable Minister of Finance.

Now, the honourable member for Midland, please.

Manitoba Hydro—Transmission Projects Site Selection Process

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): In the Clean Environment Commission report on Bipole III, the commission cited, and I quote: "The site selection process was flawed by a combination of subjectivity, lack of clarity and false precision." End of quote. Now the spenDP are forcing Manitoba Hydro to repeat this process with two new transmission projects in southern Manitoba.

Now, I realize the member from Kildonan has his own—by his own admission, has consultation fatigue, Mr. Speaker, but why is this government refusing to accept their own report to improve the site selection process for Manitoba Hydro?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): Mr. Speaker, I could have sworn that our leader already indicated that that quote was coming out of the CEC report. I could swear that that's what our member said when he answered the question.

With respect to the two lines that are going to be built in 'manit'—in southern Manitoba, those lines are being built in order to provide additional power that's required to southern Manitoba. Members opposite may not have recognized it because they are not that in favour of immigration, but this province has grown by a hundred thousand people-plus since we've been in office, Mr. Speaker. And centres—and that power that's going down those lines is 230-kilovolt power lines, are for—*[interjection]* Well, they might laugh at it, but it's providing electricity to people that require that power and require that for their lives, require that for building their businesses, require that for their families, and members opposite have opposed that.

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

In fact, time for oral questions has expired. Now it's time for—

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Black Ribbon Day

Ms. Melanie Wight (Burrows): Tomorrow marks an important memorial day that unites many of Manitoba's ethnic communities, Black Ribbon Day, also known as the European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism. It was unanimously adopted in Canada in 2009 and is recognized around the world.

Every year, Black Ribbon Day is commemorated on August 23rd. It marks the anniversary of the infamous Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, this notorious nonaggression treaty between the USSR and Nazi Germany permitted each to illegally and violently capture foreign nations.

This precursor to World War II directly led to the oppression, mass deportation and extermination of innocents. Tyranny brutally claimed tens of millions of lives and devastated many millions more.

Canadians felt it necessary to preserve the memories of victims, promote democratic values and reinforce European peace and stability. In the 1980s, Canada's eastern and central European communities initiated Black Ribbon Day and were instrumental in bringing international attention to these horrific crimes. This initiative permeated both sides of the Iron Curtain with organized demonstrations in 21 cities.

In protest of continued Soviet occupation, nearly two million people formed a human chain across the Baltic republics in 1989, and by 1991, 56 cities on three continents had seen demonstrations. Despite their histories, millions of Canadians whose families were directly affected by these heinous crimes have flourished. They have made countless significant contributions to help build the Canada of today. Their spirits will not be broken.

Thank you to the community leaders involved in organizing Black Ribbon Day events. I will be joining you in the remembrance service tomorrow. I invite the members of the Legislative Assembly and all Manitobans to mark this day. In solidarity, I stand with you for peace and justice. May the memory of these victims be eternally remembered. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Further member statements?

* (14:40)

Tinhouse Designs and Coffee Company

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I wish to—I would like to—I am pleased to have this opportunity to shine a spotlight on a new business called Tinhouse Designs and Coffee Company, which opened in July of this year in Russell, Manitoba.

For Tyler Kilkenny and Todd Sawyer, 'establishing' this—establishing this business, the Tinhouse Designs and Coffee Company, was a natural move. Tyler has been a metal artist for many years, and, after travelling to art and trade shows, the pair had spotted some top-of-the-line artwork and culinary creations. Todd's subs and salads have been the talk of his hometown of Virden. They have now brought their two passions together under one roof at 161 Main Street in Russell. Tyler's work is amazing, and I can say that I proudly have two pieces of his stained-glass work hanging in my house, and I smile every time I see it and think of the great work Tyler does.

Patrons can enjoy freshly made subs, salads and desserts and a cup of coffee or tea in the cozy shop. They plan to make use of seasonal fruits and vegetables as they become available, like raspberries and pumpkins, and adding in more warm, comfort foods as the seasons change.

In a 'delish'—in addition to delicious food and drink, the shop features beautiful handmade goods that come from the Russell area, as well as across Canada. Whether it is a gift for yourself or someone else, there are numerous art pieces, photographs, beauty products and fashion accessories to choose from.

Mr. Speaker, I would to encourage all members of this House to visit Tinhouse Designs and Coffee Company when they next visit Russell.

Congratulations, Tyler and Todd. All the best.

Orysia Tracz

Ms. Erna Braun (Rossmere): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Orysia Tracz, an active writer, translator and lecturer who is an integral and revered member of the Ukrainian community.

Since first arriving in Winnipeg in the late '60s with her husband, Myroslaw, Orysia has made an indelible mark on Manitoba. For many years, Orysia was a library assistant at the University of Manitoba, and, as a writer, her articles have been published in the Winnipeg Free Press, The Globe and Mail, Prairie Fire and The Ukrainian Weekly, among many others.

She has served as a consultant for traditional song, theatre and dance groups, translated at least 10 books from Ukrainian to English and has also dedicated a great deal of her time to volunteering for numerous organizations. By writing and lecturing on all things Ukrainian throughout North America, Australia and even Japan, Orysia is helping to keep important cultural legacies alive.

Orysia's dedication to her community is well known. She has been recognized with the Canada 125 Medal, the University of Manitoba Outreach Award and a 1990 Alpha Omega Alumnae Ukrainian Woman of the Year Award. She has also been nominated for the prestigious YM-YWCA Woman of the Year Award.

Earlier this summer, Orysia was the guest of honour at the Osvita Foundation Inc. Testimonial Dinner. The Osvita Foundation was established in 1982 to help support the Manitoba Parents for

Ukrainian Education and the English-Ukrainian bilingual program, which provides instruction in Ukrainian language and culture—cultural traditions to over 700 students across the province, including Springfield Heights School in Rossmere.

Mr. Speaker, Orysia Tracz and her family join us in the gallery today, along with representatives from the Osvita Foundation Inc., the Manitoba Parents for Ukrainian Education and members of the Ukrainian community. I would like to invite all members of the Legislative Assembly to join me in thanking and commending them for continuing to preserve, promote and share their Ukrainian culture and heritage with all Manitobans.

Dyakuyu and thank you, Mr. Speaker.

House Business

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, prior to my member's statement, on a matter of House business.

In accordance with rule 31(9), I'd like to announce that the private member's resolution that will be considered next Thursday is the resolution on Enhancing Respect for Manitobans, brought forward by the honourable member for Steinbach.

Mr. Speaker: It has been announced that, in accordance with rule 31(9), that the private member's resolution that will be considered next Thursday is the resolution on Enhancing Respect for Manitobans, brought forward by the honourable member for Steinbach.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Steinbach, on a member's statement.

Mr. Goertzen: On a member's statement, Mr. Speaker.

Summer Festivals

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): All of us had the opportunity to attend a number of events and festivals over the summer, and I want to commend all of the volunteers and the sponsors who make those local community events happen.

Certainly within my own region of southeastern Manitoba—the greatest area in Manitoba to live, in my estimation—there were a number of wonderful festival summer, summer festivals held over the last couple of months, not the least of which was the New Bothwell Country Fair from—in the cheese

capital of Manitoba, New Bothwell, Manitoba—my wife's hometown—where we had the opportunity to have supper and listen to concerts and to participate in a wine and cheese hosted by the New Bothwell cheese factory—also the Mitchell and Area Fun Days, baseball tournaments, also some local events for the kids. My son, Malachi, had an opportunity to participate there at Pioneer Days, Mr. Speaker. I enjoyed being in the parade and the thousands of people who lined the street of Steinbach and were recipients of candy, and certainly welcomed everybody who participated in the parade. Also, I enjoyed the museum activities during Pioneer Days, attending the windmill, which is always a highlight at the museum—the only working windmill, I believe, in Manitoba—and the farm demonstrations, as well.

Also, in Steinbach, earlier in the summer, was Summer in the City. There was a highlight concert of April Wine who performed on Main Street on one evening, and there was also a street festival and a number of rides in the midway that I had the opportunity, not to participate in so much, but to watch my son participate in. The minister of youth and opportunities was also in Steinbach that day. He performed a dance with his dance troupe. I believe they also named one of the dances after me, which I'm not sure if it was helpful or not, but it was very much appreciated, Mr. Speaker—

An Honourable Member: It went on for hours.

Mr. Goertzen: —and he presented—I think they called it the filibuster, Mr. Speaker—and they also presented, later on, my son, a dream catcher, which was very much appreciated.

I also had the opportunity to attend the Blumenort Fun and Fair Days, participate in their parade with our Member of Parliament—former member of Parliament, Vic Toews, in his last public event in the constituency, and had the opportunity during the day to be there with my son as he participated in the activities there.

In the Kleefeld Honey Festival, most recently, I attended some of the concerts. That is the honey capital of Manitoba, in Kleefeld. I watched the fireworks, participated in the parade and was fortunate enough to judge the chili cook-off, as well, Mr. Speaker.

So I want to thank, again, all of the volunteers and the sponsors who made each of those events

happen to make southeastern Manitoba a wonderful place to live and raise a family.

Thank you very much.

Steep Rock Centennial

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Mr. Speaker, every one of Manitoba's many rural communities has a rich past and a story to share. Today I rise to share the story of the town of Steep Rock, Manitoba, which celebrated its 100th anniversary this weekend.

A community in the northern Interlake, Steep Rock is best known for its natural beauty and its stunning limestone cliffs on the edge of Lake Manitoba. However, Steep Rock is also full of 'hist'-full of local history. Twenty-thirteen marks a century since the railway and telephone service came to Steep Rock. Two stores were also built, and Canada cement Lafarge company opened the town's quarry for operation.

These industries, along with fishing and farming, helped Steep Rock to grow into a thriving small town. So, of course, did the perseverance of residents, who worked hard to get by and still found time to enjoy life through music, games and dances at the town's hall. This spirit of community is still alive in Steep Rock today.

This past Saturday, community members, government officials and visitors gathered to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Steep Rock. The community worked hard to put together the centennial celebrations, and I very much enjoyed attending. The festivities included a pancake breakfast, a parade through town, golf and horseshoe tournaments and children's activities. Several local artists performed after dinner, and the evening ended with a bang, as a fireworks display wrapped up this milestone event.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all members to join me in congratulating the Town of Steep Rock on this momentous occasion and in wishing them the best over the next century.

Mr. Speaker: Grievances. Seeing no grievances, we'll move onto—

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, would you please call report stage on Bill 20.

REPORT STAGE AMENDMENTS

Mr. Speaker: We'll now call report stage of Bill 20, The Manitoba Building and Renewal Funding and Fiscal Management Act (Various Acts Amended).

Bill 20—The Manitoba Building and Renewal Funding and Fiscal Management Act (Various Acts Amended)

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I move, seconded by the member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson),

THAT Bill 20 be amended by adding the following after Clause 2(2):

2(2.1) The following is added after section 1.2 and before the centred heading that follows it:

Study of impact of increased sales tax on retail sales

1.3(1) Within one year after this section is enacted, the minister must cause an independent study to be conducted for the purpose of determining the impact of the increase in the general sales tax rate on retail sales in the province.

Tabling study in Assembly

1.3(2) The minister must table a copy of the study in the Assembly within 15 days after receiving it if the Assembly is sitting or, if it is not, within 15 days after the next sitting begins.

Publishing study on government website

1.3(3) The minister must publish this study on a government website.

* (14:50)

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable member for Charleswood, seconded by the honourable member for Tuxedo,

THAT Bill 20 be amended by adding the following after Clause 2(2)—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense? Dispense. The amendment is in order.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to put forward this amendment as it relates to Bill 20 and the increased sales tax and the effect it is going to have on retail sales. The warnings have certainly been out there by members within the retail businesses that, in fact, this sales tax is going to have a significant effect on sales. And I would note that the Retail Council of Canada, the Winnipeg office,

had indicated in a letter to the government that—and this was prior to the—this was prior to the government actually bringing in the PST hike—there was some concern from the retail community that the government might be considering something like that.

So, in a pre-emptive move, what the retail sales council of Canada did is send a letter a week before the budget to the government raising their concerns. And they said to the government that Manitoba retailers cannot support any increase in the provincial sales tax or the introduction of a new sales tax because of its negative impact on consumer spending and its effect on our competitiveness with neighbouring jurisdictions. They have been quite clear that this sales tax is going to have a very negative effect on consumer spending and they were very worried what it was going to do to competitiveness with neighbouring jurisdictions.

All we have to do is look just to the west of us and we have a lot of small Manitoba towns along that western boundary that—you know, the retail sales council has indicated that it's not going to be hard for people that live close to the border to be able to hop across the border to buy items and, certainly, we have seen that happen. We've heard that warning coming from many people, that when there is, you know, close proximity to some place where you can buy something cheaper, Manitobans will do that. Manitobans are looking to save some money, and if they can save it in some way they're going to take advantage of it.

So, certainly, with the Saskatchewan sales tax being only 5 per cent and the sales tax south of the border far less than what Manitoba charges, it is no surprise that there is big concern that people will look for the deals—and we know Manitobans like to look for the deals—that they will look elsewhere and they will travel elsewhere. They will combine it with, you know, some other trips or some kids' trips, if they can even afford them, to go to sporting events, and Manitobans will look for an opportunity to save money. And they have to, because people are doing that in order to make ends meet. We know that the income tax here in Manitoba is the highest west of Québec, so we know we pay a lot of taxes in Manitoba.

In fact, I think there is certainly a fear amongst people right now that we are very overtaxed. And adding one more tax on top of this is going to have a significant impact.

So what the Retail Council told the government—but obviously the government also didn't listen because they still went ahead with their illegal PST hike—they told the government that annual retail sales in the province in 2012 totalled more than \$16.6 billion, and it was an increase of only 1.3 per cent over the previous year. The pace of retail sales growth in Manitoba has slowed to below the national average for the first time in many years. So what was happening, despite the fact that there was a bit of growth in the annual retail sales, that it actually had slowed down and it was below the national average for the first time in many years.

That should have been the first warning flag to this government that people were already spending less, probably because of the—you know, the fact that we pay the highest income taxes in western Canada, but also because of what the government did in their budget last year, and that was to expand the sales tax to a number of items.

And people are starting to feel that in various insurance programs, that the government would go down the road of adding a—the PST, which they didn't have one last year, and the government added to it and now they've increased that one more per cent. And all of a sudden now, we have an 8 per cent PST on insurance programs and insurance policies. And that is really affecting some people. As this woman that lived on Burrows indicated to us the other day, she had to drop one of her policies because she couldn't afford it because of what was happening with her disposable income, and it was shrinking dramatically and she had to find a way to find more money, so she dropped one of her insurance policies.

So what Manitoba retailers were telling this government—that retail sales growth was slowing, and this was even before the government did what they did. And, you know, they raised it with the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) that, you know, there's increased competition out there. There's increased cross-border shopping. There's increasing product prices and increasing labour costs, and the Retail Council indicated that all of those challenges were facing Manitoba retailers so that if they were going to increase the retail sales tax or introduce a new sales tax, that it would have a significantly negative impact on their sector and on the provincial economy. They also warned the government and reminded the government that they employ a lot of people. They employ 73,000 Manitobans in almost 7,000 retail establishments in every community in

Manitoba. And they warned the government that the government needs to focus in more and ensure that these jobs are secure and the PST—the raising of the PST and the expansion of it was going to dramatically affect the businesses that are out there that employ people to guarantee that this same number or increasing numbers would be employed within their sector.

They have concerns, and we heard that from a number of business people, too, that they may have to lay off people. Students might not get summer jobs because there's only so much money that they have within their businesses. And there were a lot of warnings to the government on it, but it appears that the government has not listened.

So what we would like to do with this amendment is ensure that there would be an independent study that would look at the increased sales tax on retail sales so that we can find out exactly what is happening with retail sales—are they going down in Manitoba? And to try to determine, you know, the extent of what is happening. So I think it would be certainly important for the government to have a look at this particular amendment, and I would hopefully—or I would hope that they would consider supporting it.

*(15:00)

It would be interesting, too, to have the government pay some attention. For instance, they made an announcement the other day about an \$11-million PCH in Niverville. Well, if that \$11 million included the PST, that would have actually shown that that new hike, that 14 per cent increase in the PST that they brought in, would have cost the builders \$110,000 in their hike in the PST. That's a significant amount of money. So that we are looking, not just at the costs at the till, but certainly there is the cost of doing business and that includes capital goods, whether it's machinery, equipment, new technologies, whether it's materials, energy or other goods or services that entrepreneurs purchase and use to produce what they sell to their customers. That's all part of this equation. The government does not seem to have understood that and rammed this through anyway.

So, you know, it's obvious that the higher costs of capital goods is by far the most detrimental feature of the PST, you know, and if the government would just look at what's happening out there right now, they would be very aware of that. They don't seem to understand that the higher PST rate is going to

further increase the cost of doing business and it's going to leave entrepreneurs with less money to operate, expand, innovate, hire people and pay higher wages.

So this government has put Manitoba on a precarious road by increasing the PST the way they did, and, contrary to the spin of this Minister of Finance, who said it's going to enhance productivity and innovation and create jobs, that is not what the people out there who actually work within the industries are saying to him. In fact, they are saying the total opposite. So I hope the minister would pay some attention to this amendment and consider it for acceptance.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): And, of course, as I've said on other amendments that have come forward, yes, we will look at the amendments, we will pay attention, we will take a look at them.

And it's very interesting, Mr. Speaker, when you look at this particular amendment and hear the words that the honourable member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) put on the record. Wonderful speech that the member for Charleswood made, a very good speech—unfortunately, it was so far removed from reality, it was so far removed from the actual statistics and the actual facts of the matter.

Now, I have a great deal of respect for the honourable member for Charleswood, but when it comes to retail sales, whether we talk about the last several months or the forecast for the next number of months and years, with all due respect, I'm going to believe Stats Canada and I'm going to believe the Conference Board of Canada and I'm going to believe the folks at the Royal Bank of Canada. And I'm going to agree that we need to have our eyes on the retail sales for our province. We've had that position for years, budget after budget.

Mr. Speaker, the member for Charleswood, the honourable member for Charleswood, said that things weren't looking good recently for retail sales. Well, in May, the fact of the matter is that sales in Manitoba grew by 5.4 per cent year over year. That's not a bad thing; that's growth. That's Manitobans showing confidence in the economy. That's Manitobans—really it is—that is Manitobans purchasing goods and services in our province at a rate of 5.4 per cent better than they did the year before, despite what the member for Charleswood said.

So, well, maybe, okay, so maybe May was, you know, an aberration. Maybe the honourable member for Charleswood skipped over that month for whatever—let's go to June. Sure, let's go look at June. Let's see what June did, year over year. Maybe the member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) has something there. Let's see what that number is. In June, sales grew by 6.9 per cent. That's not a bad thing either. Mr. Speaker, 6.9 per cent, which was much healthier than the national sales—national sales were much weaker than that. As a matter of fact, national sales declined; Manitoba's increased by 6.9 per cent. So we can see that in the past, the facts don't bear out the argument that my honourable friend from Charleswood has just put on the records.

So maybe—okay, so let's forecast forward; let's compare the forecast of the honourable member for Charleswood with the forecasts of the Conference Board of Canada; I mean, Conference Board of Canada versus the honourable member for Charleswood. Well, she actually says that's a forecast. I said it's a forecast. She said it's a forecast. We don't know what the numbers for August throughout to next year are. We depend on forecasts and I would—with all due respect again, Mr. Speaker—I will take the forecasts of the Conference Board of Canada over the forecast of the member for Charleswood any day of the week.

But just to be sure, let's see if the doom-and-gloom predictions of the honourable member for Charleswood and her colleagues around her in the Conservative Party match up with what the Conference Board of Canada has to say.

Well, the member for Charleswood, just a few minutes ago, was all doom and gloom about the forecast for retail sales in Manitoba. Irrespect—you know, doesn't matter to them that we've attracted IKEA and Target and Marshalls and the—you know, the list goes on and on, Mr. Speaker, of corporations, businesses, coming to Manitoba, showing confidence in our economy and showing confidence, quite frankly, in our government and the stability of the approach that we take.

But let's see what the Conference Board of Canada has to—said. It says that there is positive growth forecasted for Manitoba. It says that our retail sales will increase above the national average. It says we will increase 2 and half per cent, compared to Canada's 2.1 per cent, Mr. Speaker.

So, again, the forecasts are saying one thing from the Conference Board of Canada and our

honourable friends across the way are saying something totally opposite to that. Again, with all due respect, I will take the word of the Conference Board of Canada over the political motivations of our friends across the way.

Mr. Speaker, there's no doubt that the retail sector of our economy is important, it represents about 6 per cent of our economy. And very—I think—very important, the retail sector represents 11 per cent of the jobs in Manitoba. And that, too—opposite to what members opposite have said—that, too, is an area of growth in Manitoba. We have a 5.5 per cent unemployment rate, which is third lowest in all of our nation. Our employment numbers continue to grow, not just public sector but private sector as well. The private sector in Manitoba has been stepping up and hiring people. I understand members opposite don't want to hear that, but it is a fact. That is what's happening in this province.

The member opposite also talked a little bit about cross-border shopping. And, of course, we dealt with an amendment to cross-border shopping here not so long ago. But you know what, Mr. Speaker? Not once, not one peep out of members opposite when their federal cousins in Ottawa, in Budget 2013, upped the duty-free—upped the amounts of goods—increased the limits on duty-free goods that can come across the border from Minnesota and from North Dakota.

You know, they get up and present petitions over and over again. They get all partisan and all political and all hot and bothered over this and what—and then when their own federal cousins do something that really does promote cross-border shopping, they go mum, they're quiet. They don't want to talk about their Conservative cousins in Ottawa who did the worst thing possible in terms of cross-border shopping. They say nothing, Mr. Speaker.

*(15:10)

Mr. Speaker, the—what I'd like for members opposite to do—what I'd like for members opposite to consider, is bringing forward an amendment that is actually based on some of the statistics and some of the facts put forward by groups like the Conference Board of Canada, groups like the Royal Bank of Canada, Statistics Canada. Maybe get some accurate information from the Manitoba Bureau of Statistics to help inform their amendments as they bring forward.

But, you know what, Mr. Speaker? We can't support what's been put forward here today in this amendment, so we will be voting against it.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and put a few words on the record with respect to this amendment that has been brought in by the member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger).

And it's a good amendment, Mr. Speaker, and I hope that we have an agreement from the government members on the other side to consider the validity of this very reasonable measure that would simply see that after a year after this section's enacted, that there would be an independent study that would be called for the purpose of determining the impact of the PST increase in the general sales tax, on retail sales in the province. That's something we should all be concerned with.

We understand that in the province of Manitoba it is important for our businesses to succeed, whether that is in the rural areas, whether it's in the urban areas. And it seems so short-sighted that this government would introduce these measures to increase the PST, and, indeed, already begin to receive that tax increase before the bill is passed, before it's had a chance to be ratified here. But, Mr. Speaker, you know, they do this and they undertake these measures, and it seems that they do so recklessly, not understanding what the effect will be on the retail environment.

And we continue to hear from stakeholders throughout the province of Manitoba, continually hear from businesses in urban areas and rural areas—small businesses, larger businesses—who talk about already the difficulty of doing business in a province like this. And they've made their commitment to Manitoba and they do business here and they do a good job, and they do it with considerable obstacles thrown their way. But no obstacle, Mr. Speaker, so great as a sudden and unanticipated and uncalled for increase to the PST, a 14.2 per cent increase to the PST. Now imagine being that merchant, who is trying to do a business, and just like that, with less than three months' notice, the whole landscape changes.

And, Mr. Speaker, that Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) can say, well, what landscape changes? Because, you know, it's everyone else who has to collect the taxes. Well, it isn't, and we

understand that. We understand that in this modern context, in the reality in which business operates today, our competitors are not the local ones only; they are not just those ones who are down the street like they used to be a generation ago, where you—where your idea of comparison shopping meant going from this business and walking four doors down and going into the next and saying, can you do any better? And that is a bygone era.

And we understand—I understand from representing an area of Morden-Winkler, with two very large and dynamic communities located just adjacent to each other, that not only do consumers comparison shop, but they do so in ways that were not known 20, 30 and 40 years ago. So our competition now becomes the provinces to—the province to the west where the PST is now, well, three points lower. We know that that—

An Honourable Member: And Saskatchewan at 5 per cent.

Mr. Friesen: Yes, Saskatchewan at 5 per cent. We know that that challenge comes from cross-border shopping.

And I actually had the opportunity to speak to legislators from North Dakota who were pleased to tell me about their efforts to drive down the state's tax in that state by one point. So, Mr. Speaker, in essence, the differential has not become one point difference, it has become two points different, at the point in time when North Dakota will again drive down their state's tax by a single point.

And obviously we know, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to cross-border shopping, when Canadians go over the border, it only takes a form and submitting their receipts, and the government of North Dakota will actually refund them the state tax made on purchases. And I hesitate to say that in the Chamber, because for those people who are reading Hansard, they may avail themselves of that opportunity and say, well, there's an opportunity I didn't know about.

And, you know, I know there's a lot of us who really make a point and make an effort of patronizing the businesses in their communities. But, Mr. Speaker, that is a reality, and when Manitobans feel like the tax regime has become unfair, well, then, they will increasingly, perhaps, be open to ideas that will give them an advantage, and cross-border shopping does represent an important point, I think, a portal for more and more Manitobans who are having to watch their finances because this

Finance Minister will not watch his finances. And instead of taking a hard look at where this minister could do a better job in the expenditures of this Province—I mean, void from any of their comments on the record throughout this debate on Bill 20 have been any ideas of going back and looking at government spending.

Government spending is sacrosanct. Then, their only recourse, they say, is to raise the rent for Manitobans, is to raise the PST so they will have additional revenues coming into government. And, Mr. Speaker, we know what the implications are of this ill-advised tax increase. We know that this year alone it will mean an excess of \$250 million flowing into government coffers. We know that is all in addition to the increases last year by widening the RST. We know that those two tax increases alone, in the scope of a government's mandate, they could amount to almost \$2 billion in revenue. And that's why today we are talking about a very pragmatic approach of just—at an arm's length, because I think that would create, you know, transparency in the exercise—it would also disallow the government the opportunity to fudge the numbers—but just to create a framework that would actually measure the impact of the increase of the sales tax on retail sales. That, I think is essential in this exercise.

The government has gone willy-nilly to increase the tax rate. Just today in the Chamber during question period we had questions come out talking about the tax increase and giving the government feedback about the extent to which it will harm groups. Just today, the member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson) raised the fact that this tax increase will unfairly target Manitoba families who just this week are probably hitting the stores all—with all those terrible back-to-school ads that you always hear this time of year. I remember being a student and, you know, already dreading the fact that in the last week of July they'd have those terrible flyers out advertising back-to-school sales and savings. And I always thought, as a student in high school, that, how unfair, I don't want to be thinking about back-to-school sales. Then I became a teacher, and then I remember thinking, you know, like, I—it's only July the 20th, and, although teachers were hard at work in the background already doing the preparatory work to welcome those students back to their classrooms in the first week of September, it still seemed not right to be getting those flyers on the 20th day and the 21st day of July just saying that it was time to go back-to-school shopping.

But anyway, as the member for Tuxedo indicated, here are these families. I believe, actually, last night a report on Global News indicated that the hit to Manitoba families per student going back to school was calculated independently at being somewhere around \$450. I won't have the dollar figure right on. I think they might have actually referenced \$426 per student for clothing and school supplies. And I think that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) has to realize that whatever that number be—is, \$426, \$428, \$450, that his tax increase does no favours for Manitoba families who are trying so hard to pay the bills and go—and to go into those stores and have to do that.

* (15:20)

So, now, consider the family. Consider the poor family like mine that has three—three—students who are school age. Consider what that means to families all across Manitoba. And, certainly, it's not just my family. It's families across my constituency. It's families across constituencies all over this province who have to pay more. And, just this week, that government talked about the fact that back in the '90s that the former government didn't have enough special exemptions to families when it came to taxes. And yet here was a minister who had on the table every option to protect Manitobans, and he didn't exercise them.

As a matter of fact, just yesterday in debate we talked about how this same tax would unfairly target Manitobans who were of limited income, and here the minister had an opportunity to talk about special exemptions, and instead of—

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

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): It gives me great pleasure to take some time and put some words on the record in regards to the amendment brought forward by the member from Charleswood. And I paused for a second before I got up because I was sort of waiting to see if there was anyone else from the government side that would like to possibly put some words on the record as well in regards to the amendments or to even help to defend the Finance Minister on this Bill 20, Mr. Speaker.

I know that this bill has been sort of a one-sided debate for a while, and, once in a while, the Finance Minister does get up to say a few words. But, even at that, when the Finance Minister did get up, he questioned the amount of truths that the member

from Charleswood would put on the record in regards to Bill 20 or the amendments and, in fact, she does have quite a few of her facts—as a matter of fact, all of her facts straight, Mr. Speaker. And I question some of the words that the Finance Minister has put on the record as well.

And, just on the note of putting some truths on the record, when we talked about truths, there's many, many members on the other side of the House that failed to put some of the truths on the record. And for instance this morning the member from Flin Flon had referenced an untruth that he was saying that the member from Lac du Bonnet, which is myself, doesn't believe that the Bombers will ever win the Grey Cup, and that couldn't be further from the truth, Mr. Speaker. I have a lot of hope for the Bombers, and I'm not quite sure why when it's second and 10 they decide to do a buttonhook for eight yards. But, you know what, that's not my position to question. So I just wanted to put it on the record to straighten out the member from Flin Flon that the member from Lac du Bonnet has a lot of hope for the Bombers, and, if they can't get it done this year, I'm sure sometime in my life lifetime that it will happen.

But getting back to the amendments on Bill 20, Mr. Speaker, I know that the member from Morden-Winkler referenced the back-to-school sales and the waking up—and, you know, he didn't mention the waking up in cold sweats near the end of July—but it hasn't been that long ago since I was teaching as well. And after the school bell rang the end of June, we'd be off for the summer and it would be a couple of weeks before the dreams/nightmares would sort of stop, and then it would be all good until about the middle of August. We'd wake up and then we'd have some nightmares about getting ready and getting excited to go back to school. And, when those flyers would start coming out, as the member from Morden-Winkler referenced, probably around the third week in July, it was very interesting to see that they were already promoting back-to-school sales.

And, unfortunately, this year there are going to be those added costs to those families with the increase in PST. And I know that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) always references that one-cent-on-the-dollar increase, but, in fact, it is a 14 per cent increase when you go from seven to eight. And, you know, it's not just 1 cent on the dollar; it's one more cent. And it's a fact that this government back in the election of 2011 ran on the promise to not raise taxes and to balance the books

by 2014. And, in fact, it wasn't that much longer after the people of Manitoba gave them the mandate to go ahead and govern this province they had gone ahead and, in the budget of 2012, they had increased fees and taxes on—across the board to about—to a tune of \$184 million, and then again—and that was sort of sneaky fees in tax increases, Mr. Speaker. That was sort of undercover, and a lot of people sort of were surprised with their house insurance rates going up, for one example.

But then in 2013 budget, they decided to not do it—a whole lot of undercover or under the shades of darkness there, Mr. Speaker. They decided to do it right in front of everybody, and they went ahead and they said, you know what? We're going to raise the PST by one point, or 14 per cent.

And, matter of fact, they didn't necessarily come straight out and say we're going to raise your taxes by 14 per cent. They would use lines like, you know what? We're only going to raise it up by 1 cent on the dollar, so it really won't hurt that much.

But the problem is, is when you go ahead and you add the fees and taxes from 2012 and you add increase in the PST from 2013, you combine the two, you're looking at a \$500-million increase that is being taxed on hard-working Manitobans. And to a tune, again, of half a billion dollars, Mr. Speaker.

And when you do that basic math—again, I know a lot of people like this part of my speeches, Mr. Speaker—but when you take the half a billion dollars and you divide it by 1.2 million people in this fantastic province of ours, you get roughly \$400 per Manitoban in the province that is going to—that—taking out of their back pockets. And so, when you add that up, in my case, a family of four, that's \$1,600.

So, when we talk about various things that the PST has been added to such as school supplies, that one extra point, we're looking at what are families going to have to do with that much less money, Mr. Speaker. So I know I've referenced hockey and, of course, we still have a couple of weeks left in August here, but we're already searching for hockey equipment and new skates and whatsoever. And we're looking at the increased costs and we know that in our family—and maybe not many on the other side of the House, but in our family that \$1,600 is going to play a big impact.

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Now, I know that the Finance Minister had also referenced the growth in the retail sales tax in the months of May—or April and May and—no, no he also said June—that's right. He did see an increase in the retail sales tax as far the amount of spending in May and June, but he's forgetting that they had already forced or announced to Manitobans that they were going to be paying that extra one point, or 14 per cent. So no doubt the increased in spend—increase in spending for those months had a lot to do with that—to the fear mongering. And not even fear mongering, the fact that it was—that the costs were going to go up. So it will be interesting to see what that looks like for July and August, and we're waiting for those numbers.

The sad thing is when they had to bring in the PST, what they didn't do was the referendum. They—we had many, many, many people come on many hot evenings here to the Legislature and sit in committee and bring in their opinions to the bill—to Bill 20—and the fact that they were—that this government was going to be raising the PST. And, you know, there's roughly 95 to 98 per cent of the presenters who came in were opposed to the idea of raising the PST. And a lot of them had a lot of anger in their voices to the fact that they didn't—that they went about not holding a referendum.

And I know that the Finance Minister was there on a few evenings as well, and he was sitting there and he was listening to them but he wasn't necessarily hearing them. And, when we do get to consultations on various topics or bills that are brought forward to the Manitoba Legislature, it is a good idea to go ahead and do some consulting with the various groups.

* (15:30)

And this government seems to have a few issues. And the issues are, is that I'm thinking is that they're showing that they're tired. They don't have any new ideas. They are just go ahead—going ahead, collecting the taxes, filling their own pockets. They're going ahead and they're doing ribbon cuttings, not to mention the, you know, \$5,000 each for the vote tax. But that's not the point that I'm talking about right now. It's the fact that they're bringing all this extra money and they don't have a plan. They started out saying one thing, then it switched to another thing and then it's back to flood prevention, but there's no actual plan.

The sad thing is that they're going about this the wrong way. We're strongly encouraging them, on

this side of the House, to pull the bill, call a referendum, and let Manitobans have a say.

So I thank you for your time, Mr. Acting Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Seeing no further speakers, is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Oh, wait a second. Is the House ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The question before the House is the amendment.

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

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

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

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All those opposed by saying nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: In my opinion, the Nays have it.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): On division.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: On division.

* * *

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The next amendment before the House is moved by the honourable member for Charleswood.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler),

THAT Bill 20 be amended in Clause 3 as follows:

*(a) in the proposed subsection 67.3(1) of **The Financial Administration Act**, in the part before*

clause (a), by striking out "Within six months after" and submitting "After";

(b) by replacing the proposed subsection 67.3(2) of *The Financial Administration Act* with the following:

Report to be tabled

67.3(2) The Minister of Finance must table a copy of the report referred to in subsection (1) in the Assembly within three months after the end of the fiscal year.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. Is it the agreement of the House that the amendment be accepted as written? [Agreed]

THAT Bill 20 be amended in Clause 3 as follows:

(a) in the proposed subsection 67.3(1) of *The Financial Administration Act*, in the part before clause (a), by striking out "Within six months after" and substituting "After";

(b) by replacing the proposed subsection 67.3(2) of *The Financial Administration Act* with the following:

Report to be tabled

67.3(2) The Minister of Finance must table a copy of the report referred to in subsection (1) in the Assembly within three months after the end of the fiscal year.

It has been moved by the honourable member for Charleswood, seconded by—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Dispense? Dispense. The amendment is in order.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm pleased to have an opportunity to put forward this amendment, and what we are looking for from this government would be a report, a copy of the report referred to, and have it put on the table sooner than later. We are very concerned that the longer the government has to look at some of this, the longer they're going to have to doctor the report. And certainly what we've seen with this government is—[interjection] Yes. As my colleague is pointing out, we've seen a lot of spin-doctoring going on. So what we would like to do is not give the government too much time to get the report together. And there's some really legitimate reasons for doing this, actually. This government has refused to be up front about the PST and where it's going.

First of all, it started out in the last election by the government promising not to raise the PST. It started out with the Premier (Mr. Selinger) saying that's nonsense and it's ridiculous, he wouldn't do that. So, basically, he made that promise to the electorate; he misled the electorate; and then, shortly thereafter, he actually then turned around and did the opposite and raised the PST. So there is the first in a long line of promises we've seen just since the last budget and the last election where the government has veered from what they were actually committing to do.

So they were elected. They did not have a mandate to increase the PST. In fact, they've gone further, and they've actually stripped Manitobans of their right to have a referendum on this. So, again, another swing at Manitobans and taking away their vote.

As the woman said to us the other day, that came and spoke to us—and we asked questions about her in question period, and she lives on Burrows and she really feels that her vote was stolen from her. And she feels that that was very, very disrespectful. Democracy was so important to her and she valued democracy so much. So she felt very offended by what this government does with the PST and what they're doing with the PST and the fact they're ramming it through illegally and without the referendum. So there is a breach of trust at many different levels, and that's why we think we need to have the government put a report forward sooner than later.

And be up front with Manitobans because that is what has been lacking in this whole area around Bill 20. There isn't transparency. There's a lot of spin from government about transparency; there's a lot of spin from government about accountability, but that is so far off from what the reality is that it is offensive. There is a breach of trust, there is a breach of respect for public, and we've seen it. So, when the government says they're actually going to come forward and put a report out, there is probably a lot of justification to be pretty leery about what they're actually going to do and when they're going to do it.

I would like to note that in the last comments that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) was making, he was talking about forecasts and the optimism around the forecasts. I suspect that those forecasts were made before any of these organizations knew that the NDP were increasing the PST, because they caught everybody off guard. That

was not anything anybody asked for in the consultations. The government went out and supposedly talked to people, but they did not ask any Manitoban whether or not they wanted the PST increased. And, in fact, had they asked that in the prebudget consultations, then we would have had more data—the government would have had more information, and they would have realized that there's nobody in Manitoba wanted an increase in the PST. So I imagine, you know, Manitobans were caught off guard with the last budget, so I imagine a lot of the organizations that are doing some forecasting also were caught off guard. So, you know, forecasts are what they are. I think what we're going to see is probably going to be different from what the forecasts were.

And the minister was also talking about all the great sales in May and June. Well, no kidding. In talking to a car dealer out there, he said that car sales boomed in June because everybody wanted to get there before the PST went up on July 1st. So people that were buying cars, and if you're going to be spending \$20,000, \$30,000, and you've got PST on top of it, no kidding, you are going to go out there in June and buy the big pieces of equipment or big purchases in June before the PST went up. Everybody was doing that, so, I mean, this government and this Finance Minister was a bit naive in his comments, you know, and standing up here bragging that well, in May and June things were really good. Well, I don't think that is going to be something that is sustained, and I really do think he's out of touch with his comments.

We also note that if he had heeded the warnings from the retail sales council, he would have realized that spending has been decreasing over the last little while, but the government really doesn't have any accurate information because they didn't do an economic impact study. They did not go out there and actually look at anything in any scientific way, or in any business planning way, to look at what the economic impact was going to be of a PST hike. They just needed the money so badly because of their addiction to spending that they just bulldozed this PST through and caught everybody off guard. So they really don't understand what this is going to do. They've already pulled in \$40 million that Manitobans could have had in their pockets, and that's just since July 1st. And we know they're going to take in \$277 million with this PST hike. That's a huge amount of money, and already \$40 million that has come out of Manitoba's pockets.

* (15:40)

Well, if it's going to the government we know that it's not money being spent by people on things that they feel they could spend on or should spend on. School supplies is certainly one thing, you know, we've talked about yesterday and again today in question period. And, you know, certainly there are going to be a lot of other costs coming forward with Christmas around the corner too, and we hear there's Christmas trees up in some of the stores already.

There will be decreased spending because people aren't going to have as much disposable income. So imagine, Mr. Deputy Speaker, \$40 million already that the government has sucked out of the pockets of Manitobans, out of purses and pockets, and denied Manitobans their choice in how they were going to spend the money. The government took it from them and made that decision, and they didn't even have the decency to give people the opportunity to have a referendum on this issue. They stole their vote. They broke the law in order to do that because they're so desperate to have this money.

So I think this government is really out of touch. We do not trust them anymore in their reporting around the PST or their decisions around the PST. They have refused right from the beginning to be up front about what that PST hike is going to be spent on, and I know we'll have more of an opportunity this afternoon in debate on some of the other amendments, to talk about that, to talk about how this government has come out saying they needed the money for flood protection, and when we look at where that is going, we know that we were misled by this government when they said that that was what the money was for.

They also didn't support our request, and it flatly denied it, to actually put forward what projects they were going to be spending that money on before they spent it. And, in fact, we see this ribbon-cutting charade going on right now. They are taking this money. They're treating it as a pre-election slush fund, and they are not being accountable and transparent with Manitobans. So we don't want to give the government more time to pad their report or to doctor their report. We want them to actually come forward and put that report forward sooner than later because they have certainly lost the respect and trust of Manitobans.

So I hope they'll respect this amendment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and support it. Thank you.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I do want to rise and discuss this amendment. I'm certainly pleased to have seconded this motion.

When we look—excuse me. When we look at the amendment, when we move it from six months to three months, and, you know, this week I've been asking the Minister of Agriculture for accountability on the MCEC checkoff and where some of that money had went, and we haven't got a clear answer on that. In fact, maybe if the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) and MCEC had the same type of an amendment whereby the MCEC would have some accountability on producers' money that was brought forward through a checkoff for those cattle producers with the hopes of increasing slaughter capacity within the province of Manitoba.

Now the Province is saying this 1 per cent increase, or the 14 per cent on the 7 to the 8—this is a substantial amount of money, and we want to make sure this government's held to account because obviously what has happened, we've got \$7.1 million missing out of the hard-working pockets of producers, which is unfortunate, and now the Agriculture Minister said very clearly that some of that money was used to purchase land.

I know back when the Finance Minister first got involved with the MCEC and took over the file, they started Keystone Processors, and I know that he thought that was a great project. It didn't quite work out the way that we'd like to have seen it happen, but I know the Finance Minister'll be able to rectify any comments I have. He loves to follow me, so this'll be his great opportunity to come back and set the record straight for the member from Lakeside putting information on the record that may not be what he thinks is the right way. But I can tell you it went from Keystone Processors to a new ProNatur plant that was going to be built.

So what did the government do? They went out and they took that hard-working cattle producer's money, and they were going to remodel that plant, so they did that. Then they knocked it down—knocked it down and said, we're going to build this state-of-the-art facility. They just did away with it. Now we got a lot—a lot sitting on Marion Street that is collecting weeds. I don't know who's going to be—I mean, maybe the Conservation Minister is going to take one of those fancy mowers once he gets some gas to put them in, and go out there and cut the grass at ProNatur and keep it under control so that they don't get a fine from the City. Or maybe they'll just

add it to the taxes. I—we don't even know who's paying the taxes.

But that comes back to what we're saying here: six months, three months. Maybe we can help them by keeping them to account; that's our job as opposition. We're going to be able to say to the Minister of Finance and the people of Manitoba that raised this money for the Province to go out and spend, there's a bit of a checklist. There's a checklist to say, where did you spend the money? Where did it go? How was it spent?

So I think the amendment is in the right timing. I think the—in fact, you know, the government has put out a press release saying that they're in favour of having an auditor do an audit on this particular PST increase. We're glad to see that the government feels that they need to be held to account, not only by us but by the auditor. And we'll have an amendment on that here shortly as well. I'm sure that it'll just add more to enforce what we're talking about here right now with this particular amendment.

But whenever we take a look at where the money has been spent—and we know that, you know, we've put on the record several times that, you know, the government's just running out of ribbon because of these announcements they're making. Most of them are re-announcements.

And I've talked about this before. The member from Selkirk and the hospital that's been announced out there. I mean, we still don't have a hospital yet. In fact, maybe because we don't have doctors to put in it. But I think I said, at one point, I think I counted up, it was like 18 announcements. And I think he told me it was 19, I was wrong, that I need to keep better track. So I can tell you that a lot of these re-announcements that they love to be able to go out and say, you know, we're spending money wisely; we're doing that. But they're not fooling the general public. In fact, the people from Selkirk very clearly want that hospital. They've been promised to them for, I don't know how many years—seven years, eight years. It's been a long time—been a long time.

And I know the member from Interlake is proud as well of the roads—been built up in his part of the region. In fact, I make it up there from time to time. And I can almost fall asleep, the roads are so good up there—that they just pave along and pave along.

And they were going to go over to that plant they were going to build in Dauphin, that new processing plant, that the new-found saviour of the

MCEC, Frieda Kirpan [*phonetic*] is now the new leader of their MCEC. And I know the member from Interlake probably had a little bit of input in that. She's a hard-working individual that tried to make the plant in Dauphin work. Unfortunately, it was a disaster. It turned out—I know I had money that was ready to buy hooks, and I know the member from Emerson had hooks bought as well. And we know very clearly that we needed to have some accountability there too. And where was the money being spent? How was it being invested? What kind of a check-off was there to make sure the money was bought and spent wisely?

We only saw was a plant that was decommissioned down in 'Warshington' and, in fact, the new chair of MCEC, Frieda Kirpan [*phonetic*] went down to the border and delivered a cheque—delivered a cheque. And then they put that equipment in storage, and it got a little bit of rust on it—got a little bit of rust on it—little bit of dust on it—little bit of rust on it—little bit of dust on it.

And, after a couple years, it's aha, geez, this thing just not going to work. We're tired of paying \$20,000 a year for storage. We're tired of wiping the dust off, and we can't get the rust off, so we'll sell it—we'll sell it. What'd they get? Eighteen thousand dollars for a million-dollar investment. How did that work out for hard-working Manitobans? How did that work out for the people that wanted to have this government held to account? Hold them to their commitment—hold them to their commitment. And that's why the member from Charleswood has decided to bring forward this amendment from six months to three months. It don't sound like much, but a lot can happen in three months.

* (15:50)

We know very clearly that, whenever we have that opportunity to say to the government, you're not spending the money wisely and this is why and this is where, and we'll be able to do that. We'll be able to do that, because we'll have the documentation brought forward by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers), and he'll be able to say: I spent this money wisely. I know best, because we do it all the time—we do it all the time. We spend money a whole lot smarter than a lot of Manitobans do, and that's why we want this extra bit of money so that we can be able to decide where you want to spend it.

In fact, part of that spending was for themselves, and that is—I think, it's about \$5,000 a year. And I know the member from Dauphin always loves to

throw back, how much did you get back in that election rebate, and he told me—I think I spent \$12,000. And he said, I got \$12,000 back—whatever it was. But, you know, the member from Dauphin spent \$16,000. He got \$16,000 back. Then he added \$5,000 more per year, so now he not only got \$16,000, he added another 20 to it. So now, what does that add up to? What does that add up to—\$36,000—one member—one member from that side. Oh my goodness. How can you ever justify spending hard-working taxpayers' money that way?

I know the member from Gimli—same thing—\$16,000—maybe a little more than that—might've been 17, I don't know. But what's a few thousand—what's a few thousand whenever you got endless amount of money for taxpayers who go out and say, there you go. I can spend this money. I do okay—I do okay.

And you know why? Because it's a bottomless pit. We need to hold them to account.

So why don't we look at six months to three months? We'll be able to look back and say to this government, you did wrong. Let's make it right. Let's don't do that anymore.

So, with that, we hope the government will look forward to passing this amendment, and I know the member from Dauphin will probably make sure that he corrects anything that I might've said wrong, but I don't think he will.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Seeing no further speakers, is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

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

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

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

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: In my opinion, the Nays have it.

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Speaker, on division, please.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: On division.

I declare the motion defeated on division.

* * *

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Next question before the House is report stage amendment of Bill 20.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler),

THAT Bill 20 be amended in Clause 3 by adding the following after the proposed subsection 67.3(4) of The Financial Administration Act:

Projects listed in budget

67.3(5) In the annual budget presented to the Legislative Assembly, the Minister of Finance must list the projects to be funded by the increase in the general sales rate to 8%, and specify the amount to be given to each project.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there agreement to have the—accept the amendment as printed? [*Agreed*]

THAT Bill 20 be amended in Clause 3 by adding the following after the proposed subsection 67.3(4) of The Financial Administration Act:

Projects listed in budget

67.3(5) In the annual budget presented to the Legislative Assembly, the Minister of Finance must list the projects to be funded by the increase in the general sales tax rate to 8%, and specify the amount to be given to each project.

It has been moved by the honourable member for Charleswood, seconded by the honourable member for Lakeside—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Dispense.

The amendment is in order.

Mrs. Driedger: This is one of the amendments that I really do hope that this Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) will pay significant attention to and consider accepting it when it comes to a vote. This is one of the amendments that I think would have a significant impact on accountability and transparency.

Now, during Estimates, we found out from the Minister of Finance—and it came as a surprise—that,

in fact, a lot of money lapsed in the last budget for infrastructure. In fact, it was a very significant amount of money that the government did not spend in the last budget. And it raises some serious concerns because the government has gone out saying they need all of this money for infrastructure and, therefore, we need to increase the PST in order to fund it.

But, when we heard the Minister of Finance admit in Estimates that they siphoned off \$320 million of infrastructure money from last year's budget and they used it for their pet projects, it became very, very alarming to us that here they are trying to get more money from the public for supposedly important infrastructure when they did not use \$320 million of the infrastructure budget last year. Well, it begs the question: Where did the \$320 million of infrastructure money go from the last budget? That is 19 per cent of projects from that budget that were either delayed or cancelled; that's one in five projects. So it begged the question: Where did that money go?

And then we have the government, you know, ramming through a PST hike, saying, well, they need money for critical infrastructure. Well, we then asked the government: Where are you going to put that money? If you're going to take 277 more million dollars out of the pockets of Manitobans, where are you going to spend it? And we've asked this question numerous times in Estimates. We've asked it in question period a number of times. And every single time this Minister of Finance refused to tell us, refused to table a list of what the infrastructure projects would be that this supposed PST hike was going to fund. So that raised a lot of concern, and it raised a lot of alarm bells, and the minister said, well, we don't need to provide you with a list; we'll give it to you a year after, and we'll tell you after the fact where the money went.

Well, with due respect, nobody's going to accept that anymore from this government because they have now breached the public trust. Why should anybody trust what they're going to say? And, if they decided it was so important to increase the PST for critical infrastructure projects, they should've done their homework and been able to say to the public, okay, this is where the money is going to go. They couldn't do that. And it became obvious, and it's become more and more obvious with all the ribbon cuttings that are going on, that this government is just going out there and using this PST hike as a slush fund and they are using this money to fund

whatever is going to be most appealing to communities. And we've seen that all through the summer. That's probably why they don't want to call a by-election in Morris because they haven't finished their ribbon-cutting journey, and they want more time to get out there and spend all that money.

This government, I think, had a responsibility to table a list of those projects and justify his PST hike, but he could not do that. He would—he refused, actually, many times to say where that money was going to be spent. And, when we see \$320 million used for other projects last year when it should've gone for infrastructure, it really created some serious concern for us.

So, when they jacked up the PST, they tried to tell Manitobans it was for flood mitigation. Well, if we look at the budget and look at what was earmarked for flood mitigation, or look at what this government has done over time, that money isn't going into flood mitigation. So, when that failed to resonate with the public, they changed their mind and said, well, it's going to go towards critical infrastructure.

*(16:00)

Well, what is critical infrastructure in Manitoba? Everybody, over decades and decades, know that strategic infrastructure or critical infrastructure is related to highways or rail infrastructure, local transportation, urban development, sewage treatment, water infrastructure. And so they tried to pass that off as where this money was going to go. So the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) said critical infrastructure. Well, then, that didn't seem to be resonating with the public. And so the government changed their tune again and started to say that it was going to go towards hospitals and schools. And that sort of is where it ended.

Now, what we've seen is the government is going out and making all kinds of announcements, saying that it's coming from this fund, where the definition does not fit with what the government said in the first place. Nowhere in any of the comments by this government in the early days of the budget, nowhere in there did it talk about splash pads. While splash pads, and I agree, are a good thing for communities, and I think they have a high value, that does not pass the sniff test of what is critical infrastructure. The government could have funded that through their other infrastructure dollars, but it certainly didn't fit with what they were trying to pass as critical infrastructure. And then they tried to go

out there and re-announce schools that have been in the works for two years. And all of a sudden—I think Sage Creek was one of them—they started re-announcing things that have been in the works two or three years ago and have been in development. And now they're trying to go out there and say, well, no, that's now where this fund is going to go.

So they ended up being all over the map. They manipulated the meaning of the word to include health and education. Those have always been part of government's core mandate; government has had that responsibility all the time, to fund health and education. This government has made a very, very significant change, and now they're all over the map; and what they are obviously doing is they are taking this money, they are getting ready for the next election and they're using it as a slush fund. They're going into community after community and providing them with infrastructure that has never, ever met the definition of critical infrastructure or they're re-announcing things that have been announced many times. So it's obvious what they're—this government is going to do.

And also, you know, if we look at the 2013 Budget, it was down \$112.5 million in infrastructure. Flood projects only accounted for \$48 million. Building Manitoba Fund was \$30 million. Like, there's a lot of money that wasn't accounted for in the budget for \$277 million. And the minister said, well, go to this page, or go to this page, or go to that department. It was spread all over the map, and it became really obvious they didn't have a clue what they were doing. They were just going to cherry-pick out there. They were going to find out what was most appealing to different communities and go out there and give them something before the next election. And it became obvious that this is a political slush fund for this NDP going into the next election.

If they were really interested in accountability and transparency, they would have provided a list upfront. It would have been critical infrastructure, key infrastructure projects. As Winnipeg said, they only got \$7 million out of this. So where's the rest of the money going? We have such a huge infrastructure deficit, but this government is playing games with this. And they're abusing their position in government and are not good stewards of this money that is not theirs. And then there's all this secrecy about where it's going to go. And now they're also out there saying that—emergency departments and

MRIs. That is part of core government. Since when do things like that fit into what has been known forever here in this province as critical infrastructure? So this government is cherry-picking and they are—it's all become a shell game.

So I would urge this government to support this amendment.

Mr. Struthers: Well, I'd sure rather be part of a government that cuts ribbons that leads to schools and hospitals than part of an opposition that cuts programs that leads to hardship for Manitobans.

And, if we were—and if we were going to consider this amendment, we sure wouldn't after the speech that I just heard from the member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger). Maybe the member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) will make up for the misinformation that was put on the record by the member, the honourable member for Charleswood.

You know, she mentioned our Estimates that we had in Finance; myself and my deputy minister and a whole host of people in the department tried very, very hard to answer every single question that the member for Charleswood had. We looked in different parts of the budget, we researched, we took questions as we could at the time, we took questions under advisement, so we could get back the member for Charleswood. We tried our darndest to try to answer every single question that she put on the table.

But it was very clear to us that the member for Charleswood had her mind made up before she came to those Estimates. She had her conspiracy theory all worked out. She wanted to be able to use the word slush fund someplace. She wanted to be able to use the term cherry-pick someplace. She had her mind clearly made up before any of the facts were ever put in front of her.

And that's very unfortunate because, you know, I know—I understand that the members opposite will have their fun in terms of opposing the one-cent-on-the-dollar increase to the PST. I understand that, but I also know that they live in absolute fear every time we cut a ribbon and make an announcement as to where that 1 cent on the dollar is going. And I know that they're going to try everything they can, shady or otherwise, to try to poke a hole in the commitment that this government made to have every single dollar of the one-cent-on-the-dollar increase go directly into schools and hospitals and roads and bridges, flood

mitigation, flood-proofing projects. Our commitment is there; it's clear.

We've begun to collect the tax, and we've begun to make sure that it's going right back to the benefit of those Manitoba families who depend on us to make those investments to grow our economy so that we can remain strong and—a strong province as part of our Canadian nation.

Just to put some facts on the record as opposed to what we just heard from the member for Charleswood, this year it's a partial year, so we will collect only \$198 million or so of the—of revenue from the one-cent-on-the-dollar increase. Next year that will annualize up to \$277 million.

Also, we have said in the past that we would invest the equivalent of 1 per cent of the PST into infrastructure. Well, this brings up our commitment to 2 per cent equivalency; 1 cent on the dollar directly through this budget and 1 cent on the dollar from a—our previous commitment that we have maintained. That will give us \$512 million—that equivalency—that we have said is going to go directly to building roads and schools and bridges and hospitals, the—flood mitigation, you know, those sort of things.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

And—[interjection]—well, part of what we do is we announce this, so the people of Manitoba can see what we're doing and we can be held account for that. That is true, we will announce it. And I know it kind of gets a little envious over there sometimes. We'll cut a ribbon in front of that too, Mr. Speaker.

But, Mr. Speaker, we will follow up, we will make the announcements, and we will follow up, unlike members opposite with the Brandon hospital—it's seven times they announced; nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing—I think that's seven—anyway.

Mr. Speaker, we thought very hard before we introduced the Budget 2013. We know it's not easy to bring forward a tax increase no matter how small or how big that tax increase is. We know that Manitoba families work hard for the money that they earn and they expect us to make good decisions in terms of the revenue that we collect through the tax system.

* (16:10)

When we presented the Manitoba budget back in 2013, we were facing an imminent flood threat. It

would have been the third major flood threat in five years at the time. Members opposite—I was quite disappointed in this—members opposite attitude was don't worry, be happy; there wasn't a flood this year, so we don't need to worry about the next 10 years. You know, that's pretty short-sighted, Mr. Speaker.

This side of the House—despite the slings and arrows of members opposite, this side of the House took a more responsible approach, an approach quite frankly that should've been taken in Calgary a number of years ago or Fargo or Minot. I'll always remember looking at the news items and seeing a homeowner from Minot sitting on top of his roof as the flood waters kind of tickled underneath the eavestroughs of his house as it flowed through.

Mr. Speaker, we're not going to leave Manitobans unprotected. We're going to take the tough decisions in terms of revenue to make sure that we can invest in flood mitigation, flood proofing. We're going to do that, and we're going to do it over a period—and you know what? I'd like to say this is a novel approach, but in Manitoba we've got a history of raising revenue and then investing it in flood protection. Duff Roblin had vision. Back in the day, when a Conservative had vision, Duff Roblin invested in floodway, invested in the Portage Diversion, invested in the Shellmouth Dam, and do you know what else he did? He brought in a 5 per cent sales tax in this province to pay for that, because he understood that you couldn't make that promise and you couldn't come through with that kind of protection for Manitoba families without raising revenue. And Tory members opposite should take a look at that part of our Manitoba history, a proud part of our history, when a Conservative had the integrity to say what he was going to do. He did it and then brought in a measure to pay for what he brought forward. That was a 5 per cent increase. We've got a one-cent-on-the-dollar increase. But that's flood mitigation. I think Manitobans, and really members opposite, too, I would suspect, understand that we need to invest in flood proofing in our province.

Mr. Speaker, just a few weeks before the presentation of our budget here in Manitoba, the federal government brought forward the Building Canada Fund as part of its March 2013 budget, and, to its credit, the Conservatives in Ottawa introduced the Building Canada plan. And part of that plan was that they were going to put money into it, as the member for Agassiz (Mr. Briese) knows, and part of it is that provincial governments would put money

into that. Now I don't know if the advice to members opposite is to not put money into that, not participate in a program—a tri-level program dedicated to the infrastructure gap that members opposite like to complain about but they don't have the courage to deal with, but we are very committed to making sure that we participate in that infrastructure investment plan.

We need to have the money on the table to do it. The one-cent-on-the-dollar increase will do that, Mr. Speaker. We will have—just to finish off the numbers that I need to put on the record—we will have the authority to spend \$1.8 billion on this infrastructure, on things of schools and hospitals. And, you know, the member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) wants to, you know, wants to pretend she doesn't understand this for political purposes. I understand that, but what we do is we give authority to move forward on these projects. If a project can't be done because of weather conditions, I guess the member for Charleswood would want that private company to be told by this government to plough through anyway. Do the work. Waste the money instead of waiting for the next year when weather conditions actually are conducive to that project. I will leave those decisions up to the construction companies and the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation to make rather than having her make those decisions.

But, Mr. Speaker, we won't be supporting this. It's very clear that we're confident—so confident in our commitment that we've got the Auditor General. We've asked her to do a special audit of this and then report back as part of the PAC meetings, the Public Accounts Committee that we attend. So we're very proud that we've got the Auditor General to do that and very proud that—

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

Any further debate on the amendment?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Speaker: House ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Mr. Speaker: Question before the House is the amendment on Bill 20.

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

Some Honourable Members: No.

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

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

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

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

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Speaker: Opinion of the Chair, the Nays have it.

Mr. Cullen: On division.

Mr. Speaker: On division.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: Now we'll proceed to the next amendment of Bill 20.

Mrs. Driedger: I move, seconded by the member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler),

That Bill 20 be amended in Clause 3 by adding the following after the proposed subsection 67.3(4) of The Financial Administration Act:

Annual audit

67.3(5) The Minister of Finance must cause an independent audit to be conducted annually of the projects that are funded by the increase in the general sales tax rate to 8%, and the audit must include the costs associated with those projects.

Tabling audit in Assembly

67.3(6) The minister must table a copy of the audit in the Assembly within 15 days after receiving it if the Assembly is sitting or, if it is not, within 15 days after the next sitting begins.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable member for Charleswood, seconded by the honourable member for Lakeside,

THAT—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense? Dispense. The amendment is in order.

Mrs. Driedger: Now, Mr. Speaker, this is going to be an interesting one because after we put our amendments forward I would note that the government has actually gone down the road of

asking for the Auditor General to audit these projects.

So I am going to assume, then, that the minister, in order not to look foolish, is going to have to accept this amendment because it is what we asked for, it appears to be what he has gone and done, and we actually support the Auditor General having a look at this because without, I think, that independent review things would be much more cloudy about what this government has done.

First of all, it would have been better if all of the projects had been listed in the budget, but it appears that the government is not willing to do that, so I guess this is the next best thing. And we will see these projects listed and, hopefully, have the costs associated with the projects broken down to capital and operating. And we hope to see that the government would be forthcoming with that.

However, Mr. Speaker, I think the best part of this would have been if the government had, indeed, put it into the budget because now what we're going to see is this government is just going to decide to tell the auditor: Well, Madam Auditor, here are the projects that we funded. So, I mean, how's the auditor going to know whether those were the best projects, whether they were critical infrastructure—the auditor is only going to be able to take the information of this government and look at it and then say, okay, I guess if you're telling me this is where the \$277 million went, then I guess she's going to have to take their word, but what the government has done is they've cherry-picked those projects.

They have veered off the track of what's critical infrastructure, and they are doing what looks like cherry-picking before an election. And they have turned this into a slush fund, and it's very partisan, it's very political. And so, I guess, you know, it's probably a good thing to have the auditor come in. I wish the auditor would also ask them where they syphoned off the \$320 million from last year's budget and where did that go because, certainly, if infrastructure was such an important aspect of the budget and if it was so important to spend all this money on infrastructure, why didn't they spend the budgeted amount last year. That does raise some very serious questions.

I would also indicate that their chief of staff declared that the PST hike is the start of the next election, and he has said that publicly. So it is becoming very, very clear that the PST hike was

meant for NDP pre-election slush fund. The chief of staff basically has corroborated that.

* (16:20)

So this government may go out there, have the auditor do the audit, but, again, there's going to have to be some critique as well as to what they chose to audit, because we've certainly seen that, you know, the comments they've made about what the money's for has been all over the map. They came out and they managed this in a very sloppy way. The numbers in the budget themselves are so hard to pull out to find out exactly where this money's going. It looks like in this last budget, there's a decrease of \$112 million in infrastructure spending. So nobody believes this government when they're saying that all of this money is going for critical infrastructure. And, in fact, in a survey done by CFIB, 81 per cent of Manitobans are not confident the revenue raised from the PST hike will go to infrastructure spending and flood prevention.

That is a lot of people. That's over three quarters of Manitobans don't believe this government and where they're going to spend the money. We've certainly seen them all over the map on flood mitigation numbers, and nobody really knows where all this is going to add up. And we would tell the government we are tracking very carefully all their announcements to find out what they're spending. We are wondering why they have relabelled or redefined critical infrastructure in Manitoba, but it just becomes so much more obvious when we look at what they're doing. It has become much more obvious that they've created this slush fund. Things that should've been funded as part of government's core mandate is now all of a sudden fitting into this. They're trying to justify this to the public is what they're doing.

There has been such a public backlash to this PST hike that this government is scrambling now. They're all over the map in terms of trying to figure out how to sell this to Manitobans. They know Manitobans are angry that the PST went up. They know Manitobans are angry that they actually took the vote away from Manitobans by taking away their right to a referendum. They're angry that they have illegally rammed through the PST hike even before the bill has been passed.

So Manitobans are very angry with the PST, and this government is now trying to find a way to work around that, to massage the issue. But it's all become extremely clear what this government has done, how

angry the public is, and, certainly, I look forward to the minister supporting this amendment because it is something that the government has done in moving forward by bringing in the Auditor General. It might be interesting to have the Auditor General look at a few more aspects of this, and maybe she will by the time they have a chance to look at this, and I hope it'll be done in a timely manner. I imagine what we're going to see is we're going to see all of this stack up just very nicely before the next election so that the NDP can get the best political bang for their buck on it, because, certainly, what we see, Mr. Speaker, is their behaviour right now is certainly pointing in every direction to the fact that this is their slush fund going into the next election.

So I look forward to this Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) supporting this amendment. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Any further debate on the amendment? Seeing none, House ready for the question.

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Speaker: Question before the House is the amendment to Bill 20.

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 will please signify it by saying aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

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

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Speaker: Opinion of the Chair, the Nays have it.

Recorded Vote

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Speaker, a recorded vote.

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

Order, please. The question before the House is the amendment to Bill 20.

Division

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

Yeas

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

Nays

Allum, Altemeyer, Bjornson, Blady, Braun, Caldwell, Chief, Chomiak, Crothers, Dewar, Gaudreau, Howard, Irvin-Ross, Jha, Lemieux, Mackintosh,

Maloway, Marcelino (Logan), Marcelino (Tyndall Park), Melnick, Nevakshonoff, Oswald, Pettersen, Robinson, Rondeau, Saran, Selinger, Struthers, Wiebe, Wight.

Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk): Yeas 16, Nays 30.

Mr. Speaker: The amendment is accordingly defeated.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The hour being past 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, August 22, 2013

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<http://www.gov.mb.ca/legislature/hansard/index.html>