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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
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 14, 2015

The House met at 10 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: O Eternal and Almighty God, from Whom all power and wisdom come, we are assembled here before Thee to frame such laws as may tend to the welfare and prosperity of our province. Grant, O merciful God, we pray Thee, that we may desire only that which is in accordance with Thy will, that we may seek it with wisdom 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 morning, everyone. Please be seated.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Mr. Speaker: Are we ready to proceed with Bill 200?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Speaker: No. Are we ready to proceed with Bill 201? [*Agreed*]

Bill 201—The Centennial of Manitoba Women's Right to Vote Act

Mr. Speaker: We'll call Bill 201, The Centennial of Manitoba Women's Right to Vote Act.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I move, seconded by the member for Agassiz (Mr. Briese), that Bill 201, The Centennial of Manitoba Women's Right to Vote Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mrs. Driedger: It is indeed an honour for me to bring forward Bill 201. This is the second opportunity I've had to bring this bill forward. I had brought it forward once before in 2013, but it did not pass this House. I am hoping that this time around, as we are very close to a very momentous occasion in Manitoba, that indeed this bill will go forward.

Mr. Speaker, it's exciting for all of us, I think, and—but particularly women in Manitoba, because we are on the eve of a momentous Canadian human rights milestone that is going to take place on

January 28th, 2016, because 100 years ago on this day, Manitoba women were the first in Canada and the British Commonwealth to be awarded the right to vote. This enfranchisement of Manitoba women can be regarded today as the first of a series of sweeping changes that ultimately allowed women to take their rightful place in our democratic society.

Mr. Speaker, when I think about how far Manitoba has come in 100 years, it is staggering to think that 100 years ago women were denied one of the most fundamental democratic rights. Now look where we are today. Many of us stand in this Manitoba Legislative Assembly as women, elected members of this Legislature and representatives of Manitobans. This would not be possible if it were not for the diligent perseverance shown by a very particular and special woman by the name of Nellie McClung, 98—or, pardon me, 99 years ago and almost 100.

Nellie McClung's service is the kind of public service that we aspire to as legislators. It is the passion, leadership and belief in a better way that Nellie McClung demonstrated that we try to emulate. The results Nellie McClung achieved are the ones we try to mirror and expand upon.

January 28, 2016, will mark the centennial of a seminal day in Manitoba's history, the day Manitoba became the first Canadian province to empower women with voting privileges. This bill seeks to enshrine this milestone and officially declare January 28, 2016, as the centennial of women's right to vote in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot begin to tell you how privileged I am to be able to bring forward this bill and how honoured I am to be able to do it. I've had a long journey now, in fact probably around 15, 16 years, looking at the legacy of Nellie McClung in this province. And this is only one more step along this journey of what we've been able to do to honour this incredible woman, but what she has also done in bringing forward this very, very momentous occasion for us, and that is giving women the right to vote.

It really is truly amazing to think that in 100 years we have come from women hiding under the auspices of pink teas to elected women officials

in this province. As with many great things, the women's right to vote originated in Manitoba and is a proud part of our heritage and development as a province. We led by example and created a beacon of hope that spread throughout all of Canada.

It is important that we honour our history and its heroes, and Nellie McClung and the women's right to vote are nothing short of heroic. Countless generations of women have been given what we consider today such a basic democratic right.

Ten years ago, on an initiative that was wholeheartedly approved by all members in this Chamber, the Nellie McClung Foundation was created with the bill legislating it passing on December 4th, 2003. This foundation has continued the tradition of pink teas, but these symbolic events are now advertised and celebrated, no longer forced to stay under the radar like it was 100 years ago.

The kind of support the—and the commitment by everybody in this House to support the bill that allowed for the development of the monument on the grounds of the Legislature and the development of the Nellie McClung Foundation, and that kind of support is definitely what we need with this bill, Mr. Speaker, so that this bill itself can mark that very, very special occasion which we all want to separate. And I do believe that people of all political stripes can support this, and I would really hope that that is what is going to happen.

This bill marks so much more, though, Mr. Speaker, than just the 100th anniversary of women's right to vote in this province. It marks one of the largest milestones in women's equality rights and ensuring that no one is discriminated against by virtue of being a woman. While we have had time since then where that has all been challenged and we still have a ways to go—in fact, in some areas, a very long way to go—we are reaching and striving towards building a society where women's equality rights are absolutely there and present and not denied.

And to think that some 100 years ago it was expected that women should stay at home and tend to women's work, I don't think sits very well in—with today's modern women, and it didn't sit very well with women of that era either.

Women were not supposed to have opinions on matters of state and politics, business or even community outside the home. Great visionaries like Nellie McClung knew that this was not the case, that not only did women have these opinions but that

their opinions, values and views often were different from that of men and thus were not being represented in the governance of the day. It wasn't that anybody believed their ideas were better; they were just different.

* (10:10)

Gaining the right to vote helped to change this. No longer could politicians ignore the opinions and values of Manitoba's women. Eventually, this even led to where we are today, with women in positions of influence and leadership and the female voice represented in the platforms of decision making. Now, women's equality is not yet fully realized in this province and in our country, and we know that—and in the world, as well—and there are disparities that still persist.

But there is no question the degree to which we have progressed over 100 years. I only wish I could see the progress of 100 more, but I'm not going to be around, Mr. Speaker, to see in the next 100 years what women will accomplish because we are moving forward as influencers all over the world. And I do think that there are some good things on the horizon, but there are still hurdles to climb.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride and honour that I bring forward this bill, Bill 201, and I know honourable members in this House value what this bill stands for. And I do hope that we will all do right by it.

This private member's bill is about setting aside a day to acknowledge what was happening over the last 100 years, to acknowledge what precipitated the women's right to vote and, ultimately, to celebrate the great success of Nellie McClung and the brave women who helped to make this a reality.

I certainly hope that all members of this Legislature can band together and unanimously support the bill and, as such, honour all women including those who have gone before us and shaped the landscape of our province. Mr. Speaker, this is a wonderful opportunity for us to put aside our political differences and work together to make sure that this happens, that this monumental achievement of 100 years ago gets the due respect and celebration that it deserves.

Right now, Mr. Speaker, there are women's groups all over Manitoba that are working within their own organizations and working together as a network to look at what they can all do to honour this momentous occasion. Having this bill pass is an

integral part of allowing and supporting those women so that they have something very concrete that they can use as they do their planning. And they are in the planning stages. So it's important that this bill does have a speedy passage through this House so that we can help these groups do what they are trying to do.

So I look forward to everybody in the House supporting this and moving it on to committee and, finally, at passing, so that this day gets its due recognition.

It is with great pride and honour that I bring forward this bill in the Legislature. And I am encouraging all honourable members to support the bill and help move it through, move it forward and see that it gets passed this session. It was disappointing when that didn't happen in 2013, but we have another opportunity now and I look forward to its passage.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister responsible for the Status of Women): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member from Charleswood from bringing forward Bill 201, the centennial of Manitoba women's right to vote.

The day that women won the right to vote was monumental. It really created opportunities for many of us to hold the seats that we have today and the ones that came before us.

What we need to focus on is the work that they have done in the front lines to ensure that we've had the right to sit in this Chamber, that women also continued to fight and to raise the issue and the importance of child support around protection of themselves as victims, but also really fought loudly and clearly around issues that this government is extremely invested in and proud of.

Our child-care strategy, our most recent five-year child-care strategy that's going to expand spaces, it's going to provide more—higher wages for the child-care providers within the system, development of curriculum, development of hubs within communities where family support and resource centres will provide important information and also reduce isolation for many parents within this province.

As well, not stopping there, making sure that they fought loud and clear for accessible health care, for issues that many people felt uncomfortable

talking about, they were there in the front lines ensuring that we had opportunities for women to have choices, opportunities for women to have equality, whether it was in the workplace or in the community.

Because of the work that Nellie McClung did, and the right that she earned us, we can see that benefit every day. We see that benefit in this Chamber when we see the women that take their seats. We see that benefit in the Cabinet room when the women sit there and sit and make decisions. We continue to have a huge responsibility of ensuring that we continue to pave that road of equality.

I find it very ironic that we continue to have the debate, that we still are fighting for women on boards. That is a topic that is consuming people nationally. And I would think in the year 2015, 100 years—well, 99 years after Nellie McClung had won the right for us to vote, that we wouldn't continue to have these conversations, that there would be equal representation on all boards, no matter if there was enumeration or if they were financial or social-issue boards. But we continue to have that debate. We are having that within the community. We are having that between governments. The conversation is how do we ensure that we can have equality at the boardroom table? There's been some progress, but, boy, do we ever have a lot more work to do.

I think that when I reflect about 99 years ago, and Nellie would be watching what was happening today, that there—she would acknowledge that, yes, there has been some progress, but we continue to have much more work to do. That work has to happen as we work co-operatively between all levels of government; that we work with community; that we are paving that way for the young women that are coming after us; that they, too, can build upon the foundation of Nellie McClung and all the other very important women that maybe had built a profile for themselves locally, nationally and internationally.

But for the women like my mother who continued to ensure that we had a roof over our head and the support that we needed so we could have these opportunities, a woman who stayed on the farm and helped support the development of a business that ultimately supported and raised three children—we often don't talk about those women; the women that sacrificed themselves. My mother often spoke about her desire of being a psychologist but made other choices and never had that opportunity. She has

no regrets, she tells me, is proud of what she's accomplished with her three children and the support that she has provided her husband, my father, in his business, and as they move into the next phase of their life of retirement, quite looks forward to it. Not sure what the volunteer roles will look like for her. Right now, I think rest is what she's looking forward to, not planting that acre full of garden and worrying about taking meals to the field or feeding the horses. But I think that when we talk about women's equality that it has to be inclusive.

Another issue that is very, very important is the issue of missing and murdered women. And I think that, too, Nellie would be horrified to know of—we are still battling those issues of inequality and that there are women who, because of their race, because of their economic condition, they're preyed upon. And we need to ensure that we are providing all of the same opportunities.

I once had the fortune to listen to a speaker who talked from the day that—the day we're born, we're all equal. What happens differently is when we get taken home. And for people that are dealing with issues of discrimination and racism and poverty, we need to ensure that we are providing a safety net for them, ensuring that we're making the investments that this government has made around education and employment opportunities. Looking at the issues of reducing poverty, and that starts with a home, that our commitment for 1,000 new homes within the next three years of—so 500 social and 500 affordable are extremely critical.

* (10:20)

But we can't stop there. We have to make sure as we're building these homes that we provide employment and training opportunities for local people. As we do that, we need to make sure that we are providing good-quality child care for the children so they have the developmental supports that they need to grow and to be nurtured.

You heard in Budget 2015 our Rent Assist, our commitment of moving to 75 per cent market median rent. That is extremely important when we're talking about equality and opportunities, because when I think about equality, I think about opportunities and I think about rights. So by working with all of our partners, by addressing these issues that plague many of our citizens, we have a responsibility not only in the memory of Nellie McClung and her ability to be loud and fight and challenge. We continue to have those challenges, and I hope that as

we move forward that we're able to address them, that we're able to ensure that all women experience equality, know what their rights are and are able to benefit from the opportunities. Women are Manitobans too. We need to ensure that they continue to grow and to thrive.

So I'm very excited about this opportunity to talk about the bill that's being presented, and I know that I have many colleagues that want to put some words on the record in support. I know that there are a number of activities that are being planned for next January, and I am extremely excited about those plans that I've heard about and the involvement that the Status of Women will play in the development of those plans and in some times in supporting them with—sometimes with finances and sometimes with resources such as volunteerism.

So as we debate this bill today, I look forward to listening to many other members talk about the importance of what Nellie did but also about the importance of equality and how we move forward and address the fact that we have a lot more work to do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): Mr. Speaker, it's truly an honour this morning to put a few words on the record in regard to Bill 201, the centennial of Manitoba women's right to vote. And I want to thank the member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) for bringing this particular legislation to the Legislature again. Certainly, following up on the minister's comments this morning, I hope that besides some words on the record from the government, I'm hoping that they will take the member for Charleswood's offer and move this particular piece of legislation into committee with the ultimate goal that we can actually pass this.

Clearly, I think it's important that we take the time to recognize the 100 years of the—women's ability to vote here in Manitoba. And, clearly, it's a very important milestone that we should be marking. And, clearly, you know, as comments are being made this morning, there is more work to do in terms of women's rights and we should all be discussing that and what we can do as a province and as legislators to move things forward. But at the same time, I think it's important that we move this legislation forward and actually recognize this very important milestone in our history in Manitoba. And it's people like, you know, Nellie McClung that had the passion for the women's right to vote in Manitoba

and actually spearheaded that movement and really brought that to the public for their discussion. And we certainly want to recognize her foresight in that.

Mr. Speaker, I know Nellie McClung certainly is one of the most famous Manitoba women we have. Nellie, actually, grew up in the Wawanesa area close to my hometown as well. And, certainly, she was certainly very important in that community there. And, obviously, after her—she was a teacher by trade and after she got—her first teaching job was actually in Manitou, so a lot of people in the Manitou area take Nellie McClung as being one of their own, but history will show Nellie McClung actually grew up in the Wawanesa area.

And just as an interesting fact, Nellie McClung was the first person married in what is now the Wawanesa United Church. And as another interesting point in history, my sister was actually the last person married in that same church. So it's quite an interesting piece of history there. So certainly Nellie McClung was—is well known in that area of western Manitoba.

And, Mr. Speaker, what we're trying to do with this particular bill is just recognize the important role that Nellie and her group of followers and the accomplishments that they made 100 years ago in terms of providing the woman's right to vote. And I think it would go a long way in recognizing that and helping spread the good word about women's rights and their ability to vote and some of the good things that have happened and we hope will continue to happen, and hopefully things will progress in Manitoba.

So, Mr. Speaker, we know that January 28th of 2016 will mark the centennial of this great accomplishment, and certainly this legislation will help to really mark that accomplishment.

So I hope, Mr. Speaker, that we will have more than just words from the government this morning, we will actually see a desire to move this particular legislation forward, and we hope that we can move that on to committee and get some feedback from other Manitobans.

Thank you very much.

Ms. Jennifer Howard (Fort Rouge): It's my pleasure to get up and speak today to this bill. Thank the member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) for bringing it forward.

I do think it is important for us in this Legislature to take some time this morning to talk about not only the history of women's right to vote in Manitoba, but also the future and the present and what women's positions in not only our Chamber here in the Legislature, but women's positions in our politics are today and how hopefully those will—those positions will continue to improve over the time to come.

When I was thinking this morning about the history of the suffrage movement in Canada and Manitoba and England and other countries, I saw a quote that came on the magazine about the MayWorks festival that I thought was very apt for that struggle, and the quote is: Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will, by Frederick Douglass. And I think that is a very apt way to describe the suffrage movement in Manitoba and around the world.

The vote was never given to women. The vote was taken by women, and it was taken at great cost. Women who fought for the right to vote in England were imprisoned, were force-fed, were abused in those prisons, and around the world the story of women's suffrage is a story of struggle and of putting one's body and sometimes one's life on the line to win that right to vote.

And so, you know, we—perhaps now we look back at that time and we look at the women who are fighting for the right to vote in their long skirts and their hats, and they were women of a certain class; that is absolutely true. The right of women to vote, of Aboriginal women to vote, the right of women to vote who do not own property came later in our history, and I think that's important to recognize. And I think it's also important to recognize that as important a figure as Nellie McClung was, she was not a figure without controversy. She was not a perfect person. She held views that today we would think were not appropriate, to say the least, and were controversial at the time and are controversial today. And so I think that's also important when we talk about history that we talk about people's whole history and as whole people. But her contribution to winning the right to vote is not marred by other views, I think, that she held at the time.

And one of the things that I'm always reminded of when we talk about Nellie McClung, we talk about the struggle in Manitoba of the right to vote, is that historical—I don't know if they still call them vignettes; that's probably showing my age on TV

when they had the vignettes. Now I think they're Heritage Minutes, and I'm thinking of the one that had currency on television where they showed Nellie McClung talking to the premier at the time, Premier Roblin, and the premier telling her very succinctly that nice women don't want the vote. And we would like to think we've come a long way but, in fact, the accusation that women who want to vote, who want to lead, who want to take up positions of leadership, who want to participate in the power structures of our society are not nice, is still very current and it's still used to keep those women in their place.

* (10:30)

I think it is true that women in politics and all of us in this Chamber who are women have experienced this, whether we choose to talk about it or not, that women in politics are taught or told that we need to occupy a very much more narrow position, a very much more narrow bandwidth of emotion of the way we speak, of the way we behave than our male counterparts are permitted, and that when we step outside of what is considered ladylike behaviour, of what is considered appropriate for a woman, then we are punished for it. We are punished by sexist and misogynistic insults on social media under the veil of anonymity. We're punished sometimes by the attitudes of the people who claim to support us, who in confidential and private conversations use words that they would never use to our face.

And we can perhaps pretend that that doesn't happen. And I think as women in this House and as women in politics, we spend a lot of time letting it go. We spend a lot of time letting the sexism that is still pervasive in our culture wash over us and not comment on it. And, in fact, you know, one of the best pieces of advice that my wife ever gave me was not to go to every fight I'm invited to, and I don't often take that advice. It's good advice. I don't often take it.

But I'm also today reminded of something that I recently read on Twitter where somebody wrote: I regret the stupid things I've said, but not as much as the things I've not said out of a false sense of propriety, and I think that is true. I do think that there are occasions when we see sexism and misogyny and other prejudices that we do have to speak up and we do have to call it for what it is, and we do have to challenge each other to do better.

I also want to, for a moment, to remark about the progress that has been made by women in politics. One third of the government caucus in this House is

made up of women. When that happened—when I was elected in 2007 that was a historic achievement and we celebrated it. In the recent election in Alberta we saw that 45 per cent of the government caucus is women and that is as close as we've ever come in this country to a caucus, a body that is equally representative of men and women, and we should celebrate that achievement. But it is painfully slow progress.

If you think about the time between the right to vote, now almost 100 years, and today, the reality is that my daughter, who will hopefully be born in the next few weeks, will not see a Manitoba Legislature equally made up of men and women in her lifetime. That is stunning to take a moment to think about. We have to do better. We have to make progress more quickly.

I also want to take a moment to celebrate the increasing diversity of women that we've seen elected. In my time as an elected person I've been joined by the first woman of colour who's elected to the Manitoba Legislature, the member for Logan (Ms. Marcelino), and recently we've all seen a historic event having the first woman of First Nation status be elected in the member for The Pas (Ms. Lathlin), and those are things worth celebrating. And we shouldn't underestimate how important it is to the communities that we come from and we represent that they see themselves represented in this Chamber.

On election night in Alberta one of the comments that stuck with me was from a young woman who said that what that night had taught her is that she didn't have to be white, male and over 60 to be elected in Canada, and that's tremendous. It might sound facetious, but it's tremendous, because to make something possible—and I think the member for The Pas talked about this in her maiden speech—to dream about what's possible in your life, sometimes you have to see somebody else who looks like you, who comes from your community do it. And I think every time one of us breaks through as a first woman, as a first woman of colour, as the first lesbian woman, as the first Aboriginal woman, as the first whatever we are elected, we break through, we crack that feeling and we make it possible for other people to join us. And we know that when women are elected we hope that they change the institutions that they are elected to.

I had the great fortune of getting to meet with the federal NDP caucus who also has a historic

number of women among their ranks and a historic number of young women, women who are starting families, women who in some ways were surprised at their election but also wanted to be mothers. And that has changed that institution. And it's also changed those families where we see, more and more, the men that they are married to taking on full-time responsibilities of child rearing so that their wife, so that their partner can go and take their seat in the House of Commons. And I think we have a ways to go yet to make our family policies more friendly to men who want to do the bulk of the work of child raising. And I hope that we can continue to make the progress to do that.

So often, I think, in politics, women—when we're subjected to sexism or misogyny, we're patted on the head and we're told, that's just politics and you just have to grow a thicker skin. But I think we can do better. I believe we can do better. It doesn't have to be that way. And I think one of the ways that we can celebrate the centennial of the right to vote and keep what Nellie McClung and her sisters were fighting for alive is for each of us to take on the challenge of challenging and stopping sexism and misogyny wherever we hear it but especially when we hear it applied to each other. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): Nellie McClung's name and Manitou are—fit very well together, as we know that Nellie McClung had her first teaching job in Manitou in 1892 at Hazel School, just three miles north of Manitou, and then the next year she taught both in Manitou and Treherne. And the collegiate in Manitou is named after Nellie McClung; it's the Nellie McClung Collegiate.

And this past February 28th, they had a 50th anniversary of the school. And I was there for the pancake breakfast, and the students did a really great job. They had all the classrooms set back in decades of the '90s, the '80s, the '70s, et cetera. And they had different—what the fashions were of that day, what the vehicles were, the—it just, like—and, of course, the students were all dressed in that particular era of the dress in—both boys and girls there. So it was really a fun day that they had.

They had the—as I said, they had to start it out with a pancake breakfast in the morning. They had the displays on during the day, and then they were going to have a supper and community dance that evening, and it was celebrating the anniversary of the naming of the school, the Nellie McClung

Collegiate. And it was really a good tribute to Nellie McClung and to the—to her contributions to Manitoba. And, of course, as we speak to this bill of the centennial women—Manitoba women's right to vote, and she was instrumental in pushing that vote forward and—or that act forward, in order to have women's right to vote. And we certainly celebrate that.

In Manitou, also, there—they do have—at the school that day, they had a small bust of Nellie McClung in the school and it also sits out in front of the Manitou Opera House, which is a very popular place for plays. Throughout the year, there's a very active theatre club in Manitou at the opera house, and they're doing an upgrade now to make the facility more accessible for disabled people. And they have a very extensive renovation going on there. And, of course, the—Manitou is very proud of their connections with Nellie McClung and they continue to project that to all—throughout Manitoba and around the world. I know they were doing—they're doing fundraising right now for this opera house, and they were doing the—trying to get the funding on the cloud funding and they were having—this computer age—they were just getting it set up and running on that February 28th. And so they're—it's a very progressive town and very proud to have that in my constituency.

And so, with those few words, Mr. Speaker, I just want to pay tribute to Manitou for continuing the Nellie McClung legacy in Manitoba and their very proud part in this. Thank you.

* (10:40)

Mr. Peter Bjornson (Gimli): Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted to stand in the Chamber today to speak to this bill, The Centennial of Manitoba Women's Right to Vote Act, and bringing much different perspective to the discussion today.

I know everyone, of course, knows about the role that Nellie McClung has played to bring women to the forefront of the enfranchise—of enfranchisement, to bring them through the suffrage movement, but there were many seeds planted very early in our history in Manitoba by a small group of very determined immigrant women from what we affectionately refer to in our history locally as Nyja Island, New Iceland.

And, of course, women from Iceland had arrived in 1875 and they set up their own independent republic and had their own set of rules which

included enfranchisement, which included property rights. They also came from a country where they had property rights and where they had the right to vote, and then, suddenly, when the Republic of New Iceland became part of the province of Manitoba, those rights were taken away.

Now, there was a woman named Margret Jónsdóttir Benedicsson who became the first to lecture on suffrage among the Icelandic community in 1893. And she founded the Icelandic Women's Suffrage Society in Winnipeg in 1893, and by 1898 was publishing the only suffrage newspaper in Canada specifically for the suffrage movement from 1898 to 1910. And in that time, her assistant editor was her husband, Sigfus Benedicsson.

Now, things changed for Margret in 1910 when she and Sigfus ended up getting divorced, and she moved to Washington State and raised three children on her own in Washington State. And she left before she realized her dream of seeing women earn the right to vote here in Manitoba—by six years missing that. But it was quite appropriate, though, that when the bill was brought to third reading in the Chamber, in January 27th of 1916, it's quite appropriate that the acting premier moved debate on the third reading of the bill, and the acting premier at the time was T.H. Johnson, who happened to be the son of an Icelandic suffragist. So I thought that that was quite appropriate.

And, unfortunately, little is known about the work that they have done towards this movement as a group. Coming from New Iceland from the Gimli area and working in Winnipeg, I know that Margret, I believe, lived on Maryland when she first moved here. And she was very immersed in the Icelandic community, working with the community to engage women in the debate and in the discussion on how we need to work to earn the right to vote here in Manitoba. So that's a part of history that's often overlooked. A lot of people don't realize the role that they've played.

We talk about the Group of Seven in terms of the arts group in Manitoba—or in Canada, but I know that there was a group of seven Icelandic women who were very instrumental in working towards bringing awareness and fighting the suffragist fight very early in our history.

So that was a, I think, very—a very proud part of my community's culture and heritage, and I do recall when I first started teaching in Gimli and teaching about the suffrage movement, and, of course, the

curriculum talked about Nellie McClung, I did have a very young woman in my class come up to me and said, you have to talk about my cousin Mugga. And, of course, Mugga is an abbreviated version of the Iceland name Margret, so—the way that the Icelanders refer to Margaret. So as it turns out, this young woman had connections to Margret Benedicsson and told me her story. And with a little bit of research, what little information was available to me, I was able to relay that to the class about the role that our local community played in working towards the right to vote for women. So I'm very pleased that I have the opportunity to put those words on the record today.

As you know, prior to politics, I was teaching history. I feel like I'm giving another little history lesson, but perhaps I'll be doing that again sometime in the not-too-distant future back in the classroom. Who knows, we'll see where life takes us. But again, this is a very important part of our history here in Manitoba, and I'm proud to be part of a province that was the first in Canada to grant the right for women to vote, where women earned the right to vote.

But as mentioned by my colleagues, there's a lot of things that need to be done, a lot more work that needs to be done as far as equality. Wage equality still remains an issue today.

I remember when I was in university even, Mr. Speaker, seeing a headline in the Free Press in the 1980s saying, for the first time, the two faculties—or, no, actually, I'm sorry. It wasn't while I was in university; it was shortly after university while I was teaching. It was the early '90s, and the headline read about the first time where we had the faculties of law and medicine had more women enrolled than men. That was the first time that that had happened in our history, and that's not that long ago in terms of the numbers of women that have been enrolled in these two professional faculties. And now, of course, we see that that is more the norm than the exception these days with respect to the professional faculties. It speaks about how far we've come.

But we also talk about how far we need to go, as far as wage equality issues are concerned, with many of the professions and whatnot. One of my colleagues referenced the fact that—very difficult to get more equal representation on boards; CEOs, et cetera, disproportionately male. There's still a number of things that we need to look at at how we can create a truly equal society.

But Manitoba has a proud history, in terms of being the first where women had the right to vote. And, of course, 1920, we had the first woman elected to the Manitoba Legislature in Edith Rogers. We had, 1952, Manitoba Aboriginal women and men became eligible to vote and hold office in 1952. Eight years later in 1960, Aboriginal women and men became eligible to vote and hold office provincially. So this is very significant when you think of our history and the role that Manitoba has played. And 1960, we had our first woman appointed to Senate; 1963, the first woman appointed to the Speaker of the House; 1963, the first Manitoban elected to the House of Commons—Manitoba woman, and coincidentally the daughter of the first woman elected to the Manitoba Legislature in 1920.

There's a lot of important dates and significant milestones that have been reached towards issues of equality in the province of Manitoba, and we have truly been leaders in many respects. Of course, I was very proud to be elected in 2003 with the caucus that was almost a third women, and at that time the largest representation of women in any caucus in Canada. And as mentioned by one of my colleagues, of course, the events in Alberta where almost half of the caucus of the NDP government in Alberta is represented by women MLAs, so, indeed, we have come a long way, but, indeed, we have more to do.

And, of course, I would be remiss, Mr. Speaker, if I didn't mention my seatmate and how proud we are that the first—our first First Nations female elected to the Legislature in Manitoba in the by-election, and you'll probably hear that a few times over the course of the discussion, but we're indeed—another milestone in the history of Manitoba as we're very proud to have her join us in our caucus.

So there are, as I said, many role models that have been a part of the suffrage movement in the late 1890s through to the time that the vote was awarded in 1916, and I did mention locally what—the contributions of the suffragists in the Gimli community.

And it would be no surprise to me as a young man when I first met Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, who was the president of Iceland, and that was really remarkable at the time, the impression that she made on me as a woman president in—from Iceland. And, of course, Iceland has quite a history in terms of the issues of equality and the election of women to the Althing or the Thingvellir where the Icelandic parliament—and we've seen that as a model that

perhaps other countries could learn from in terms of the representation that we've seen in that Legislature, Mr. Speaker.

So with those few words, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this resolution today, and, again as I said, perhaps I'll have an opportunity to provide that history lesson again as I return to public life—or private life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

* (10:50)

Hon. Deanne Crothers (Minister of Healthy Living and Seniors): I'm very pleased to be able to stand and speak to this today.

And I'm going to be a little self-indulgent for a minute because I want to relate something that happened when I was about 13 years old. And I was always a bit of a dreamer in school and was never an A student. But when I was in my first year of high school, my grade 9 history teacher was quite inspirational and he had asked the class to choose a historical figure to write an essay on for our final project. And so I chose to do my essay on Nellie McClung. And I spent quite a bit of time researching her life and reading books to get a stronger understanding of who she was. And I wrote my essay on her and felt somewhat confined by the limit of the words that I was allowed to use because she was—I mean, there's so much to say about her. And she was intelligent, witty and bold and whatever her flaws were, there were a lot of good things to say about this woman.

So I wrote my essay. I handed it in and about a week later when my history teacher was handing the papers back, I was astonished when he handed my paper to me and said, you know, this is the way a history paper should be written and I saw an A on it. And it was the first A I had ever gotten.

But I feel I have to share that story because the significance of now being in this role, in this building, with a statue of her on the Legislative grounds, is pretty remarkable to me. And to—the work of many, many women have allowed someone like me to get into this position. But, certainly, in light of Nellie McClung's role in this province and what she has done here, I feel a great deal of—a sense of debt to her.

And I have to say, as a woman elected to represent my community members, it's both an honour and a responsibility that I respect, and which

is intertwined into the whole of my life currently, and including my family's life, whether they like it or not. And the very fact that we have as many women as we do on this side of the House, and across the way here, is inspirational to me. It is a perspective that we need more of in many places, not just the Leg., but in boards, as my colleague mentioned earlier, and elsewhere in positions of power. And it's a perspective that is important because when you're living with children, for example, and you're looking at challenges that Manitobans have, that is front and centre for you.

And I will speak to another experience that I had. Two female ministers had—have played a significant role for me. When I was asked to do the child-care consultation, I have to say it was a little intimidating but it became one of the best experiences that I've had in this role. And I so deeply respect that the work that both of these women did on developing our latest child-care strategy. And that came from their experiences. It came from my experience. It came from the experiences of my colleagues and, most definitely, listening to the experiences of Manitobans. And I'm so proud of the work that came from that: our previous multi-year plans; our current multi-year plan; the fact that we've tripled the annual funding for child care to more than \$160 million; we've funded more than 14,340 child-care spaces, which is an increase of over 90 per cent; we've increased wages by nearly 60 per cent; and introduced a provide-wide pension plan for child-care workers. This is something that I am deeply proud of that we've done, that this government has done. And I know that, male or female alike, my colleagues support those kinds of initiatives. And it's what makes me want to keep doing this.

I have learned a lot from my female colleagues, as well as my male colleagues, but I've certainly watched as female colleagues have handled very difficult situations. I've learned a great deal from listening to their insight as I considered my own perspective. And I would say that this is not the easiest thing to do as a woman, which does not mean it shouldn't be done, by any means. I've been asked a few times to speak to some women's groups about being a female politician and some of the challenges that it brings, and I've been very open and honest when I've had these discussions with them because I wanted them to understand what some of the challenges can be in this role.

I've been a little bit cautious about sharing some of the experiences I've had when some of the groups I spoke with had many young women, because I didn't want to discourage them. I've shared some of these stories with my female colleagues and even a couple of my male colleagues, but there have been some things said in this building and outside of this building by members in this Chamber that I would say nice men would not say. And some of these things have been said with my partner and my children a mere two or three feet away. I think that there is a level of disrespect for women still to this day that is swept under the carpet, and until we have not just women but our male colleagues saying that this is not going to be permitted, it's not going to be tolerated and you are not welcome to behave like that, that this will continue to carry on.

Now, I don't feel discouraged by this. I think that this is an important piece that's not a part of my legislative responsibilities, but it is very much a part of what I feel as a woman I'm responsible to continue working to change because it should not—in this day and age, it shouldn't exist. I shouldn't have to be telling silly stories about what some of the male people in this room have said, who should know better.

Now, as I said, I've shared some of these experiences with women who were interested in becoming involved in politics, but I have held that a little bit back because I don't want it to intimidate women. I think that they should come here, they should share their insights, they should share how they solve problems and what their perspective is because that enriches the lives of everybody. We need some balanced perspective, and that comes from both men and women working together.

I think that this is fantastic, what has been brought forward. I know that I have other colleagues that would like to speak to this, so I'm going to close. But I am just so delighted that as a woman elected in this Legislature, that Nellie McClung has done what she's done and made it that much easier for people like to me to come here, so thank you.

Hon. Melanie Wight (Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities): I'd like to thank the member opposite for bringing forward this bill.

I think back, I guess, to my own mom. Over Mother's Day, I was thinking about the two people who had the most influence to my life, and one was my mother and one was my daughter, on how I think

about women's issues and how I think about many things.

But my mom—I had no idea when I was a kid, actually, that there really was a difference between the equality of men and women. I didn't know because my mom never acted like there was any difference. In my home, there wasn't any. She changed—back in 1944, when she got married, she took the obey out of the ceremony, saying to anyone who cared to know that she had no intention of ever obeying my dad and my dad had no interest in her obeying him; that was not the relationship they had. They had an equal partnership. And that's what I saw all of my growing up years in small-time town, rural Manitoba.

The only time Mom made a mistake on that was one time when I was 16 and I'd come home super late the previous weekend, like, about 4 o'clock in the morning, and when I asked if I could go out the next weekend, she said, you can if your dad says you can, which she had never said in her entire life, ever, had she passed this off before to my dad. I went to ask Dad, and Dad said, yes, sure, do you want me to put gas in the car? And I went back to tell Mom, and, wow, we sure never saw that happen again.

When I went to the city, I started to learn that there was a massive difference between men and women. And I went to work for a real estate—corporate real estate company, and I started as a special assistant, Mr. Speaker. And in that role I collected for them a quarter of a million dollars, which back then was a lot of money. That got me a promotion—

* (11:00)

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. When this matter's again before the House, the honourable member—Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities will have eight minutes remaining.

The time being 11 a.m., it's time for private members' resolutions.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: But before I get to the resolutions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today from St. John's-Ravenscourt School 20 grade 9 students under the direction of Jock Martin and Dan Stanier, and this group is located in the constituency of the

honourable Minister of Education and Advanced Learning (Mr. Allum).

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

House Business

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

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, first on House business, Mr. Speaker.

In accordance with rule 31(9), I'd like to announce that the private member's resolution that'll be considered next Thursday is the resolution on Provincial Government Mismanagement Hurting Manitoba's Mining Industry, brought forward by the honourable member for Midland (Mr. Pedersen).

Mr. Speaker: It has been announced that, in accordance with rule 31(9), that the private member's resolution that will be considered next Thursday is the resolution on Provincial Government Mismanagement Hurting Manitoba's Mining Industry, brought forward by the honourable member for Midland.

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 2—Severance Payments Costing Manitoba Families

Mr. Speaker: Now we'll proceed to private member's resolution, and the resolution to be considered this morning is entitled Severance Payments Costing Manitoba Families, sponsored by the honourable member for Steinbach.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I move, seconded by the member for Morris (Mr. Martin), that

WHEREAS in the fall of 2014 the First Minister faced a revolt from senior members of the provincial government caucus and Cabinet; and

WHEREAS the Premier agreed to a leadership contest at the NDP convention in March of 2015, which he subsequently won by only 33 votes; and

WHEREAS in a December 2014 memo to the provincial government political staff the First Minister's now former chief of staff indicated that political staff would be free to work on leadership campaigns of their choosing; and

WHEREAS according to media reports the Premier stated, we believe everybody should be able to exercise their civil rights as citizens to participate in an electoral leadership contest, subsequently, a number of political staff took leaves of absence to work on campaigns of their choosing; and

WHEREAS the—WHEREAS after the Premier secured his leadership by a 51 per cent to 49 per cent margin, the Premier's office began firing government staff who worked on leadership campaigns other than his own and, according to media reports the Premier stated, people have civil rights but we also have an organization to run; and

WHEREAS the Premier's office offered substantial severance payments in exchange for silence of departing employees, including \$146,047 to the Premier's chief of staff, but have not fully disclosed all severance packages.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the provincial government be urged to immediately release all details related to severance payments, secondment costs and leaves of absence resulting from the leadership race so that Manitobans know how much the government has paid in political payouts that cannot be used for front-line services like health care and education.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable member for Steinbach, seconded by the honourable member for Morris (Mr. Martin),

WHEREAS in the fall of 2014—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense? Dispense.

The resolution is in order.

Mr. Goertzen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good morning to you and to all the members of the Assembly. It's an important issue that we debate here this morning, and this is an issue that has already been debated publicly, but it's important that it come back to the floor of the Legislature.

The issue of significant severance—or as some would call them, departure tax payments—to former staff of the NDP purely as a result of the leadership fiasco that Manitobans, unfortunately, had to bear witness to over the last number of months, and I say unfortunately because it certainly did not bring honour to our province. There are many people around Canada who were talking about the—what was going on here in Manitoba. Even in Alberta after

they had an electoral victory for the NDP, I heard a commentator on CBC say it's in stark contrast to the disaster—and these are his words, not mine. It was, I think, Andrew Coyne who said, the disaster that is happening with the NDP in Manitoba, and that is, in fact, how it's viewed.

And adding to that disaster is the fact this government has taken almost \$700,000, at least that we know of, and given it to staff, Mr. Speaker, to leave the Premier's (Mr. Selinger) office and other positions and Executive Council for the sole reason that they supported a leadership candidate other than the Premier; they either supported the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) or the member for Seine River (Ms. Oswald). And this after the Premier made a promise. He made a promise—and I know Manitobans are used to the Premier not keeping his promise.

They'll remember the promise not to raise the PST; they'll remember the promise to balance the budget in 2014, then promised in 2016 again. Now there's a new promise, Mr. Speaker. Nobody believes it anymore, but he made a promise to this political staff, to those who are working in his operation that they could go and work on other leadership campaigns. In fact, he went further than that; he said they had the civil right.

Mr. Ted Marcelino, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

And of course we all know—and we were talking just earlier in the first hour of private members' business about rights and how we've had the right to vote given, of course, to women for many, many years, and other rights. And there was discussion, I heard other members eloquently talk, I heard other members of the NDP speak eloquently about the need to ensure that rights are protected. And now an hour later I suspect we're going to hear a different message from those same members because the government didn't protect the rights that the Premier promised that his political staff had.

Now there may be some, Mr. Acting Speaker, who would say, well, I mean, what choice did the Premier have, these staff weren't loyal to him. The fact is it was his promise. It's like saying what choice did he have except to raise the PST. Well, he made the promise. He made the promise not to raise the PST. He made the promise that he was going to allow political staff to work on other campaigns and that there wouldn't be reprisal. In fact, a memo went out—an internal memo went out to political staff of the NDP which said you're free on your own time to

work on other leadership campaigns. That wasn't a memo that I authored or any member of the Conservative caucus authored; that was authored by the NDP. They made that assurance.

So, of course, after the balloons had come down from the Convention Centre and the Premier (Mr. Selinger) walked off with his landslide victory of 33 votes, Mr. Speaker, suddenly he had an entirely different message. Suddenly he decided that, oh, I don't remember who wrote that memo. It was like it was written in disappearing ink and suddenly it was gone. It was totally gone, and immediately he started negotiations. Now, that should have already set off alarms because when you're talking about severance, certainly it is our view that severance pay for political staff or other people in politics should be—it should be predictable, it should be transparent and it should be fair. And those are the principles by which it should be based on.

But the Premier immediately started negotiating from his desk in the Premier's office, negotiating severance. And the reason he had to negotiate, Mr. Acting Speaker, is because he had made a promise and now he had to rescind that promise and he had to somehow pay off these political staff to go away quietly because he'd committed to them that they wouldn't be—that there wouldn't be a reprisal for them working on another leadership campaign. Now he had to get them to go away, and go away quietly. Well, that means he had to pay them—he had to pay them. He had to pay them significantly.

We know for a fact that the chief of staff—the former chief of staff to the Premier received \$146,000 to go away quietly after only working for two years, or perhaps a little bit less than two years, Mr. Speaker. And the remaining staff that were disclosed, the other six got the balance of over half a million dollars. Many of them will have worked not for several years at all, probably just for several months, and then they went off to Alberta and started working right away; it was almost like a campaign contribution to the Alberta NDP.

But, Mr. Speaker, that is the issue that we're discussing here. And now I know that members—and I've heard it in the House and we heard it during question period, several of them said, well, don't you have anything more important to discuss? Well, I can tell you, you know, if they're not hearing from their constituents about this massive payout—well, and I'm glad to see the member for Burrows (Ms. Wight) says, no, she's not hearing at all. Well, we're going to

talk to some of her constituents and we're going to find out. She dismisses it. Well, maybe to her \$700,000 is the drop in the bucket, maybe it doesn't mean anything to her. But I believe to her—the families that are in her constituency it would mean a great deal. I believe that it would mean a great deal, \$700,000 to the constituents in Southdale. I believe it would mean a great deal to the constituents in Seine River. I believe it would mean a great deal to many of those constituents, and we'll make sure that they hear about it and they can be the judge and the 'arbiture'.

* (11:10)

And if the member for Burrows or any member of the NDP caucus don't believe it's significant, you know, we can rent a little hall, we can rent a bingo hall or rent a little community centre, and we can have a community forum. And we can have a community forum on whether or not paying \$700,000 for an NDP family feud is a good use of taxpayers' money. And I'm happy to go and to speak on behalf of our caucus. Others in our caucus, I'm sure, would do it.

I'd love to see an NDP member get up and defend that in front of their constituents, Mr. Speaker, but they're not going to do it. They're not going to do it because they can talk in this Legislature and say how it's not important; it's not a big deal; nobody really cares. They can say that here, but they won't say it in their community because they know—they know—that people are offended by the fact that the government is taking their money, hard-working taxpayers' dollars from the families of Manitoba and paying off political staff to go away quietly and to not speak about what's happened and—because of the NDP family feud.

And the question was raised by the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Pallister), why should Manitobans have to pay for this at all? Why are Manitobans on the hook for the dispute that went on in the NDP party? Everybody at that convention, or I assume 99 per cent of the people at that convention, were NDP members. They were just—they were settling out an NDP dispute. It wasn't to select the premier, actually, it was to select the leader of the NDP, Mr. Speaker, and as a result of that dispute Manitobans get fleeced for \$700,000. Manitobans get this bill from the NDP.

Now, we know that the NDP are having a tough time raising money, and we've seen that, and not surprisingly, Mr. Speaker, that they are having a

challenge. Of course, that's why they had to bring in the vote tax, another operation where they decided to go to Manitobans and say, well, we've got to take this money. Because they can't raise money on their own because either they're afraid to ask, or when they ask they get rejected. It's probably a combination of the two.

So maybe they don't have the money. Maybe they don't have the money to pay it back, and that's why they're refusing to do it. But that would be the right thing. It would be the right thing, Mr. Speaker, for them to say, yes, this was the result of a broken promise by the leader of the NDP; it was the result because of an internal dispute and internal fight within the NDP, and instead of taking \$700,000 from the pockets of hard-working Manitobans, we're going to ensure that that money is paid back.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

And there hasn't been full disclosure. I believe that there are others that have left government as a result of this, and we haven't heard all of the news. We've heard some from Executive Council, but I think that there are others. We haven't heard fully what the costs of some of the secondments are and what the severance agreements are for those who are seconded into the Premier's (Mr. Selinger) office. I'm sure that this bill is going to end up well in excess of \$1 million by the time that it is done.

And I'm not even adding on to the fact that the government has in the past, you know, given \$100,000 to defeated NDP candidate Scott Smith. They gave \$190,000 to defeated NDP candidate Bonnie Korzeniowski. They gave \$200,000 to former chief of staff Michael Balagus to go away. Members won't remember—or won't forget—that the government, the Cabinet signed off in Cabinet to give \$50,000 to the former CEO of Manitoba Public Insurance for a no-work contract after she'd gotten \$300,000 of severance because they didn't believe that \$300,000 was enough so let's throw in another \$50,000.

Manitobans have a hard time understanding and grasping these figures not only because they're extraordinary and they're large, but because Manitobans work every day and have a hard time, in many cases, making ends meet. But this is a government at this stage of their political lives, Mr. Speaker, which has become arrogant, distracted and don't relate to ordinary families in Manitoba. And that is obvious by the fact that they take their money and they give it over to political staff,

hundreds of thousands of dollars, and they think it's not an issue, nobody cares.

Well, I say, let's take it to the people of Manitoba. I'm willing to go anywhere to have this discussion with Manitobans because I think that they would be appalled that members opposite don't think this is an issue and that this is how taxpayers' dollars should be treated.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): If you want the definition of hypocrisy, I think you just have to look at the comments put on the record by the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen). I mean, talk about hypocrisy.

Mr. Speaker, first of all, by the way, I have to say, Tories' talk about anything to do with leadership is pretty rich and, boy, they're—they know about rich and they know about leadership disputes. You know, I happened to run into Stu Murray the other day. He's still pulling the knives out from 10 years ago. You know, there are people who remember when, you know, in this Chamber there were MLAs—some of them are still here—that disagreed with Stu Murray, launched a direct attack on Stu Murray.

But, you know, you want to talk about hypocrisy, I want to read on the record a comment, and this is, you know—I wish the Leader of the Opposition would be able to respond to this because this is a bit—I know it's a bit of a trick question, but—Mr. Speaker, I want to quote Charles Adler, and it's—if a certain individual is lucky, those who vote will forget how this individual, who's an MLA, manipulated voters and sponged off taxpayers. This is from February 1st, 2006. Well, who was that individual? It was the Leader of the Opposition.

Let's understand the way the Conservatives operate when it comes to leadership disputes. First of all, I mentioned the coup, the successful coup against Stu Murray. But one, you know, the Leader of the Opposition, who was a federal Member of Parliament at the time, decided to go on a listening tour with his taxpayer-funded assistant, around the province to test the waters on whether he should run for the provincial leadership. Mr. Speaker, he was collecting an MP's salary and he was campaigning for the leadership here. Now, okay, that's one dimension of hypocrisy.

Let's talk about severance pay. Let's talk about severance pay for a moment. Now I must say, Mr. Speaker, that the Leader of the Opposition has

become the Brian Williams of Manitoba politics. I'm not talking about the hockey side. You know, the news anchor. I'm waiting after yesterday where the Leader of the Opposition talked about, you know, he knew Jack Layton and he was friends with Jack Layton. You know, like, first of all I have to say this. You know, I knew Jack Layton and the Leader of the Opposition is no Jack Layton. But, you know, next thing you're going to hear, the Leader of the Opposition talk about combat missions he was on and, you know, embellishing as he does, you know, pretty well anything and everything he does.

But, you know, I found the ultimate in question period. The Leader of the Opposition got up and with that sort of righteous indignation that only the Leader of the Opposition, you know, can excel at. He talked about severance pay, Mr. Speaker, severance pay. Well, you know, he's not only the king of by-elections, he's caused more by-elections, I think, than virtually any other politician, both the provincial and the federal. But both times when he left politics, he collected severance pay. And, look, let's be clear, I'm not criticizing people collecting severance pay. But, you know, I will criticize people for hypocrisy. When you stand up and you make it sound like there's something untoward with people getting severance pay, when you've collected it twice, that's the Leader of the Opposition.

So I want to go further and that is to recognize—let's understand that their argument here, Mr. Speaker, is about the political staff and the biggest thing they can find to complain, is that political staff receives severance pay. Well what a contrast to when they were in government. I mean, let's understand what the controversy of the day was and kind of continue. Let's talk about chiefs of staff. I know the member from Steinbach talked about former chiefs of staff receiving severance pay. Well, I know for a couple of things, that they didn't engage in an attempt to violate The Elections Act. They weren't cited for being untrustworthy witnesses in a judicial inquiry. They weren't taken to court, convicted of violating The Elections Act, and fined, I believe it was \$10,000. Who am I talking about? The chief of staff of the day, Taras Sokolyk.

Now, you want to talk about severance and getting paid for doing nothing. Stu Murray hired him to provide political advice. When it became public, members opposite actually understood that there might be some concern about getting political advice from someone that was involved in one of the major political scandals of our time in Manitoba. So what

did they do? They severed his contract. He basically he got \$25,000 to do nothing because they saw the heat. They were quite happy to get political advice from someone until people found out. So when it comes to severance pay, again, the issue.

And I want to challenge members opposite to put on the record what's happened with their staff in the last number of weeks and months. There seems to be a turnover issue there, both their political party and in their caucus, Mr. Speaker, and also caucus staff.

* (11:20)

And, you know, it was interesting because I think the Leader of the Opposition might be classified as kind of doing the Philadelphia lawyer route a few days ago when he said, well, no taxpayers' money went to severance. You notice he didn't say no money went to severance. No, he was parsing the words. Yes, I think he was—you know, I mean, he used every sort of creative way to throw smoke around the fact that he clearly paid severance pay.

And, Mr. Speaker, let's put on the record, if they pay severance pay from their political party—and, again, talk about hypocrisy, they criticize, you know, various aspects of public funding, but every time someone donates to their party—same with ours—there is a tax credit, so there's taxpayers' money that goes to their political party.

So, Mr. Speaker, for him to parse the words, I don't think so. I think, you know, well, the hypocrisy speaks loud and clear. And I want to go one step further, and, you know, I realize that members opposite have put a lot of attention on our leadership race. They've been obsessed by our leadership race. Well, they never had one when the Leader of the Opposition ran. And I have to say, I do have, you know, friends who were Conservatives—not a lot, actually, but I do have some—and I must admit, you know, I actually said to a friend of mine, he came up to me, you know, during the leadership process and he came and he said he felt sorry for—he said, you know, this—I feel sorry for you because it might hurt, you know, the NDP in the polls. And I said, you know, I said, yes, you know, I'm somewhat upset too, and I looked him right in the eye and I said, you know, I do think at times we're acting like Tories.

I mean, Mr. Speaker, I hate to say it, but you know when you have leadership disputes, there are things that happen that no one should ever want to see happen. But members opposite, to lecture us

about leadership dissension—I mean, they're a party at the federal and the provincial level. They've taken the—you know, they knife their leaders on a regular basis. They've taken it to the highest level.

But, you know, I love when the—you know, when they go on about, yes, when you have this leadership disputes, you know, there can be some division. And I want to put on the record that we came out of our convention united. Members opposite may not like that, Mr. Speaker. We came out of our convention united, but what I noticed with the Conservatives, they don't have a leadership race but it seems that anybody that disagrees with the Leader of the Opposition somehow manages to have a democratic race in their constituency. I don't know, there seems to have been a whole series of former Conservative MLAs that I've talked to that seem to point the finger at the Leader of the Opposition as to why they're not in politics anymore.

So, you know what? I walk by the Tory caucus every day to go to my office in room 203. I don't exactly hear members opposite, you know, holding hands and singing Kumbaya in their caucus, Mr. Speaker, so let them not lecture us.

So I want to put on the record, and I can put this on the record as someone that did run for the leadership, Mr. Speaker, I can say that we made a real commitment coming out of our convention to be united. We're united in our caucus; every single member of our caucus is now a full member of our caucus. And when it comes to issues like this, I will compare the way we have approached issues involving our staff—and, yes, some of them have received severance pay, you know what, as is every member of the Legislature entitled to, as the case in terms of the Conservative members opposite.

But what I really want to put on the record is that the real hypocrisy is they can talk about a lot of things, but if they're talking about our political staff, I'm proud of the fact that none of them was implicated in a scandal like the vote-rigging scandal. Not our chief of staff, not our—by the way, on the clerk of Cabinet, Julian Benson was involved—not our clerk of Cabinet, none of our key donors, Mr. Speaker. We didn't run a phony party. We didn't get involved in anything involving subverting The Elections Act.

So, Mr. Speaker, file the last speech of the Conservative House leader under one thing, file it under hypocrisy.

Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to get up in support of the resolution by my colleague, the MLA for Steinbach.

It's always interesting listening to the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) talk about hypocrisy. And I remember quite some time ago when the member was on the other side of the House and he had waxed eloquently and raged about how not a day went by in his community that he didn't see families devastated by gambling, but since then what have we seen? We've seen a—what, a three-, four-time increase in the number of casinos? We've seen wholesale replacement of VLTs not once, but twice. We've seen a mailer go to every single household in this province encouraging them to gamble, so the member for Thompson should be more cautious in his comments about hypocrisy or least have the good sense to look in a mirror before uttering those words.

Mr. Speaker, this issue of severance really comes down to the issue of family feud. You know, Family Feud, I think, is a show that many of us watch or that our—that we watched with our parents around those evenings. And you know what's interesting about Family Feud is the average payout, and the average payout, actually, on Family Feud—and the beauty of Google is they tell you these things, and Google tells me the average payout for Family Feud is actually \$20,000.

So what's interesting about that number, Mr. Speaker, \$20,000, if—is, you know what, that is the amount that if each member opposite, if each NDP member wrote a cheque, that would actually cover the \$670,000 in question.

An Honourable Member: Good answer.

Mr. Martin: Good answer. Actually, they—and they don't have to write \$20,000, Mr. Speaker; \$18,611.11—if each of them would each write a cheque in that amount to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar), then they could repay the money that they took from the taxpayers.

But the issue, Mr. Speaker, and members opposite will argue that somehow we're against severance, and I think my member for the—my colleague for Steinbach made it very, very clear we have no issue with severance. But the severance must be predictable, it must be transparent and it must be fair. And what we've seen throughout, with members opposite, with the NDP, that it is not predictable, it is not transparent and it's not fair.

I mean, nothing says business as usual and this is standard practice than the video of watching the Premier (Mr. Selinger) of this province literally running down the hallway away from the media in an attempt to avoid questions about this issue. So it's always interesting to hear them talk about how this is business as usual as the Premier sprints down the hallway.

And of course, the other line I always enjoy from the Premier is his comment that this is more or less standard practice. But he doesn't really say, is it more than standard practice, or is it less than standard practice. And I would suggest, based on these numbers, Mr. Speaker, more importantly, on the history of members opposite in terms of the very generous severance packages that they will underwrite and will even go to Cabinet to go beyond or to go outside of rules laid down by the Legislature to prevent such actions, that it's probably on the more side.

So \$670,000, Mr. Speaker, I mean, to members opposite, it's meaningless, it's just this change that they find in the couch. And one comment by the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) really stood out, and he talked about how we, on this side, you know, when we talk about, you know, potentially the staff who may have left our employment, that there was no taxpayer money went to severance.

And that's the difference between ourselves and the NDP. They see the taxpayer purse as their own purse. They see taxpayer money as their money. And so they don't see, they don't differentiate when they're doling out \$670,000 from general revenues into the pockets of staffers, staffers that I would remind the House that were promised by this Premier that everyone, and I quote: We believe everyone should be able to exercise their civil rights as citizens to participate in electoral leadership contest. End quote. I didn't say that, the Premier of this House said it.

Of course, another favourite comment from the NDP and from this Premier and many, many of his colleagues is the famous quote of a promise made is a promise kept. Now, Mr. Speaker, we know the history of the NDP breaking their promises, and it goes back to their initial election and it continues unabated. I mean, just, obviously, most recently, with these seven former staffers in their receipt of \$670,000.

And what's even more interesting, Mr. Speaker, is we are running a \$422-million deficit. I mean,

obviously, the deficit has gone up under the NDP, but they claim somehow that a rising deficit is a declining deficit, and up is down and down is up, and it all gets very confusing following their logic.

* (11:30)

But the point being, that hundred and—\$670,000 severance package, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar) actually had to go to the money lenders in Toronto, in New York, and actually borrow that money on behalf of the Province of Manitoba. That money actually had to be borrowed. And as a result, there will be interest charges. So, I mean, you think, you know what, maybe give yourself a generous mortgage rate of, you know, 3 per cent, Mr. Speaker, 3 and a half per cent, 25 years.

How many hundreds of thousands of dollars of interest payments are my children, your children and Manitobans' children is going to be paying as a result of this severance package? And, again, a severance package that was paid out exclusively to shut people up, to hush them up because they know where the bodies were buried. These are individuals that had received a commitment from the Premier of this province that they had the civil right to engage in any leadership contest. And, of course, after that dynamic victory by the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger), after the attempted coup by the members for Seine River and Thompson, of course, he—the entire time he quickly sharpened that axe and he quickly severed some of those staff.

And, of course, it being—severing staff isn't new. And generous payouts, severance packages aren't new, these political payouts, these departure taxes. I mean, we saw it with Michael Balagus and the very, very generous package that he received, obviously, again, due to a conflict with the Premier. We saw the—you know, the \$300,000 package provided to the former president and CEO of MPI, and of course, the \$50,000 packages simply do nothing and stay at home. Who could forget about the \$100,000 package to former Brandon West MLA to do—we don't know. He was a former Minister of Industry and suddenly he's paid \$100,000 to do what, Mr. Speaker? There's no evidence that he actually did anything. And, of course, Bonnie Korzeniowski, who was offered—who taxpayers funded to the tune of \$190,000 to run a part-time office.

So, Mr. Speaker, this whole issue could be very easily dealt with by members opposite, by the NDP. And, again, if they would just simply take out from

their wallets and their purses a chequebook and, again—

An Honourable Member: Or borrow.

Mr. Martin: Or borrow if they—if need be, just as the provincial—

An Honourable Member: Interest rates are good.

Mr. Martin: Interest rates are good, my colleague from Morden-Winkler notes, because why should the taxpayer of Manitoba have to borrow the \$670,000 to pay for their political feuds and that?

You know, so, Mr. Speaker, we talk about fairness, we talk about transparency and we talk about predictability. These are things that obviously political staff require in accepting these jobs. We know these jobs can be challenging jobs for political staff.

But, again, there is the balance required in terms of the taxpayers. Taxpayers need that level of accountability, and it's accountability that they don't find and they have actually never found within the ranks of the NDP. And, again, I mean, the NDP see the public purse as their purse, and they—there is no line for them, so there is no qualm to write these kind of generous political payouts and these departure taxes in excess of \$670,000 or, as the Premier (Mr. Selinger) puts it, that's more or less the norm.

And, of course, you know, the Premier always likes to say, you know, that these have been negotiated and this is what's been recommended, but he doesn't ever talk about the fact that all these staff—and if I'm wrong I'd be more than happy to correct the record—but I suspect that all these staff signed a non-disclosure agreement, Mr. Speaker.

So, I mean, these very, very generous packages come—become questionable. And I've been asked whether or not this is, indeed, just simply hush money paid to these individuals to go away and probably go to Alberta and find employment there, but just simply go away, because clearly, despite the Premier saying that they have that right and there would be no repercussions for backing individuals other than himself, some of them did back the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton), some of them backed the member for Seine River (Ms. Oswald). And, of course, what happened is the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger) was able—successfully held off that coup and then again he decided to make this known.

So, again, Mr. Speaker, members opposite can—

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

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to rise in the House and speak to this particular motion.

I'd have to admit, Mr. Speaker, I did try to follow the member for Morris's (Mr. Martin) comments. And towards the end, I mean, I hesitate to say this, but it did sound more like ramblings on our—you know, on an internal, you know, political process that was undertaken on this side of the House.

And, you know, I'm—as the member for Thompson mentioned, I mean, completely baffled by how much time they're spending on this, you know, attention towards our leadership contest and, you know, without any kind of context for their own at all because they didn't have one. So—but they are certainly fixated on ours.

And, you know, I'd like to submit to the House that we do have a set amount of time and a limited amount of time to debate these sorts of issues, and if they were interested in debating these sorts of things, I mean, you know, certainly there are issues we'd like to talk about. But, you know, certainly, fixating on our internal leadership race is certainly not helpful.

And I think, actually, I mean, my time in the House, I—the things that I've found to be true are that we—you know, giving the people of Manitoba more credit than something like this does, I think, is certainly a good starting point because people understand the value of, you know, honest work and honest compensation for that work, you know, fair pay for fair work.

And certainly, you know, in the public service, of all places, this is somewhere where, you know, all of us in this Chamber and others that support the work that we do is valuable to the people of Manitoba. And they get that. They understand that. And I would go so far as to say that I think the Leader of the Opposition actually believes that as well.

You know, he's certainly willing to make statements about certain parts of the political—or the public service, I should say, Mr. Speaker. But he doesn't want to acknowledge the people in his own caucus or his own party that have, you know, I would presume have provided a service to the people

of Manitoba, certainly provided a service to the official opposition in this House, and I'm assuming have been properly compensated for the work that they've done. And I don't think anyone on this side of the House would question that. I think that's an important part of what we do here.

We have to make sure that we have people that are willing to give their—of themselves and give their time and their efforts. And to question the fact that they would receive some compensation, I think, would—is just—it's insulting to the people of Manitoba, quite frankly, to assume that they don't see the value in this as well.

You know, the Leader of the Opposition himself said that in any business or any endeavour, HR is difficult. That's what he said in this House. He said it's a difficult part of the—of how to run an organization. And it's certainly true. I mean, it does, you know, speak to the fact that there is a severance; there is some kind of compensation for folks who are in this line of work. And, you know, certainly, I think it's important that we, you know, that we appreciate those folks, that we give them the appreciation that they so deserve.

But here we are in the House and, I mean, we just came through a great debate on the budget, and certainly, I heard some inspiring comments from the members on our side about that budget and about how it affects and actually benefits the people of Manitoba and their constituents. And, you know, I'm all for more discussion on those kinds of issues.

I know we're, you know, eager to get to Estimates here in this House, we're eager to move through to important legislation that we have on the table. We are ready to do the work here in the Chamber. And yet, here we are discussing, you know, I think, frankly, I think it's a distraction for folks, and I think it's, you know, an intellectually dishonest one at that. The Leader of the Opposition certainly has a double standard when it comes to, you know, who should be—what should be disclosed and who should be singled out.

So, you know, frankly, Mr. Speaker, I think we should move on in terms of discussion, and I do want to take a little bit of time this morning to just put on the record a little bit more about what we are not discussing because we're discussing this right now. You know, he's unwilling to talk about, I think, the issues that really are important to Manitobans.

And I think he's just—he's afraid because he knows that our plan is working and he knows that when we invest in core infrastructure and skills training that our economy benefits and that we move forward.

So, you know, I mean, the Leader of the Opposition doesn't want to talk about the 70,000 jobs that he's, you know, willing to eliminate if his economic plan were to go forward. He doesn't want to talk about that. He doesn't want to talk about, you know, how they fired 1,000 teachers—or nurses, how they laid off 700 teachers. He doesn't want to talk about those kinds of issues. And, instead, he thinks that Manitobans will be bamboozled by this distraction here in the house.

* (11:40)

So, you know, we're absolutely eager here, as, you know, as the government, to talk about important issues, about the bills that, and the legislation that we have coming forward. And, you know, we are committed to promoting and working with Manitobans on Budget 2015 and enabling them to make the most here in Manitoba. Of course, we know with the severe economic disturbances we've had in this province that investing in core infrastructure, keeping Manitobans working, is a priority, and that's what we hear on the doorstep.

You know, we hear that, you know, investments on—in, you know, the—in giving people opportunities, especially young people, when it comes to education, is absolutely vital. And so the only thing that has been offered up on the other side is, you know, a complete, you know, destruction when it comes to our economy, by cutting, and we know that that just is not the—that's not the way to go. And that's not just us saying this, Mr. Speaker, that's third-party validators, that's economists around the world.

So I just—I simply want to put a few words on the record with regards to what I think is important to be discussing in this Chamber, and I, you know, certainly think that, you know, if it weren't for this double standard and if it were, you know, an opportunity for us to actually, you know, debate this issue, I think we'd find that Manitobans certainly understand, you know, the dynamics in terms of the public service, in terms of having—you know, basing decisions on HR, on legal advice, on human resources practice, you know, rather than politicizing it and rather than, you know, turning this into a discussion about, you know, issues that it's not.

So I say to the House I believe that we have more important issues to discuss and I think that we should continue on with that work.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jim Rondeau (Assiniboia): I'm pleased to put a few words on this, and I'm pleased to put a few words on this because we talk about transparent, fair and other words like respect and appropriate compensation. And I look at it this way. Why would a leader of the opposition, why would a Conservative Party, want to say that what they've done in the past, in the '90s when they—people were part of their government and they were let go, they were given compensation. When there's people in the House of Commons and they leave the House of Commons, they're given compensation. Only a party that wants to remove half a billion dollars of budget and then fire the teachers and fire the nurses and fire all the people in the political civil service, well, what they're trying to do is go back to the 1990s and then fire those people and not compensate them when they fire them. That's what their—the standard that they are starting to play to.

And, Mr. Speaker, I look at people who have double standards, and I'm not naming out names, but people who would get MP pension plans, get compensation plans when they leave, and when they get their compensation for leaving and they get their pension plans and then they say others don't deserve it, I think that is truly unfair and inappropriate. It's not respectful.

And so when I look at equity, I believe in equity. Our party's founded on what you desire of yourselves, you desire for all. And that means that when a person loses their job, be it in the private sector or public sector, they are given compensation.

Now, let's talk a few seconds about some of the compensation that happens in the public interest. Well, Target was an interesting case in point. You have Target coming into Canada and then going bankrupt. And you have the CEO of Target getting about \$75 million compensation for five years' work. And the company failed. Actually, it was interesting because there was a couple of commentaries in the Financial Post and The Globe that actually said that the compensation the CEO made was equivalent to all of the employees who lost their jobs.

Now, you tell me, Mr. Speaker, whether the \$70 million to the thousands of employees—split between the thousands of employees—or the

\$70 million to one individual is fair. I don't think it's fair. I think that people deserve reasonable compensation. So I disagree with the member from Selkirk—sorry, Steinbach—[interjection]—I agree—Steinbach, I'm sorry—and the Leader of the Opposition.

And I'd like to also say some other things, where we believe in fairness. We believe in 'reasing'—raising the minimum wage. We raise the minimum wage every single year, and the Conservative Party votes against that. They raised it once in 10 years—

Mr. Speaker: I think I may have seen a member of the public who's visiting us here taking a picture from within the Assembly. If that is the case, I want to draw the attention of our guests who are here with us this morning that there is no photography permitted in the Chamber. That includes our guests sitting in the public gallery. So I'm asking for your co-operation.

Sorry to interrupt the honourable member for Assiniboia (Mr. Rondeau).

Mr. Rondeau: So let's talk about minimum wage. We believe in raising the minimum wage. We have raised the minimum wage every single budget because it's fair. It's equitable. It shows respect. The Conservatives have voted against that every time because they don't believe in those basic premises.

We talk about holiday pay. It's through our government that we've moved forward on improvements on holiday pays. And, you know, we believe in having the ability to work together, to collectively bargain. We believe in the rights of unions. We believe in the right that people should have dignity and respect.

And, Mr. Speaker, part of that means when you lose your job, whether you're in the private sector, whether you're in the public sector, you're either given notice or you're given compensation. And that is just fair and respectful.

So it's interesting how the members opposite want to spin their case. When they gave compensation to their political staff, then what happened is that the donations that they get, 75 per cent of provincial tax money to compensate the people who donate make those contributions.

So when they keep on having a revolving door on their political staff door, don't make it hypocritical, where we—they say, oh, but this had no support from government. What they have got—that

whole concept is ridiculous. What's happened is that they take money from the Treasury and they give it to their donors at 75 cents on the dollar. Then what happens is they take that money and they give it to this revolving door of political staff that's been out of their leader's office.

So Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that you need to look very far at hypocrisy in the Conservative Party. I believe that we want to govern for all and be fair for all. And I look at this resolution and I can't believe that this is being moved forward by the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), who has voted against minimum wage, voted against improvements in worker safety, who voted against any moves forward on improving the working conditions in Manitoba and really pushed, and, in fact, the one thing that my brother did mention was, as a firefighter, he could not even believe that the Conservative Party would not even allow presumptive legislation on workers' compensation for firefighters.

So Mr. Speaker, this is a party that when they talk about respect and transparency, they are transparent now, and that is how negative transparency on the workers, on civil rights, on respecting people in the workplace—and I am pleased to be a party that respects workers, respects people where they work and when they work.

Thank you very much.

Hon. Melanie Wight (Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities): I'm very pleased to get a chance to speak on this topic. I'm not at all surprised by the members opposites' fixation on our leadership race, since no one in their party wants to be the leader. It must be interesting for them to be able to watch us. But I absolutely—yes—understand why they want to delay Estimates. I understand why they don't want to speak to our budget, Mr. Speaker. It's not hard to figure out. There is no vision on that side of the House.

* (11:50)

When your entire statement is that you want to cut half a billion dollars out of the economy and out of the investment in our province, then there's no vision over there. So it must be incredibly difficult for them when we have to discuss budgets and look at all of those things.

I think the member from Morris showed clearly his incredible lack of knowledge around finance, and it's frightening, but I'm sure that if he actually asked

our Finance Minister for a briefing that our Finance Minister would be able to help him understand what some of these terms mean and how the financing for the government works and how much better we are doing, Mr. Speaker, in our economy now in Manitoba than we ever did under the reins of the PC Party. So I'm not at all surprised by that.

We're delaying Estimates by speaking about this. We know, Mr. Speaker, that the Leader of the Opposition himself took severance pay. When the member from Steinbach mentioned that—I don't know, what was he saying? Something about we don't relate to regular people, yet the Leader of the Opposition with his \$2-million house and his seven-car garage, the man who has never had a—any understanding, I'm sure, of what it's like to live poor, somehow relates to the people—I don't think so.

We see from when they were last in government that they took out of the pockets of our lowest income people \$48 million a year by clawing back the Child Tax Benefit, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry, but for me and in my area, those are the kinds of things that I am concerned about a government doing, stealing that money right out of the hands of the people who need it most.

I was an emergency foster parent at the time of that previous government, Mr. Speaker, and when they lowered our rates from—it was \$18 a day, I think, to \$16 a day, and then they killed our association that could support us.

Yes, so they didn't just cut the rates, then they made sure there was no way for us to effectively fight back. They cut EIA rates, I believe, three times while they were in. They had a snitch line, and because I live in the North End just over the Arlington Street bridge, I saw that sign. Every time I went to work—that snitch line sign.

And the snitch line, it's not even—the concept of a snitch line, Mr. Speaker, speaks to so many things about how the party opposite thinks. They see people who are poor as being people who are somehow dishonest, who just have not worked hard enough, and that's what a snitch line says. That is exactly what a snitch line says. It says that you need to report on your neighbour, and that comes straight out of a philosophy that we see on the other side of the House. And it's a very clear philosophy and we see it in so many of the choices that they made back when they last had the opportunity, and we're going to see it in their future plans if they're 'evan' given the opportunity.

The members opposite have been clear about proposing to cut half a billion dollars that will lose the province of Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, over 70,000 jobs. That will hurt those folks across all parts of Manitoba. And it won't matter whether or not you're a business person or whatever field you might be in, it's going to harm you and it's going to hurt your family.

And so I understand their lack of desire to talk about this budget, to go into Estimates and talk about how well we're doing in the province of Manitoba, and that's exactly what we're seeing. We look at all this, how we're investing, Mr. Speaker, again in education and training, something that never happened during the last time they were in. They were not investing in education and training. They were not investing in our young people. It was truly the time of the extinction of the crane because nothing was built across our province.

They were absolutely, without question, the no-build government. And that hurts everyone in our province—everyone. When we are not building roads, Mr. Speaker, that hurts everyone. A lot of our trade and commerce occurs, obviously, on good infrastructure. We need that. But, as we've said in our budget that they obviously don't want to speak about, a budget is more than just, you know, dollars and cents. It's all about people. It's all about the philosophy of the government and what that government cares about, and what we see from members opposite is that they are not the folks that are going to be caring about the average Manitoban family, and we know that. We know that from the past. We know that from the cuts of half a billion dollars out of the economy.

In Budget 2015, for example, here's another reason why they don't want to talk about it: we're keeping life affordable for all Manitobans. So we've increased the caregiver's tax credit by 10 per cent because we know that a lot of our people are helping out their friends or helping out family members and they can receive a benefit of up to \$4,200 each, and that is going to help many Manitobans, the sandwich generation as they're called. We're doubling the seniors' school tax rebate in 2015 to \$470, Mr. Speaker, but we also give a benefit to all Manitobans of \$700.

When it comes to small business, which members opposite seem to claim is people they were helping, I mean they had a business tax there of 9 per cent when they were in government. What do

we have? Zero, zero per cent. And, I'm sorry, when you cut half a billion dollars out of the economy you hurt small business. When you cut the Child Tax Benefit out of the pockets of our lower income people, then you hurt small business because those people who would've had that money to spend in their grocery stores and to buy clothing for their children don't have that money. And the people that are hurt are small business, because the people in your population don't have the same amount of dollars in their pockets.

The minimum wage alone, Mr. Speaker, that they froze seven years out of 11 years took millions of dollars from the pockets of our lower wage earners. So when we increase that minimum wage every single year that put money directly into the hands of the people who need it most, and they were able to take that money and go to their small businesses and buy the goods and all of the things that they need. So everyone in the entire province is lifted up, and that is the difference between our side and their side.

We are people that are working for equality in our government, Mr. Speaker. So I absolutely understand completely why the member from Steinbach is busy delaying Estimates, why the members on the whole, that side, don't want to have to speak about these things.

We increased, for example, Mr. Speaker, Rent Assist to 75 per cent, but not just for those folks who are EIA, for all people who have—who are in need of that Rent Assist. So we invested in 900 new child-care spaces just in this budget. In fact, about 14,000 of them since we've been in government, and that allows your economy to grow because women can then work, because it is usually the women that stay at home often with their children. So we know that investing in child-care spaces helps your economy and allows—*[interjection]* Well, the vast majority can, it is true. So there is no question across the world as you create child-care spaces you open up the economy to women, and we want to see that. We want them to be able to do that.

We have increased—oh, wait, I almost missed this. We have new volunteer firefighter and search-and-rescue tax credits. Perhaps they are against that as well, Mr. Speaker. So we would like—I'd just like to say that I think it's pretty clear why the members opposite don't want to be speaking about this budget.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): No one on the other side wants to speak to this at this particular moment. That's shocking. If you've-winded or maybe suffering from whiplash. It's never a good morning when you bring forward a motion and it blows up in your face. For those of you who have joined us recently-

* (12:00)

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

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Wolseley will have nine minutes remaining.

The hour being 12 noon, this House is recessed until 1:30 p.m. this afternoon.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 14, 2015

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