

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

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLAN, Nancy	St. Vital	NDP
ALLUM, James, Hon.	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	NDP
BJORNSON, Peter	Gimli	NDP
BLADY, Sharon, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	NDP
BRAUN, Erna, Hon.	Rossmere	NDP
BRIESE, Stuart	Agassiz	PC
CALDWELL, Drew, Hon.	Brandon East	NDP
CHIEF, Kevin, Hon.	Point Douglas	NDP
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	NDP
CROTHERS, Deanne, Hon.	St. James	NDP
CULLEN, Cliff	Spruce Woods	PC
DEWAR, Greg, Hon.	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	Fort Rouge	NDP
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Richmond	NDP
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	NDP
KOSTYSHYN, Ron, Hon.	Swan River	NDP
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas	NDP
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	Dawson Trail	NDP
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor, Hon.	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	Morris	PC
MELNICK, Christine	Riel	NDP
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	PC
NEVAKSHONOFF, Thomas, Hon.	Interlake	NDP
OSWALD, Theresa	Seine River	NDP
PALLISTER, Brian	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Midland	PC
PETTERSEN, Clarence	Flin Flon	NDP
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Arthur-Virden	PC
REID, Daryl, Hon.	Transcona	NDP
ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Kewatinook	NDP
RONDEAU, Jim	Assiniboia	NDP
ROWAT, Leanne	Riding Mountain	PC
SARAN, Mohinder, Hon.	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	St. Paul	PC
SELBY, Erin	Southdale	NDP
SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Verendrye	PC
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	PC
STRUTHERS, Stan	Dauphin	NDP
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	NDP
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WIGHT, Melanie, Hon.	Burrows	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 5, 2015

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 17—The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Amendment Act

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Act): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Education, that Bill 17, The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Société d'assurance publique du Manitoba, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, this bill proposes a new and relatively unique MPI benefit suggested by a citizen, Mr. John McDonald, at a standing committee and pursued by the member for Minto (Mr. Swan). It introduces a benefit of up to almost \$30,000 a year for families who lose a stay-at-home unpaid caregiver so that dependent children or infirm adults, for example, can continue to be supported. It recognizes the value of unpaid family work.

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

Any further introduction of bills?

PETITIONS

Mr. Speaker: Seeing none, we'll move on to petitions.

Government Record—Apology Request

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

(1) Government members have been quoted as stating that, in quotations, Manitobans no longer trust the current government, end of quotations.

(2) Sadly, these same members have reportedly stated that since 2014 the government has been focused on its own narrow political interests, in quotations, ahead of what was once a government plan and what would be indeed the priorities of Manitobans, end of quote, and that the Premier is, in quotations, driven by his desire to hold on to his leadership rather than by the best interests of Manitobans, end of quote.

(3) According to comments from government members, their caucus is divided by, in quotations, fundamental differences and on animosity, end of quote, and that, quotation, deep divisions are not just amongst the MLAs and caucus, but they exist at the staff level as well, end of quotation.

(4) Regrettably, the dysfunction and infighting within the provincial government has nothing to do with addressing the fact Manitobans are paying more and getting less. A Winnipeg family pays \$3,200 more in sales and income tax than they would in Regina but receives some of the worst results in health care and education in the country.

(5) Government members have said in the media that caucus dysfunction is entirely related to internal polls that indicate they are in, quotation marks, annihilation territory, end of quotation, saying that, in quotations, our numbers are down and the status quo is not good enough anymore. Our own party pollsters have told us we are facing oblivion, end of quotation.

(6) Little has been done by government members to end the infighting with the Premier, claiming retaliation is justified because of public comments such as, in quotation, people have civil rights, but we also have an organization to run, end of quotation. Government members acting on behalf of the Premier have said publicly, in quotations, we are not

on a witch hunt, end of quotations, and have also said, in quotations, we have to look at who caused this and who are the ones that have damaged us the most, end of quotations.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Premier of Manitoba to take responsibility and apologize to the people of Manitoba for the social and economic damage created by his failed leadership and the disgraceful conduct of government members that has destabilized the provincial government and hurt Manitoba businesses and families.

And this petition is signed by B. Squance, R. Garrett, D. Jowett and many other 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.

Rights of Manitoba Children

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 should uphold the rights of children set forth by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by Canada over 20 years ago, to better protect and promote children and their rights to ensure the voices of children are heard.

Instead, many children in Manitoba, especially those in the child-welfare system, reveal that they sometimes feel that they have no say in what happens to them.

Under this provincial government, Manitoba's children and youth are falling behind on several indicators of well-being and in areas that would prepare them for better outcomes in life.

This year, the provincial government's education system was ranked last of all Canadian provinces in science, reading and math.

Under this provincial government, Manitobans also have the second highest rate of children using food banks of all Canadian provinces and the highest child poverty rate.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government and the minister of child and youth opportunities to ensure that the rights of all Manitoba children are respected and that the opinions of children are taken into consideration when decisions that affect them are made.

To urge the provincial government and the Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities to correct the tragic systemic flaws that have failed Manitoba children in the recent past.

This petition's signed by A. Robles, C. Fleming, B. Hill and many more concerned Manitobans.

Provincial Trunk Highway 206 and Cedar Avenue in Oakbank—Pedestrian Safety

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Every day, hundreds of Manitoba children walk to school in Oakbank and must cross PTH 206 at the intersection with Cedar Avenue.

(2) There have been many dangerous incidents where drivers use the right shoulder to pass vehicles that have stopped at the traffic light waiting to turn left at this intersection.

* (13:40)

(3) Law enforcement officials have identified this intersection as a hot spot of concern for the safety of schoolchildren, drivers and emergency responders.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge that the provincial government improve the safety at the pedestrian corridor at the intersection of PTH 206 and Cedar Avenue in Oakbank by considering such steps as highlighting pavement markings to better indicate the location of the shoulders and crosswalk, as well as installing a lighted crosswalk structure.

This is signed by P. Williams, M. Willems and J. Risto and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Beausejour District Hospital—Weekend and Holiday Physician Availability

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

(1) The Beausejour District Hospital is a 30-bed, acute-care facility that serves the communities of Beausejour and Brokenhead.

(2) The hospital and the primary-care centre have had no doctor available on weekends and holidays for many months, jeopardizing the health and livelihoods of those in the northeast region of the Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority.

(3) During the 2011 election, the provincial government promised to provide every Manitoban with access to a family doctor by 2015.

(4) This promise is far from being realized, and Manitobans are witnessing many emergency rooms limiting services or closing temporarily, with the majority of these reductions taking place in rural Manitoba.

(5) According to the Health Council of Canada, only 25 per cent of doctors in Manitoba reported that their patients had access to care on evenings and weekends.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government and the Minister of Health to ensure that the Beausejour District Hospital and primary-care centre have a primary-care physician available on weekends and holidays to better provide area residents with this essential service.

This petition is signed by H. Dekezel, J. Gmilerek, M. Middleton and many, many more fine Manitobans, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Committee reports? Tabling of reports? Ministerial statements?

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, from Anola School we have 45 grades 3, 4 and 5 students under the direction of Ms. Karen Burr and Jodi Montgomery. And this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for La Verendrye (Mr. Smook).

And also in the public gallery we have with us today from Red River College Language Training Centre 16 adult English language students under the direction of Ms. Linda Schroeder. And this group is

located in the constituency of the Minister of Multiculturalism and Literacy (Ms. Marcelino).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Provincial Deficit Debt Servicing Costs

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, the problem, and there are many problems with this government's budget of last week, Mr. Speaker, but the problem is it takes our province in the wrong direction again. And while other provinces are reducing their deficits and paying down their debts, this government seems unable to do that and is, in fact, doing the opposite. This is the Premier's seventh consecutive deficit budget. And, in fact, the deficit is projected to be 20 per cent higher than the projected number for last year.

Now, the trouble is that this Premier has doubled our provincial debt, and this results in debt service costs which go through the roof. Now, that means that this year's budget contains almost \$900 million allocated to moneylenders that jeopardizes our front-line services today.

In Saskatchewan, in this year's budget, debt service costs are 40 per cent less than they were 10 years ago. That's \$1-million-a-day savings for the people of Saskatchewan—\$1-million-a-day savings for the people of Saskatchewan—versus Manitobans under the NDP.

So I have to ask the Premier: Who is doing better, Brad Wall or him?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, our economy is projected to grow in the top three. The Bank of Montreal has just indicated we could very well be one of the leading economies in the country this year, and we've had the strongest employment growth of any province in Canada. So those—any time you get 20,000 more Manitobans working, you know you're going in the right direction.

With respect to the debt, Mr. Speaker, when the member opposite was in office the cost of servicing the debt was 13 cents plus of every dollar that we budgeted for. It is, this budget, 5.6 cents on the dollar, less than half—less than half—and the cost of servicing the debt has gone down \$10 million in this budget, if he would read it carefully.

Mr. Pallister: Only a premier with a record this bad would have to run away from that record and go to forecast to try to stake his reputation on future events, Mr. Speaker.

When this Premier came into power—when the NDP came into power in 1999, we as a province owed \$14 billion, today \$36 billion, and the NDP doesn't seem to understand the difference in interest rates over that time period either. They are responsible across the way for raising our debt by two and a half times, but they are most certainly never going to be responsible for paying it back; Manitobans will have that responsibility.

Now, when the NDP came into power, each person in our province had a piece of the debt at \$12,000, and now each person owes \$28,000, every man, woman and child in the province, Mr. Speaker. A family of four owes over \$110,000 now, thanks to the NDP. That has doubled under this Premier.

Could he explain to Manitoba's children, perhaps those in the gallery today, how he could be so very unfair to them?

Mr. Selinger: I was very pleased to be in South Pointe today with the MLA for St. Norbert where we announced a brand new school, \$30-million investment, for up to—that will provide a brand new school for 800 children, 74 spots for a daycare centre, a child-care centre in the same facility in a growing neighbourhood with young families. Those investments will pay off for decades, Mr. Speaker, for decades, for many generations of Manitobans that are raising families in Manitoba.

That's exactly what we're doing. We're investing in the future of this province. Debt servicing costs are less than half of what they were. The debt as a proportion of the economy has actually shrunk during our time in office; it's less than it was when the members opposite were in office, Mr. Speaker.

The member opposite never likes to mention the fact that we've doubled the size of the economy since we've been in office, projected to be a \$66-billion economy, the largest ever in the history of the province, Mr. Speaker. More schools, more hospitals, more personal-care homes, more jobs, more disposable incomes for Manitobans and one of the lowest—the second lowest unemployment rate in the country. The member opposite would be very happy if he ever had those numbers during his time in office.

Mr. Pallister: The Premier forgets again that we may well in the future need new hospitals, new schools, new roads but we won't be able to pay for them as effectively because this government has expanded our debt and our debt service costs will steal from our future. Every Manitoban understands that today's deficit is tomorrow's tax hike, and the real problem compounds while these people twiddle their thumbs, and because of the compounding of interest, it's creating a drain today on our front-line services and a far greater drain tomorrow as well.

Now, in Manitoba we pay \$900 million this year; in Saskatchewan they pay \$550 million for debt service costs. That means \$350 million this year alone that Saskatchewan's government can use on real priorities today like lower taxes, like better access to health care, like better educational outcomes. In Saskatchewan they have a government that is demonstrating some common sense; we don't have that here in Manitoba. A Saskatchewan family of four—a family who is from Winnipeg paying taxes here pays—a family of four living in Winnipeg will pay \$3,200 more in taxes this year than if that family moved to Regina. That's deplorable.

I'd like the Premier to explain: While Saskatchewan's government is putting money into the pockets of its people, why is he taking \$3,200 out of the pockets of every family in our province?

Mr. Selinger: The Manitoba advantage—the cost of living in Manitoba is more competitive here in Manitoba than it is in Saskatchewan. A single person with a disability, the taxes and basic household costs in Manitoba, \$10,475; in Saskatchewan, \$11,800. And the story continues: for a single parent with one child at \$30,000, costs in Manitoba, \$13,134; in Saskatchewan, \$15,667, \$2,500 more. And I can give many other examples if the member wishes to pursue this line of reasoning.

* (13:50)

We've kept the cost of living reasonable in Manitoba. We've provided opportunities for people to work and learn and gain skills, Mr. Speaker. We've made sure that there's jobs being created in this province of Manitoba. We're looking after people with respect to health care and education and training. We're growing the prosperity and the wealth of Manitobans and they are helping do that by participating in the economy and we're proud to support them.

Personal Income Tax Brackets Provincial Comparison

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): Mr. Speaker, the numbers are clear. This NDP government is headed in the wrong direction.

Now, even though the NDP promised that the deficit would be eliminated by now, it's actually up 20 per cent and they'll miss their targets again. Even though the NDP said the economic forecast looks good, they're raiding the Fiscal Stabilization Account. And even though revenues are up \$334 million, Manitobans are paying more.

Mr. Speaker, in this budget provincial tax brackets have not been adjusted and this means that there is a heavier tax burden on Manitoba families.

Will the Finance Minister just admit that his NDP government's failure to manage their spending is causing Manitobans to pay more?

Hon. Greg Dewar (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, Manitobans are paying less taxes under this government than when they were in office.

This budget contains tax cuts for seniors, a doubling of the property education tax credit from \$235 to \$470.

This budget contains tax cuts for small business; another 2,000 small businesses in Manitoba will not have to pay any income tax. We came to office, the small-business tax rate was 8 per cent; it's now zero. We are the envy, Mr. Speaker, we are the envy of Canada.

We came into office, our corporate tax rate was 17 per cent. Now—it was one of the highest rates in the nation. At 12 per cent, it's now one of the lowest rates in the nation.

This budget also brought in the tax credit for volunteer firefighters, as I'm quite proud of.

We have a tremendous record on reducing taxes, Mr. Speaker, far better than theirs.

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Speaker, I don't know where the Minister of Finance is taking his numbers from, but let's be clear. Manitobans pay among the highest taxes in Canada and the highest of all the western provinces.

Now, when you take into account just the PST and the income tax, the average Manitoba family pays \$3,200 more than the same family living in Saskatchewan. Now, Saskatchewan's income tax

brackets are adjusted each year for cost of living, but this NDP government does not do that. That means a real Manitoba family with no real increase to their income has a real decrease in their after-tax household spending because of this NDP's government policies.

Why didn't this NDP Finance Minister do anything in this budget to help Manitoba families cope with the rising cost of living?

Mr. Dewar: Refer the member to page C40 of The Manitoba Advantage, Mr. Speaker: Saskatchewan, family of—or two-earner family of five, \$75,000, \$43,500; Manitoba, \$39,400. Manitoba is the more affordable place to live.

As I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, this budget contains tax credits for seniors. This budget contains tax credits for volunteer firefighters. This budget cuts taxes for businesses. This budget increases the tax credit for the caregiver tax credit, which members opposite will vote against.

Average Manitobans are paying \$4,200 less. We have 89 tax reductions since we formed government in 1999. Manitoba is a far more affordable place to live than Saskatchewan.

Mr. Friesen: Judging by the looks on their faces, his own colleagues don't buy what he's trying to sell.

Mr. Speaker, not only does the average Manitoba family pay \$3,200 more than in Saskatchewan, it's getting worse. The tax gap with Saskatchewan has actually grown \$1,100 wider in just the past five years. This is because Saskatchewan has already addressed bracket creep, like most other provinces in Canada, but the NDP government refuses to do that even though their own revenues are way up.

Mr. Speaker, will this Finance Minister just admit that his government has no regard for Manitoba families who are paying more and more tax and having less and less disposable income because of their unsustainable tax policies?

Mr. Dewar: Refer the member to the budget documents: two-earner family of four, \$60,000, Saskatchewan, they pay \$30,400; here, \$29,150. Mr. Speaker, again, as I've—89 reductions in taxes since 1999, \$4,200.

We have a plan and, as the Premier (Mr. Selinger) has mentioned, a plan to grow the economy. The BMO recently said that employment

growth in Manitoba led the nation, the best pace in 13 years in the province of Manitoba.

The members opposite want to kill that plan. They want to kill jobs. They want to kill our infrastructure programs creating opportunities, 60,000 jobs here in the province. That is our plan. Our plan is to grow the economy. The Conference Board of Canada said we'll lead the nation in 2015 and 2016, strongest job growth. Their record is to kill jobs; we reject that.

Manitoba Hydro Minnesota Transmission Line Costs

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Manitobans are tired of NDP broken promises and want a change for the better.

Every NDP member campaigned that the \$700-million Minnesota-Manitoba transmission line would be paid for by export sales. The problem is Manitoba Hydro is exporting less and less power for less and less profit. As a result, Manitobans are paying more and getting less.

Will the minister admit that he has broken his promise to Manitobans and that Manitobans will be on the hook for the costs of the Manitoba-Minnesota transmission line?

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to rise today to again reiterate that we in Manitoba enjoy the lowest hydro rates anywhere in North America.

And we have done a commendable job and—especially Manitoba Hydro, in dealing with the many stakeholders that we have in the province of Manitoba, most particularly the First Nations that have been affected directly as a result of hydro development in the past. We have done a reconciliation tour to correct the wrongs of the past and, as we move forward into the future, we don't repeat those mistakes that were done previously in years gone by.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, I repeat, Manitobans are tired of NDP broken promises and want a change for the better.

I quote from the 2011 NDP platform: In 2015 a publicly owned Manitoba Hydro will be stronger than ever, end of quote. The facts tell a different story, Mr. Speaker. A 5 per cent increase since 2011, a projected of at least doubling the rates, export revenues declining sharply, selling power at a loss:

hardly Manitoba Hydro that is stronger than ever as promised by this NDP in 2011.

Will the minister stand up today and apologize to all Manitobans for breaking this NDP promise to Manitobans, yes or no?

Mr. Robinson: Mr. Speaker, I will not apologize for something that we as Manitobans should be very proud of, and that is what I indicated in my earlier response, that is the low cost of hydroelectricity here in the province of Manitoba, the inroads that we have made in ensuring that our customers are satisfied on the United States side, the important work that we are doing to the east of us, to the west, and now the latest discussions that are occurring with our friends and neighbours in Nunavut.

Manitoba Hydro, it should be reiterated, Mr. Speaker, is a very important part of our economic growth in the province of Manitoba. We are creating jobs. We are creating economic opportunities throughout the province of Manitoba.

Mental Health Funding Community Support Services

Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, to kick off Mental Health Week, the NDP noted that the stigma attached to mental health is one of the main things that keep people from accessing services. I would suggest one of the main things is actually a lack of services.

I received a copy of correspondence from the regional director of mental health programs from Southern Health to a constituent who has made one suicide attempt and numerous crisis admissions. It reads that due to NDP funding cuts, and I quote, the kind of community mental health services where community mental health workers check in with people is no longer available. End quote.

Mr. Speaker, why has this constituent's essential front-line services been eliminated by the NDP?

* (14:00)

Hon. Sharon Blady (Minister of Health): I'd like to thank the member for the question.

As many folks in this Chamber know and throughout the province, like a physical illness, mental illness can take many forms and be extremely challenging for an individual and for those around them, so I appreciate the question that the member has brought forward.

I would also ask that, in the case that this seems to be related to casework and a response, that if this information has not already been brought forward to my office, I invite him to bring it forward so that I can investigate this. Because, again, we do not discuss casework in this Chamber, but if something has gone wrong, I would like to know.

Mr. Martin: If the minister would talk to her colleague the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway), she'd be well aware of this because he has the same information.

Mr. Speaker, the regional director notes, and I quote, we recognize that people often feel better when they have a relationship where they can vent about difficulties and simply be heard. Our program no longer has the resources to provide this service, end quote. The director goes on to suggest family or friends can replace the services of trained mental health professionals.

Mr. Speaker, is the minister suggesting that where trained health professionals used to provide mental health services, family members are to fill in?

Ms. Blady: The Province's funding for mental health services, including community-based mental health services, has more than doubled from \$89 million in the '98-99 year to \$226 million in 2013-14. Does that mean that the work is done? No it doesn't, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I ask the member to bring forward his concerns directly to my office and I will work with the professionals because, again, these programs, all programs, are valuable to all Manitobans. The physical and mental and emotional health of all Manitobans is important, and in this week especially, we should take note and stand up for those folks.

So, again, I ask him to please come discuss this with me.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, again, the NDP have been aware of this for the last four months.

The regional director writes that due to funding reductions, the RHA had to, quote, give up the long-term ongoing support, end quote.

In the last two budgets alone, Mr. Speaker, the NDP have reduced support to mental health services by almost 10 per cent. So much for the NDP's multi-year strategy.

If my constituent, an individual on CPP disability, requires local alternative counselling

options, she must pay out of pocket. If not, she has to travel 65 kilometres to a different community to access it.

Mr. Speaker, can this minister offer my constituent anything more than her tired rhetoric and broken promises?

Ms. Blady: Again, Mr. Speaker, the mental health of Manitobans is a priority.

We have invested in a Mental Health Crisis Response Centre; a program for assertive community treatment, PACT teams that work with people who have persistent and severe mental illness and experience serious difficulties in meeting basic daily needs in the community; and work that is done between my own department, that of Children and Youth Opportunities and my partner in the Health Department, the Minister of Healthy Living and Seniors (Ms. Crothers), in rising to the challenge.

So, again, I ask the member, if there's a specific concern that faces a constituent, let's talk about it.

Emergency Child-Care Services Accommodation Concerns

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, this government continues to disappoint Manitobans by placing children in the care of Child and Family Services in high-risk situations. Nearly 10 years after a commitment by this government, they are still struggling to get children out of high-risk situations like hotels.

The minister has repeatedly said hotels are a placement of last resort, but there are too many situations where children are left in hotels when capacity existed elsewhere in the system in more secure locations. This government has promised for years a centralized registry of foster beds, but it is still not accomplished.

Why is this government not capable of keeping its promises to these most vulnerable children and providing them with places of safety?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): We announced about six weeks ago that as of June 1st that there will no longer be children in hotels. When we made that announcement, we had already been working on that commitment for the number of months. In November we came out and we talked about hiring more workers, 200 more workers; talking about investing in more placements, specialized placements; looking at what do we do to support high-risk victims.

Hotels are a placement of last resort, but that last resort also has to be developed into this system where we can provide the families as well as the children with the necessary supports. These are families with complex needs. We need to make sure that we're available and ready to support them.

Mr. Wishart: Mr. Speaker, this government made this promise 10 years ago and we have seen no results.

Other provinces have noticed the disarray. The BC child and youth representative, Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, said people will victimize and prey upon vulnerable women and girls in this—in these situations. Didn't this just happen in Manitoba? Ms. Turpel-Lafond also said, does the minister even know what is going on in her own province?

Does the minister know what is going on? How many CFS children were in hotels last weekend and how many instead were in the Manitoba Youth Centre?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member opposite that every day when I come to take on the responsibility of minister of Family Services that I put the children as our priority. Like everyone else in this Chamber and all Manitobans, that is our priority and that is our commitment.

We are continuing to work with the authorities and the agencies. We're developing more resources, more specialized placements. More staff will be hired. We're looking at all of our community partners to build this safety net.

But also what needs to be spoken about, the importance of prevention, ensuring that children are at home with their families, because that is where—if at all possible—that is where they will grow and flourish.

The system is not built to raise families; it is developed to protect them. We need to make sure that we provide the resources to families so children could be reunified, and in that case when they're not able to, we'll make sure that we are providing them with the support that they need, whether that is within the foster family system.

Mr. Wishart: Mr. Speaker, Manitobans don't even believe this minister knows what her own resources are.

This government's long-standing practice of housing children in hotels and jails in itself may be illegal under The Child and Family Services Act. In

the act, abuse is defined as an action that results in emotional disability of a permanent nature in the child. According to Tina Fontaine's great-aunt, Tina was only gone a month and she was completely changed.

How many children in this minister—sorry, how many more children that this minister is responsible for will have to be victims of institutional abuse while she is—while they are in his—her care?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It is all of us working together. It is all of our responsibility to support families and to provide them with necessary services. I take—*[interjection]* If you'd like to listen, I'll continue. I take the responsibility very, very seriously, but it is all of us working together that provide those necessary supports to families in order for them to support their children.

We do not and we have committed not to place children in hotels after June 1st. We are committed to that.

We are working with all of our partners. We are developing more resources, if they're specialized placements, we're working with foster families, we're hiring more staff and, most importantly, we are investing in prevention services so children can stay with their own families and in their own communities, as we've heard very loudly from all Manitobans.

Emergency Child-Care Services Accommodation Concerns

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): But there's been successive ministers to Family Services over the last 10 years that have promised sweeping changes to keep kids out of hotels and move them from hotels into family rooms. Mr. Speaker, they've broken their promises. They've failed Manitoba's most vulnerable children.

When will this minister just stop the rhetoric and admit that children under her watch, under her responsibility, are falling through the cracks of her failed policies and her broken promises?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): Mr. Speaker, the safety of children are our No. 1 priority. We work every day with the front-line staff to ensure that we are providing them with that necessary support. We are working with all of our partners throughout the authorities and the agencies across this great province to ensure that we're able to develop those resources of foster placements, of

specialized group homes, to ensure that they have a safe place to go and receive the services that they need.

*(14:10)

In November we announced 100 more beds, 200 more staff. We announced more psychological services to be made available to them. We also announced a new development at Marymount.

We continue to work across the province to develop those resources to support Manitoba's children.

Mrs. Mitchelson: It's clear that the more they work, the worse it gets.

Mr. Speaker, successive NDP budgets have failed many of Manitoba's most vulnerable children. The minister brags about increases in funding. As they spend more, children are receiving less and our most vulnerable children at risk are not being given the care that they've been promised by this government. More children are falling through the cracks.

When will this minister show some leadership and take some concrete action, for the sake of our most vulnerable children, children that she has the responsibility for?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, our government has made significant investments in providing more supports to Manitoba families. We've tripled the budget for Family Services. We've hired more than 500 more social workers. We've developed 5,000 more places of safety for children. We're continuing to do that.

But we're not stopping there. We are investing millions of dollars in prevention for families across this province to ensure that their children can stay within their family unit, in a safe, nurturing environment, and most importantly, to stay in their communities.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Well, Mr. Speaker, if they're investing more money at keeping families together, why are there more children in care today?

The failure of this NDP government to protect our most vulnerable children has made national headlines. And, Mr. Speaker, that's not something that this NDP government should be proud of.

When will this minister stop wringing her hands, and will she take some responsibility to do something to keep kids under her watch safe and secure?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Every day there are people that have the responsibility to work in the child-welfare system, that go to work every day to support Manitoba children and Manitoba families, and they're doing a good job. We're identifying when children are at risk. We are bringing them in and protecting them and providing them with the resources they need. But we're not stopping there. We're providing the services to reunify them with their families. We've made record investments as far as foster parents. We continue to develop more resources, hire more professionals to work in the system.

The member allows me now to talk about what their record was. She talked about national headlines. She should go back to when she was the minister and see what those headlines look like where they slashed payments to foster parents, by nine times they reduced it.

And what we are doing with Budget 2015 is continuing to invest in Manitoba families and support all of our communities.

Breastfeeding Rates Low-Income Northern Manitobans

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, speaking as a pediatrician, I want to emphasize the importance of attachment to the early development of children. The importance of breastfeeding in facilitating attachment and in the lifelong health of a child, including, for example, decreasing the likelihood of diabetes, is well known.

The 2012 report of Healthy Child Manitoba said that the rates of breastfeeding are lower in northern Manitoba and in lower income areas of Winnipeg.

I ask the Premier today: What action is being taken to address the low rates of breastfeeding in northern Manitoba and in low-income areas of Winnipeg?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): We were the first province to introduce the Prenatal Benefit here in Manitoba. And not only was it a dollar benefit, but there was also the support of a home visitor, a person to work with the family, the young mother and members of her family to get off to a healthy start. This is part of our early childhood development strategy in Manitoba. We continue to make sure that program is well financed and moves forward. We want these people to have all the supports they can get to get off to a healthy start in their lives.

Nurses are available as well in the community. There are places where young parents can come together at schools and in family resource centres where they can get support from their peers and other members of the community. All of these things are intended to foster the greatest possible ability of a young mother to support her child, Mr. Speaker.

Child Apprehensions

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, the Premier says one thing and his government does the other.

The very areas of Manitoba with lower rates of breastfeeding are those with high rates of CFS child apprehension. I now table a document that shows that for many years today's NDP government has supported policies resulting in almost one baby being apprehended at birth each day in Manitoba. That's 2 per cent of all infants in the province being torn from their mother before they have a chance to bond, and in some areas it's much higher.

I ask the Premier: Why has his government been apprehending so many babies instead of supporting mothers to care for and to nurture their children?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the information brought forward by the member opposite, and I would say to him this: we are making substantial investments in young families. The Rent Assist itself will put more money in the hands of young families. The job supports for young families, particularly lone parents, to get opportunities to enter the labour market and get training are intended to help lone-parent families get off to a healthy start and have the ability to have a career for themselves.

I mentioned the Prenatal Benefit and the early childhood development program and the family resource centres and our daycare program, including infant daycare, Mr. Speaker. Every place we're building new daycares, if there's a need demonstrated in that community, we are putting infant spots in place in those daycare centres so there's support for the youngest of families and their infants, particularly if the parents feel the need to be attached to the labour market.

So all of these things are intended to be community-based interventions to support families and to support communities to support families. It's all about a child is raised in a village, Mr. Speaker. It's the parents, it's the extended family, it's the other members of the community and the professional supports we put in to walk that journey with them to healthy life as young families.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, our province has an extraordinary high rate of apprehensions of children at birth compared to other jurisdictions. This is preventing mothers from nurturing their babies.

Instead of going in every direction, the Premier should know that there are two local projects, one at Mount Carmel Clinic and the other at the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation in Nelson House, that have found ways to support families that dramatically reduce the number of children being apprehended at birth.

And so I ask the Premier: Why is he not ensuring that these examples, these best practices are occurring province-wide in order to reduce the apprehensions of infants at birth and allow more mothers to nurture their babies? Why for 15 years has things been going in the wrong direction?

Mr. Selinger: So I appreciate the member acknowledging that we've supported these demonstration projects in high-need communities such as Mount Carmel Clinic, such as Nelson House, Nisichawayasihk First Nation. Those are communities that have taken a forward-looking approach to caring for young families, and Mount Carmel Clinic itself has always been a leader in this regard in the inner city from the earliest days, and we were there.

I believe I was there with Minister Chief just over a year ago when we saw some of the work they were doing in their early childhood learning centre. They're expanding that program—for the Minister of Jobs and the Economy (Mr. Chief), thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was there with the MLA for Point Douglas and we looked at some of the work being there.

There's also, in another part of Point Douglas, another very important project called project bold, an early childhood development project supported by the McConnell foundation.

So everywhere in Manitoba we're partnering up with communities to do prevention. We're partnering up to have family support workers. We're partnering up to support families with parenting skills. We're partnering up to provide healthy food alternatives to those young families. The Prenatal Benefit I've already mentioned. We have nurses available. We have family support workers available.

More work needs to be done for sure, Mr. Speaker, and we will continue to do it. And I only

ask for the member of River Heights, for once, to support these things in the budget by voting for it.

City of Winnipeg Roads Funding Announcement

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): Mr. Speaker, this is my first question of the session to my good friend and the minister of local government and responsible for the City of Winnipeg.

You know, Mr. Speaker, you and I in that area that we live and most of the friends here that they live in the city in urban areas, that the residents are very frustrated with the broken roads and infrastructure.

Now we see some cranes and some road construction going on, particularly in my constituency. I will be very delighted to know if the minister can give us some idea what we are doing to fix our roads—crumbling roads—and make our lives better to drive in the city.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

*(14:20)

Hon. Drew Caldwell (Minister of Municipal Government): Well, Mr. Speaker, yesterday I was very pleased to be joined by the Premier (Mr. Selinger), Mayor Bowman, the Minister of Health (Ms. Blady), the Minister of Healthy Living and Seniors (Ms. Crothers), as well as the MLA for Assiniboia, to announce the provincial contribution to the City of Winnipeg's road funding for this year. That announcement was a \$65-million announcement, the largest on record.

Our government this year will be providing \$322 million—[interjection] The members opposite should listen to this. This year the government will be providing \$322 million to the City of Winnipeg, 130 per cent increase since 1999 when the Leader of the Opposition had his hand on the tiller. Winnipeggers know there's one government building this province and another party, the opposition, seeking to stop that construction.

Mental Health Nurses Prairie Mountain Health Vacancies

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): This NDP government suggested that they were active on the Manitoba mental health file, a statement that is almost comical if it didn't have such a damaging effect on so many vulnerable Manitobans.

The Prairie Mountain Health region has at least five vacancies for mental health resource nurses right now. Three of these vacancies have remained vacant since 2014, one as far back as April of 2014.

Families and caregivers have said that patients needing the supports of a mental health nurse expect to be assessed in a timely manner, and they also say that family members respond better to a consistent and familiar mental health nurse.

So why, Mr. Speaker, has this government denied mental health patients the key resources they need? Why haven't they filled the vacancies for the five mental health resource nurses?

Hon. Sharon Blady (Minister of Health): I'd like to thank the member for the question.

In terms of mental health needs and the resources that the member mentions, it is the RHAs that work with the communities and work to fill the positions, and in terms of their—[interjection] Mr. Speaker, in mental—during Mental Health Week, we each need to do everything that we can, and I will gladly respond to the member's question if her colleagues would—[interjection] One thing I would expect from members opposite during Mental Health Week is some respect for issues surrounding mental health.

The important investments that are being made are crucial, and we are working with the WRHA and their partners and—[interjection] Again, some respect, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Rowat: I think the people from Russell, Hamiota, Virden, Neepawa, Gilbert Plains all deserve respect, and all they're getting is nonsense and noncommittals from this minister.

This—these communities have heard the broken promises made by this NDP Health Minister. What they have received in reality was anything but timely access to mental health resources. Instead, regular assessments are being made by a mental health worker or a nurse who travels in excess of four hours from outside the community to complete up to six assessments in one day.

Is this, as the minister for child and youth said, identifying and supporting critical services and workforce needs? I think not, Mr. Speaker. Shame on this government.

Ms. Blady: I can assure the member and all members of rural Manitoba that we are making sure that Manitoba families have access to health care and

mental health care near their homes by adding medical facilities and expanding services, whether that was the opening of the first rural QuickCare clinics in Steinbach and in Selkirk, expanding surgical services, new and renovated hospitals in Brandon, Swan River, Thompson, The Pas, Beausejour, Pinawa, Gimli, Morden, Winkler, Ste. Anne, Steinbach, Shoal Lake, with new ones on the way in Selkirk and Notre Dame de Lourdes. We've invested in new ambulances and we are building new services.

So, yes, we are investing in rural health care, including mental health care. And, again, quite a contrast to members opposite, when they cut—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. The honourable member's time for this question has elapsed.

Time for oral questions has expired.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: And prior to members' statements, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us from River West Park School 18 grade 9 students under the direction of Mr. Todd Johnson. And this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger).

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

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Mr. Speaker: Now, time for oral questions has expired, as I've indicated, it is now time for members' statements.

Liberation Day of Holland

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): Today we commemorate the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Holland from the occupation by Nazi Germany in World War II on this date, May 5th, 1945.

Starting in September 1944, the First Canadian Army fought German forces on the Scheldt estuary as this was essential to gain seaport access to bring supplies to Antwerp, Belgium.

The Canadian Army then moved on to securing the northern and western portions of the Netherlands. The conditions were horrendous for our soldiers as not only were they facing the German forces, but it was also the worst winter in 50 years. It should be noted also that the Fort Garry Horse regiment from

Winnipeg played a pivotal role in the liberation of the Netherlands.

By the time Canadian General Charles Foulkes accepted the surrender of German forces, more than 7,600 Canadian soldiers, sailors and airmen had died fighting in the Netherlands.

The Dutch people are extremely appreciative of Canada's role in liberating their country. Prime Minister Stephen Harper is in the Netherlands right now leading a Canadian delegation and attending events honouring the sacrifices of Canadian Armed Forces on this 70th anniversary.

Mr. Speaker, there is a significant Dutch population living in Midland constituency. I know first-hand the appreciation of the Dutch people as each year at Remembrance Day service in Carman the hall is filled to overflowing with gratitude for the Canadian Armed Forces who were instrumental in the liberation of their homeland.

The freedom many of us take for granted today was only made possible by the sacrifices of these Canadian soldiers, sailors and airmen. We shall not forget.

Primary Immunodeficiency Awareness

Mr. Dave Gaudreau (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, several current and former members of the Canadian Immunodeficiencies Patient Organization, or CIPO, are in the gallery today. I would like to highlight the work of CIPO and raise awareness about PI, or primary immunodeficiency.

PI is where a person's immune system is either absent or deficient in its ability to function. There are many types of PI affecting people in various ways. For most people, having PI means their body can't fight infections properly, often leading to sinus and respiratory infections. Over time, these infections can become chronic and patients can build up a tolerance for their medications, making them ineffective. For someone with PI, a respiratory infection can result in permanent lung damage.

The worldwide PI awareness week recently ended on April 29th. Last week it brought people together—patients, parents, physicians and nurses—to raise awareness of PI. By working together, they hope to improve the recognition, diagnosis, treatment and the quality of life with people with PI across the world. Currently, many PI sufferers go undiagnosed. With increasing awareness, hopefully, this can change.

CIPO has played an important role in helping patients understand their condition and getting access to the care they need. CIPO also works with Canadian Blood Services to ensure the safe usage of blood products, since blood products are an important part of PI patients' medical care.

Here in Manitoba, our government has worked with doctors and CIPO to improve the care of people living with PI. Since 2007, those with PI have been able to receive treatments to boost their immune system in the comfort of their own home. This allows the patients to have a low-dose treatment more frequently rather than high-dose occasional treatments in the hospital, which makes them regulating their immune system much easier.

I'm proud to support the Canadian Immunodeficiencies Patient Organization and the great work they are doing for people suffering from the primary immunodeficiency.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

International Day of the Midwife

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): May 5th marks an important day in the health community as International Day of the Midwife.

It is with great honour that I rise to recognize the hard work and tremendous talent of midwives in Manitoba.

* (14:30)

This day of recognition is co-led by the International Confederation of Midwives and the World Health Organization and, since 1992, has sought to acknowledge the important contributions that midwives and midwifery associations make in providing maternal and newborn health care.

Midwives help form the bedrock for maternal and newborn health-care strategies, providing essential services to women before, during and after childbirth. Many families develop strong relationships with their midwives as they assist them through healthy, safe and respectful pregnancy and childbirth experiences.

Here in Manitoba we have midwives doing amazing work. Their contributions to maternal health are invaluable, and today I would like express gratitude for this.

Today is also a day to recognize, however, that there remains a need for more midwives in our province, especially in rural and remote

communities, so that mothers can choose to stay at home and in their communities to deliver their child.

Midwives can make valuable contributions in Manitoba's Aboriginal communities where maternal and newborn health continues to be worse than in other areas of the province.

Under this NDP's leadership, it is unfortunate that the Bachelor of Midwifery Program at UCN has been unable to fulfill vacancies and the need for midwives in northern Manitoba and other parts of the province.

This year's theme for International Day of the Midwife is For a Better Tomorrow, and I encourage all to recognize and promote how midwives can help us in ushering a better tomorrow for Manitobans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MacNeil Family

Hon. Thomas Nevakshonoff (Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship): Mr. Speaker, the lessons we learn from our teachers stay with us throughout our lives. Today, I would like to recognize the MacNeil family from my constituency for their dedication to shaping the minds of their students. The MacNeils are a family of teachers who have had an exceptional impact in our local community. For over 60 years, they have exemplified the service and dedication of teachers in our province.

Their story starts with Dan and Hope MacNeil.

Mr. Speaker, Hope grew up in Lundar where her dad, A.V. Olson, was a long-time trustee and chairman of the Lakeshore School Division.

Dan grew up in Cape Breton, where he joined the army after high school to pay for university. He moved to Lundar from Cape Breton in 1957 to begin his teaching career. At the young age of 24, Dan was hired to be the principal of the Inwood School where he worked until 1966.

Later, Dan's brother, John, moved to Manitoba from Cape Breton to teach in Fisher Branch.

Hope began her teaching career in 1981 at Fisher Branch Collegiate where she had the reputation of loving every student she had and treating them like her own children.

Dan and Hope remained part of our schools until their retirement.

Their son, Neil, would eventually follow in the family's tradition. While he was completing his master's program, Neil was instructing first-year students when he realized his love of teaching. He left his master's program to get his teaching certificate the following year. Neil would then begin his teaching career in 1983 at Lundar, the same school where his father had started teaching. Throughout his career, he has been recognized for his excellence. This year, Neil is retiring as principal of Ashern Central School.

The MacNeils have passionately and energetically mentored hundreds of students in the Interlake. I would like to recognize this family for leaving their mark on the world by encouraging students to learn and grow.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Neurofibromatosis Awareness Month

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I'd ask—I'd like to ask all my colleagues within the Chamber to take a moment to join me in recognizing May as Neurofibromatosis Awareness Month in Manitoba. Neurofibromatosis affects one in 3,000 births in Canada. Neurofibromatosis, or NF, is a neurological disorder that causes tumours to 'form on—form on nerves.

Last spring, I had the pleasure of working with members of the Manitoba NF support group to create a private member's bill to make Manitoba—May NF Awareness Month in Manitoba. Thanks to my colleagues in this Chamber it passed, and the NF support group is excited to be celebrating their first awareness month this year.

We are very fortunate in Manitoba to have many wonderful families and volunteers that have championed the awareness of NF and supported the people in our province that are directly affected. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate my constituent, Tracy Gregorash, the executive director for Manitoba NF, and her son, Seth, who suffers from NF, along with the rest of the Manitoba NF support group. They have done an incredible job at raising awareness and funds for a variety of NF projects.

One of their amazing accomplishments was the purchase of a—CinemaVision MRI goggles that are being used at the Children's Hospital Foundation at Children's Hospital, and it—in partnership with the Children's Hospital Foundation of Manitoba. These goggles allow children to watch a DVD while

undergoing their MRI, and these MRIs often take several hours and the children have to remain very still. So it's something that is very significant in supporting children who are going through these tests.

Founded in 2005, the Manitoba NF support group is celebrating their 10th year and is very excited that it includes its first NF awareness month in Manitoba. It's celebrating this milestone by a comedy night at Rumor's here in Winnipeg on May 22nd, and their ninth annual run for fun event in Minnedosa this summer. They are also partnering with Manitoba Marathon's for—26 for 26 challenge this year to raise funds and awareness of intellectual disabilities, as most people living with NF will also be affected by a learning disability.

So congratulations to Tracy Gregorash and the NF support organization for all that they do for Manitoba children suffering from NF. And I am proud to join—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member's time for this member statement has elapsed.

I believe that concludes members' statements for today.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

BUDGET DEBATE (Fourth Day of Debate)

Mr. Speaker: And now orders of the day, government business.

To resume the adjourned debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar), and the proposed amendment thereto, standing in the name of the honourable Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities, who has 23 minutes remaining.

Hon. Melanie Wight (Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities): Just for those who missed it yesterday—no, I'm not going to redo it all, just kidding. No. I just want to say that I am, as I mentioned yesterday, torn all the time between whether or not I should be speaking to try to correct the endless number of errors put on the record by the opposition or just to talk about all the great things in our own budget. And so I think, Mr. Speaker, that I have found a way where I can work kind of both of these things into my speech.

So I'd like to start with the fact that I'm very proud that our government continues to work hard to make life in Manitoba better for all people, all over the province. It is our goal, Mr. Speaker, for greater equity for all because that benefits everyone—families, businesses—everyone in the province. And that is our philosophy.

When we say we're on the side of everyday working families, Mr. Speaker, it's not just a slogan; it's our philosophy. We want everyone to have an opportunity to reach their potential no matter what barriers may have blocked their path. We want all our workers to be safe in the workplace and to come, at the end of the day, home to their families safely. That is why our government has passed numerous pieces of workplace health and safety legislation.

The opposition, they have a different philosophy, Mr. Speaker, one where government does not get involved in things like keeping the workplace safe. One where you might say the rich benefit and the working class should be grateful for that.

You know, there was a headline, Mr. Speaker, to our budget—I think maybe right before it—that the Finance Minister makes no apologies for the budget that relies on borrowing, and I couldn't agree more. I am proud that we did not cut front-line services in 2015 or during a significant recession that was across the globe. During that time we did not cut it, and I am grateful for that. That leaves us in one of the best places probably in the world.

I'm grateful that we chose to continue to invest in a five-year core infrastructure plan, because it will lift our overall real GDP by \$6.3 billion and will massively increase the number of jobs available to Manitobans.

In this past year alone, we saw an increase of 20,000 jobs, the majority being in the private sector. Our continued investment in roads and bridges and flood mitigation, in schools and hospitals and affordable housing—wait, I have to stop just for a minute on affordable housing, Mr. Speaker, because we have built thousands of units—thousands of units—and we will build many more.

*(14:40)

The Leader of the Opposition, when in Cabinet the last time the Conservatives ruled in Manitoba, built not a single unit. And why is that, Mr. Speaker? Because there is a difference in the philosophies of our government and that of the Conservative

government. They believe in making the rich richer and hoping for a trickle-down effect to somehow get to those who did not have the same advantages that they had. William Blum explains it this way: The trickle-down theory, the principle that the poor, who must subsist on table scraps dropped by the rich, can best be served by giving the rich bigger meals.

So no matter how much they might hug an NDPer during elections, which we see a lot of, or, when they are not in government, which we see even more of, once they hold the reins of power, these policies disappear like the pixies at dawn. They do not bring in policies that help those in the working class. They do not believe in investments in child-care spaces. We believe in universally accessible early learning child care.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we have created thousands—I believe 14,000—child-care spaces. We have embedded the growth of child care right into the fact that every school we build new has child care right in it. And why did our government do that, and not the Conservative government when they were in power? Because there is a difference in philosophy.

We believe that women being able to work, should they wish to, is very good for the family and very good for the economy. Child-care units are key to the fight against poverty. We brought in Healthy Baby programs with over 100 sites around the province, 26 child-care coalitions, Prenatal Benefit, Bright Futures programs, major investments in FASD. We believe that government needs to be a partner in making life better for Manitobans.

We created Rent Assist, which is different than simply increasing EIA rates, because it is portable, Mr. Speaker. And when the person gets an entry-level job, the benefit goes with them. Those who are not on EIA are also eligible to apply for this benefit.

We believe, Mr. Speaker, in social inclusion. We don't just say things like, everyone benefits from a society that helps all individuals to participate and to prosper; we believe it. And our choices in our budgets and in our legislation backs up that belief and philosophy.

Our government has increased the minimum wage every year since we came into government, and businesses have continued to prosper here. In fact, Manitoba is the most affordable place to start a business in the entire midwest of North America, and has been for the past five years.

Why have we increased the minimum wage every year? It is about our philosophy. It is about our belief in the dignity that every person is owed. We do not believe that massive corporations should make billions of dollars while the people who work for them are unable to meet the basic costs of living. We believe that small business is the lifeblood of our economy. And we have removed entirely the small-business corporate tax. It is zero in Manitoba.

How many times did the Leader of the Opposition raise the minimum wage when he had the opportunity? That's what you actually have to look at, not what the words might be, in an election, not when the—what the words might be in here when they're complaining about us, but what actions did they actually take when they had the reins of power. And we know that. They froze the minimum wage seven times out of 11 years, Mr. Speaker.

We have kept Manitoba the most affordable place to live in the country for many years. That is not by accident, Mr. Speaker. We brought in legislation ensuring that our Crown corporations that provide heat, light and auto insurance are the most affordable in the country. In 2014, for example, Manitobans saved \$2,161 compared to the national average for utility rates. What did the Conservatives do when they were in? They sold MTS. We have paid higher rates ever since. And it cannot be undone. And why did that happen? It's because there is a core difference in philosophy.

Winnipeg is the most affordable place to live in the country. In 2014, over 50,000 senior homeowners had their school taxes rebated, and in 2015, the school tax rebate for seniors has doubled in this budget, from 235 to 470.

We want everyone in our province to be able to get a good education. We want to keep university costs and college costs and apprenticeships at a level that ensures anyone who wishes to will be able to receive post-secondary education. This does not help only the individual but all businesses and all of society because people who are better educated are also more likely to volunteer, to have less health concerns. Just—there are many, many benefits.

We have policies that prove that we believe that. Student loans are interest free in the province of Manitoba. Under our tuition rebate, anyone who has graduated after 2006 can receive 60 per cent of their tuition back on their taxes. We are creating dual credits in our high schools so our youth can begin

their post-secondary for free and discover their talents early.

Our investments in infrastructure, which have and will continue to create thousands of good jobs for Manitobans, has allowed Manitoba to prosper and become one of the top economic performers in our country. When we took over government, the costs of servicing debt in this province was 13.2 cents for every dollar. It is now 5.6 cents on every dollar. We have doubled the economy in Manitoba since being in government, and our debt-to-GDP ratio remains lower than under the Conservative government when last in office.

And we have assets, Mr. Speaker. We have put money into infrastructure and schools and hospitals, and these things are assets, just like your home. The idea that you would never borrow money as a government is purely ridiculous. How many people bought their home with cash, other than, perhaps, the Leader of the Opposition? Most of us borrowed money in order to do it. Most businesses borrow money to invest in their business, and that is good business. It is particularly good business to do it when the interest rates are particularly low, as they are now.

My father lived through the Great Depression of the '30s, and one of his biggest regrets was the fear that came to him during that time, having to pay the mortgage, having debt, having to pay it in the middle of a depression, and he said that stopped him from investing in the land around him his whole life. He did not want to borrow that money. And you know what? That was not good business, Mr. Speaker. It was not.

So we have done all these things while the federal government has balanced their budget on the backs of the provinces. And again, Mr. Speaker, this is a very different philosophy. We have kept Manitoba affordable, and we certainly did not do it on the backs of the municipalities. In fact, they have had record dollars and investments from our Province into our municipalities in Manitoba because we want all Manitobans to succeed.

I wish I had longer, Mr. Speaker, but I know I need to hand this over soon to someone else. I'd like to say just about our caucus, that we have a—*[interjection]* Yes, listen. Listen. We have a passionate number of people in our caucus. All of our people are passionate, absolutely passionate about what they do. And whether or not they might agree with each other all of the time is not at issue. I

can tell you what they do agree on, and it is the philosophy that every Manitoban deserves the chance to live their dream. Every Manitoban deserves the government to do everything they can to be helping them reach those dreams. And everyone on this side of the House, I think it's safe to say, can agree with that.

From March 2014 to March 2015, Manitoba had the strongest labour market performance in the country, ranking first in four key indicators. The labour force grew by 20,000. That's 3 per cent compared to 0.6 per cent. Total jobs rose by 3.1 per cent. You know what the national average was under, oh, a Tory government? It was 0.8 per cent. Private sector employment rose by 3 per cent versus the national average of 0.5. Full-time employment increased by 3.2 per cent versus the national average of 0.8 per cent.

* (14:50)

I am happy to note that Manitobans, Mr. Speaker, are also earning more under this government. Real average weekly earnings have increased by about 5 per cent and the minimum wage by 26 per cent since 2008. We want every Manitoban to benefit from our province economic growth, and we have put policies and programs in place to ensure that happens.

We on this side of the House all want to increase inclusion, provide pathways for people who face barriers to employment to get trained and join the middle class. We want our businesses to continue to prosper as they have over the past 15 years as never before, and while narrowing the gap between the 1 per cent and everyone else. And every one of us on this side of the House, just as the Finance Minister said, stand together on the side of families. We truly are on their side.

House Business

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, on House business?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker, on House business.

I—rising pursuant to rule 31(8), I am announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next sitting Tuesday morning will be put forward by the honourable member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway), and the title of the resolution is Support for Canadian Troops Serving Abroad.

Mr. Speaker: It's been announced that, pursuant to rule 31(8), that the private member's resolution to be considered next sitting Tuesday morning will be the one put forward by the honourable member for Elmwood, and the title of the resolution is supporting—*[interjection]*—Support for Canadian Troops Serving Abroad.

That's for the information of the House.

* * *

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): First of all, I would like to welcome the member for The Pas (Ms. Lathlin) to this House. It is always an honour to be in this Chamber and—as a sitting member and interested to watch her nomination and her—and the subsequent by-election happen after—it only took a year to call it, so I think she probably had a little bit of time to get ready.

But most of us have been through nominations and—contested nominations, and we realize how stressful that could be. But I'm—I—and the only advice I would offer the member, the new member for The Pas is: hang on to that coin. She may need it, deciding which faction, whether it's the A faction, the O faction or the S faction from the NDP caucus. It may help her to decide just where to hang her hat, so to speak. But, anyway, welcome to the member for The Pas.

Yesterday I had the opportunity to attend a citizenship ceremony just down the street here at the old CN station, and one of my constituents was getting her citizenship, Ravinder Dhulkoti—and I'll get the correct spelling for Hansard after—and there was 74 people, new Canadians yesterday that received their citizenship, 74 new Canadians from 19 different countries.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

And it's just such an amazing thing to watch as these new Canadians receive their citizenship from all over the world and their expectations now that they are—a number of them have been in Canada for a number of years, but now that they're here and have their Canadian citizenship and—but, as I was sitting there watching the ceremony, I couldn't help but think many of them have moved from other countries under less fortunate circumstances. Many of them moved from not such less fortunate, but have chosen to make Canada as their home and Canada—and they've made Manitoba their home—and I was thinking, well, we're debating a budget here that's

going to increase their taxes. They're—they've become—they have, as of yesterday, officially become those Manitobans who are now paying more and getting less out of this government, and I was thinking of all their expectations. They come here to create a better life and they will. These are terrific people that come and they will create a better life. But how much opportunity are they giving up due to the incompetence of this government, and we see that in this budget here.

And, you know, as you sit there and you watch this, I think of—I have family that lives in Alberta. I know—I'll bet pretty well everybody in here has family that's either in Saskatchewan or Alberta—how do we entice them to come back to Manitoba? And—*[interjection]* The—well, I know that the NDP have high hopes in Alberta, but we'll see after tonight.

But you—right now you can't entice them back on taxes alone, unless they want to pay more taxes, because here we are paying the highest taxes of any province west of Quebec, and that comes from—when you think back, you'll relate this back to the citizenship ceremony that I watched yesterday. Government members, in the last election in October 2011, went to doors, knocked on those doors and said to those people, we will not raise your taxes. That's not what those new Canadians yesterday would expect—we would expect of them to not tell a truth.

And that's what happened with these—with this government, the legacy of this government, the legacy of a government of lies, disrespect, poor performance, living on projections. Their only answer to everything is, well, we project this to get better. The problem is their projections have been so far off, they've been off just like their financial records, so we can't even go—can't even put any prudence on their projections.

The Premier (Mr. Selinger) will also have a legacy of a fractured caucus. We watched—there's nothing short of calling it than a gong show all winter, and we hear back from the—from citizens of Manitoba, we hear back from businesses of Manitoba how insecurity in government, non-confidence in government is not a way to build a province, not a way to build business. Businesses do not go where there is insecurity on their investment.

And we've heard this. We've heard this in our outreach as we've travelled the entire province listening to Manitobans, engaging with Manitobans, and what came through loud and clear was the need

to create—is to have respect, and for them to have—for the citizens of Manitoba to have some sense of believing what government actually will do what they say. There's a cynicism out there and it's—it is well founded these days with this government and it continues to be. It's a problem we have in Manitoba because nobody believes this government on anything they say.

They said they were not going to raise taxes—they said that to people in Manitoba. The Premier said that was nonsense to raise taxes; there's no way that they would do that. And they turned around and they broadened the PST—everything from haircuts to home insurance to disability insurance premiums, charging PST on people who pay a disability insurance or people who keep their home insured, you're now charging them the sales tax on them.

You include accountants' fees, fuel taxes, vehicle registration. Rural and northern Manitoba pays a disproportionate amount of those fuel taxes and vehicle registrations because we don't have public transit to pick us up and move us around.

And then, if that wasn't enough, a year later they came in with their 14 per cent increase in the PST, which is a real job killer. All you'll have to do—if you got out of Winnipeg and went out to some of the rural communities that live along Saskatchewan, you would hear that first hand. If you actually talk to them you would hear it. And I know that, you know, the member for Burrows (Ms. Wight) is obviously the next Finance Minister—what will that be, five or six? I'm—I've lose track of how many here, but their—their broken promise budget—it's their inability to ever balance a budget. Before it was '14-15, then it moved up a couple years. Now, it's, well, we think maybe it's 2018, but we're not going to engrave that in stone and, you know, it's just—we don't really—nobody believes them anymore when they talk about ever balancing a budget.

* (15:00)

In this budget alone, \$145 million in new fees. The NDP waste and mismanagement continues to threaten the front-line services in Manitoba. We heard that in question period today: mental health workers not being hired. Then the Health Minister stands up and blames the RHA. It's a good thing she had the RHA to blame. She probably would've turned to the federal government next or to the opposition; it's always somebody else's fault when they have problems within their own management—mismanagement.

But, despite the growth in tax revenue, despite the increases in the sales tax, the widening of the PST, the fees and regulation increases, they continue to run deficits and even borrow even more money, a \$500 million—or four—just short of \$500-million deficit this year in spite of that tax growth; \$500 million in increased taxes and they still run a deficit. They still borrow more money, another \$3 billion this year.

This Premier (Mr. Selinger) has a doubtful legacy. I don't know whether I would want it as a legacy, but that—apparently he does as having doubled the debt of Manitoba in his term as Premier, gone from 18 to 36 billion dollars in five years.

This is a government with a spending problem; it's not a revenue problem. They have more money coming in and they continue to have waste and mismanagement, but they're not willing to look for that waste and mismanagement. The burdensome red tape that we hear from Manitobans every day, the overregulation, this is their idea of how to run government. Big government needs to run everything, and look at the mess that they're creating. They're unwilling to join the New West Partnership to increase our efficiency and trade opportunities. Why wouldn't you join a trade agreement where we could expand our trade opportunities?

Mr. Acting Speaker, this government has, in spite of their record growth in revenues, their record growth in expenditures, we're still 10th in education, in literacy, math and science skills. We're 10th in health-care delivery, wait-time ambulance costs—wait times and ambulance costs. We are the bottom of the barrel in health-care delivery. CFS, the highest number of children in care in our history, and the minister's not even aware of what's happening in her department; and no answers to how to curb this. Ten years of provinces—promises to stop putting children in hotels and it still continues to this day.

It seems to be this government's legacy that their fundamental inability to contain costs, even their inability to listen to each other, apparently, is—seems to be lacking. It's no wonder that Moody's has issued a warning on our credit rating. When will our credit be downgraded, given the spin and borrowing practices of this government? Our credit rating is bound to drop because of this government's fiscal poor handling.

Our interest costs are \$900 million. Think of what \$900 million could do in terms of fixing roads and fixing health care, in helping our children to get

a proper education; that's \$900 million that's not for front-line services, not for education, not for infrastructure, and certainly not for a second outlet on Lake Manitoba; instead, it's going to pay the interest costs of the debt that this government continues to run up, the waste and mismanagement that's coming from a tired, arrogant and out-of-touch government.

This government is—in the budget speech, as Agriculture critic, I was looking to see any mention at all of agriculture in this budget and, well, there was one small paragraph, but it didn't say how they were closing GO offices across the province. What it didn't say is closing Manitoba Hydro offices across the province. We now have Manitoba Hydro employees driving at least a half to three-quarters of an hour just to get to the office where they have to turn around then and go out on a service call. The costs of this are horrendous.

This budget continued to renege on the farmland education tax rebate promises. Instead, they've placed a cap on it so that they—grabbing even more money off of the farm community across Manitoba. No promise at all about a second outlet on Lake Manitoba, which affects so much of—which had such a devastating effect on the cattle industry around Lake Manitoba. Instead, they continue to talk about studies and stalling on real changes to water management. It's the—this government is the obstacle to real job growth. They like to think of themselves as being the job creators, but they are very poor at doing that.

And then there's Manitoba Hydro, how they're driving it into the ground. It's interesting; I was speaking to a grade 6 class a week ago, and it's always interesting talking to school classes because I give a little description of the job I do and then I like to go into questions from the students. And there was a couple of questions, and pretty good questions. And then one young fellow at the back, he put up his hand—a little prompting from the teacher—and he says, well, I've got this question about a hydro line across some farmland. And of course I'm kind of waiting for him to come—a little—be more forthcoming. And I said, do you mean Bipole III? And he said, yes, yes. That's what he says—Bipole III.

So I went to the whiteboard—it's not a blackboard anymore in classes, it's a whiteboard—and I drew a map of Manitoba, drew in the two lakes, drew on where Jenpeg is approximately, where Winnipeg is, drew the bipoles I and II on. And I said, you know,

you would think if they're going to build a hydro line to connect the two, you'd just draw it straight down. Yes, I could see some kids nodding; yes, that makes sense. I said, no, this is what they're doing. And I drew in Bipole III as it wanders across Manitoba, across southern Manitoba, over towards Steinbach, around by Ste. Anne, and then it eventually wanders back right through the constituency of Dawson Trail. I know the member's very familiar with the route there although he refuses to talk to the landowners out there.

Anyway, I drew the line in and I lost control of the class. The kids jumped up and said, well, that's stupid. That's crazy. I drew the line. I drew the—and then when they—when I finally got control—*[interjection]* I know the minister from Kildonan is a little excited, a little touchy about this. But then when I finally got control of the class again, when they saw how ridiculous this line is, I said, well, don't worry, we're producing power for 14 cents per kilowatt hour and we're going to sell it to the US for 3 cents. Lost control of them again. Grade 6s are smarter than the NDP. Who knew that? Like, so I—you know what, I understand that when grade 6s are frustrated with this government, you can only imagine how frustrated their parents are as they pay their tax bills every day to a government that has no respect for them, that continues to spend money—spend everyone else's money, has no clue as to financial accountability.

Just going back to hydro rates—or Hydro, for a minute—they continue to raise the hydro rates faster than the cost of inflation. And I'm glad that the members like to repeat that it used to be the cheapest in the country because it's not anymore and it's certainly not going to be. But the people that you affect most by those hydro rate increases that you've done since you've come in to power, and what will—by hydro—Manitoba Hydro's own admission will go up something like 4 per cent per year every year for the next 20 years. The people that you affect the most are low-income Manitobans and rural and northern Manitobans. There's a lot of rural Manitoba, a lot of northern Manitoba that does not have access to natural gas.

* (1510)

All I know is that when Manitobans have less money because they have to pay their hydro bills because of poor management, this continues to affect low-income Manitobans the hardest. It continues to affect rural Manitobans and northern Manitobans the

hardest because they don't have an alternative energy source; they have to use hydro. And this government is using that as their—it's unfortunate how they continue to use Manitoba Hydro—mismanage Manitoba Hydro and not let the hydro—Manitoba Hydro work for all of Manitobas.

This government has a record of deceit and being untrustworthy. They run on fear. I only had to listen to the member from Burrows. Her presentation there, man, that was a story. If that's the history of Manitoba, no wonder our kids are getting such a poor education if that's what—the way that this government portrays history. They can't run on their record; we know that, that they cannot run on their record because their record is so poor. Instead, they're going to run on fear, and they'll continue with their poor management.

But I always—but I go back to thinking about those new Canadians or those people who became new Canadians yesterday with their citizenship and the potential that we do have in this country, that we could—we can do so much better in this country, and we will because we will—we have the ability to tell the truth, and that's really all we have to do. It's not about offering a handout. We need to—we will build a province where our young people will choose to stay in Manitoba, not leave Manitoba, because it's the best deal they've got. And it's about offering a hand up to Manitobans, not a handout, unlike this government pretends to do.

We will bring this province back from the brink of bankruptcy where this NDP is sending it, and we'll do that because all we have to do is tell the truth.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Rob Altemeyer): Recognizing the honourable Minister for Healthy Living and Seniors.

Hon. Deanne Crothers (Minister of Healthy Living and Seniors): I am especially pleased to be able to speak today to the recent budget speech presented by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar) and I'd like to thank him and those in his department who have worked on this budget, and I appreciate the time he spent listening to me and my colleagues as we shared with him the concerns of our constituents.

And while not everyone in this Chamber will appreciate every detail, there truly is something to benefit every Manitoban at any stage of life within this budget. Whether you are a first-time parent going back to work looking for quality child care,

have an adult child graduating from university looking for a job in Manitoba, or you are a family member who is working while simultaneously being a caregiver to elderly parents who need some extra support to stay in their home, this budget will benefit you. We understand the challenges that each of these stages of life present because as a collective group of people we've lived them.

Our focus is on finding ways to make the lives of Manitobans better, and we do this by building stronger services, creating more jobs and growing a healthy economy.

Now, I'd like to tell you about the kind of day I had yesterday. As I'm sure we all remember, yesterday was the kind of spectacular spring day that holds the promise of growth and warm days to come, that makes even the gloomiest of souls look up—well, unless you are from across the way, and then even the brightest of spring days can't seem to make a dent in your doom-and-gloom perspective. Poor souls, but I won't dwell on that because I want to share the snapshot that yesterday provided me of the good things to come in the year ahead, and let me tell you what a day it was.

I began the day by attending the 32nd Annual Spring Research Symposium for the Centre on Aging at the University of Manitoba. These folks were connecting research to real life experience, which is the kind of valuable information that leads to good policy and practical solutions. They were also devoting a session to Manitoba's Home Care program and discussing its impact on helping Manitobans age in place. And as stated in the budget speech, we have doubled the senior school tax rebate so that senior homeowners can now save up to \$1,570 off their property taxes; that means nearly 24,000 senior households that will no longer pay any school taxes at all this year.

It means people like my neighbour Fred, who is now in his 80s, will have more of a financial cushion if he needs it. When he decides he's had enough of cutting his lawn, and I'm embarrassed to say, occasionally mine, if I get it—let it go a little too long, he'll be able to have someone else take care of it so that it doesn't become a reason to have to leave his home before he actually wants to.

As well, the Primary Caregiver Tax Credit has been increased by 10 per cent, which will give thousands of caregivers, members of the sandwich generation, support of up to \$4,200 each. This will help my neighbour on Winchester, who has had her

elderly mom move in with her, an elderly mother who is still actively involved in her community, but needs the care and support of someone to be there at the start and end of the day.

The Centre on Aging in the U of M are great partners to the Department of Healthy Living and Seniors, and I'm extremely grateful and proud that this government recognizes the importance of strong partnerships such as these.

I'm thankful that we have an Education Minister that believes in increasing operating grants to educational institutions, like the U of M, by 2.5 per cent, when most other provinces have been cutting funding for colleges and universities.

Mr. Speaker—Mr. Deputy Speaker, that event was at 8:45 a.m. and it was a great way to start the day, but I had to keep moving, because by 9:30 I was expected at the Grace general hospital with the Minister of Health (Ms. Blady) for a sod-turning for the new MRI suite being built. This important addition to the services available at the Grace will provide an estimated 2,800 additional scans per year for Manitobans. This will help address wait times and provide another option for folks in the surrounding communities and beyond that will make getting an MRI easier.

In a community such as St. James, with a high percentage of seniors, this kind of access to such an important piece of equipment right at their local hospital is an immense benefit. And don't forget how much of a draw this equipment is to doctors and MRI technicians who we want to attract and keep in this province.

And our investments in health care, such as the Grace's MRI, is allowing us to not only continue to improve our health care, but make sure we keep attracting more doctors and health-care professionals to this province, as we are currently doing.

Now, at this point in the morning, it was 10:15, and I had to be at the intersection of St. James Street and Ness Avenue by 10:30 in order to make the next announcement that was taking place in my constituency. I drove down a rather bumpy Ness and turned into the parking lot, where Premier Selinger and the Minister of Municipal Government (Mr. Caldwell) were announcing an investment of nearly \$60 million to renew Winnipeg roads in 2015.

Now, I'm sure you know that St. James Street has been named one of the worst streets in the province. So it was with great enthusiasm that I met

my colleagues from Kirkfield Park and Assiniboia to share in the good news that St. James Street, along with Ness and Portage Avenue, would be experiencing renewal and improvements.

And we weren't in—we weren't alone in celebrating, though. No, no—the mayor of Winnipeg also joined us at this announcement and was particularly appreciative of the funds being provided to assist in the infrastructure improvements the City is hoping to complete.

And I'm appreciative to the City for identifying and scheduling these road repairs that have such a significant impact on not only safe travels through my community, but that also have created barriers to business owners when people are reluctant to travel along rough roads to go shopping. This is very good news for anyone that chooses to shop at Polo Park or the surrounding retailers. And it's very good news for retailers too.

This budget outlines how we will continue to provide record funding to municipalities, including the City of Winnipeg, by providing more than \$440 million to address communities' priorities, including roads and flood protection. And I know the members opposite like to grumble and growl whenever we talk about infrastructure, but the reality is we can see the impact that these investments make all around us—and they can too.

We see the impact in the improvements to our roads. We see the impact in the number of jobs created since our last budget—20,000—giving Manitoba the second lowest unemployment rate in the country. We see the impact that is had on our economy. Analysts at the Bank of Montreal forecast economic growth in Manitoba will be among the strongest in the country this year. And, while they can and frequently do find a reason to dismiss our 'gooden'—good news stories, it is much harder for members opposite to be cynical Cindys when we are someone else's good news story, such as the Conference Board of Canada, which forecasts that our economic growth will actually lead the country in 2015 and 2016 combined.

*(15:20)

Yesterday was, indeed, a busy day. Who could imagine squeezing so many good news stories into one morning? I didn't think it was possible. But I still had one more to go. I needed to get downtown to the Hydro building for an announcement at noon. It was the launch of Mental Health Week in Manitoba, and

I went to share the province's proclamation with the Canadian Mental Health Association and other partners at the event.

And I was so glad to be joined by the Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities (Ms. Wight) who announced the youth mental health strategy brought forward by the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet. This strategy was developed with schools and health-care professionals to promote mental health, prevent mental health illnesses and strengthen available resources. Two million dollars is being invested into better supporting our children and providing resources for those who work with children and can identify when a child they teach or interact with is struggling and in need of some help. The earlier we can identify these kinds of issues, the sooner we are able to provide options that lead to relief and improved mental health.

And we are also going to be continuing our commitment to reduce the number of smokers in the province by focusing on youth. With a new investment of \$2 million to prevent tobacco use, we look forward to partnering with the Canadian Cancer Society to make sure this new investment has the best possible impact. This is important to me not only as the Minister of Healthy Living and Seniors, but also as a parent.

We are a government that will continue to work to improve the quality of life for Manitobans despite challenging circumstances and an uncertain financial climate nationally. We will continue to put Manitobans first because we are on their side.

By the time I was finished the fourth event it was only 1 o'clock in the afternoon, four events, all representative of the priorities of this government with impacts that my constituents can feel directly in their community and at a provincial level. It was quite the morning. It looked a bit daunting in the schedule, but I discovered as I moved through the morning that I was seeing the immediate impact that our budget decisions were having on my community and others in the province. The commitment we have on this side of the House to continue to work at improving the quality of life for all Manitobans gave me more energy at each stop.

I came back from that last announcement just in time for question period. It was a stark contrast to go from seeing intention become action at each event I had attended, then find myself sitting in the Chamber with the members opposite while they insisted we could only be wrong about absolutely everything.

I have talked openly before about being raised in a conservative household and I have never viewed that as a negative thing. I've also talked about the love I have for my parents and my appreciation to them for encouraging me by their example to respectfully view other people's opinions and political perspectives without malice. Trust me, that has come in handy in this building—and I don't think the word conservative is a bad one.

You know there are some really good c-words like consultation, collaboration, consideration, and the double-whammy, constructive criticism, which is vital for any meaningful government and something that the members opposite should be encouraged to provide more of. These are great c-words, and while not always easy to manage, almost always lead to good things. And then there are some c-words that leave one feeling less than inspired. You know what I'm talking about; we see it played out in the Chamber every time we have QP. I'm talking about words like cynicism, constant condemnation and downright crotchety, cantankerous behaviour.

It is absolutely correct, Mr. Speaker—Mr. Deputy Speaker, excuse me—to raise an issue and highlight it to the government of the day, because as elected officials they feel it must be addressed for the sake of their constituents and other likeminded Manitobans. It is one thing to point to an issue and criticize, but it is another entirely to criticize, speak on behalf of their constituents, and yet vote against the very improvement they'd tell us we need to make. There is only one word for that, and if the sole purpose of the members opposite is to be contrarians, they are really are not serving their constituents or the inherent good in a constructive, collaborative and meaningful democratic process that they could be.

In my time here, I have experienced just how difficult it is to make the best decisions possible when faced with less than ideal circumstances, and I've discovered how to do as much good as possible in spite of those challenges. And whether other political parties or media outlets take the time to get to the truth of a situation or not, the only gauge at the end of the day in this job is how many people did I help.

I believe that Budget 2015 will help Manitobans. I believe it is a budget that reflects co-operation and collaboration between community organizations and this government to best serve Manitobans. I believe it is a constructive commitment to the future of this province and its young people and highlights our

concern for the quality of life of our seniors. This is a budget that shows we care about the challenges and the celebrations of Manitobans. This is a budget that shows we are on their side.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Rob Altemeyer): Recognize the member for Brandon West.

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): I'm pleased to rise today to speak to the amendment to the budget presented by the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Pallister).

And prior to starting out I would like, though, to welcome everyone back and thank the Public Accounts clerk and staff and the pages, and the Auditor General and all of our members for a lot of good work that was done while we were recessed there. There's a lot of work that has been happening and I'm—as I'm sure you probably know, we are hosting the national meetings here in Manitoba. And I would encourage all members to attend, and I'm sure we'll see a number of you out there. I really do have to commend the Auditor General's department and our clerks and staff that have been working to organize that conference, and there's been a lot of pressure on how to make everything work.

So we're moving ahead here on—and looking at what we can do on this budget, and the comments that I have heard loud and clear from people after it was presented last week is that obviously the government is going in the wrong direction. We see this time and again, and they had promised and promised and promised what they were going to do, when they were going to hit some targets, when they were going to reduce the deficit, when they were going to balance the budget, when they were going to ensure that service would—services would be delivered to Manitobans, and we've found time and again that they have failed in all those regards.

Obviously, the deficit targets, the debt target, the balancing of the budget, because it was not apparently written in stone, is irrelevant to this government. And constantly we fear from—hear from Manitobans that services are deteriorating throughout Manitoba, especially in the health-care sector, and they're having trouble accessing these services from this government. So Manitobans continue to pay much, much more as we saw in the previous budgets, tax increases across the board and again in this one, and obviously declining services throughout

Manitoba—not just in Winnipeg but the rest of the province as well.

So, very sad to watch the lack of progress—in fact, the steps back that this government has taken in this budget. You know, I watched things that might come to fore here. We saw—I was interested when the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar) commented on the federal budget, and the comments that he thought were pertinent was he's disappointed that the federal government didn't invest more in infrastructure. I thought that was particularly rich coming from a government that has underfunded infrastructure by over \$2.2 billion since this Premier (Mr. Selinger) has taken office particularly, and, you know, disappointments across the board. And we see those infrastructure failures throughout the province as we try to drive on Manitoba's highways and we see the deterioration. We hear from individuals across the board.

And, again, we hear from the minister that, well, the drop in oil prices is going to have an impact on Manitoba's economy. Well—but other people are saying a positive impact, because the Minister of Infrastructure has made several announcements multiple times, as has the Premier; some of them may actually happen this year and we might actually get some paving done. And it seems to me that a component of asphalt may be oil. I do believe, talking to my many friends in the industry, that is a large component of asphalt, so there is a possibility for opportunities there for Manitoba for perhaps some savings, although I think the minister probably priced the asphalt at last year's oil price in—when he issued the tenders, maybe not this year's oil price but there may be some savings moving forward, and I'm sure this government will spend them just as quickly because obviously the other thing that we saw in the federal budget—and it was—there were some tax reductions for Canadians and provinces, especially Manitoba, immediately jumped to fill that gap to take that—those tax reductions away from Canadians, in particular, Manitobans.

In fact, the Minister of Finance was dismayed that there would be an opportunity for Manitobans to put more money into a TFSA, and that's money that Manitobans have already paid tax on, and he was disappointed that he wouldn't get a chance to tax it a second time, that Manitobans might actually get to keep some of that money. So, very disappointing to the Minister of Finance.

* (15:30)

And, you know, I'm interested, though, that he is—his claim to fame for his ability to be Finance Minister is because he reads *The Economist*. And, you know, I have seen him having it in committee and he picks it up from time to time, and, well, you know what? I've read *A Brief History of Time* by Stephen Hawking, but because I don't have the adequate training in the field, I'm not going to debate Dr. Hawking in terms of the origins of the universe. And reading *The Economist* may not exactly give you all the authority and reliability on how to move forward in this particular world.

So, you know, I look at my copy of *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* by John Maynard Keynes, and this government has taken some information, some pages out of that book that was first published in 1936 and they've seem to be on the deficit-spending side of the ledger there, and that is, indeed, something that was theorized by Keynes in the Keynesian theory. And obviously we look at the effect that has on economies across the world, and there's been plenty of research available on this. Indeed, one of the pieces of research, indeed, that Keynes did discuss early on was the theory of crowding out of private expenditure by government overexpenditure, governor—government debt and government deficit and the government going to the markets and, indeed, crowding out the ability of the private sector to, indeed, be effective and to borrow in that market. And that is indeed what I believe we are seeing in Manitoba here with the government.

I would hazard a guess from what we've heard in the past we'll have to go to market to borrow new money that they have proposed in this budget. And we know, from what they talked about in Public Accounts that they had not gone to the market. They did not know what the effect would have been of the caution from the bond rating agencies last year. We—they did anticipate that there was a degrade in the ability of the Ontario government to go to market and, in fact, had pay—had to pay increased interest to achieve their financing for a similar caution from the bond rating agencies.

So there is the expectation that when this government goes to market to finance their debt that we will see an increased 'increst'—interest cost, and we're already at a formidable interest cost for Manitobans, well over \$800 million, and that is money that is not available to Manitobans. That's money that is not available to fund front-line services, and obviously we're seeing the deterioration daily of those front-line services. Indeed, I've seen

recently that Saskatchewan has reduced their debt considerably and their deficits and I believe has somewhere around \$1 million more per day to invest in front-line services than Manitoba has because of that debt reduction alone.

The opportunity lost here in Manitoba is quite startling, is what we've seen, because as you look at the crowding out, and I have a paper here by Roger Spencer and William Yohe, The "Crowding Out" of Private Expenditures by Fiscal Policy Actions, and they talk about the crowding out that they see. There's opportunities there for income tax reductions to have a positive impact on that and reduce the impact that governments might have on the private sector but, of course, our government here, the NDP government, has gone the opposite way with income tax—with sorry, not income tax increases, but tax increases across the board for the past several years and, indeed, spending and borrowing increase—well, not spending increases in all the departments.

I was really surprised when I went through the budget where we saw reductions in spending. I did listen to the Finance Minister early on. He stated, I believe, somewhere in his documents, that this was a budget about infrastructure and this is—was a budget about education and this was a budget about jobs and the economy, and when I look through the budget, that's where the spending reductions are. So, how is this a budget about those areas when you've reduced spending? Maybe the government thinks those aren't necessary areas of the economy anymore. And, you know, when I go back to—there was something happened a little while ago, it was some kind of leadership campaign across the way and there was a lot of fit and furor about it. *[interjection]*

Is it still going on? Well, I guess it is. There's, you know, people that don't quite seem to know what's going on over there. But I listened to what the possible candidates had to say, and for the past couple of years there's been—they've been talking about the importance of infrastructure to Manitoba, the importance to the economy, the importance of upgrading infrastructure, and I think there's pretty much agreement across the board from municipalities that there is a dramatic infrastructure deficit caused by this government and it's time to start reducing that deficit.

But I did not hear any one of those three—I believe there was three candidates, wasn't something like that that ran—three candidates that ran for the NDP leadership, not one ever—ever—mentioned the

word infrastructure. So apparently, it's no longer important to the NDP. That's old news. We don't need to worry about that according to the NDP. Infrastructure is not important now. They've moved on to other things, and we'll see, maybe they'll figure out actually what that next step might be and they'll figure—will they figure it out eventually? I don't know. We're not quite sure where they're going to go with all this.

So, you know, I kind of wondered when I listened to the Finance Minister there criticizing the federal government for allowing Canadians and Manitobans to put more money into their TFSA's to allow for changes to retirement income funds. I wondered if the wealthy Cabinet ministers along—the way are going to protest that change. If they're going to not put their excess money that we anticipate they have—as they're all wealthy Cabinet ministers, well above the average income for Manitobans—if they're going to protest that tax reduction and they're not going to put the maximum into their TFAs—TFSA's. So they have the opportunity to put their money where their mouth is and, indeed, they could keep that money out and pay more tax on it and then they can support their own government in that way. But that—they have that opportunity. So I'd be interested to know if they're going to let that go or, indeed, they would take advantage of the income sharing that the federal government has put in their budgets and reduce their tax burden as well. So as wealthy Manitobans, as wealthy Manitoban Cabinet ministers, I'm interested to know what they do with their personal income there.

Because, you know, I've seen a lot of ribbon cuttings here lately with ministers now that the by-election is over—and congratulations to our new member of the Legislative Assembly. I admire anybody that runs for the Legislature or any public office. It is, indeed, a challenge, and welcome her here.

And so now that the by-election is over, the announcements have started dramatically increasing. And so, you know, I did see last Friday, I was in the House here listening to the speeches and then I—after the House recessed I knew that the Finance Minister was going to be in to Brandon. So I drove to Brandon to see if I could catch the end of his presentation there and then—but they were all done by the time I got there. You know, they'd—I met them coming out of the building. So, you know, met them, talked to them.

And then I knew that my friend Larry Maguire, the MP for Brandon-Souris, was in Brandon, and he was going to be making some federal announcements to another good friend of mine, Dave Cumming at Zenith Paving. So I knew that was happening, so I drove over to talk to Dave and to see what was going on there, and Minister Pierre Poilievre showed up and they announced a funding to Zenith Paving of \$11,000 from the federal government to enhance the HR training and development for safety.

But, you know, I was really quite shocked. We had—so we had the local MP, the federal minister responsible for the program announcing federal dollars, and then three provincial Cabinet ministers showed up. I thought that was a little odd, you know. So all of a sudden we have three Cabinet ministers showing up for an announcement that they're not contributing any money whatsoever for. Welcome to Brandon. I appreciate you being in Brandon. It was a little bit of overkill for an \$11,000 federal announcement, I thought, though. Just, you know—*[interjection]* Yes, attracted to ribbon cutting. It's those small, sparkly, flashing things apparently, they were there. *[interjection]* Small baubles, yes.

So, anyway, it's quite startling to watch and, you know, I did see another announcement in Brandon. I was invited by several friends to Brandon University because they know that I have been long involved in mentoring and in entrepreneurship in Brandon and in Manitoba and would be interested in many programs. So there was a—again, a federal program, Futurpreneur, that the Province is a part of, and they were having an announcement at Brandon University. So I was invited by my friends to come and attend, and there were several there that are entrepreneurs and continue to invest in the Manitoba economy.

* (15:40)

And I—again, I saw a couple of provincial Cabinet ministers there, neither of whom, as far as I know, have taken one dime of their government-funded income to invest in entrepreneurship in Manitoba like I have. I have invested in entrepreneurs in Manitoba. I have supported entrepreneurs. We have developed businesses and we continue to employ Manitobans and create employment in the private sector, unlike either of these ministers that pretended to know about entrepreneurship. But it was all about the tweet. It was, can't we do a selfie, how quickly can we do a selfie, how quickly can we tweet that out.

So I am encouraged that they at least know the word entrepreneur. I am a little concerned about their taxation plan for those particular entrepreneurs, but I am, however, encouraged that at least they did make the step of being out at that announcement and learning a bit more about entrepreneurship, even though the only way to really learn about it is to take your money and invest it and see how it works out, and work at it and employ other people and generate wealth for them and generate wealth for yourself and create jobs in this economy, as difficult it is to create jobs and use your income to reinvest in that business, because this government seems to feel constantly that Manitobans' income belongs to the NDP government as opposed to the individuals themselves. They constantly want more and more and more of individual Manitobans' incomes.

And then they talk about spending, even though their spending seems to be coming at the cost of the future of Manitoba as we increased our deficits beyond all possible plans, we increase our debt beyond astounding levels that were inconceivable as close as recently, when the—this Premier (Mr. Selinger) took office, has doubled the debt, I believe, since he started.

So, obviously, the plan is to make announcements of where your targets are going to be, ignore those announcements, borrow more money, pretend to spend more money in areas that may be of interest to Manitobans, but we'll put out the budget and we have the plan in that budget apparently but then we don't follow the plan. I mean, if we followed the plan, well, there wouldn't be \$2.2 billion that was not spent on infrastructure in the past few years. We would have an infrastructure plan that would have been put in place and followed, and that money would have been spent on our roads, and, indeed, I'm sure that our roads would be the better for it.

But, unfortunately, that's not the case in Manitoba. We still have, I believe, something like 83 bridges—the minister will correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe the number was 83 bridges that were damaged and destroyed in the 2011 flood and many of those are still yet to be repaired—*[interjection]* Oh, one or two may have been repaired? Okay, well, you can't—you know, I know he'll come up with some other ideas and words that may—he may put on the record.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

But I'm struck by the words of the Premier prior to the last election when we talked about what were

the promises that people were going to make, and I believe not only the Premier (Mr. Selinger) went to every door that he went to and made this promise, but every candidate for the NDP also went to the doors and made the promise that they would not raise taxes, they would not raise the PST. And, indeed, I believe the very notion, as was commented on, the very notion of raising taxes was—there was a word there—was ridiculous, that he said. I believe he said it was nonsense. That was the word, yes, thank you, nonsense. He thought it was nonsense that the NDP government would raise taxes.

And, of course, we saw again that they were caught in—what?—yet another lie. And we move along, they expand the PST, they raise the PST, they take in ever more money above anything they possibly estimated, and yet we see continued deficits in our infrastructure, that the roads continue to deteriorate and the promises continue to be failures because they also promised, I believe, that they were going to spend \$2 from every dollar on—from the gas tax would be—from every dollar raised from the gas tax they would spend \$2 on infrastructure, and, again, we saw that that didn't come to fruition. That didn't happen in Manitoba. Not one dime of that money was spent, but it was—it has gone elsewhere.

And then, I believe, there was another promise when they raised the vehicle registration fee into a level that we've seen recently here, astounding levels, again, and every nickel, every penny, every dime of that vehicle registration fee was going to go to fund infrastructure. And, again, we saw that that promise was broken and did not happen in Manitoba.

So, again, then we saw, well, we're going to broaden the PST. We're going to use, you know, some of that money, most of that money maybe, I think, for infrastructure. Oh, but maybe not infrastructure, might go somewhere else. Because now they're hedging their bets because they're realizing that they can't fulfill their provinces—promises time and time again.

And then we get to the PST in—I don't know how many places I saw that the PST increase was going to go. I know at one time it was 100 per cent committed to infrastructure. Every nickel, every dime, every dollar of the PST increase annually was going to infrastructure, core infrastructure. But then I think it was also going to flood relief. There was another promise—oh, and then that didn't quite happen, and then, oh yes, schools and hospitals was another one, because sometimes the NDP get

confused on infrastructure and superstructure and they—they're not sure which is what, if it's above ground, below ground, in ground, a bridge. You know, they're not quite sure so then they invent the word the core infrastructure, and they have to define that time and time again, and that definition seems to change.

Mr. Speaker, so, again, we see promises that are broken and, you know, again we saw that they were going to balance the budget. They had movable dates, kind of like their—our fixed election date became a movable fixed election date under this government. So their budget promises, their deficit reductions, their debt reductions, their balanced budgets are again movable promises. And even now they're hedging their bets and saying, well, you know, we'll—we're not really sure if it's going to be that date and it may not happen. We may—well, may, may, may; there's lots of promises that have been broken, and it's quite sad to watch because Manitobans, I believe, want to believe in their government. They want to believe what the government says, but unfortunately this NDP government has proven time and time again that they can't be trusted.

What they can be trusted to do is take more money from Manitobans in tax increases and reduce the services that those Manitobans depend on. That is indeed something that this government can be trusted to do, because we have seen that time and time again. And, if you've ever waited in an emergency room, Mr. Speaker, you are well aware of the reductions in services that has happened under this NDP government, indeed, under this Premier most often.

So those are things that we see are very sad to watch and, I guess, will continue under this government because their plan seems to change pretty much daily. And we'll be interested to hear, you know, that we've got a—perhaps a bit of a plan in this budget. But, again, it's not really trustworthy where this budget's going to go.

They haven't hit their deficit targets for—I don't know—the last number of years, and I don't imagine they're going to be able to hit this one or even come close, Mr. Speaker.

So quite sad to watch the direction that this government is—the path that they've taken Manitoba down, because I truly do believe that Manitoba has some of the greatest opportunities in Canada, if not the world, and we are underserving Manitobans with

this NDP government. We have some opportunities in the North with lots of mining opportunity. We have some opportunities in the southwest, of course, with the oil patch or in agriculture, but, again, this government continues to ignore them and it seems to treat them as another world that doesn't exist. Opportunities for manufacturing, of course, Winnipeg has some great opportunities there. Transport: we are the centre of the continent, Mr. Speaker, and I look at where Manitoba could be if there was a government that had a plan. But, unfortunately, with the failed plans—well, I can't even call them plans—with the failures and continued failures of this NDP government, failures to live up to anything they say in their budget, we are damaging Manitoba and we are damaging Manitobans' opportunities.

So those opportunities do exist, and I think we can look to change some of them. We can create more opportunities and work with those entrepreneurs that the ministers did go and meet. And I hope they were thrilled to meet those entrepreneurs, somebody that actually puts their investment on the line every day and hires staff and hires and creates employment and creates wealth for themselves, creates wealth for their employees. Those are the ones that we need to celebrate in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker.

* (15:50)

And then we have the civil service to support that opportunity to make it easier for Manitobans to make a living here as opposed to create barriers because we have some fabulous civil servants. We have some fabulous teachers, doctors and nurses throughout Manitoba that just want to do their job well, but even they are frustrated by the barriers put up by this government. And those people are also at risk for, of course, these increases—tax increases, and their children are at risk for the debt and deficit that this government continues to foist upon Manitobans.

So I'm sure there's many others that want to speak, Mr. Speaker, so I'll leave it at that and we'll—sure we'll have some other words later.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Thomas Nevakshonoff (Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship): It is my pleasure today to rise to address the budget speech, and I would like to begin my paying tribute to the new Minister of Finance, the member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar), for bringing this document forward,

for bringing our whole province forward, as a matter of fact. With this budget we will continue onward and upward. Our growth, reducing our debt-to-equity ratio, for instance—all of these good moves orchestrated by his very able and capable hands.

I would also like to begin by extending my gratitude to our Premier (Mr. Selinger) for showing his faith in me and offering me the opportunity to serve as the Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship. He's gone through some difficult times of late, I have to say, but he has shown himself to be a true leader today, and he's reached out with great sincerity to his entire caucus—successfully, I might add—and we are a united team, all moving forward toward our soon-to-be victory in the coming election this time next spring.

This position is something that I have dreamed of for many years. Just with—I wish my old father could still be alive to see this. He was—he wanted to—actually sought the nomination himself back in 1969, and it was only because he went up against the great Bill Uruski, I think, that he was unsuccessful in achieving that. But—and he died just a year before I was actually elected. So it's too bad because he lived and breathed politics, so I will try and do him proud.

My father—a lot of what I learned about conservation issues, about natural resource issues, I have to attribute to my father. He showed great wisdom. When we were still young boys—seven, eight years old—my brother and myself, he bought a fishing lodge up in northern Manitoba and that's where I started to really learn about the outdoors, how to operate the boats. I was guiding when I was 11, 12 years old, already, for lake trout, which is not an easy thing; we're not just casting for jacks, we're anchoring at 100 feet of water on a big lake. So Dad never held us back. In fact, it was the opposite with him. And then, of course, into the bush as well, cutting logs and hauling them off the shorelines with the boat and into the mill, getting them sawn up—all of these things were things Dad did to train us, to teach us about the outdoors. So I appreciate very much his contribution.

When we built this fishing lodge, I recall—this was up on a steep hill, you have to—this was in the Precambrian Shield—and we rebuilt a number of cottages, and I literally carried every one of those cottages up the hill on my back. To build the strength was his objective. And after we got all these cottages built, then he bought a tractor so we could haul the

American suitcases up the hill. But that was part of his plan, right? He wanted to strengthen us, which he did, and following on that he sent us off into the workforce. I remember when I left high school, shortly after that he bought us a truck, my brother and I, and said, literally, go west, young men. And we went to the Alberta oil fields. I spent almost 20 years drilling for oil and got a really good understanding of heavy industry and how it interacts with the environment, which is now a part of my portfolio.

Believe me, back in 1979, practices in the oil patch were pretty lax, eh? Like, we would just dig a big hole in the ground and all the effluent from the rig would just go off into this big hole, and at the end of the—well, with the bulldozer we would just push the earth back in. When I left the oil patch in—when was it, 1997, just shortly before I was elected here—it was a completely different scenario. We were quite environmentally conscience at that point. Drilling for oil is always, you know, a dirty business, but you can manage it, you can control it. So I understand the interaction between industry and the environment, and I hope that I can take that experience with me going forward.

I mentioned the fishing side of things. Did I mention I'm a master angler several times over, mainly the trout.

An Honourable Member: How big?

Mr. Nevakshonoff: Well, not the biggest of lake trout. Although our lake did hold the world record for lake trout for almost 50 years, incidentally, caught by a woman I might add, back in 1930 using the steel lines. And if anybody—any of you have had the opportunity to fish using the steel lines, not an easy thing to bring a 63-pound lake trout in, literally two to three hundred lines of—200 yards of steel line out is an incredible feat, believe me.

On the land I'm many years hunting, whitetail is my preference. I just sent my application in for the elk draw just this very week, as a matter of fact. So, if you don't see me for a few days come late September, that might be reason why. If I get drawn, and I'm not going to exercise any influence in that regard, I assure you, much as I would like to. Getting drawn is not as easy and it's not easy these days because our wildlife populations, some of them are in jeopardy. We're all aware of the situation with the moose population, for instance, for a number of reasons: the spread of disease, brainworm, wood ticks have a severe impact on moose. You know,

there's the use by all consumers as well. A great many factors come into play there. So part of my responsibilities as minister of this department now will be to try and manage those game populations, try and bring them back, and if I don't get drawn, then I totally understand that. Not that I'm a great elk hunter anyways but—and this will be with the rifle this time. I used to do it with the bow and arrow, but I don't have the knees for that any more quite frankly. That entails a lot of walking, you know. Typically, you walk 10 to 15 miles a day when you're elk hunting, and that's not walking down a sidewalk. It's through the slash and the swamp. The elk know exactly what's happening and they go through the absolute worst terrain, believe me, quite deliberately, which makes it that much more difficult, that much more challenging.

And later on in life, in fact, after I was elected, as a matter of fact, my wife and I, we relocated back to the town where I was raised initially, Poplarfield, Manitoba. We call it king buck country in Poplarfield. Please come out. We've got the big king buck statue that is need of a paint job I have to admit, but we're working on that. *[interjection]* One of my colleagues is asking me about one of my ancestors or one of my relatives.

Let me get back on track here and talk a little bit more about the department. I was going to talk a little bit about my time as a farmer in Poplarfield, also very relevant experience, I might add, for this particular portfolio. The interaction between wildlife and the farming community is something that I've been aware of for years not just as a small farmer myself, I'm not a big Tory-style farmer. I'm just a little one-quarter section farmer with maybe 100 head of sheep.

* (16:00)

One of the members opposite, I think, referred to me as Old MacDonald last year in one of his speeches which—*[interjection]* You know, I'm no uncle. I won't mention any names there, but it is important to have this perspective, though, in this department to understand the needs of the agricultural community, how to deal with problem wildlife and so forth.

Water management—a big part of this department, obviously, and if anybody understands drainage, I think it's me, because virtually half the casework that I have done over the years was related to water management, drainage in particular. And it's not just drainage, it's water management, because

just draining the land is no solution. You know that old saying, drain, drain, drain, put in the crops and pray for rain? Well, that's really not sustainable management. We have to think more in terms of storage, in terms of staged release, in terms of restoring some of our aquifers and our wetlands. So it's a multi-faceted approach, I have to say.

Some of the things that this budget makes reference to, our investment in parks—and I see a—right at the top of my list I see a \$5-million investment over two years at Birds Hill lake and beach expansion. Well, what a coincidence that is for me, personally, because one of my ancestors was named Bird, as a matter of fact. His name was James Curtis Bird. He was the chief factor for the Hudson's Bay Company, worked out of Lower Fort Garry. He was the acting governor of Assiniboia for a couple of years until they sent somebody royal to take this position, because you had to be a member of royalty to hold these positions back then. And it was his son, Curtis James Bird—Dr. Bird was his name—was a Speaker in this very Legislature. First Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, he was the Speaker. As a matter of fact, he was a member of the Legislative Assembly of Assiniboia. He was a part of that, as well. You recall Louis Riel, he had 12 First Nations— or Metis people; there were 12 white people—just to show his mindset at that time. It wasn't just about his ethnic group; he truly also wanted a united government.

Coincidentally, my great-great-great-grandfather was also a member of that Legislative Assembly. His name was Frederick Adolphus Bird. So Birds Hill park is actually our original homestead. That's where Dr. Bird established himself. Not that I'm going to be making any land claims or anything like that; I'm quite content to leave it in the hands of the people of Manitoba, but noteworthy nonetheless.

I see I have a few minutes left here. We're doing a number of other treatments across our parks. Parks serve the people of Manitoba well. This is something that we've recognized—you know, new sewage lagoons, lift stations at Spruce Woods Provincial Park, water treatment plant upgrades, and so on and so forth. So we've put a lot of emphasis in this department on the development of our parks.

We've dedicated \$1 million toward climate change, which is something that matters greatly to all Manitobans, at least—well, I don't know so much about members opposite. I think it's climate what, I think that's their approach to things. But, if there

were any doubting Thomases in this Chamber, I am not one of them, having been the member here that represented the Interlake, one of the most traumatically impacted constituencies in the flood of 2011.

This was truly the flood of the millennium. There was nothing to compare to it in modern Manitoba history, as far as I am concerned. And it is still a great challenge to us, many of the people still evacuated. And, as I said at the beginning of my last election, at the beginning of the term, I said that I would dedicate my time wholly, fully, to resolving these issues. And it's been a difficult process with the various different levels of government but, you know, I thank our Premier (Mr. Selinger) for the \$100-million commitment that he put on the table in order to facilitate their return, and that process is coming close to being a reality now.

Another thing, of course, this government committed to address the issue of climate change and the catastrophic flooding that we are experiencing now, of course, is the commitment to flood proofing—and in my perspective, it's particularly around Lake Manitoba. I represent nine First Nations communities in my constituency. Of those nine, six of them were directly impacted by the flood of 2011, a great many of them continuing on to this very day, a number of the ranchers in that area as well.

And, again, I would like to acknowledge the vision of this government in going above and beyond just standard disaster financial assistance, which was as far as the feds ever went and still have not budged off of that. In fact, they haven't even followed through on that totally, as far as I'm concerned, because when you look at the emergency outlet, another \$100-million figure—you know, it seems \$100 million sticks in my mind today. I recall back in 2004, the BSE crisis. As I recall, when the federal government basically left Manitoba ranchers twisting in the wind, this government under Premier Gary Doer put \$100 million on the table at that time to, you know, give low-interest loans to the farmers that saved the cattle sector in my particular constituency. I know that the—and the impact of the drought at that time, which is another manifestation of climate change. So, you know, we're totally aware of climate change and as a government have a proven track record of stepping up to the plate when the needs of our people are there.

Other things, I see we're fully funding conservation officer positions, and I fully intend to

engage with our conservation officers—and I'd better, because my brother-in-law was a conservation officer. His name was Jack Kowalchuk. I know there's a few people, I know the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko) knows Jack Kowalchuk well. He and I are married to sisters, actually, and it was Jack Kowalchuk that got me involved in politics. He was the guy that, you know, the—there was a change in the Interlake. He was the guy that brought me forward, introduced me to people and set me off on the path to becoming an MLA, to becoming the Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship today. Thank you, Jack Kowalchuk. That's what I'd like on the record here today. So—[interjection]—and he's still active. He may be retired, but you will never put Jack down. I know the member opposite would agree with me. He's—regardless of your political stripe, Jack will engage you and will engage you fully and will not disengage until he's got his pound of flesh. So a very inspiring man, to say the least.

You know, our investments to the Office of Drinking Water, something that—just a basic, fundamental need like that, following the example of how not to do it in Walkerton. You know, our government stepped up to the plate. You know, we've got our challenges, obviously, but I think I'd read somewhere that, you know, almost 100 per cent, 99 per cent of our population have access to clean water. So, you know, you have to look at the bright side, but we will not lose sight of the fact that, you know, there are many Manitobans out there in need. We will do all that we can to address their needs as well.

Conservation districts, something else we're looking at seriously in terms of funding. I know some challenges on that front over the years. But I would like to just acknowledge another great New Democrat, the Right Honourable Ed Schreyer, who actually created the Conservation Districts program back in 1974, I believe it was, and we have added to this program. I think there were nine conservation districts when I was elected. We've more than doubled that number in I—in our term in office, and we will continue to work with them.

* (16:10)

Conservation districts are a critical venue where you get local people involved in the decision-making process, and even more importantly, you engage the municipal governments as well. These are the people that are the closest to the land. They're the closest to the people. They have the most intimate

understanding of the lay of the land of these issues. So I want to acknowledge all of those people, the citizens, but municipal councillors in particular for playing this critical role, and they do it for very little financial recompense, I might add. As well, it's a labour of love for them, I'm—think it's safe to say. So, you know, their efforts are very much appreciated.

We've got some challenges going forward—zebra mussels is something that's important. I want to acknowledge my predecessor, who is now our Minister of Justice (Mr. Mackintosh), for doing an extraordinary job in his time in this office and the reaction to zebra mussels, I think, is a case in point.

So, Mr. Speaker, I know that other members want to speak. I'm very happy that I was given this opportunity, but 21 minutes is long enough. Let's have some more speeches here.

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen, and onward and upward.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): It's my pleasure to put some words on the record with regard to the budget for 2015.

Again, there was really nothing that surprises me with regard to the government's decision in ensuring that we remain in a very financially fragile situation with regard to the deficit and the debt of this province, Mr. Speaker, and it appears that it has been lost on this government the significance of having such a significant debt and how this directly impacts the front-line services that Manitobans deserve and in many ways are not receiving from this current government. But, boy, \$900 million would go a long way in responding to the needs of so many Manitobans, but it appears to have been lost on this government once again.

Before I start my debate, I would like to welcome the member for The Pas (Ms. Lathlin) to the Legislature, the newest member to the gang of 57, and I want to congratulate her on her election win. I've spent a lot of time in The Pas over the last 13 to 14 years as an elected official and I've gained many friendships in that community. And I know it's a community that she's very proud of, and I know that she's in a role that has big shoes to fill as she is replacing a gentleman who worked very hard for his community. So I look forward to working with her as we go forward, Mr. Speaker.

I want to also recognize the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands, Mr. Speaker.

I've had an opportunity to travel to Europe and I'm always so impressed and overwhelmed by the generosity and the friendship and the true, true feeling of gratitude that you can't help but recognize from Europeans, and whether it be the Netherlands or whether it be in France, and how respectful they are of us as Canadians and how grateful they are they are for the work that our ancestors did in helping liberate many European countries, Mr. Speaker, during the war.

So I just want to say that I want to congratulate, you know, the—and recognize the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands. And I want to congratulate the veterans, the Canadian troops who played a pivotal role in the—in 1994—or 1944 and 1945 because, together with other Allied forces, they fought bravely and many paid the ultimate price, and we've seen that at Vimy Ridge and other places that recognize the significant sacrifices that have been made by many Manitobans and Canadians, Mr. Speaker. So veterans will always have the gratitude and respect of myself and all the members, I believe, within the Chamber and the work that they did to help and, in this case, the people of the Netherlands. So I just want to put a few words on the record with regard to that.

Back to the budget debate, Mr. Speaker, our leader has been very, very, very thorough in bringing out the shortcomings with regard to this budget. And we are focusing a lot of our time right now on the debt that is continuing to be a burden on what could be—potentially could be an opportunity for Manitoba to help so many more people.

We understand that it costs nearly \$900 million to service the debt. And I believe that that is probably the third—or fourth largest department of government, Mr. Speaker, is the debt servicing rate is the fourth largest department in government. So, if you put it in that perspective, you can see how \$900 million could easily fund so many important programs that we know Manitobans wish that they could access.

Today, earlier, I raised a question with regard to mental health resource nurses and how this government has failed to fulfill a promise they made well over four years ago to ensure that there are mental health nurse practitioners and nurse—resource nurses in the communities where they're needed, Mr. Speaker. And what did we find out? In the riding—or in the area of Prairie Mountain Health we have five positions that are vacant, and we have well over

hundreds of people that are waiting for these types of services. And, when you see positions that are vacant and this government doing very little to fulfill them, it leaves a lot of people very disappointed, including the caregivers, the family members and, most importantly, the patients who are waiting for this treatment.

And we learn, you know, from these communities that a person has to come from a community four hours away to provide support in some of these communities. So she travels for four hours, provides an assessment on five or six different patients, Mr. Speaker, and then when she makes these assessments we're finding out that some of these assessments aren't even being considered. Her recommendations are being turned away.

So this can't be a system that's working, Mr. Speaker. This cannot be what this government is talking about, is supporting front-line workers, when you have a worker who is putting all of this time and effort into providing supports and then her work is not being recognized within the system. And the—and what comes from that is individuals are not receiving the support that they need to become healthy.

So, when you hear this government speaking about mental health awareness and the supports available, Mr. Speaker, we know that there are shortcomings and there continue to be, but they won't speak to those. And it's our job as opposition to make sure that they are aware that we are quite aware that they have a long way to go before they can speak about their significance. *[interjection]* A lot of what?

An Honourable Member: Awareness.

Mrs. Rowat: A lot of awareness, right.

And, you know, I just cannot appreciate this government's arrogance when it comes to not being able to respond to such issues as ensuring that those positions are filled if they are needed, Mr. Speaker, in the community.

It's—and when you get a phone call from an individual, Mr. Speaker, who is fighting an eating disorder and you know that there are absolutely a minimal amount of supports out there for this individual, a young 19-, 20-year-old who has the life—her life in front of her, and when she comes to you and asks for help and you have to tell her that, you know, we've been raising this with the government, it is an issue, but we cannot seem to get the government to understand that a year wait-list is a death sentence—is a death sentence—to a lot of

young people because you cannot wait a full year for treatment.

* (16:20)

So, you know, I guess this government will continue to say what they want to say about their support for different initiatives, Mr. Speaker, but Manitobans know different. They know that this is not a government that actually fulfills the promises that they make with regard to programs and services that are important to Manitobans.

So, you know, I've been at this now for 13-some years, and I—you know, it never gets old, Mr. Speaker, in how concerned I am that this government really doesn't take these types of issues seriously. We raise them and they turn it into rhetoric. They try to blow it off, and these are actually—when we raise these questions and these concerns, it's on behalf of Manitobans who are not being heard by this government. We're trying to be a voice for them, and when the government stands and says, we respect, you know, front-line service personnel, well, they don't, because if you did, you would actually look at what you're doing and improve on what is happening out there. But, instead, they turn a deaf ear, and they respond to what they feel are important issues which really are out of touch with what's really happening in Manitoba.

With regard to the balanced budget promises and broken promises, Mr. Speaker, over the last several years, and I would say over the last six or seven years, Manitobans have been receiving a mixed message with regard to where this NDP government really is at with regard to balanced budget legislation. It depends, sometimes, on the minister that's going to be responding to a question. In 2011, the NDP platform touted a five-year budget plan to bring the budget back to balance by 2014. Well, that came and went. In 2012, the Finance minister committed that budget—that we're on track to balance the budget by 2014. Well, that promise came and went.

And then in 2014 there seemed to be a shift in their ideology with regard to balanced budget legislation. In 2014, the member for Fort Rouge (Ms. Howard), who was then the minister of Finance, announced we're on track to return to balanced budget by 2016. Well, that was a ray of hope, Mr. Speaker, I guess, but it raised some concerns because it was a broken promise. It was moving in a direction that wasn't what was said in 2011.

And then we hear the Premier (Mr. Selinger) again change his tune on eliminating the deficit in late 2014, saying we are focused on balancing the budget by 2016. That's the objective and we will look at that. So that was a pretty weak statement, and it raised some red flags to many of us and many Manitobans, Mr. Speaker, with regard to whether this government was actually taking it seriously, and, to this date, we do know that this government has left it as a moving target.

But what we do see in Budget 2015 is a number of increased fees, Mr. Speaker, and that always speaks volumes to where this government feels that they can offload some of their, you know, expenses and have—and collect fees from others. But what was interesting is that we actually saw an increase in fees for students who are wanting to study independently, and, you know, that really is something when a lot of these students are from rural and northern Manitoba and, often, distance education is their really only hope in securing a post-secondary education. And when you see government increasing fees in that area, it really makes you wonder where this government is going with regard to their policies. When you want to encourage individuals to continue to study and to continue to learn, you see this government increasing fees to raise some challenges in that even happening.

Mr. Speaker, we've heard this government talk about their graduation rates and how they're bragging about those graduation rates, and we know that those graduation rates that they're bragging about, that they say they're record graduation rates, don't include a segment of the population that need this government to pay attention to their education, and that would be the Aboriginal community. We see a significant number of young Aboriginal people who are needing this government to actually pay attention to their literacy challenges. We need a government that's actually going to pay attention to their—to how they're learning and to encourage them to remain in school and to graduate. But, when a government ignores those rates and doesn't include them in their final numbers, what does that say to these individuals who are working so hard at getting by and actually would give anything to be able to remain in school and to graduate? But, when the government turns its back and doesn't even include those numbers in their totals, it doesn't say much about this government's faith in that population.

And we have to look at some of the issues on why children within the Aboriginal communities,

why they are struggling. We know that poverty is a big problem in a lot of our communities, whether it be in Winnipeg or whether it be rural or northern Manitoba. We know that if children are not eating and if they're not nourished, that they're not going to learn, Mr. Speaker. So there is a systemic challenge here that this government has failed to address. When we continue to be one of the highest—we have the highest percentage of children living in poverty across the country, that speaks to this government's inability to bring in programs and supports that are actually working for and with them—these young children.

Mr. Speaker, the C.D. Howe Institute indicated that nearly 63 per cent of Aboriginal high school students in Manitoba did not graduate, and that is a very, very significant number. So what we need is this government to actually be looking at how we could be doing better, how we can be working better at ensuring that children who are at risk are actually, you know, receiving supports from a government that has continually provided lip service for so many years.

With regard to post-secondary education, Mr. Speaker, I would love for my children to be going to school here in Manitoba, but they just feel that there are better opportunities for them in other jurisdictions. And it's unfortunate because I think that this province has the potential to be a leader with regard to post-secondary education. But we've seen over and over again, we saw in Westman, at the Brandon University strike in 2011 that this government failed to put the needs and the—needs of the students ahead of their union friends. There were over 3,000 students and their families who were directly affected by this government's inability to manage that file. And so many of these children took on other opportunities, and some of them never did go back to university. They just got fed up with this government's inability to have their best interests put forward.

With regard to the midwifery program at University College of the North, again, another very important program—a very important program—and highly needed in so many areas of the province. It just crumbled; it fell apart with limited applicants and limited graduates, and this government, you know, had an opportunity to do something with this. They had an opportunity to be a leader with regard to a midwifery program in northern Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, and they failed. And they not only failed with the college program, but they failed so many

Manitobans who were looking for this type of a program to allow young moms to have a decision of whether they want to have their children in a—born in a facility or in their homes.

* (16:30)

And in northern Manitoba you don't—you often don't have that option, and the midwifery program would have provided definitely some options for many Manitoba women who would have preferred to have their children at home.

With regard to Agriculture, full and—food and rural development, Mr. Speaker, again, I, you know, I just wish this was a government that just cared a little more about the farm family and, actually, at their Cabinet table, actually discussed the farm family in a more positive way and developed policies and programs that would actually support those families. We've seen this government ignore the sector, a sector that is so important to Manitoba's economy, and continue to look at ways to just undermine and weaken this very important economic contributor to our province. So I just don't understand how this government can continue to mismanage such an important file, and it's been a good decade plus without a very solid program coming from this government with—in that area.

The Shellmouth Dam is, in a lot of ways, a diamond in the rough within the Riding Mountain constituency, Mr. Speaker, and we've seen this government continue to mismanage that file with over 40,000 acres of farmland being flooded. Every year there seems to be a government announcement that is supposed to be in the best interests of those producers, but, again, it's promises made and promises broken. And it doesn't appear to be—there doesn't appear to be any leadership on the government's side of the House in addressing this issue and, at some point, there's going to have to be some type of leadership on this because this cannot continue to happen. These producers are getting very tired, and what is happening is their children who, many of them, have decided that they just want out; they don't want to be involved with this gong show and are looking at other careers, not because they want to but because they're being forced to.

As I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, Manitoba remains the child poverty capital of Canada and a title our province has held for many years under this government. And that, you know, is an indicator that so many programs that this government has put forward are not working.

Almost three out of 10 Manitoba children are living in poverty, and the number continues to grow each year. Child poverty rates here in Manitoba are the worst among all provinces, at 29 per cent and almost 10 per cent above the rate for all of Canada. Manitoba also has the second highest rate of First Nation child poverty, at nearly two thirds of the First Nation children living in poverty.

So this is where we need to be looking at increasing supports. We have to ensure that these children are nourished, that they are receiving, you know, nourishment so that they can learn and that they can, you know, continue to stay in school and graduate, and this is something that this government has failed to do and failed to look at.

In 2013-14, there were 11 tragic child and youth suicides, and in 2013-2014 there were 17, Mr. Speaker. And this continues to increase in numbers, and it appears there's announcements that occur every few years from this government, and we continue to see the numbers increase. So I'm very interested to know what this government is planning with regard to mental health supports for children and youth because I believe that this government has missed the ball—or missed the target on this, and we continue to have so many children in crisis that I'm very interested to see how they move forward on this file.

It was interesting. The NDP were recently talking about climate change and greenhouse gas emissions. I remember back a few years ago when the NDP introduced their own Kyoto targets into law and we debated that and we tried to get them to set a bar to set some, you know, standards so that we could actually see, Manitobans could see, where they were moving forward with regard to their targets. But they refused, Mr. Speaker. They, you know, they skated along and skirted the issue, and now we know why. They had no intentions of fulfilling that. They passed the bill, they threw it in the cupboard, and they never looked at it again.

And, in fact, in—according to 2012 data, the most recent available, Manitoba greenhouse gas emissions have spiked 5 per cent over the previous year. So we're not even, you know, holding our own. You know, we're going in the wrong direction and at record speed, Mr. Speaker. So this is not a government that, you know, can speak highly of their record on green initiatives. We've—we actually see them go the other way.

Budget 2015 also continues to take the position to raise cottage service fees for cottage owners \$4.5 million per year. So this NDP eight-year plan, cottage owners will pay an average of \$2,000 more for their residences out in cottage country, Mr. Speaker, and it's quite amazing that this government has allowed this to happen. But they are so desperate for funds that they just don't see how this is just violating, you know, the interests of so many Manitobans.

The Department of Education, Mr. Speaker, we've seen more money go into that department, but, you know, I'm hearing from more and more teachers. A lot of them are my friends that live out in the Russell, Rossburn, you know, Shoal Lake area, and what they're saying is they're tired of this government's inability to lead the Education file. They're looking for a government that actually—that will introduce policy that'll actually help not only their—themselves in teaching the Englishes, the maths and the sciences but help the children.

I don't know how many of them are on leave at various times of the year because they just—they cannot believe how this government has just let them—left them to twist in the wind. They know what needs to get done. But this government's not listening. So many teachers out there know that the challenges that they're facing with regard to providing an education for a student so that they can continue to go on to university and succeed are being left at the door by this minister and this government. They continually ignore what needs to get done. It's hard work. And, if it was easy, it would have been done. But it takes some time and it takes interest from a government to listen to the teachers, to actually engage them in the process. They know what is best—in the best interests of the child: work with the parents and the teachers and develop policies that actually work.

But so many of these teachers are just saying, you know, they're fed up. They're tired of this government not providing the tools that they need to help children become the best that they can be. So, when this government talks about their friends, I don't think it's the teachers. I really don't. I believe that it's the union. And I think that so many teachers are fed up with this government's ability to hide behind the union and not provide the support that teachers need to educate our children. And it's discouraging—very discouraging.

So, with the—those words on the record, I just want to say that this is not a budget that I can support. It's not a budget that I can support. There are things in the budget that I think are great for Manitobans, but there's a lot of things in this budget that just are—fly in direct contrast to what I believe is great policy for Manitoba, and that is not what is in this budget. It's a budget full of broken promises, promises that have never been kept and may never be kept and likely won't be by this government who continue to mislead Manitobans. So, on that, it's unfortunate, but, again, here's another budget that I will not support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Minister of Education—Municipal Government, sorry.

* (16:40)

Hon. Drew Caldwell (Minister of Municipal Government): It's a privilege to rise in the House this afternoon and put a few words on the record in regard to Budget 2015.

This budget continues the unprecedented and historic levels of investment being made in the City of Brandon by the provincial government. Of the 15 budgets that I have had the privilege to speak to over the last 15 years, this is, by far and away, the best budget for Brandon. It signals the continuation of the greatest levels of investment made in my community by the provincial government in the history of Brandon and, indeed, the history of Manitoba. It signals approximately a quarter-of-a-billion dollars' worth of ongoing investment in Brandon. In fact, it would be irresponsible and destructive for a Brandon MLA to oppose this budget. A Brandon MLA opposing this budget would be opposing investment in Brandon, would be opposing the development of Assiniboine Community College at the Brandon North Hill campus. A Brandon MLA opposing this budget would be opposing the continued development of the Keystone Centre, would be opposing the development of the Brandon Municipal Airport. A Brandon MLA opposing this budget and voting against this budget would be voting against the Daly bridge, the Daly Overpass renewal. A Brandon MLA voting against this budget would be voting against the First Street Bridge reconstruction.

A Brandon MLA voting against this budget would be voting against his community. He would be voting to diminish his community. He would be

voting to diminish Brandon. He would be voting against investment in our community and the further development of our community, Mr. Speaker. He would be voting against the largest investment in Brandon's history. A Brandon MLA voting against this budget would be voting against the best interests of his community, and I think that's very important to put on the record because over the last 15 years we've had three MLAs from Brandon West.

Mr. Speaker, I hope for a fourth in the next election, that we change that situation because it's very frustrating to work for Brandon and having to be opposed in terms of the investment being made in the community. It's difficult for me, as a Brandonite, to understand how a Brandon MLA could oppose the Keystone Centre, or how a Brandon MLA could oppose the development of Brandon University and the construction at Brandon University with the wellness centre, with the centre for health studies, another initiative at Brandon University.

It troubles me that, as a citizen of Brandon, that one of the MLAs in Brandon opposes the development of Assiniboine Community College at the North Hill campus, Mr. Speaker, the largest investment—the largest post-secondary investment in provincial history outside of the city of Winnipeg, an investment that will transform Brandon into a centre of educational excellence for western Canada. It's also an investment that is transformative for young people in our community, and it supports the business community in western Manitoba, particularly the business community that depends on skilled trade, the skilled trade sector. Assiniboine Community College provides educational excellence in many, many areas, but one of the most significant in a growing region of the province are in the skilled trades. So, when a Brandon MLA votes against Assiniboine Community College at Brandon's North Hill, he's voting against generations of young people, Mr. Speaker. He's voting against the business community that depends upon the education of young people for skilled trade opportunities in the region. He votes against the heritage of our community. He votes against the future. He places a bet solidly against our community.

Brandon airport, same thing, Mr. Speaker: voting against the Brandon Municipal Airport, voting against creating solid transportation for trade, for families into western Canada today, but, hopefully, central Canada tomorrow. I know that I am working with others in Brandon to encourage WestJet to open up central Canada to direct flights from Brandon. We

are—have got direct flights to Calgary now, and I know there's a great many business people in particular, but also Canadian Forces personnel and families, that have availed themselves—very, very strongly availed themselves of the opportunity to use WestJet to fly out of Brandon back and forth for trade, for family reasons, and I'm proud to support the construction at the Brandon Municipal Airport. I'm proud that our government believes in investing in Brandon Municipal Airport.

I'm horrified and shocked and disappointed that one of the Brandon MLAs does not support that investment, Mr. Speaker. A vote against this budget is a vote against flood protection for Brandon—the ongoing development of flood protection. A vote against this budget is a vote against health-care excellence in Brandon and region. It's a vote against the development and further renewal of communities in Brandon—to the Brandon Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation and Renaissance Brandon. This budget, which, as I said in my opening remarks, is the best one I've seen in the 15 years here for the city of Brandon and for signalling historic levels of ongoing investment in education, in recreation, in infrastructure.

This is a budget, Mr. Speaker, that all Brandon MLAs should be strongly supporting, vigorously supporting. And, on this side, I don't have to convince my colleagues, because we do believe as a government in investing in Brandon and investing strongly in Brandon. I would hope and would've expected, as a citizen of Brandon, that the Brandon West MLA would be encouraging his colleagues to support a budget that invests so heavily in building a strong future for Brandon in western Manitoba.

But, you know, partisan blinkers and placing the interests of a very extreme leader of a Conservative Party—very extreme with an extremist record not only in the House of Commons but extremist record in this very Chamber when he sat in this Chamber during the 1990s and punished Manitobans over and over and over again with policies that led to the sell-off of the Manitoba Telephone System, with policies that led to clawbacks from single mothers on welfare of the Canadian tax benefit, literally taking food out of children's mouths, that the member from Brandon West would place his community behind the partisan extremist interests of the member from Portage la Prairie, the member of Whyte Ridge, I believe, is where he serves here. What is it? I'm sorry? *[interjection]* Fort Whyte—the

member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Pallister), the member from Portage, former MP that has extremist views, well-documented, homophobic views that have been expressed in the House of Commons, a nastiness that is—has never been seen in this House. You know, the member makes Sterling Lyon look like a socialist, the member from Fort Whyte who, when he didn't get the top job here, quit the provincial Legislature and then he went off to Ottawa and he proved to be too extreme for Stephen Harper to stomach—to put in the bus. So he quit in Ottawa, and then he came back here and ran for the Conservative Party unopposed; nobody wanted the job. Apparently, nobody wanted the job, so they handed it to probably the most extreme, extremist politician that has ever sat in this Chamber or has ever spoken in this Chamber—someone that would drive the Manitoba economy into the ground, as he did as a member of Cabinet 15 years ago under our previous Conservative administration.

So the fact that a Brandon MLA would vote against Assiniboine Community College, would vote against Brandon University, would vote against the Keystone Centre, would vote against flood protection, would vote against infrastructure and renewal, would vote against the Daly Overpass reconstruction, would vote against the development of the First Street bridge.

In fact, we in the Throne Speech praised the Brandon Wheat Kings who are on their way to the Memorial Cup. This Friday they begin the final series in the WHL to continue that journey to the Memorial Cup. The member, in voting against the budget speech, is even voting against the Brandon Wheat Kings, Mr. Speaker. So, you know, Brandonites have to know and they will know with increasing—I think with increasing clarity over the next nine months that there is one member in Brandon that works to build the community and another member in Brandon that puts the interests of the most extremist politician that we've had in this Chamber, the member for Fort Whyte, ahead of his community, ahead of the Keystone Centre, ahead of the college, ahead of the university, ahead of every single community organization, every single citizen and every single initiative in the city of Brandon.

* (16:50)

So, Mr. Speaker, as we continue the budget debate in this Chamber, I do want to thank the Finance Minister and thank the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and thank my colleagues in government for always putting Brandon at the centre

of the provincial agenda, for always supporting me in my endeavours to bring resources and bring initiatives to the city of Brandon. My colleagues have been very helpful and very supportive in building the Wheat City of Canada, building Brandon, over our time in office. They have been, year in and year out, supportive of Brandon and supportive of building Brandon.

We've got 37 MLAs on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker; each one of them place Brandon ahead of partisan interests. Each one of these MLAs, on this side of the House, are acting in the interest of Brandon to a degree that is 100 per cent greater than the member of Brandon West. And I'm very, very proud to be with 37 people on this side of the House, on the government side of the House, that always place the Brandon—always place the city of Brandon at the centre of the provincial agenda and provide the resources needed to continue to build that community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): Indeed it's a pleasure to be in the Chamber today to enter in debate on this particular budget the NDP have brought forward.

I can tell the member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell) that we certainly will be voting against this budget based primarily on principle, Mr. Speaker. We know, and we're hearing from Manitobans all across this great province that they are tired of the same NDP broken promises, and Manitobans are looking for a change for the better.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to welcome you back. It's certainly nice to be back in the Chamber here. It's been a bit of a layoff but, obviously, as we jump back into things, things come back fairly quickly.

I do want to offer the best wishes to the new MLA from The Pas and wish her all the best in her future political career.

I do too want to welcome the Chamber staff, all the Chamber staff, and the table staff as well for their assistance in providing us assistance here in the Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, it's a privilege for me to represent the great people of the constituency of Spruce Woods, and it's always a pleasure to go out and visit with those people in the various communities and hear what they have to say. And we are at a very interesting time in Manitoba politics. And certainly the NDP government, the

NDP Cabinet, or the various factions within the caucus, have really got the media's attention over the last several months. And I think as a result of that, Manitobans are paying attention to what is happening with the provincial government. And I know they're certainly—from the feedback I've been getting—certainly interested in the provincial budget and the direction that the government is going. And over the course of my presentation here on the budget debate, I'm going to bring to the Chamber some of the comments that, you know, have appeared in the papers, and some of the comments that I'm getting from my constituents and others around Manitoba.

And certainly our caucus is really taking the opportunity over the course of the winter to go out and actually visit Manitobans all across the province and here in Winnipeg as well. And it's been very, very enlightening, some of the discussions we've had with individuals, with companies and volunteer organizations across our great province. And certainly they're in the mood for some change. They've been telling us they're a little tired of the NDP broken promises and they look forward to having an election next April, Mr. Speaker, or possibly sooner, if the Premier (Mr. Selinger) decides to take that on—take that challenge on.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it was interesting to see this particular budget. And this budget in Manitoba came out on the heels of a balanced federal budget, and we know the NDP keep using the term balanced but it's in—they use the term balanced approach—they certainly don't mean it in terms of a balanced budget because this particular budget was anywhere from being a balanced budget. We see the provincial debt going to increase \$3 billion this year alone. That is going to put us in the area of a \$36-billion debt, which is tremendous. It obviously has major implications for each and every Manitoban.

This particular budget reflects a \$420-million deficit, Mr. Speaker, and we know the history of the NDP in terms of actually making their targets in their budget. They've failed in just about every year. They consistently fail to meet their targets in their budget. In fact, I think it's been every year except one they have overspent their own targets. And, even last year, they're—looks like they're going to be overspending their budget again by several million dollars again.

So, even though this budget says it's going to be a \$420-million deficit, we can expect, and

Manitobans can expect that we—the deficit, by this time next year, will be a lot more than \$420 million. They have a history of overspending their own targets, Mr. Speaker, and this is the seventh year in a row of a deficit budget.

Quite frankly, I didn't see this deficit budget coming like this. I thought the NDP might show some prudence and actually try to balance the budget, Mr. Speaker, show—actually showing Manitobans that there is some degree of fiscal responsibility there. But they didn't do that.

So, now, how—what should Manitobans interpret by another deficit budget to the tune of \$420 million? The fact of the matter is we're going to have a provincial election next April or possibly sooner. So it looks to us, as Manitobans and Manitoba taxpayers, that the NDP are going to try to buy their way into the next election, and history, if history repeats itself, I'm sure this would be the case.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen the provincial budget grow from \$6 billion in 1999 to almost \$13 billion in this particular budget. That has been a tremendous increase in the last 16 years, and we've seen pretty well every department go up in terms of their spending. The problem we're seeing are the results, and that's really what Manitobans, I hope, will gauge the next election on, are the results. Are we actually getting value for the money that we're putting into the various departments?

Now, Mr. Speaker, I don't think that's happening. You know, if we look at health care, we are spending the most per capita on health care and we're getting the poorest results across the nation. Education—again, we're putting in the most per capita on education and, again, our results are dead last in the country in reading, writing, and arithmetic. So, clearly, the results aren't there, and that's what Manitobans are for. Manitobans realize they've been paying more and more, but they're getting less and

less. And I hope that's what Manitobans will think about when they go to the next election campaign.

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest the NDP are going to use our money as taxpayers to try to buy themselves the next election, and they're buying the next election with our money. That is the way it looks in this particular budget. I'm going to quote Graham Lane. Graham Lane is a chartered accountant, you may know, who was former chair of the Public Utilities Board. Well, he had some interesting comments in an article that he'd written, and, you know, he talked about some of the history of the NDP, and he said, in 2011 election campaign, the NDP promised to balance the budget by 2014. Once they got elected, they promised to balance by 2016 instead. And just last week, Finance Minister Greg Dewar changed the promise once again. Now they're going to try for 2018. They might as well say it will be balanced in 2150. If anyone still believes any forecast of theirs, I have a bridge for sale in Brooklyn.

Mr. Speaker: I might interrupt the honourable member for Spruce Woods (Mr. Cullen) for a moment. When he's referencing members of the Chamber, it's to be by their—ministers by their portfolio or members by their constituency name, even when we're quoting from third party sources. So I'm drawing that to the attention of the honourable member for Spruce Woods.

Mr. Cullen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate that, and I'm sorry I got caught up in the quotation there, but, certainly, a point well taken and I thank you for that guidance.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Spruce Woods will have 22 minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 5, 2015

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