

First Session – Forty-First Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-First Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLUM, James	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
BINDLE, Kelly	Thompson	PC
CHIEF, Kevin	Point Douglas	NDP
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy, Hon.	River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
CURRY, Nic	Kildonan	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Charleswood	PC
EICHLER, Ralph, Hon.	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FIELDING, Scott, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	PC
FLETCHER, Steven, Hon.	Assiniboia	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
FRIESEN, Cameron, Hon.	Morden-Winkler	PC
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon.	Steinbach	PC
GRAYDON, Clifford	Emerson	PC
GUILLEMARD, Sarah	Fort Richmond	PC
HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott	St. James	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
KLASSEN, Judy	Kewatinook	Lib.
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan	Selkirk	PC
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Burrows	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom	Flin Flon	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	Morris	PC
MAYER, Colleen	St. Vital	PC
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
MICKLEFIELD, Andrew	Rossmere	PC
MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice	Seine River	PC
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
PALLISTER, Brian, Hon.	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine, Hon.	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Arthur-Virden	PC
REYES, Jon	St. Norbert	PC
SARAN, Mohinder	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron, Hon.	St. Paul	PC
SELINGER, Greg	St. Boniface	NDP
SMITH, Andrew	Southdale	PC
SMOOK, Dennis	La Verendrye	PC
SQUIRES, Rochelle, Hon.	Riel	PC
STEFANSON, Heather, Hon.	Tuxedo	PC
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	NDP
TEITSMA, James	Radisson	PC
WHARTON, Jeff	Gimli	PC
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WISHART, Ian, Hon.	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
YAKIMOSKI, Blair	Transcona	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, May 30, 2016

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Madam 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.

Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Madam Speaker: Introduction of bills? Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade): I am pleased to present the following reports to the Legislative Assembly: the Annual Report of the Workers Compensation Board of Manitoba for 2015; the PowerSmart Annual Provincial Report for 2015; the Annual Report of the Appeal Commission and Medical Review Panel for 2015; and the Workers Compensation Board of Manitoba Five-Year Plan for 2016-2020.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Madam Speaker: The required 90 minutes' notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with a statement.

Aerospace Week

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade): It's indeed a pleasure to stand and celebrate Aerospace Week in Manitoba. Manitoba is home to a world-class aerospace industry. It is the largest in western Canada with approximately 5,400 employed directly and many more indirectly in related sectors.

Our aerospace sector is diverse and on the cutting edge of technology and innovation, and the outlook for the Manitoba aerospace is positive. Our government understands the global supply chain is

extremely competitive, and Manitoba companies face pressure from lower cost jurisdictions. It is important our new government work with the industry and other partners to ensure our province has the opportunity to benefit from a globally competitive and growing aerospace sector. This includes removing barriers to growth and trade.

Two thirds of the Canada aerospace sector exports go to Trans-Pacific Partnership countries. Aerospace experts have said the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement is essential to the aerospace sector's ability to grow, innovate and create jobs.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement will lower trade barriers for our aerospace industry, providing equal or preferential access to key markets. Our government put forward a motion last week to declare Manitoba's support for the Trans-Pacific Partnership. We continue to call on members opposite to support economic growth and protect jobs in aerospace and other sectors.

Supporting Manitoba aerospace jobs includes standing up for our sector within Canada. It is both in our and the national interest to maintain a robust and competitive aerospace industry outside of eastern Canada. Proposed federal amendments to the Air Canada Public Participation Act virtually eliminate any obligation for Air Canada to maintain high-quality, skilled heavy-maintenance jobs in our province. This is contrary to the interests of Manitobans, and it is not appropriate to rush through these amendments without substantial dialogue and consideration.

Our new government has been engaging with the aerospace sector and our partners in the federal government and Air Canada. We have made it clear our government opposes federal amendments to the Air Canada Public Participation Act and will continue to do so until such time as specific commitments have been made to reassure Manitobans that changes to the act and related accompanying investments and job creation will provide a net benefit to the Manitoba economy.

We encourage Manitobans to take the time this week to learn more about Manitoba aerospace and the important role it plays in providing high-quality jobs in our province. The achievements of Manitoba

aerospace and the role this vital industry plays in building a better Manitoba is truly worth celebrating.

Mr. Kevin Chief (Point Douglas): Madam Speaker, I rise today to commend those contributing to our successful aerospace sector here in Manitoba. Canada is a global leader in aerospace, and Manitoba is home to Canada's third largest aerospace industry and Canada's largest aerospace composite manufacturing centre.

The aerospace sector is a huge contributor to the economy in Manitoba, accounting over—for over 5,000 jobs. The vibrant aerospace sector makes Manitoba an attractive place to live, work, and invest. Aerospace products, exports and services offer significant growth potential for Manitoba and opens doors for employment opportunities. The aerospace sector offers Manitobans, particularly our young people, highly skilled, satisfying careers with the potential for training and advancement. And one thing that we know, Madam Speaker, is that young people—the world's a small place. They want to be able to have a global reach, international connections, but still making their biggest impact here in their hometown, and we know that the aerospace industry works incredibly hard for young people to make that possible.

Our NDP government invested in training opportunities in the aviation trades because we believe in the potential of our students to succeed in new technologies, and we believe that every Manitoban should have the opportunity to find a career that they are passionate about.

One of the things that we know the aerospace industry does is they take the workplace and take it directly into the classroom, and they take the classroom and they take it into the workplace, and they make sure that every young person starting in elementary school gets a tap on the shoulder to say there's a great job for you in the aerospace industry.

The Manitoba Aerospace Association, the Manitoba Aerospace Human Resource Council, provide leadership and assistance to the sector in becoming globally competitive. The achievements of Manitoba's aerospace companies are worthy of celebration and we commend them on their achievements.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

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

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, I think it's appropriate that we are celebrating Aerospace Week here in Manitoba. It is a tremendously important industry for us. It is at the front edge of technology and innovation, and it's an important industry for us as a province, for many who work in this industry and for all of us because of the contributions of this industry to technology, to taxes and to the well-being of our province.

* (13:40)

I note that the minister had talked about the bill, which is in Ottawa at the moment, and which deals with the situation of Air Canada. I would tell the minister that we would be happy to support an all-party resolution in support of specific commitments to Manitoba. I would think it would be very important for the minister to put that list of commitments on paper so that we can all see what they are and what's being asked for and what is needed. And then we can all get behind that.

One of the interesting developments, Madam Speaker, is the potential for a project called EMILI, which has the importance to significantly boost the aerospace sector. The minister could consider whether that could be part of a commitment from the federal government as one of a series of commitments. But I would urge the minister to put that list of commitments that he wants down on paper so that we can all see it and all support it and approach Ottawa on that basis.

Thank you.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Peter Barkman

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for—sorry—the honourable Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): On April 3rd of this year, our province lost a great Manitoban.

Peter Barkman spent his earliest years watching his parents, who had not much to spare themselves, consistently help others during the Great Depression and extended droughts. It formed in him a spirit of humility, gratefulness and generosity that would last his entire lifetime.

In 1947, he and his brothers began a plumbing and heating business that would over the next seven decades become Barkman Concrete, one of Canada's foremost suppliers of precast concrete and an iconic Manitoba business.

During his time leading the company, he showed he was an astute businessman who had a heart for his employees and the world around him. He gave generously, although often quietly, to individuals and causes locally and around the world. He counted as his greatest accomplishments the lives he was able to change from the fruits of his business.

I had the great pleasure of visiting Peter a week before he passed away. We had an engaging conversation about our community, his business, politics and faith. It was one of the most enjoyable visits that I've ever had with him, and I will always treasure it.

While his mobility had failed him in his later years, he wasn't able to get out of the house much, so he told his pastor, Terry Kaufmann, that the last thing he would ever give up was going to church. He kept that promise as well. On Sunday morning, April 3rd, Peter passed away preparing to go to church.

On behalf of all members of this Assembly, I want to offer our condolences to Peter's wife Winnie; his children Carol and Keith, Alan and Joy, Kathy and John and his many family and friends.

Peter's example of caring and giving will live on through each of you and everyone who knew this great Manitoban.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Queer Frontier Tour

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, the wonderful thing about Manitoba's history is that we are always discovering new stories. As historically oppressed people establish their own narrative, we discover new stories from the past that we can all be inspired of.

Earlier this month, Robert Lidstone and Scott de Groot, two local historians in LGBTTTQ* studies, led a walking tour around Winnipeg's North End and downtown that explored the city's queer history.

The walk focused on Winnipeg's pre-1970s gay liberation movement and Winnipeggers who became leaders within it: people like Francois Mary Duchesne, a transgender Metis person; MTC founder

John Hirsch and City Councillor Charles Herbert Spence.

The tour visited Winnipeg's landmarks that served as safe spaces for queer and dispossessed people, like the Royal Alexandra and Marlborough hotels, cafes in Chinatown or bathhouses.

Starting in Point Douglas, Queer Frontier moves through familiar Winnipeg spaces and unveils their historic role in the expression, celebration and identity of Winnipeg's LGBTTTQ* community.

The tour ended in Thunderbird House for a discussion about the two-spirited community, a term which was actually coined in Winnipeg by Myra Laramée, in 1990, at the Inter-tribal Native American, First Nations, Gay and Lesbian American Conference. Proceeds from the tour were donated to two-spirited Manitoba, an organization which facilitates culturally appropriate workshops for two-spirited people and those who want to learn more.

Congratulations and thank you to Robert Lidstone and Scott de Groot, as well as two-spirited Manitoba Executive Director Albert McLeod. The work you've shared helps us to see Winnipeg in a new rainbow-coloured light.

Legislative Staff Appreciation

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Families): Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to stand up and introduce—deliver my first member's statement for the member for Kirkfield Park.

I can tell you that, on the record, that this is the third time that the good people of Kirkfield Park and surrounding areas have seen fit to support me and have them as representative. I take that role and responsibility very seriously.

I first would like to recognize a lot of people here in our administration that have made the transition, not just for myself but I think other new members, an easy process that has made a lot of sense. The people such as the support workers here in the Legislature, the front-line workers, the people in the Legislature, the movers, the clerical staff, the security, the legislative assistants, they've made our transition much easier than would necessarily be the case and otherwise.

Without your tireless support, without your support to us, the legislators, we couldn't effectively represent our members and our constituents in our respective areas. So I very much want to thank you

and recognize all the work that you guys have done to make our transition easy.

So thank you. Working together, we will make a better Manitoba.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Michelle McHale

Mr. Wab Kinew (Fort Rouge): Miigwech, Madam Speaker. I rise in the House today to speak to the courage and leadership of Michelle McHale, a mother from the Steinbach area whose child was allegedly bullied at school for having same-sex parents.

When she learned about the suffering of her child, rather than remain silent, Ms. McHale approached school administrators to talk about what was happening and requested they address LGBTTQ* issues in the classroom. She then learned the Hanover School Division instructed staff not to discuss topics like same-sex relationships with students at all before high school.

Recognizing that staying silent on the exclusion of sexual orientations and gender identities in the classroom serves only to alienate children who identify as LGBTTQ* and deprives all children of the opportunity to learn about the diversity of humanity, Michelle spoke out passionately and persuasively to the board of trustees for Hanover School Division, urging them to amend their policy on gender and sexual diversity.

Despite a backlash, including even threats on social media, Michelle has never given up in her pursuit of better policies from the school division, policies that would live up to the spirit of the Human Rights Code. In fact, because of the conversation started by Michelle's brave public stand in her community and her ongoing willingness to take a leadership role in advancing the human rights of LGBTTQ* community members in her area, I am glad to say that this July 9th will mark the inaugural Pride march in Steinbach, Manitoba.

Members of our caucus and, I trust, all members of the House, applaud Ms. McHale and the organizing committee for their dedication and leadership, and offer our best wishes to them in this very worthwhile endeavour.

We also stand for the inclusion of LGBTTQ* issues in the Manitoba human rights curriculum. Until the fundamental human rights of all Manitobans are secure and respected, we should all

be as vigilant as Ms. McHale and demand improvement from our society.

Deer Lodge 100th Anniversary

Mr. Scott Johnston (St. James): It is an honour to address the House for my first time, and I congratulate you, Madam Speaker, on your election to the Speaker's Chair.

* (13:50)

It is my pleasure to rise today and inform the House of an institution in my constituency celebrating its 100th anniversary of serving the community, the Deer Lodge Centre on Portage Avenue.

Originally a hotel in the 19th century, Deer Lodge was converted to a military convalescent hospital when soldiers began returning from World War I. And, to this day, convalesce—excuse me—veterans continue being treated here, making up a large population of community patients and residents.

It wouldn't be until 1983 that the centre was transferred from Veterans Affairs Canada to become a provincial facility, but would always stay true to its origins, taking care of those who served and made substantial sacrifices so we can continue to enjoy our rights and freedoms in the best country in the world. One hundred personal-care beds are maintained exclusively for veterans under the federal-provincial agreement.

When Deer Lodge changed from an acute hospital to a facility caring for adult patients with complex needs, it became the largest rehabilitation and long-term-care facility in Manitoba, with a bed capacity of 429.

To this day, the centre has been an innovator and pioneer in geriatric and 'geroncology' research, just as it has been in treatment of patients, residents and clients. Rehabilitation services, outreach patients and geriatric mental health, respiratory therapy, day hospital and adult care centre for 'cognity'-impaired community clients address broad in-patient and community needs.

In addition to the Operational Stress Injury Clinic, Movement Disorder Clinic, communication devices—

Madam Speaker: Order. The member's time has expired.

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave of the House to allow him to finish his statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Johnston: –along with services from ALS patients have been initiated in order to serve the public.

Here are a few important Deer Lodge historical milestones for my colleagues: first documented account of wheelchair sports anywhere in Canada; first dialysis machine built and operated in western Canada; first geriatric pharmacology research unit, which are many of the initiatives that the hospital took.

I would like to thank the staff who have made and continue to make Deer Lodge hospital such an important part of my riding, of Winnipeg, all of Manitoba, and wish nothing but continued success and innovation for the next 100 years. Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today mayor of Brandon, Rick Chrest, and city manager for Brandon, Scott Hildebrand, who are the guests of the honourable members for Brandon East (Mr. Isleifson) and Brandon West (Mr. Helwer).

Also seated in the public gallery, from Woodlawn School, 100 grade 4 students under the direction of Lisa Martens. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for–honourable Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living (Mr. Goertzen).

Also seated in the public gallery, from Stony Creek School, six students under the direction of Roland Toews. And this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Piwniuk).

And seated, in my loge to the right, we have Bob Banman, former MLA for La Verendrye; J. Frank Johnston, former MLA for Sturgeon Creek; and Marcel Laurendeau, former MLA for St. Norbert.

On behalf of all honourable members, I welcome all of you here today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

LGBTQ* Rights Government Position

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, New Democrats have

a proud tradition of fighting for human rights. We've brought in sexual orientation in the Human Rights Act, same-sex adoption, transgender rights and supported same-sex marriage rights.

As we celebrate Pride week, it was interesting to see the federal Tories remove their discriminatory anti-same-sex marriage definition, although they did not actually come out in support of same-sex marriage, Madam Speaker, too little and 10 years too late.

Will the Premier (Mr. Pallister) admit that his opposition and the opposition of his party to same-sex marriage was discriminatory and wrong?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Deputy Premier): Madam Speaker, just before I answer the question I just want to welcome Bob Banman, J. Frank Johnston and Marcel Laurendeau, former MLAs, to the Manitoba Legislature. It's great to see you all here again.

I also want to recognize members of the LBGTTQ two-spirit community, who are here with us today in the gallery, and I just want to say that I was happy, along with a few of my colleagues on this side of the House and the other side, to participate in the Pride Run on Saturday morning. It was a great morning, a beautiful Manitoba morning, and we were very happy to be a part of that.

And I just want to thank all the organizers that made that day happen. We know those things don't happen without the incredible work of all the volunteers, so I just want to thank all of those who participated in that and who volunteered to make that happen.

Madam Speaker: The honourable interim Official Opposition Leader, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Marcelino: Madam Speaker, one of our other achievements was to bring in Bill 18 to protect LBTTQ* kids against bullying by requiring every school to allow gay-straight alliances.

The Premier and his party fought the bill for months and voted against it because they wanted to allow some schools to not support LGBTQ* kids.

Will the Premier now admit that he and his party were wrong in their discriminatory opposition to Bill 18?

Mrs. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, as I recall, at that time we and the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) actually brought in legislation,

amendments to that legislation, to try and make it stronger, and members opposite, in point of fact, voted against that.

So, but again, Madam Speaker, this being Pride week, we know that there's several events that are going to be taking place throughout the course of this week, and, again, I want to thank all the volunteers that have been involved in co-ordinating those events, and we just look forward to attending more of those events as the week unfolds.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: The honourable interim Official Opposition Leader, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Marcelino: Madam Speaker, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) may try to hide from his past and his party's past, but when it comes to human rights for LGBTTTQ* Manitobans, we don't just show up at the end of the parade. We, as New Democrats, walk the walk year in and year out.

Why won't the Premier admit that he and his party have never introduced a single measure promoting LGBTTTQ* rights and really haven't changed their discriminatory opposition to LGBTTTQ* rights?

Mrs. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the interim official opposition House leader for the question.

I can assure her that we don't just show up at the end but we show up at the beginning for these events and these festivities, Madam Speaker. And, again, we look forward to celebrating with people from the LGBTTTQ two-spirit community throughout this week as they—as we celebrate Pride week here in Manitoba.

Gender Identity Bill Support for Legislation

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Madam Speaker, Manitoba's Human Rights Code was amended in 2012 to include protection against discrimination based on gender identity. The federal government has now taken the right step by following Manitoba's lead and reintroducing similar legislation in the House of Commons. The bill was brought by an NDP MP from British Columbia several years ago. It passed the House of Commons but was delayed by the Senate and was—and died on the Order Paper when the Harper government refused to call it back for debate.

* (14:00)

Has the Minister of Justice contacted her federal counterpart to offer Manitoba's unconditional support for this important piece of human rights legislation?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I want to thank the member, my official opposition House critic, for the question.

Of course, human rights is a very important aspect of rights in Manitoba. We respect the rights of all Manitobans, and we will continue to work with various stakeholders in the community to ensure that those human rights are upheld in Manitoba.

Mr. Swan: Well, I thank the minister for her comments, but I do encourage her to show leadership by actually calling the federal Minister of Justice and putting Manitoba's position on the record.

You know, it was just last year that the PC caucus refused to pass an NDP resolution to call upon the Harper government to stop delaying the gender identity bill. And they said that resolution was too political, and they refused to pass it.

Last time the federal gender identity bill was supported by Manitoba's NDP and Liberal MPs, but voted against by all Conservative MPs except for Shelly Glover.

In light of this, will this minister now use her influence to try and ensure that all Manitoba MPs support this important piece of human rights legislation?

Mrs. Stefanson: Again, I want to thank my colleague, the critic for Justice, for the question.

Again, of course, human rights is very important for Manitobans, and we need to respect all Manitobans regardless of where they come from. And that's a very important part of where we stand on this side of the House, and we will continue to do so. We will stand up for all Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Minto, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Swan: Well, Madam Speaker, I thank the minister for her comments, but I do hope we'll see some signs that every member of this Legislature has moved a long way from battles that were fought that were very difficult and very painful for a lot of Manitobans.

And although Pride week is about celebrating, it's also about acknowledging the fights that had to happen and the work that's yet to be done.

And it was unfortunate that Conservative members of the Senate, led by Manitoba Senator Don Plett, spent a lot of time and energy opposing the bill, worrying about where people are going to go to the bathroom, rather than moving ahead human rights.

Has this government, and will this Minister of Justice advise, have they made any efforts to contact this unelected, unaccountable and ill-advised Manitoba senator to allow this bill to pass through Parliament without delay?

Mrs. Stefanson: I want to thank the member again for his question.

Again, we will—human rights are very important to our party and, indeed, to all Manitobans. And we look forward to working with stakeholders from all levels of government to ensure that everyone protects those individuals under the Human Rights Act and Human Rights Code.

And I will just say to members opposite that I've had the opportunity to have discussions on many levels with federal counterparts and municipal counterparts from those from other provinces as well, and we will continue to do so, to work with people from all across this country to ensure that the Manitoba's rights are protected.

LGBTQT Manitobans Curriculum Reform

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Last week we heard the Minister of Education refuse to commit to supporting an inclusive education curriculum when the member from Fort Rouge asked about Michelle McHale and her call for more LGBTQT topics in the Hanover school curriculum.

I want to point out that this is a question for human rights for Manitoba citizens in the LGBTT community.

So I would ask the minister to commit to the curriculum reforms, which would include LGBTTQ narratives and realities.

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): I thank the member for her question.

Our government is very committed to an inclusive type of education system, and so we want

to engender, as much as possible, the discussion that is going on in the education community.

And as the member knows, we made reference, actually, to the Manitoba Human Rights Commission in our answer last week, that that is one of the possible solutions if this family feels that they have not been well heard.

Program and Policy Support

Ms. Fontaine: Many Manitobans, like Executive Director Albert McLeod for two-spirited Manitoba, are working to promote acceptance and understanding of two-spirited peoples and the unique challenges that they face.

A recent research report put forward several recommendations to enhance programs and services for two-spirited Manitobans, including funding for an indigenous worker at the Rainbow Resource Centre, safe transition housing and long-term substance treatment for two-spirited trans women.

I ask the Minister of Indigenous and Municipal Relations (Ms. Clarke): What policies will the government put forward to support two-spirited peoples, an organization like two-spirited Manitoba in their programming?

Mr. Wishart: I thank the member for her question.

Certainly, we're all very clear that we are—want to be as inclusive as possible and anyone who has—is continuing to work, either on their own or in conjunction with any volunteer group or agency that is trying to make sure that all society is inclusive as much as possible, it's certainly an approach that we would support.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. Johns, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Fontaine: Our NDP government made a lot of progress for LGBTT rights and equality, recognizing there are still more to do. We committed to expanding health-care services for Manitoba's LGBTT community, including some of the most comprehensive coverage for gender-transition procedures in Canada. We extended full marriage and adoption rights to same-sex parents, protected LGBTTQ youth from bullying in schools and prohibited discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. We also committed to designating a minister responsible for the LGTBT community.

How will this government build on the NDP's past commitments to create a more inclusive and supportive province for LGBTT Manitobans?

Mr. Wishart: I thank the member for her question.

I think our whole caucus, and certainly our government, is committed to an inclusive approach as much as possible for anyone in Manitoba, whatever their sexual orientation, whatever their physical limitations. So whether you're disabled or whether you have sexual orientation point of view, we are inclusive as possible, and I think it's very important that every Manitoban should make every effort as much as possible to work and make sure that that happens.

Thank you.

Climate Change Government Position

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): The Canadian Press reported last week that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) was asked twice whether he agrees with the scientific consensus that human activity is the prime cause of climate change. He was asked twice and would not answer.

Why does the Premier refuse to answer this straightforward question about the basic facts of climate change?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Deputy Premier): I want to thank the interim Leader of the Official Opposition for the question.

I do recall back in the early 2000s when the previous government set targets with respect to climate change and in reductions, greenhouse gas reductions, they never, ever once met their target, so we will take no lessons from members opposite.

Madam Speaker: The honourable interim Official Opposition Leader, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Marcelino: Madam Speaker, the members opposite say that they have entered the 21st century, but if the Premier doesn't accept the basics of climate change that is caused by human activity, how can he expect to take leadership on this issue?

How can Manitoba truly do its part to address climate change if the Premier won't accept that people are fundamentally changing their climate?

Mrs. Stefanson: I again want to thank the Leader of the Official Opposition for the question. It is an

important one, and, of course, we do respect the environment on this side of the House.

I do recall the former premier once saying that Manitobans would have a chance to speak if members opposite—or if members of the government at the time did not meet their targets they would have a chance to speak. Well, I see in the last election maybe Manitobans have spoken on this very issue, on behalf of Manitobans.

* (14:10)

Madam Speaker: The honourable interim Official Opposition Leader, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Marcelino: Madam Speaker, the Premier wonders why people are concerned that he has a hidden agenda, yet it has been challenging to get a straight answer from him and even from the minister.

Why is this Premier—this minister equivocating about one of the most important issues of our time?

Mrs. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, again, I want to thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question.

In fact, what our Premier has committed to and what we as government have committed to is one of the most clean, open governments in Manitoba history. And I want to thank him for his leadership in this issue. We all have our mandate letters. We are all looking forward to getting the job done that members opposite didn't get a chance to do and never did when they were in government.

Climate Change Government Position

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): So let's just take climate change down to a very simple question.

If it isn't humans that are primarily responsible for it, perhaps the minister could explain to all of the rest of us: What's causing climate change?

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sustainable Development): Madam Speaker, I'd like to thank the member opposite for that question.

There are many, many reasons for climate change. I think driving here today probably was—contributed towards climate change.

As said earlier by the Justice Minister, we are an open and transparent government, and we believe in talking and consulting with many, many other Manitobans to ensure that we have a made-in-Manitoba plan.

We will do that; we'll talk. We've already talked with the minister, the federal minister, and we'll continue to do those discussions.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Wolseley, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Altemeyer: Well, Madam Speaker, that's good; the minister has recognized that a human activity might have contributed to climate change.

I'll give her a chance again to avoid having several hundred thousand embarrassing hits on social media.

Will she acknowledge today that human activity is the cause of climate change?

Mrs. Cox: Thank you to the member opposite again for that question.

I suppose that under the former government, we actually saw emissions, in the last round of targets, rise 14.4 per cent. So, yes, it's unfortunate that they did not have a plan, and I haven't heard about a plan to address climate change.

But we will do better. I can guarantee you. We will develop a made-in-Manitoba plan.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Wolseley, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Altemeyer: Well, Madam Speaker, it is encouraging to hear the minister claiming that she will do better than our track record.

For a brief moment in history—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Altemeyer: I did anticipate that would happen, Madam Speaker.

The problem that they face, though, is they may not realize when they were last in office, emissions increased in this province, on average, over 200,000 tons per year. Our government reduced that by 75 per cent.

So I'll ask the minister again: Is she going to focus her activity and her plan on humans, or is there something that she understands that all of the scientists from the IPCC somehow overlooked, and it's something other than human activity that she'll be targeting in this plan that is somehow going to do better?

Mrs. Cox: Thanks again for the subsequent question.

We've already met with stakeholders and partners to discuss climate change, which is a hugely important issue to all members on this side of the House. We will continue to consult and hold different meetings, discussions with partners, to address this very important issue.

Thank you.

First Nations Housing Standards for Mould Prevention

Mrs. Judy Klassen (Kewatinook): Madam Speaker, all of us enjoy our comforts of home. They are our peaceful retreats.

This is not so for our First Nations. Our homes are literally killing us. First Nation housing is a—in a state of crisis. Many of us have seen the images of our dilapidated homes, but my issue today is that our interiors are just as dangerous.

Madam Speaker, Manitoba has the highest percentage, 29 per cent, of indigenous people living in poor housing in Canada. Far too many develop mould issues within the first five years of construction, posing major health risks to our people. This should not be acceptable.

Can the Minister responsible for Health tell me what he will do to ensure that our homes in northern Manitoba have standards and resources that will enable their homes to be mould free?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Families): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the question from the member opposite.

And this House, this side of the House and all members, should ensure that housing is essential for everyone, up North, whether it be south, whether in Winnipeg. We are, as a government, absolutely committed to providing housing solutions that make sense. If there are specific cases in terms of what the member had talked about, I can have our department staff review each and every case. Thank you.

Mrs. Klassen: Madam Speaker, an improved province means that we recognize that the health of all Manitobans, no matter their location, as equally important. We all need healthy living environments. These are the responsibilities of both the federal and provincial governments. We need to ensure standards are in place that—and that those agencies responsible are held to account.

Can the Minister responsible for Health tell me what he will do to ensure proper standards are put in

place to combat the major problem of mould in First Nation housing?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my friend for the question. It is on a very, very important issue. Absolutely, all Manitobans deserve to live in a place where they not only feel safe in their communities, but their home is safe from a health perspective as well.

Certainly, we know that there have been ongoing discussions with the federal government. I look forward to continuing those discussions and I would ask my friend to also help with those discussions with their federal colleagues who have a significant responsibility on this file.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Kewatinook, on a final supplementary.

Mrs. Klassen: Maybe if I put it to a financial perspective I'll get a better answer.

Illness due to household mould is a major issue which affects thousands of families. The health-care costs dealing with the effects of poor housing standards and follow-up are quite significant. Instead of diverting attention and responsibilities, I want reassurances that this government will address this grave concern.

I'd like to ask the Minister of Health: What is he going to do to reduce the financial impact this will have on our health-care system? What is this going—what is this government going to put in its budget tomorrow that—to address this chronic issue?

Mr. Goertzen: And, again, Madam Speaker, I thank my friend for the question.

It is an important question for all Manitobans, Madam Speaker, and, certainly, we know in our discussions that we've had and that we look forward to having with our federal friends that they've expressed an interest on this. We are concerned that there are certain issues regarding health care where they have decided to step away from the table where they have responsibility, particularly on reserve.

Madam Speaker, I would ask my friend to join with me in those discussions to ensure that we have an active partner in Ottawa to ensure that those responsibilities are being fulfilled as they should be under our Constitution.

Aerospace Industry Innovation and Research

Mr. Scott Johnston (St. James): Madam Speaker, my constituency of St. James houses much of our aerospace industry. Manitoba is home to the largest aerospace industry in western Canada and we are very proud of that. This industry employs many, many Manitobans.

* (14:20)

Can the Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade tell the House the importance of this industry to Manitoba and how they could benefit from the Trans-Pacific Partnership?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade): I appreciate the question from the member for St. James, who obviously directly understands the importance of the aerospace industry here in Manitoba. And it's a great week to celebrate the great things that are happening in Manitoba.

We certainly possess some of the world's most advanced jet engine testing infrastructure. We are very excited about the innovation and the innovation—innovative research that's going on and, certainly, in part of the composite material development that's going on here in Manitoba. We know there's 5,500 people directly employed, many others indirectly.

Madam Speaker, we also recognize that, as part of Aerospace Week this week, the Royal Canadian Air Force snowbirds will be performing out at Southport aerospace centre this week, June 4th, as part of the Manitoba Air Show.

So thank you very much.

Dissolution of the East Side Road Authority All-Weather Road Development Concerns

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): Madam Speaker, my question is to the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and concerns his immediate elimination of the East Side Road Authority.

The extension of an all-weather road access is one of the most important undertakings in a generation in Manitoba. Without all-weather road access, there are 21 winter-road communities that are faced with the loss of their access because of climate change.

On Friday, this government didn't even wait for its budget to eliminate the East Side Road Authority and has already begun to extend all—that has already

begun to extend all-weather road access into these communities.

Why has this government put this important initiative at risk?

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Infrastructure): I thank the member for the question because infrastructure is important to all of Manitoba, and the best way to get infrastructure dollars well spent is through the Department of Infrastructure. And so that's what this government is doing. Our commitment is to continue building roads throughout all of Manitoba.

We understand the importance of investment in infrastructure. We will continue that in a spirit of consultation. It's about investment. It's about guaranteed investment. And it's about a predictable manner so that all Manitobans can be assured of the Department of Infrastructure.

Provincial Capital Commitment

Mr. Maloway: I'd also ask—like to ask the Premier (Mr. Pallister): The government has suggested that it's business as usual, but they've repeatedly refused to commit to the \$90-million capital investment that our government had committed previously.

It's also amazing to see them cancel the East Side Road Authority the very weekend that the Prime Minister was here in Winnipeg, the same Prime Minister that promised to support the east-side road initiative in the election.

Will the government maintain the provincial capital commitment and follow up on the previous government's initiative to seek federal cost sharing, yes or no?

Mr. Pedersen: I thank the member for that question.

And it's important to realize that infrastructure means access to all communities, and this government will continue with that work of working on access for everyone.

It's also about efficiency, and that was something that this former government just didn't understand. This is about getting the best value for the taxpayers' dollars and investing in a predictable, reliable manner that brings back investment to all of Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Elmwood, on a final supplementary.

First Nations Community Benefits Agreements

Mr. Maloway: And another non-answer from this government, Madam Speaker.

I'd like to ask the Premier the following question: The East Side Road Authority had a vision of building all-weather road access in partnership with First Nations communities.

Will this government maintain the community benefits agreements that were negotiated with the 13 First Nations communities for training, employment and contract activities, and will this government respect the project labour agreement that ensures priority hiring goes to east-side First Nations residents?

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you to the member for that question.

And, again, it's important to, yes, understand the important of infrastructure. It's important to understand the importance of consultation and working in partnership with all Manitobans. That is something—and also about efficiency, about getting the best value for the taxpayer's dollar, something that this former government had no idea how to do.

East Side Road Authority Dissolution of Authority

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas): When we hear Conservatives talking about business as usual in the North, we know what that really means. Whenever they have been in government they have cut northern Manitoba, and we have no doubt that this is true—this is the true reason why they cancelled the east-side road initiative.

Madam Speaker, once again they didn't even wait for Tuesday's budget to wipe out the East Side Road Authority.

Why didn't this government respect northern Manitoba? Why are they eliminating the authority?

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Infrastructure): I thank the member for that question.

And, again this is about partnering with all of Manitobans. Whether you live in the North, whether you live in the east side, whether you live anywhere in Manitoba, infrastructure is important. The department will continue to build roads as they have. The difference is we believe in efficiency and not wasting taxpayers' money like the former government did.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for The Pas, on a supplementary question.

Highway 384 Upgrade Commitment

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas): Madam Speaker, northerners are also concerned about the fact that this government has repeatedly refused to make any commitment to maintaining the numerous initiatives that have been under way in northern Manitoba as part of the NDP's historic infrastructure investments.

I want to ask the Minister of Infrastructure once again: Will he uphold the Province of Manitoba's commitment to the people of Moose Lake to upgrade and pave Highway 384?

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Infrastructure): I thank the member for the question.

I would like to advise the House that just last week I was at the table with northern Manitoba residents talking about the roads. We're in consultation with them all the time. We had a very respectful meeting, and it's about building relationships and relationships that are built on respect.

This is the message that we got back last week, is that they are very interested in building on respect, and we did that last week. We started building that bridge, if I may call it that, and we will continue to build partnerships with all of Manitoba.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member of The Pas, on a final supplementary.

Northern Manitoba Communities Infrastructure Investments

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas): When the Conservatives were in government before, they put as little as 5 per cent of the highways capital budget in northern Manitoba. In opposition, they said they would move highway spending out of northern Manitoba into the south. They define the North as anywhere north of Riding Mountain.

Will the minister confirm that the elimination of the roadside road authority is really nothing more than the beginning of the shifting of resources out of northern Manitoba? Why won't he make a commitment to the historic investments in northern Manitoba infrastructure?

Madam Speaker, is it yes, North or no, North?

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Infrastructure): Again, I thank the member for that question.

And this is about efficiency of—for all of Manitobans. It's about respecting the taxpayer, respecting all Manitobans no matter where they live. Infrastructure's important for all Manitobans, and unlike the previous government who wasted taxpayers' money, we will build more—we will—our department will be far more efficient and be able to build roads in all of Manitoba.

East Side Road Authority Employment Loss Concern

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Madam Speaker, on Friday the government announced that the East Side Road Authority had been dissolved and that its mandate had been transferred to the Department of Infrastructure.

Will the Minister of Infrastructure please tell the House how many jobs will be lost in the process and where?

* (14:30)

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Infrastructure): Thank you for that question.

There was such raucous applause for his question that I just—I'm sorry I actually missed the question, but I take it that they are referring to the dissolution of the East Side Road Authority, and this will happen over the summer. And it means that we will be able to bring far more efficiency into government, stop wasting taxpayers' money like the previous government was so very good at.

This is about building infrastructure for all of Manitoba.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Flin Flon, on a supplementary question.

Aboriginal Engagement Policy

Mr. Lindsey: It's unfortunate, Madam Speaker, that the applause drowned out the question, but I suspect the answer would have been pretty much the same anyway.

The East Side Road Authority had as part of its mandate a six-point Aboriginal Engagement Strategy that included such provisions as local procurement to provide much-needed investment in northern communities, training and local-preference hiring policies for residents of the east-side communities.

Can the minister explain to the House which policies his department will pursue in fostering local procurement, training and job opportunities for residents of the east-side communities?

Mr. Pedersen: Madam Speaker, thank you for the question, and this time the applause was slightly less, so I was able to hear the question.

So—but I just want to reassure the members that the Ministry of Infrastructure is very efficient at building roads. This—and they have in the past and they will continue to engage Aboriginal partnership, Aboriginal training. This is part and parcel of our government in working in partnership with all Manitobans, and we will continue to do this in teamwork with all of it—all of Manitoba.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Flin Flon, on a final supplementary.

Freedom Road Construction

Mr. Lindsey: Last November, the former government introduced legislation to expand the mandate of the East Side Road Authority to build Freedom Road and provide families living on Shoal Lake—living on the east—Shoal Lake 40 First Nation with a vital all-weather road link.

Will the minister provide details to the House on when construction will begin, or will he dither and continue to leave these families in the lurch? And I'd appreciate an answer that didn't include efficiency, infrastructure, partner, sharing.

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister of Infrastructure, with his answer.

Mr. Pedersen: Madam Speaker, it's unfortunate that the former government doesn't like the word efficiency, because efficiency—[interjection] There is only one taxpayer; unfortunately, the former government wanted to pick those pockets clean and not return any money back to them.

We are about building roads. We are about saving money for the taxpayers of—money—saving taxpayers' money, and we are about being more efficient through all of Manitoba.

Electoral Divisions Fixed By-Election Dates

Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris): A key component of accountability is ensuring Manitobans' right to political representation in a timely manner. Unfortunately, and not surprising, under the former

NDP government the citizens of Morris were denied political representation for a record 360 days.

The Winnipeg Free Press noted the delay was a result of, and I quote, political passive aggressiveness, end quote, by the former premier, the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger).

Can the Minister of Justice share what our government is undertaking to ensure that the delay experienced in Morris is relegated to the history books?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague, the member for Morris, for that excellent question today.

And I want to assure him that Bill 2 that has been introduced in this Legislature and will be debated on shortly, that this is a bill that will bring—is our first open government bill towards bringing transparency and accountability for all Manitobans.

We know that certainly the people from Morris were left without representation in the Manitoba Legislature for far too long. There were members in The Pas that were left without representation as well; there were other constituencies. We want to ensure that that doesn't happen again.

Madam Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

Petitions? Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Could you please call for business this afternoon Bill 2, The Legislative Assembly Amendment Act, sponsored by the member—the honourable Minister of Justice.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced by the Government House Leader that this House will consider Bill 2 this afternoon, second reading, Bill 2, The Legislative Assembly Amendment Act.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 2—The Legislative Assembly Amendment Act

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I move, seconded by the Minister of Health, that Bill 2, The Legislative Assembly Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur

l'Assemblée législative, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mrs. Stefanson: I just want to start off by saying that it's an honour to bring in one of the first bills in government. I've been in opposition for many years. Prior to this, I've had the opportunity to bring forward some bills in this Manitoba Legislature, and I'm honoured to bring in my first bill on the government side of this House, and it brings me more hope of actually having a bill pass through the Manitoba Legislature this time around.

And it's indeed an honour because one of our main election platforms was to run on clean, open government, and this is our first step towards achieving those goals for our government, and it is in my mandate. And I'm so pleased to be here to help fulfill one of the areas of my mandate that was given to me by the Premier (Mr. Pallister), which was also shared with all the members of the public, and I'm—it's indeed an honour to be here and to bring in this piece of legislation.

I do want to just thank the Minister of Health. I know that he—when he was in opposition he brought forward this piece of legislation out of concern for a couple of ridings, one of them being Morris, that was left unattended for as long as possible before an election was called, and indeed The Pas as well. And I think it's unfortunate that the premier, the previous premier of the province, didn't see fit, didn't see that it was an important aspect of having people represented in the Manitoba Legislature from those communities.

And we believe on this side of the House that it's very important to have Manitobans represented in all communities across this province. That's what democracy is all about. And so we need to ensure that we need to lower the number of days, and that's why we have done that in this piece of legislation from a year to six months.

And I just—I'm very pleased to have this opportunity to bring this forward today because to me democracy is what we're all about. That's what we are debating here in the Manitoba Legislature. This is of the utmost respect that we need to show members in our constituencies. We need to show all Manitobans that we care about their representation here in the Manitoba Legislature.

We all come from different areas of the province; we all have different backgrounds; we're

all—we represent the diversity of this great province of ours. And to not have proper representation for a year is just, to me, absolutely unacceptable.

* (14:40)

And so, again, I want to thank the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) who brought this in when we were in opposition, this piece of legislation.

Unfortunately, members opposite saw fit not to support that piece of legislation, and I'm not sure why, but this is now going to give Manitobans the opportunity to be properly represented in a timely manner in the Manitoba Legislature.

You know, Madam Speaker, it's just an honour to be here to talk about our democratic way of life. I've represented my constituency for about 15 and a half years, the great constituency of Tuxedo. I actually was elected in a by-election in 2000 and I do recall the premier at the time, when—as soon as I was—I went through the nomination process within my party, I had the opportunity—I got a—it was pretty much almost right away that the premier, out of respect, called a by-election, and I think it was held almost within a month. It was just—he called it almost the next day or it was just a few days later, and the by-election was held on November 21st of 2000. And I think that that premier at the time understood and respected the fact that he didn't want to have the people of Tuxedo be left without someone representing them in the Manitoba Legislature.

And I know that there were other by-elections called back in the '90s when they were called right away or within the—within a timely fashion. And it was really—it was kind of the norm. It was an unwritten rule at the time that we wouldn't—that premiers wouldn't leave Manitobans without representation in the Manitoba Legislature because this is one of the most important parts of democracy. People need representation at the various levels of government.

So it was an unwritten rule at the time, but what happened, which is unfortunate, is that the previous premier saw fit to wait as long as possible in a few ridings to ensure that those members—that those Manitobans were not represented here in the Manitoba Legislature, and he made those decisions based on political reasons only. And that to me is not what democracy is all about. We should never be afraid to have Manitobans represented in the Manitoba Legislature.

And so that's why, as part of our clean, open government initiative that we stand before Manitobans today and we are debating Bill 2. And I hope that members opposite will finally see fit to support this piece of legislation because this is the cornerstone of democracy. This is what it's all about to ensure that Manitobans are properly represented in the Manitoba Legislature.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Questions

Madam Speaker: A question period of up to 15 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed to the minister by any member in the following sequence: first question by the official opposition critic or designate; subsequent questions asked by critics or designates from other recognized opposition parties; subsequent questions asked by each independent member; remaining questions asked by any opposition members; and no question or answer shall exceed 45 minutes. *[interjection]* Sorry, seconds.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Now, I'm just—I'd like to ask the minister—congratulate her first on her first bill that she's introduced as a member of the government.

Did the Commissioner of Elections Manitoba—was he calling for this change to the legislation?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Actually, there's a—we consulted with people all across Manitoba throughout the last election and prior to that, and that's a very important question that the member asks.

This is about consultation. We wanted to make sure that we get this right and we wanted to ensure that, you know, we make sure that Manitobans are properly represented in the Manitoba Legislature, and so that's why we've consulted with many, many stakeholders within the community, including constituents themselves. And we—I've heard from so many of people in my own community during the past election about the importance of being represented. And, again, having been through a by-election myself, the importance of making sure that Manitobans are represented in the Manitoba Legislature, I do recall that.

So I want to thank the member for the question and I look forward to his other questions.

Mr. Swan: Now, of course, there are all different times that a member of this Legislature could choose

to resign their seat. So, for example, an individual could choose to resign their seat in February. If that was to happen, a government of the day could have a concern that that would prevent them from being able to talk about the budget, advertise their budget to do any kind of press releases during not only the budget rollout, but also the session. If a member was to resign in February or March, that could require an election campaign taking place over the summer.

Is she aware that her leader called August family time in which it was not appropriate to have a by-election?

Mrs. Stefanson: I want to thank the member for Minto for the question, and it's an important one,

I think that that's why we have provided some flexibility within this legislation, while we have reduced it from one year to six months or 180 days, it does provide for some flexibility within that six-month period to allow for those various things that may transpire as a result of this, whether it's a budget or what have you. So I think it is an important question that he raises.

I think it's also important to ensure that the importance of having that flexibility, but to ensure that the spirit of this remains and that Manitobans are properly represented by this.

Mr. Swan: Well, just to highlight the Attorney General's thoughts on the actual situation I'm talking about, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) won—well, he was acclaimed because there wasn't a race. He was acclaimed as their leader on—late in July 2012 and the government then called the by-election right away. And if I can just read from the Metro story: Newly acclaimed Tory leader, and I will not give his name, said an upcoming by-election date is a cynical move by the Manitoba NDP government but plans to campaign hard anyway. On Friday the Premier announced a by-election would be held on September 4 in the provincial constituency of Fort Whyte in Winnipeg. The leader who took over the reins of the Manitoba Progressive Conservative party last weekend said August is a month for families and believes a higher voter turnout would have been—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mrs. Stefanson: I—you know, I think it's important I didn't hear a specific question there, but I think I understand where the member was going, and I think it's important to understand that all political parties go through their leadership processes. We do recall, of course, the member opposite, when he ran

for leader at one point and he dropped out and didn't finish running for leader, and, you know, that's people's rights, to choose whether or not they're going to run for leader.

We went through our party processes for leadership. Our leader was chosen we are very pleased that he was chosen. He is doing a tremendous job now as the Premier of our province and we look forward to moving forward with him as the Premier of our province.

Mr. Swan: So, just to make it clear, then, when the Premier (Mr. Pallister) said that August is a month for families and was an inappropriate month in which to have a by-election called or a by-election date set, is the Attorney General saying she does not agree with that and, in fact, it would be open to the government of the day to call a by-election campaign which could include August?

Mrs. Stefanson: Of course, that's why, again, I talked about the flexibility within this legislation. It provides for that flexibility, and I just think it's important, though, that members opposite recognize that the previous government denied people in The Pas fair representation for 341 days. To me that is not what democracy is all about. Manitobans deserve to be represented by their—by MLAs within their constituency and that is a very, very important part of this. So I want to ensure members opposite that we want to ensure that it is so important to make sure that Manitobans are properly represented—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): Perhaps the minister could inform the House as to what other jurisdictions she checked with to see what sort of rules they have regarding the calling of a by-election and whether there—how many other jurisdictions and which ones in Canada actually have the requirement that you have to call a by-election within six months.

* (14:50)

Mrs. Stefanson: I want to thank the member for the question.

I think it's very important while we look at other jurisdictions across Canada, it's also very important that we look at our own jurisdiction here and what's in the best interest of Manitobans.

What I don't believe is in the best interest of Manitobans is leaving people from The Pas, for 341 days, out of representation in the Manitoba Legislature. And the previous government left the

people of Morris waiting 350 days for fair representation in the Manitoba Legislature.

We don't believe that that's the Manitoba way, but we will always try and develop solutions that are made in Manitoba.

Mr. Maloway: Madam Speaker, I can't believe the minister is telling this House that she has not checked with a single other province in Canada to see what their rules are. *[interjection]* And yes, I know, that's not a very good plan for consultation.

Like to also ask her whether she checked with other provinces for advertising restrictions and communications restrictions.

Mrs. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, I, again, I thank the member for the question.

And I look forward to working with colleagues all across our country in developing solutions that are—what is in the best interest of Manitoban—Manitoba. And I will continue to do so. I've only been on the job for a few weeks now, but I look forward to the many years ahead of having the opportunity of working with our counterparts in other provinces. And so we will continue to do so, on this side of the House, as part of our clean, open government initiative.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Maloway: Well, I don't know what this tells us about the government's legislative schedule, but she's admitted she doesn't know what the rules are in other provinces, that she never consulted with one other province to see what their rules are, and she's not really clear about any kind of advertising restrictions or communications restrictions in other sorts of provinces.

I just wonder whether this is the proper way to be conducting legislative initiatives in this House, without having done any type of consultations on this subject.

Mrs. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for the question.

And, of course, we—he's absolutely wrong, and I think it's important that we put some facts on the record.

In fact, we did have significant consultation with all Manitobans very recently in something that's called an election. Now, I know that members opposite may not have liked the results of that election, but Manitobans have spoken. And they—

we heard loud and clear from them that they wanted a very open, clean government initiative towards bringing more transparency to the way that the province is governed.

What we heard time and time again, from Manitobans as well, is that members from the previous government did not consult Manitobans, and that was very important to them that we do.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Assiniboia): Madam Speaker, my question for the member from Tuxedo is, as I hear this debate, it sounds that the opposition members are tied up in process and things that are 'extraneous' to the actual issue.

We're here to represent the people of Manitoba. The minister drew out an interesting contrast between a by-election within one month versus a year.

Maybe you could share with us what an MLA does for the people they represent in that year and what people would be missing if they didn't have that representation.

Mrs. Stefanson: Now that's a very good question.

And I think many of us who have been here for a long time understand, and, certainly, our constituents understand the importance of representing them in the Manitoba Legislature.

You know, I've had the opportunity to be here for 15 and a half years and just work with constituents, with all my constituents, bringing forward concerns by my constituents in the Manitoba Legislature. Many of those issues I've had the opportunity to debate here on the floor of the Legislature. Sometimes we've even had the opportunity to work with members of the previous government to pass legislation.

So, again, I want to thank the member for the question. It's a very good one, and I appreciate it.

Debate

Madam Speaker: If there are no further questions, the floor is open for further debate.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 2, and it's interesting as we see the top priorities for the new government. And, really, when we say top priorities, we mean the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) to-do list, the things that he's marked down as the most important things for him. And we know, of course, No. 1 was a failure to complete his

conflict-of-interest forms in accordance with Manitoba law. So check; I guess he's got that done.

Number 2, of course, for this new Premier was to break his promise with respect to hydro. Of course, during the election campaign he said he'd take a question of hydro development to the Public Utilities Board and yet, even before this legislature was recalled, even before we'd had a Throne Speech or a day of sitting, that one was already broken. And the question of hydro development was then referred to his new hand-picked board of Hydro. So break a promise is No. 2.

Number 3, of course, the next most important thing that the Premier had on his list was to introduce a motion on TPP, the Trans-Pacific Partnership. And, in fact, it was so important that we set aside debate on the Throne Speech for an afternoon so his MLAs could read through their prepared speaking notes, and his backbenchers could be horrified as we put some facts on the record about what the Trans-Pacific Partnership is really all about.

The fourth item, apparently, his legislation on by-election dates. And at least getting up and talking with this bill—at least there are some positive aspects to No. 4 on the Premier's to-do list. It is the ultimate irony—[interjection] Well, and I know, they're clapping because I know how frustrating it must have been for the first couple of days of the session to wonder where they were going, as they learned a lot about the TPP, as they learned about the Premier's failure to follow the law. But here we are.

And we can talk about Bill 2. And it's the ultimate irony, of course, that the Premier's main concern is about the length of time to call by-elections, yet it was this very Premier who whined and complained because he thought a by-election was called too soon. And that happened right after he was acclaimed to be the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, because they couldn't find anyone else in a province of 1.3 million people to run for the leadership. And he was very, very upset that the government of the day called the by-election right away.

An Honourable Member: It's only one opinion.

Mr. Swan: And, of course—well, and I hear that the member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon) is saying it's only one opinion. It was the Premier's opinion, and what did he have to say in the Metro? He said, an upcoming by-election date is a cynical move by the Manitoba NDP government but plans to campaign

hard anyway. Because a by-election was announced almost immediately, it was called just days after—

An Honourable Member: Who won?

Mr. Swan: Well, who won? Well, the very guy who complained about the fact that it had been called so quickly. You know, he's like Goldilocks, right? This bed's too soft. This bed's too hard. This by-election's called too soon. This by-election's called too late.

And what, of course, did he have to say when the Premier (Mr. Pallister) went ahead and called the by-election quickly? Well, the then-Leader of the Opposition said the timing is cynical regardless of who you support. I'm not sure what's so cynical about calling a by-election just days after the new leader is elected. I still, to this day, don't know why it was a problem for the member for Fort Whyte but, indeed, it was.

But it must be somewhat embarrassing for the members of the government to sit there to realize No. 4 on the to-do list was actually something that was a great big problem. And what, of course, did he say in the—oh, in the Portage graphic, one of my favourite papers. He said he was unhappy with the timing of the by-election and said this is an example of the NDP putting politics ahead of family.

What could be more terrible than the Premier calling a by-election quickly and promptly to give the courtesy of giving the Opposition Leader a seat in the Legislature. It's a shame that he came into politics or—returned to politics, returned to Manitoba politics, because he kept leaving and quitting and going and coming back.

We now know that he began his return to Manitoba on simply a sour note, because he told the Portage Daily Graphic, we're excited to enter the race, but disappointed to get the call. August is not the month to have a by-election.

* (15:00)

My goodness. How many Manitobans believe that they have the right to have the entire month of August as family time when they don't have to be engaged in their job, they don't have to be engaged with Manitobans, they actually don't have to go out there and work. Well, not very many of them, but one of them appears to now be sitting in the Premier's chair, and it is highly ironic.

Mrs. Colleen Mayer, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

And, of course, the member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson) herself said that, yes, the by-election was called quickly. To her credit I don't recall her complaining about it. I think she did what most of us would do, what I did when I ran in Minto, what my colleague here did in Concordia. You get your campaign together, you go out and you campaign and you do your best, and it's a shame that the Premier couldn't even manage to do that when he had his opportunity. And it really does make us question what else is coming on the Premier's to-do list.

Now, I was elected in the by-election back in 2004. It was one of the stranger set-ups for running in Manitoba's political history. It began, first of all, when John Harvard, then the Member of Parliament for St. James-Assiniboia-Charleswood—and I know the member will correct me if I've got the name wrong—well, he had the word that he was going to be tagged to become the new Lieutenant Governor of this province.

So, once that was—that leaked out in the Liberal circles, Mayor Glen Murray decided he really didn't want to be mayor of Winnipeg anymore, and for reasons that we're still not sure of, decided he wanted to run for MP in St. James.

That, then, set off a chain reaction because MaryAnn Mihychuk, who was a Cabinet minister in Gary Doer's government and the MLA for Minto, decided she really wanted to be mayor of the City of Winnipeg. So Mayor Murray resigned, MaryAnn Mihychuk resigned, and there was a by-election called in Minto. And it was very different than a regular election. Whoever's been elected in a by-election, you know it's a lot different. There's a lot more people coming and helping in your by-election than when the general election gets called, and all of a sudden you realize there's nobody coming in from anywhere except folks you're gathering up.

There's only one other member of the class of 2004 in this entire Legislature, and that is the member for Spruce Woods (Mr. Cullen). He and I were actually elected six days apart in 2004 in the middle of a federal election. We could have had the election on the same day, but his predecessor, Merv Tweed, held on to the seat as long as he could, I guess to keep collecting his MLA pay, before he resigned to run federally.

So Merv Tweed, of course, was the king of by-elections. He also quit federal politics to take a

job with OmniTRAX, which is now heavily engaged in trying to shaft the people of the North, and he was replaced by Larry Maguire. Of course, Larry Maguire resigned his seat in Arthur-Virden, which resulted in the current member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Piwniuk) winning in a by-election.

The Premier (Mr. Pallister), of course, knows a lot about by-elections because he caused a by-election in Portage la Prairie, and what date did he resign his seat in the Manitoba Legislature? April 28, 1997. It was a pretty fateful time on the prairies. In fact, it was less than two weeks after we saw the terrible footage of most of downtown Grand Forks, North Dakota, burning to the ground, and it was mere days before the flood waters peaked in Winnipeg, and we know that was the exact time that the then-member for Portage la Prairie, now the Premier of this province, decided it was time to pull up stakes and resign his seat in the Legislature so he could try something new in Ottawa.

And there is sort of something—I don't know if it's something in the water in that Fort Whyte seat, but there have been a succession of by-elections, a lot of by-elections, in Fort Whyte over the years. Of course, John Loewen quit suddenly one day. I remember driving through the Whiteshell with my family when CJOB all of a sudden had a news break, and they said that John Loewen had quit.

We know, of course, my old friend Hugh McFadyen quit the seat after he led them to a second straight election defeat, for himself. And who knows? Maybe a Queen's Bench judge will decide there's another by-election coming up for the people of Fort Whyte. I guess we'll just have to wait and see what happens.

Of course, in the by-election in 2004—and this is important for considering this bill—it was a strange time because of the pieces of the puzzle that I've laid out. There was a federal election going on at the same time. There was also, because of Mayor Murray resigning, there was also a mayoral by-election taking place at exactly the same time, which, I can tell people, created a lot of confusion everywhere in the city of Winnipeg and maybe even more so in Minto because there was also this provincial by-election going on. I'm sure my colleague, the MLA for Spruce Woods, had the same experience when he was running. I was told by a lot of people that I seemed like a very nice young man, but why was I running against Pat Martin? And it took a long time on every doorstep to explain that,

no, I was not running against Pat Martin; I was running on the same team as Pat Martin, but I was running provincially and he was running federally.

It became a very, very confusing situation with the mayoral by-election going on. It was not unusual for me to see one of my signs up on the same lawn as somebody who would have a Dan Vandal sign or a Maryann Mihychuk or a Sam Katz sign or, in one circumstance, the same lawn as an Al Golden sign. And I had to review the election's act to see if it was actually an offence for me to steal my own sign back off that lawn, but I decided I would just stand pat and let matters take its course.

It was confusing. What was especially confusing was that on election day in Minto people were being asked to go and vote for the mayoral by-election but also the provincial by-election, and almost all people had to go not just to one but to two separate places to vote. So everyone in this room knows what it's like polling the vote, trying to get people out, trying to get people engaged, trying to get them into the car so they can go down to the polling place. And it became very confusing and we had to decide, do we drive people if they're going to two places? Do we take them to vote for the MLA for Minto? Do we also take them to vote for the mayoral candidate? And, of course, as you find in politics, you do what the people ask and we wound up spending a lot of time.

And I don't just say that to make it an interesting story. It is one concern and what I think is a largely positive move, but there has to be some consideration. The timing of how things work in this Legislature given the limits put on advertising, given the limits put on communication, that it could be the case that elections—a by-election might then have to happen very close to a municipal or a federal election which—I just want to put on the record—can have unintended consequences for anybody who's running in that role.

I know, of course, my colleague from Concordia ran in a by-election not that long before the general election. It seemed we were always out in Concordia knocking on doors, and I'm sure if he has an opportunity to speak he'll tell you his own experiences on how things went in that by-election.

And I know there's—there was a lot of comments put on the record by the minister and by the Premier about electoral reform, and, frankly, I'm quite pleased with what our previous government did to make sure that elections were as fair and as open and as transparent as possible. And, indeed,

our government went to great lengths to make the electoral process more transparent and more accountable throughout our years in government. Some of these things were done by consent. I do want to make that very clear. A number of other matters were actually done with the vehement opposition of the Progressive Conservatives whenever they thought that their own view of what's transparent and open and democratic was put at risk.

And the first step that I want to talk about on that front were the steps that the NDP government took to the leaders across this country to improve the system by banning both union and corporate donations, and also by putting limits on the amount of individual contributions. Now, we know that the banning of corporate and union donations and limits on those donors have increased the accountability demands on political parties. The opposition Conservatives at the time opposed the ban on union and corporate donations—well, they didn't oppose the ban on union donations, but they certainly opposed the ban on corporate donations, and they refused to make a commitment to keep the ban in place ever since.

Well, we don't have to look too far. We can simply look across the border to see what happened in the United States of America where the richest, where the biggest corporations have their opportunity to spend millions or tens of millions or hundreds of millions of dollars to try to get a certain person or a certain party elected or defeated. That's not the way we work in Manitoba—that's not the way it works in Manitoba. In Manitoba it's the will of the people that should make the difference, and that's why we took that step.

And it was interesting even during the election campaign. I know the Premier (Mr. Pallister) was pretty tightly scripted, but once in a while he was able to get himself out from under that script and just start talking off the top of his head, and boy does that make folks across the aisle nervous when he does that. And he said maybe the \$3,000 limit that any one person can give to a political party in a year, well, maybe that's too low and maybe that should be raised.

Maybe they have some plans to get \$5,000 or \$10,000 or \$50,000 from different people because who knows what's going to come in part five of the Premier's to-do list. Maybe it's privatizing home care, maybe it's privatizing other home-care services, maybe it's going to be steps taken with using social

bonds to privatize probation services and the child and family services. I guess we'll just have to wait and see.

* (15:10)

But it was surprising to hear the Conservatives that opposed to it and, in fact, then-leader—the then-leader of the party said maybe they would undo that and maybe they'd allow big money back into Manitoba politics. We're hoping this government will not go down that road.

Of course, when we introduced an independent commissioner to enforce the act, we gave that commissioner more broader discretion to ensure compliance with the act, and the entire enforcement process was made far more transparent than it ever had been in Manitoba history.

We also wanted to improve the way that redistribution and boundary changes took place. And those of us who have done this for a while, we always worry when it's redistribution time because what happens is that the jigsaw puzzle is redrawn and recut. And what it means is that areas that experience greater population growth generally will become physically smaller and those areas that have had depopulation or flat population growth will generally become physically larger, the idea being that every Manitoban should have roughly the same power with their vote.

Now, we know, and it's correct, under the act and under the work of the commission, that if you are a voter in rural Manitoba or in northern Manitoba, well, maybe there's some concessions, and that's only reasonable. If the member for The Pas (Ms. Lathlin), or, for that matter, the member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Piwniuk), spend a lot more time on the road and have a lot more territory to cover, it does make sense that the voters in those areas maybe have a little bit more control than someone who may only live three or four blocks from their MLA's office in the West End of Winnipeg.

But what we did is we expanded representation on that commission, which redraws the boundaries every 10 years to make sure the interests of rural and northern Manitobans were taken into account, by adding the heads of Brandon University and the University College of the North to the commission. And I thought that was very, very useful. They then expanded Elections Manitoba's role to include the promotion of participation so individual Manitobans

could have a say when the boundaries are being redrawn.

I should mention for all members those boundaries get redrawn again in 2019, so by the time we fight another election, the areas that we represent may not look quite the same. And, frankly, I'm heartened by the fact that it's not just the head of the University of Manitoba and the University Winnipeg and the Chief Justice of Manitoba who do that work but also a representative from Brandon and a representative of the North. I think that's a wise change and a good change that's good for democracy. And I'm proud that we did that.

Of course, one of the other things that we did is we established a set date for general elections. Now, of course, some people said, is that a fixed date? We say no: It's the Conservatives that fix elections; it's the New Democrats who set dates for elections. And we set the date for the first Tuesday in October every four years. And this was done to allow better planning around the enumeration process and allow for a stronger voters list.

Now, as we know, this time around there was a longer period between elections. That happened because of the federal election taking place very nearby. Of course, Brad Wall and the Saskatchewan Party in Saskatchewan first brought in very similar legislation. We did the same. The confusion I talked about on the doorsteps of Minto would have been widespread if there had been both a federal and a provincial election taking place at the same time.

But setting a date for general elections, we now know October 6, 2020 is going to be the next date for the general election in Manitoba. Well, that makes sense. That gives certainty and that allows us to get ready for the next election and gives the Elections Manitoba folks time to prepare, to have a reasonable schedule to get set to go.

What's also important, of course, is providing greater access to voting, rules which of course do apply to the by-elections as well. And the last government introduced amendments to allow polls to open an hour earlier at 7 a.m. on election day. I'm not going to suggest that there was a stampede of people knocking down the doors on election day at 7 a.m., but, indeed, there are a lot of people who work extra hours and extended hours. Having those polls open for an extra hour might have been tough on the poll clerks, we acknowledge, but it's certainly good for democracy to give everybody their opportunity to vote.

We also added the number of days for advance voting. You'll notice in the federal election the number of days for advance voting was only three or four. It was really only over a long weekend. We believed it was more appropriate to give every opportunity for advance voting for a week. And that applies as well to by-elections. Even though by-election turnouts are often lower, we want to give everybody who has an opportunity to vote—who wants to vote the opportunity to do so.

What's also very important is that we improved access to advance polls in rural and northern areas so that residents in a community never have to travel more than 30 kilometres to an advance poll.

These things built on some previous amendments we had made which removed restrictions from advance voting. It used to be you had to give a reason; you had to give some explanation. Now if you want to come and cast your vote in an advance poll, you're welcome to do so, and I am expecting just about every member in this House had a strategy to get people out to advance polls. If you didn't have that strategy, you probably wouldn't be in this House, so it speaks for itself.

One of the other things that we did—again, very, useful—was to expand the number of places that people could vote. Very important for people who are at university, very important for people who may be busy travelling through the airport, travelling through other places, to give people every opportunity and every chance to cast their democratic ballot for the person they want.

In addition to places like universities and the airport, we enabled super polls in malls so people could come and vote in advance just about anywhere. And I'm sure everybody, because we're all human and we tend to do this, I'm sure each of us have had a look at our statement of votes and I'm sure everybody was surprised by the number of people who voted at other locations in Manitoba and how many people voted in the advance polls.

We also extended absentee voting to students and public employees who are outside the province. We made sure that we placed voting stations in apartment complexes with 100 or more units wherever practical, and we reduced travel time to rural voting places by not only dealing with the physical distance, but also reducing the average number of voters in a rural voting area from 350 to 250.

There were other things that we did. Again, in the interest of making sure our democratic system works as well it could, we implemented a requirement for an MLA who so-called crosses the floor to sit as an independent rather than join another caucus unless a by-election is held. And we thought that was the right thing. We'd seen federally a number of members simply crossing the floor and taking up a job with a new team, sometimes taking up a Cabinet post with a new team, which may not have been what the people in their communities that elected them wanted to have happen. So in this case—and I'm sure there will be some MLAs who leave the Conservative Party after they have a bit more time to find out what it's all about and the Premier (Mr. Pallister) gets through his to-do list—they can't join our team just yet, I'm afraid, but they can certainly sit as independents. There's already a few very friendly independents they can come and join, and I'm sure that they'll be treated very kindly over there.

An Honourable Member: The more the merrier.

Mr. Swan: The more the merrier, says the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew), and I have to agree with him.

We also implemented a requirement of municipal councillors to resign a nomination when they're seeking another position, of course, to avoid conflict between their roles within the municipality and their desire to run for provincial office. That's also another way that we were open and transparent in changing the laws.

Of course, there were other things that we did. We implemented a requirement of elected officials to disclose additional salaries they receive from a party. That's now causing a bit of a controversy in British Columbia where we discovered that the Liberal Premier—although she's not really a liberal; we know she's a conservative—Christy Clark is apparently paid tens of thousands of dollars by the British Columbia Liberal Party because the Premier's salary of 200-some thousand dollars in British Columbia just isn't enough for her—for Christy Clark to get by. Well, we made sure that that has to be disclosed. Of course, it has to be disclosed by whoever's receiving the money, which we know is a little bit of a challenge on the other side, but we're hoping in the future maybe they will comply with the law.

We also created a position for an independent officer to receive and prosecute complaints about election financing and we also implemented a

requirement that any loans received by a candidate must be filed with the Chief Electoral Officer immediately, with loans from friends and family, again, restricted to \$3,000. What was very helpful was coming up with the allowance commissioner. We put in place Canada's first non-partisan commissioner to determine public financing for political parties. And those things went hand in hand with the reduction in the amount that any one person could give, the ending of corporate and union donations in the province of Manitoba and the additional accountability that came with it.

Now, of course, we know that every party has their own track record on elections. We know from the other side they're upset because sometimes we called by-elections too fast for their liking; sometimes we called them too slow for their liking.

*(15:20)

The things that have been done by the Progressive Conservative Party in the past really are not to anybody who cares about democracy's liking. And it must be remembered that the worst democratic scandal in Manitoba's history occurred following the 1999 election when allegations came forward that the Progressive Conservatives had encouraged candidates to run in three constituencies in a blatant attempt to try and steal votes away from the NDP by running a stated Aboriginal party, encouraging indigenous people to vote for a party, for candidates who were no more than puppets in the Progressive Conservative Party.

And there was actually an inquiry led by former chief justice of the highest court in Manitoba, the Court of Appeal, Alfred Monnin, a man of incredible wisdom and understanding, and he looked into the allegation. And what Mr. Justice Monnin found was that various high-ranking Progressive Conservative operatives had hatched a plot to induce an Aboriginal candidate, Darryl Sutherland, to run in order to draw votes from the NDP candidate during the 1995 election.

I'm sorry, I'm getting choked up just thinking about it. And, in that inquiry, it was found that a man called Gordon McFarlane, who was the party accountant during the 1995 election, had actually broken the law when he filed a false election return. And we know, because it took so long for the inquiry to do its work, we know those individuals got away with minimal prosecution because the time limit for prosecutions under the legislation in effect at the time was only six months. How coincidental. Six

months. I don't—I think that's just a coincidence, but there you go. The Chief Judge said although there was wrongdoing, there was really nothing that could be done legally.

We know the former Treasury Board secretary who helped cover up the scheme lost his position. We know that another individual, who was a party fundraiser and a member of the board of Manitoba Hydro, was removed from both positions by the then-premier of the time, Gary Filmon, for his role in the 1995 scheme.

And, you know, that inquiry gave us so much information on what the Progressive Conservative Party of the time was all about. The government, which, of course, the current Premier (Mr. Pallister) calls the best government in Manitoba's history, what did Alfred Monnin have to say? Well, on page 16, he said, "In all my years on the Bench, I never encountered as many liars in one proceeding as I did during this inquiry."

And, in fact, it was this quote that gave its title to the excellent book written by Doug Smith, who's a Winnipeg author, which, of course, is called *As Many Liars*. And, if any of the members of the Legislature want to borrow my copy, I'm more than happy to let you have it. It's not signed by the author; I probably should've had him do it, but it's a great work—[interjection] Well, the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko), I'll be happy; come on over, I'll let you borrow the book. You'll learn an awful lot about your party.

What he also said—what Justice Monnin also had to say is: "It is disheartening, indeed, to realize that an oath to tell the truth means so little to some people." And he went on to say, page 13, in the inquiry, "a vote-rigging plot constitutes an unconscionable debasement of the citizen's right to vote, to reduce the voting rights of individuals is a violation of our democratic system."

Also, on the same page, he said the basic premise of the vote-rigging plot was that Aboriginal people in these ridings had historically voted for the NDP, but, quote, "the Aboriginal vote," end quote, would be split if there were Aboriginal candidates running. The attempt here at vote-splitting was, in my opinion, clearly unethical and morally reprehensible.

And, Justice Monnin, who, as you're discovering, did not pull his punches, had this to say on page 11 of his inquiry report: "Political mores have

reached a dangerous low when one party member can actively support his party but sees nothing objectionable in helping to finance and organize the candidate of a second party in order to harm a third party."

And he went on to say at page 55 of his report: "I cannot ignore the fact that throughout this episode, especially during the investigation, at the hearings, some of these witnesses exhibited a degree of arrogance or an I-know-better attitude."

Well, you know, it hasn't taken long to see that attitude start to sprout again, just like dandelions in the spring on the—from the members on the other side.

And he went on to say, "a considerable amount of time, effort and money was expended by this commission in order to confirm what should have been freely admitted at the outset." The bank records and other documentation of the PC party of Manitoba election account and of other individuals had to be obtained and examined to find out what really occurred.

So, you know, we're all about democracy. We're all about giving people the opportunity to have fair representation and, frankly, timely representation. And there are some good parts of this bill that I think we can agree upon, but I think it's very, very important to remember that not only does no party have a monopoly on democracy, in fact, the Progressive Conservative Party has had a shortage of it for a very, very long time.

So, look, this is—again, this is No. 4 on the Premier's to-do list. It is by far the most positive item on the Premier's to-do list. We'll look forward to see what other items are going to come forward.

Thank you very much for allowing me the opportunity to put some words on the record. Time goes so short when you're speaking in this House, and I look forward to what other members have to say on this bill.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris): Madam Deputy Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise and put a few brief comments on the record in relation to our first bill as a government, and I'm very pleased to see that this bill is part of our government's plan for an open and transparent government, an open and transparent government denied by members opposite during their 17 years in office.

I listened to the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) on many of his comments and I will react to some of those comments.

But, Madam Deputy Speaker, you may not realize what I often talk about in this House is that as the MLA for Morris, I have the distinction of having three firsts. I was the longest delayed by-election in Manitoba history. It was 360 days from vacancy to swear-in. That was 360 days that a group of Manitobans were denied political representation in the Manitoba Legislature, a record that is shameful on the part of members opposite, the NDP and, fortunately, with the passage of this legislation, which I hope members opposite will support, will go down in the history books never to be repeated. It was also the coldest by-election in Manitoba history, something my colleague for Arthur-Virden can well attest to. And, lastly, it was the first by-election to cover two calendar years.

For some strange reason members opposite decided to call the by-election, oh, I don't know, it was about December 20—[interjection] There you go, thank you. December 27th. I'm not sure why they would pick that time, whether there was some sort of political advantage to calling a by-election for Arthur-Virden and Morris in between Christmas and New Year's in the middle of a polar vortex, but I'm sure they had their—I'm sure the members opposite had their reasons.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it's interesting because at the time when this vacancy was created in the constituency of Morris, vacated after excellent representation by my predecessor, a decade of representation by Mavis Taillieu, Ms. Taillieu had to resign due to some health concerns on the part of her husband, and we wish Wilf the very best as he continues to fight the good fight when it comes to cancer. I was always amazed subsequent to Mavis resigning that members opposite would constantly and regularly heckle during question period and other times: Where's Mavis, where's Mavis? And I was thinking to myself, you know, here we have an individual, an elected official, and despite who we all are at the end of the day, I think we should be people first, that as much as we enjoy our positions as elected representatives we are spouses, we are partners, we are parents. And I think—I don't think any of us should be disregarded for putting our family and our loved ones first. In this instance this is what Mavis did. In her case she put her family first and she put her spouse first in terms of tending to their needs as they fought and continue to fight this

very difficult fight. But, despite that, members opposite continued to heckle. But I think it speaks more to their lack of integrity than anything else.

The by-election in Morris was an interesting time. Mavis retired in early February, and if one took a look at the history of the NDP—so up 'til then there had been 10 by-elections called here in the province of Manitoba under the NDP, starting with the Minister of Justice's (Mrs. Stefanson) own by-election, that being—I'm sorry, in Tuxedo, and the delay there was 64 days; Kirkfield Park: 75 days; Lac du Bonnet in 2002, 32 days; Minto in 2004, 32 days; Turtle Mountain, 35 days; Fort Whyte, 78 days; Elmwood, 207 days; The Pas, 143 days; Concordia, 186 days; and Fort Whyte: 82 days.

* (15:30)

So under the NDP tenure up to myself and the member for Arthur-Virden's (Mr. Piwniuk) by-elections being called, there was 10 by-elections from 2000 to 2012. The average wait, Madam Deputy Speaker, was 93 days, so roughly three months. But, for some reason, in the instance of the Morris by-election, there was a decision made by all members opposite to deny the people of Morris their right to have political representation.

I remember the Winnipeg Free Press wrote an article in June of that year, in June 2013, wondering just where was the by-election and what was going on with the—at that time, the inordinate delay on behalf of the NDP. And I'll quote from the article: If the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger), the then-premier, quote, waits until September, Morris will have been vacant for about seven months: not a record, but close. Any further push into the fall would most definitely be setting a new standard for political passive-aggressiveness. The most frustrating part of the story is the NDP government's failure to enunciate a reason for delaying the vote. End quote, Madam Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, and this is really what the delay was about. Members opposite did not like to be held accountable. For those that are new to the House, they may recall that members opposite, in the previous election, had run on a core campaign commitment not to raise the PST. They even went so far to suggest that anyone who said or any idea that they would raise the PST beyond 7 per cent was total—was ridiculous and total nonsense. And they went around, they knocked on every door, and they sung that song to anyone who answered the doors.

And, of course, we all know that happened, Madam Deputy Speaker. Subsequent to the election, not only did they raise the PST from seven to eight per cent, but it turns out that behind closed doors, and FIPPA documents confirm, they actually looked at increasing the PST not to 8 per cent but actually to 9 per cent. And I can only imagine that at some point, somewhere amongst them, someone must have said stop the—stop this love train; I've got to get off because—*[interjection]* And they did. They did—*[interjection]* They did jump—well, he was tossed off, though, actually. Let's be honest. He was tossed off.

But, that being said, the previous government was held to account by us an official opposition because that was what our role was. And so we held them to account. We held them in the legislative Chamber, not just through that spring session but through the entire very, very hot summer, Madam Deputy Speaker. And, apparently, members opposite don't like to be held to account, not only for their decisions but, more importantly, for their broken promises.

And so members opposite decided, and in particular, the premier, and every single member across the way who sat around those benches decided that, you know what? We're going to be petty about things and we're going to deny Manitobans the right for representation and we don't really care, Madam Deputy Speaker.

In fact, I remember—I recall at the—going to The Forks, Madam Deputy Speaker, in one of my previous positions when I ran a not-for-profit and I—the minister responsible for Persons with Disabilities, the former member for Fort Rouge, was in attendance to declare—because it was diversity awareness week—disability awareness week, and I was there as part of that celebration, the recognition that one out of six Manitobans is identified as a person with a disability.

And so I knew the member; I knew Jennifer from our days at Brandon University where we'd often have some heated conversations, and I remember asking the minister at the time when I could anticipate a Morris by-election being called. And it always—it still sticks with me today, that the minister's response on behalf of her and her colleagues and the then-premier, the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger), that democracy and political representation for the people of Morris, was, and I am quoting, Madam Deputy Speaker, not a priority of her government. End quote.

But it gives you an idea, Madam Deputy Speaker, of the arrogance that had soaked through members opposite, soaked through their very pores. There was little that they felt that they could do, and they felt they could do all things with impunity.

And maybe for some time there was, Madam Deputy Speaker, but that all ended in the summer of 2012, when some 19 Progressive Conservative MLAs held the NDP and their majority to account, held them through that long summer and forced them to rationalize and explain their decision to Manitobans to the point that, actually, this—the NDP actually used taxpayer dollars to go to court and actually fight for their right to break Manitoba's balanced budget legislation, balanced budget legislation that they themselves vowed to maintain. And that word, maintain, is actually a quote from the NDP themselves, again, in a bid to get elected. They are—they have proved themselves to—a party that will say anything, and, more importantly, or more worrisome, is that they will do anything to get elected and to stay elected.

We saw some of their atrocious behaviour in the most recent campaign, obviously, with the cancer-care fear mongering that went on, on behalf of the NDP, with the suggestion that individuals who were fighting cancer—my own mother died of brain cancer, Madam Deputy Speaker—and that they would go around and they would hold news conferences and they would say to Manitobans, you know, if the Tories get elected, you are suddenly going to be facing bills in the tens of thousands of dollars for cancer-care drugs because of the Tories. And it was, actually, it was a shameful moment.

And some of my colleagues had suggested at the time that maybe, you know, that might have been the moment when members opposite, when their campaign had jumped the shark, Madam Deputy Speaker. And I said, no, actually, it wasn't. And I said I don't like to use that term, jump the shark. For those who don't recall, it was from a television show called Happy Days, when the Fonz actually literally and figuratively, on water skis, jumped the shark. And it was a suggestion—was—that was when the show had gone downhill. But to me, the jump the shark was more of a playful term. And what they had done, and what the NDP, had done was simply shameful and shameless. *[interjection]* Fear mongering at its worst, actually, in—to correct my colleague, the MLA for Emerson.

So I listened, and the member opposite and the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) did accurately put some information on the record, a rarity in of itself when it comes to members opposite, Madam Deputy Speaker, but about some of the instances where his government had made improvements to Manitoba's electoral system.

And it's funny, the members opposite, the MLA for Minto, had spoke about set-election dates. And it was always interesting, Madam Speaker, because in a previous life, when I had the fortune of being the provincial director for the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, this was a position that our members, small- and mid-sized businesses here in Manitoba, the backbone of the provincial economy, had brought forward to the government, saying, you know, this is something that is occurring throughout jurisdictions in Canada and that Manitoba was being left behind when it came to the idea that election dates should be on a set calendar.

And what was interesting at the time was the NDP's wholehearted rejection of that position, both privately and publicly, Madam Deputy Speaker. And it wasn't until some years later that, on the road to Damascus, they decided they would convert to the idea that, you know what, we need set election dates.

But what's also interesting is despite bringing in the set-election dates and putting forward that calendar of—so when citizens and when elected officials and potential elected officials and their volunteers should be preparing for the next general election, again, members opposite just simply changed the law to best suit them, and they pushed that date forward by another six months, all under the claim that they didn't want to conflict with the federal general election. So they thought, well, we might as well give ourselves an extra six months of governing.

One can only imagine, and as my colleague, the member for Morden-Winkler (Mr. Friesen), the Finance Minister, lifts those fiscal rocks and finds that 1-plus-billion-dollar deficit left by members opposite, can only imagine the fiscal damage wrought by members opposite during that additional six months that they had in power, Madam Deputy Speaker.

* (15:40)

Madam Deputy Speaker, my colleague across the way also talked about the vote tax, and, of course, he never referred to it as a vote tax; I think,

he used some sort of more flowery euphemism. But at the end of the day that's what it was. And on the idea—originally back in 2008 when the NDP brought forward Bill 37, and it was all part of The Lobbyist Registration Act. It was a—you know, the idea—and they brought in—within that bill also was actually when they finally brought in the idea of setting—of set election dates and accountability for lobbyists. Of—hidden within that bill, which was an omnibus bill, and it was something that governments that—get a little long under the tooth and have hidden agendas, as they did in that instance. They will hide other components, other legislative goals within larger bills in the attempt to hide it, or hide it from the view of Manitobans. But when you hid—and when you peel back the layers of Bill 37, back in 2008, and hidden within the many sections and subsections of that convoluted legislation was a little thing called hypocrisy, an ugly word, but all too appropriate when used by members opposite, the NDP.

Madam Deputy Speaker, for years, business groups, social groups had been calling upon that provincial government, the NDP, to index the personal income tax system to protect individuals against inflation. And I'm proud to be part of a government that ran on that mandate and we will fulfill that mandate of indexing the personal tax system to inflation.

The idea is to increase the tax brackets and tax exemptions by the rate of inflation to protect an individual's real wages against a rising cost of gas and groceries. And it's not rocket science; it's, really, just matter of bringing Manitoba into the middle of the pack, something that members opposite, the NDP, would repeat ad nauseam in justification of many of their legislative goals. But, you know what? When it actually came to improving the lives of madam—of Manitobans—of regular Manitobans, it was something that they simply ignored. And, in fact, there is no tax strategy that offers individuals of low and fixed income the greatest benefit than that of indexing the tax system.

And that idea and that suggestion I'm putting forward, actually, was the justification why, for that very policy brought in next door in Saskatchewan, not by the Saskatchewan Party, Madam Deputy Speaker, but, actually, by their previous NDP government, who actually brought in indexation because they recognized that individuals on low and fixed incomes needed some protection against

inflation. And indexing the tax system was a key component to that. Was it the be all and end all? Absolutely not, but it was a component.

I remember several years ago FIPPA'ing a briefing note from members opposite, from the minister of Finance's office, and at the time it had estimated that the NDP, by denying Manitobans the indexation of the tax system, had taken from Manitobans approximately 100 million additional dollars in tax revenue. I would suggest by the end of their mandate, just based on that time frame, that it was probably closer to a quarter of a billion dollars.

And I remember the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger), when I had brought up the idea of indexation, I was really surprised that they wouldn't simply jump on it, because, again, as I had indicated to members opposite—that the Saskatchewan NDP government was the one that had brought it in. And I had thought, you know, here we have a piece of legislation you could model after a neighbouring NDP government that has the greatest benefit to low and fixed income Manitobans. Why won't you bring it in?

And I remember quite clearly the former Finance minister, the member for St. Boniface, telling me that the reason that they wouldn't bring in indexation is because organizations like the CFIB and other lobbying organizations would not give them credit where credit was due, that it became automatic that if it was something that just simply occurred every January 1st, that the tax system was indexed to inflation, that this government, the NDP, was more interested in political credit for themselves than tax credits for low and fixed-income Manitobans.

What was also particularly interesting, too, Madam Deputy Speaker, about Bill 37, the 'omnious' bill that hid in the original vote tax, was originally the NDP actually planned to index the vote tax itself. So, again, I thought it was the height of hypocrisy and which is why I talked about indexation in my previous comments, because here was an NDP government that denied low- and fixed-income and all Manitobans the benefits that derive from indexing the taxes to inflation, but they themselves were so cognizant of the issue of diminishing purchasing power of an individual or a corporation that they decided, you know what, that vote tax that we are going to take from Manitobans, that needs to be indexed to inflation. And so the original legislation of bill—and if you look—go through the original bill, Bill 37, back in 2008, you will actually see written in

the legislation that that vote tax was supposed to be indexed to inflation.

And I remember running into the former Premier Gary Doer into the hallway and expressing my dismay that they would deny Manitobans that tax indexation protection while granting themselves the very protection in terms of their own vote tax, that they would siphon money out of health care, that they would siphon money out of education, that they would siphon money out of those front-line services like the non-profit world, all to pad their own pocketbooks, Madam Deputy Speaker, and not only that but every year they would increase it by whatever the rate of inflation was. And it was quite shocking that the members opposite had no issue with the public funding of political parties through tax dollars. And political systems and political parties are all funded in some degree through the—through our tax system; during the election campaign, all political parties and candidates that received a set percentage of vote will receive the authorized payments back of qualifying expenses.

And from our perspective and our consistent perspective since 2008, we have said: That is enough. The taxpayer of Manitoba gives enough money to all political parties in the event—or in the—when it comes to rebates and the funding of eligible expenses. But the NDP, their belief was, no, we need more and we will simply take more, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I remember when I was running that not-for-profit for several years and the NDP were cutting our budget year after year after year: 6 per cent, 7 per cent, 10 per cent one year, and it got to the point where you simply couldn't find any savings anymore. You squeezed every nickel out of a very lean not-for-profit agency, and we weren't only one who suffered under members opposite in their cutbacks during that time frame.

I do remember, actually just prior to one Christmas, the members opposite, the NDP, sent out a notice to one hundred and—I believe it was forty-four not-for-profits here in the city of Winnipeg demanding that they return a portion of the agreed upon—their agreed-upon budget that had previously been negotiated and signed the previous April. They wanted it back to government and that those not-for-profits had a matter of two weeks just before Christmas to either write a cheque to the member for St. Boniface and to the NDP and give that money back or they had to—and I will use the words from

that memo, a memo that has previously—that I previously tabled in this House—that they would have to justify—and that's an exact word used by the NDP to these not-for-profits—they would have to justify to the NDP why at Christmas that they were simply unable, and at the end of a fiscal year, how they were unable to go back and somehow magically find this pot of money, all because members opposite were in desperate need to pad their own pocketbooks.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the member from Minto talked about the vote-rigging scandal, and I think he hit the salient points, and absolutely it was an unjustified action here in the province of Manitoba. But what's interesting is the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) never talked about his own party's electoral vote rigging that went back—that was—that came out in 1999.

* (15:50)

That was the NDP and the unions' in-and-out pyramid scheme that apparently had gone back from—for years and years, so far back that the then-Premier Gary Doer simply said that he had no recollection of how long the NDP and their union cohorts had been fleecing Elections Manitoba, Madam Speaker. And so what they would do is that the union members would donate labour to the various campaigns; they would bill it, and they would be paid and that money would be donated back to the NDP.

And, then, it turns out that the NDP, subsequent to the 1999 election, the members opposite held a secret meeting in the NDP headquarters of which the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger), the then-Finance minister, was present along with, I believe, a dozen other campaigns, to deal with the fact that approximately a dozen official election forms had been falsified. Election returns had been falsified by members opposite, falsified by the NDP, that they had been turned in and had been falsified by the NDP power in order to garner additional monies out of Elections Manitoba.

Madam Deputy Speaker, members opposite were found guilty of this gross abuse of power, this gross fleecing of tax dollars, and they were forced to pay a fine in the tens of thousands of dollars. And so, while the minister—the member for Minto cites an example, and I, again, I agree that it was absolutely an abuse of power, what happened in the mid-'90s, that—the several—the—I think it was a couple—\$4,000 that was at the heart of the 1995 voting scandal. He

made no mention of the 1999 voting scandal, under his government, under his watch, that resulted, again, in Elections Manitoba finding them guilty and fining them to the tune of tens of thousands of dollars.

So, while members opposite can talk all they want about the improvements they've done to date to enhancing and improving Manitoba's electoral system, whether it is in terms of fixing or setting election dates, whether it's in terms of a legislative calendar, whether it's in terms of limits and that on donations, Madam Deputy Speaker, they would do well to put on their public record and put on Hansard similar comments in regarding their own attempts to manipulate the books, to fleece Elections Manitoba and something that had, by their own admission, had gone on for years and years prior.

In fact, at that secret meeting at the NDP headquarters, apparently, it was suggested by an NDP whistleblower—I forget for which riding he was the official agent for, but he was so horrified at the—at what the NDP had done, the cover-up and the alteration, the illegal alteration of his electoral forms that he had submitted, he had indicated that the member for saint 'foniface' basically blew his stack and demanded a personal letter from the party exonerating him. And, despite receiving that letter, the former premier has yet to ever table that letter in this House showing that he was somehow absolved from their own electoral fraud in 1999.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, for members opposite to suggest they are somehow lily-white when it comes to elections is simply not true. Obviously, all individuals that run for office need to be held to a higher standard. We are all individuals that need and should be held to that standard, because we're not just representing ourselves, we're not just representing a political party, but we're representing an institution, and, in this case, the institution being the Manitoba Legislative Assembly. And what we do as individuals, in this Chamber, reflects on all of us, regardless of NDP, Liberal or Progressive Conservative or independent. It is a reflection on all of our actions both today and tomorrow. So it's unfortunate when instances happen, but we need to be—hold all individuals accountable for those actions and even those of our own actions.

So it is my hope that, with the passage of this bill, Madam Deputy Speaker, we will move Manitoba forward. We will make—we will ensure that what happened in the constituency of Morris, the

360-day delay does get relegated to the history books, that no individual, no voter in Manitoba will ever be held hostage by the political, the passive aggressiveness, by any political party. And, in this—in the case of Morris, by the NDP. This bill will bring Manitoba into the mainstream in terms of the time frame in calling a by-election. I think this is a good legislation. I would be surprised that any member could possibly vote against it, but I will be interested if they do vote for it—

The Acting Speaker (Colleen Mayer): Order. The member's time has expired.

Mr. Wab Kinew (Fort Rouge): Madam Deputy Speaker, I'd like to thank the member from Morris for his remarks to the bill. Also the member for Minto (Mr. Swan), and of course the honourable Minister of Justice (Mrs. Stefanson) for bringing this bill before us. I do think it's important that we constantly evaluate and, you know, consider whether we are fulfilling our democratic duty, our democratic obligation to our constituents to the full extent on an ongoing basis.

I'd also like to congratulate, you know, some of those people that I just mentioned, including the member from Morris, the honourable Minister of Justice and, I believe, the member from Kildonan, and the member from Point Douglas, who I had occasion to see at the Pride Run this past weekend in Winnipeg. The words that I saw on Twitter from the honourable member from Morris were that there's nothing partisan about the Pride Run. And so it's in that same spirit of bipartisan collaboration that I rise to speak to you here today because I seek only to make this law here better and to ensure the full contemplation of all possible implications and ramifications here in this House.

Now I, in particular, do want to single out my colleague here, the member for Minto, to give him specific thanks for putting his remarks on the record, in particular, you know, his ability to make clear the fact that there is some tension between the oblique references made by the members on the government side who claim that there is some sort of unfairness with the manner in which by-elections were called previously, but then pointing out the tension with the fact that the Premier had made some remarks in which he noted that the timing of his particular by-election was cynical, and of course, you know, we have to consider these things because we want to take in all germane topics with respect to new laws, and we should constantly be holding those things up

to the light and making sure that they're there for us to consider duly.

I'd also like to add to the record that I think that there's a further tension that we should, perhaps, be considering with respect to this legislation. I think I'm hearing my colleagues right on the government side of the House when their concern is that they're trying to prevent some sort of political calculation from interfering with the free, fair, and open timing of when by-elections are called. However, I would point out that though this is the point that the member—after minister got up to raise in the House, this law doesn't actually prevent or speak to political calculations interfering with the timing of by-elections being called. All that this law actually does is it reduces the time period from one year to 180 days.

So political calculations coming into play with respect to when a by-election is called here in Manitoba might still be a possibility. It's just that those political calculations, the scope of them, would not be limited from one year; rather, to 180 days. So, again, there's some tension there between the concern that we hear stated time and time again from those members on the government side of the House and the actual bill that is being proposed here. So I'd put that on the record.

Again, I don't think that the change to 180 days is unreasonable, but I do think that we should think very carefully about any change to our democratic system. I take very seriously the point that was raised on a few occasions, that every single constituency in Manitoba and every citizen in Manitoba does deserve to have a representative in this House to take their concerns forward into the legislative building, into the Legislature, and I think that that is a very true statement and it is one, the sentiment of which, that we should respect on an ongoing basis.

* (16:00)

However, we also have to balance that with the principle of allowing the residents of a given constituency to have a full and thorough consideration of the candidates that are being put before them, and I would argue that part of that consideration should include enough of a time period to elapse so that anyone who might be an effective MLA, an effective candidate for that constituency, has enough time to give proper consideration as to whether or not they are going to run, and then of course to launch that process.

So again, I'd like to say that there needs to be some sort of balancing between the desire to have representation in this House as soon as possible while also making sure that the process is open and thorough enough so that, you know, we can get the best-quality candidates from all parties to run and therefore allow for a true democratic choice amongst all constituents.

I, of course take, you know, the democratic tradition particularly close to my heart, coming from a family where one of my parents was not allowed to vote in this country until 1960. And so it is with that history in mind that in this year of celebration where we honour the fact that some women in Manitoba received the right to vote 100 years ago, we always do demarcate that it was only some women who received the right to vote 100 years ago. For First Nations women, of course, there were many decades of disenfranchisement, which, you know, interceded before they could have a chance to express themselves freely and fully in our democratic election.

Now, of course, that is one of the reasons why one of the most recent by-elections, that of The Pas in 2015, is so significant, because although First Nations people got the right to vote in 1960, for some reason, though we had First Nations men in this House, going back to the times of Eric Robinson, Oscar Lathlin, the late Oscar Lathlin, and Elijah Harper, it wasn't until 2015 that we actually saw a First Nations woman walking into this House as the elected representative for a constituency here in Manitoba. And we know it's not for the lack of there being First Nations women here in the province, nor for the lack of there being well-qualified, hard-working, educated First Nations women in the this province. So we have to always remember that this is the history that we are walking into.

And so it is, of course, a huge moment—it was a huge moment in our history when the member from The Pas was able to walk into these hallowed halls for the first time. And so I believe that the existing by-election process leading to a result such as that shows us that, you know, the system does work in some cases, some instances.

On a similar point, I think that, you know, I was reminded of a conversation that I had recently with the president of the New Democratic Party here in Manitoba, who himself was a politician in a previous life, if you will, though he didn't serve in, you know, a provincial Legislature or in the House of Commons in Ottawa. He was a national chief for the Assembly

of First Nations. And he was an elected First Nations representative. And, you know, of course, he's former National Chief Ovide Mercredi.

And, now, I remember Ovide from back in the day, when I was just a young child. I used to watch him at the large First Nations political conventions like the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs or at the Assembly of First Nations. And he would be engaged in these epic battles, trying to secure the necessary votes to win against other luminaries such as Phil Fontaine, who himself was somebody that I look up to greatly. And so I grew up in this, you know, era in which those leaders were rising up through the ranks of First Nations politics.

So recently I had occasion to have a conversation with Ovide, and he shared with me, you know, the fact that he's unsure about his legacy, and he was, you know, confiding in me that, you know, he wondered how much he could have accomplished had he participated in mainstream politics rather than in First Nations politics.

But I responded to him, like, your legacy is secure, sir. You accomplished great things, you know, the proposed Charlottetown Accord could have been a dramatic step forward, you know, in this nation's history. And he did many other great things.

But the point that I made to him was this. You participated in First Nations politics because that was what was open to you at the time. You didn't even have the franchise when you were younger, right—same with my father's generation, they did not have the franchise when they were younger. And so of course they entered First Nations politics.

For subsequent generations, in the First Nations community, such as myself, such as the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine), such as the member from The Pas, such as the member from Kewatinook, because we grew up in a milieu where we had the right to participate freely and fully in Canadian democracy, now you do see increasing representation in the political mainstream. And so, of course, I present this as background, as evidence for how serious we ought to take these considerations and deliberations when we do take a look at revisiting how our democracy functions because they do have real, they do have lasting impacts on the lives of many people in our communities.

I also want to shout out the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) who's one of my colleagues who won in a by-election, of course. I had some fun

with him earlier because he had a by-election which, you know, was followed hot on the heels by a general election but, of course, we're very happy to have him here twice re-elected and, you know, continuing to bring forward such great questions in question period, you know, asking, you know, what does the term front line mean of people who use the term front line, asking, you know, whether we're going to see funding for, you know, very needed health facilities in Concordia and, of course, looking out for the best interests of all Manitobans who require health care. And so I congratulate him, perhaps a little belated, on his 2010 win. Yes, well, it's the first occasion that I've had to congratulate him so I guess that's what I'm going to say about that.

Now, I was wondering—yes, what's six years between friends? So I was wondering, you know, whether Bill 2 might have possibly, you know, had any impact on my, you know, recent experience in the campaign here and I'm not sure that it would have really impacted things. It was some 60 days that, you know, went between me being nominated as a candidate and me, you know, facing election day for the first time. And I don't think I'd wish upon anyone that they have less than 60 days. But, of course, Bill 2 here guarantees that somebody would have up to 180 days between the time that the by-election is called and the time that they have to face an election, so I think 180 days might be getting close to what is a reasonable minimum between, you know, the call of a by-election and, of course, the election day.

And so, of course, my own campaign experience was an excellent one. I was very honoured to have many volunteers from all walks of life, many, you know, students, many elders, you know, people from the indigenous community, people from other cultural communities and, of course, many solid New Democrats who came out to help me and to support me. And, of course, I'm very proud to say that many, you know, individuals from the labour community came out and volunteered their time as well, and I do believe that it is a strong sign of our democracy when you can have, you know, people giving up their own time to volunteer and to help you and, of course, that's an important thing, as well.

Now, the member from Minto, he did raise some important issues about how by-elections overlapping with other provincial and federal elections may lead to some confusion among voters, but I'd argue that in some cases the consequences can be even more dire than mere confusion. We can actually see lower

voter turnout, right, as a result of there being election fatigue. And I think that some of the results of the recent provincial election here in Manitoba do bear testament to the fact that there has been some voter fatigue here in Manitoba what with our recent provincial election coming hot on the heels of a federal election, which in turn came not too long after a municipal election.

And so as we look forward, and we see that we have our fixed election date in 2020 and then we know that there's going to be another, you know, federal election in 2019, we might also wonder whether there's room for this bill to be changed in light of the fact that election fatigue from those upcoming, you know, elections might actually interfere with the proposed—or with the hypothetical by-election that we're now considering here today.

Of course, for the voter, the point was made by the member for Minto (Mr. Swan), for the voter they don't necessarily care which jurisdiction the election is taking place in; just the fact that they're headed to the polls is enough to cause some consternation and some confusion so I would encourage perhaps some consideration of whether or not we might make room under this legislation to contemplate the impact that a potential federal election might have on, you know, the turnout during a by-election.

* (16:10)

Of course, I do agree that that one-year buffer between the next provincial election and a hypothetical by-election is a good idea, and so I'm on board with the, you know, the law in that respect. And so I am happy to see that.

Now, we are talking about, as I stated earlier, a relatively narrow impact on our democratic tradition, which is that the reform or rather the change of the timing within which a by-election could be called. But I'd argue that there's other areas that we might consider looking at in, you know, revisiting how it is that we conduct elections here. For me, as a, you know, a member of the First Nations community, increasing outreach might be one of the very important aspects that we might look at empowering Elections Manitoba to do more of.

I know in the recent federal election my home community of Onigaming, Ontario, the Ojibways of Onigaming First Nation in Northwestern Ontario, actually ran out of ballots, and this was sort of a shocking outcome that in our, you know, modern democratic society that a community could actually,

you know, run out of ballots. But there they were on election day at the Mikinaak Onigaming School, and just as they saw that the supply of ballots was running low, some of the returning officers found a volunteer in my community by the name of Joe Jack, you know, somebody that I grew up around, a very good powwow singer, and they sent him to Kenora to go get some more ballots.

So, you know, Mr. Jack drove all the way to Kenora—it's about an hour drive, picked up the ballots from the Elections Canada officials, drove back to the community just in time to replenish the stock of ballots.

Now, I had a chance to speak to officials from Elections Canada after the election, and, you know, I was very active on social media questioning them, you know, how is it that a community can run out of ballots, how is it that, you know, Elections Canada may have, you know, so grossly misunderstood or misestimated the amount of people who wanted to turn out and exercise their democratic right, and what they told me was that, you know, they made their projections for how many people are going to vote based on how many people have voted in those polling locations in the past.

However, what we saw in this recent federal election was Canadians, by and large, turning out to the polls to reject Stephen Harper and his government, but specifically an unprecedented turnout amongst First Nations people to vote out who they—the Prime Minister—former prime minister who they viewed as an antagonist in the relationship between First Nations people and the rest of the country.

And so it's important—[interjection]—they were absolutely right, the member from Tyndall Park points out, and I agree with him.

Now, of course, the implication here is that what we are seeing nowadays is that it is possible for groups who have previously been identified as non-voters or a low turnout group for that phenomenon to be reversed, and so we've seen it, you know, in First Nations communities in the most recent federal election such as my home community of Onigaming, such as Shoal Lake, Ontario, other communities in northern Manitoba, other communities in Alberta running out of ballots, and so to me that is a strong sign, at the very least, that First Nations people can turn out to the polls to vote in large numbers if they have a strong motivation to do so, and it's my personal hope that this is the beginning of an

increasing trend of voter engagement in indigenous communities across the country.

We might, you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, we might project that phenomenon even further and ask whether not just indigenous voters are beginning to turn out more than ever before, but other, you know, votes were—other voting groups where turnout was previously low, such as, you know, the turnout for young people. Perhaps we're on the precipice of seeing, you know, unprecedented youth engagement when it comes to our elections. Perhaps we are beginning to see, you know, other cultural communities such as the Islamic community begin to vote more when they view their rights as, perhaps, being in some way threatened by potential candidates. Perhaps more new Canadians will exercise their ability to use the franchise for the first time in this country.

And so all that to say that I believe that perhaps increasing outreach might be another priority that we should look at in the very near term. In the same way that I was able to participate in Elections Canada's process of trying to figure out how to better serve the needs of new voters from the indigenous community, we might task Elections Manitoba with a similar sort of process and encourage Elections Manitoba to make sure that everyone in this country not only has the opportunity to cast a vote, but that that, you know, opportunity is actually the reality when election day comes forward.

And so one of the other issues that I can see on the horizon is that, you know, online voting is probably something that we could look at doing. Perhaps an exploratory process could be launched with Elections Manitoba. You know, all of us are able to send money online, we're able to bank online and yet for some reason we can't cast a vote online. As we go forward into the future and as we seek to greater engage young people who live most of their, you know, lives in some connection with the digital realm, we might ask why we don't have that opportunity. And, of course, I guess the caution there is that we don't want any sort of impersonation of identity to be taking place at the polls. But with, you know, new technologies such as biometric identifications, perhaps there is a possibility and a way forward there.

Finally, in terms of other areas that we might be looking at considering in terms of, you know, electoral reform processes here in Canada, I would encourage members on the government side to think

about how a potential reform of federal election policy might interact with some of the changes that they're proposing here. We know that the federal government has launched a exploratory group, committee, bipartisan–tripartisan, I guess I should say, that is going to be looking at the process of democratic reform. And so perhaps we ought to be carrying out some conversations and some consultations with those people to be sure that any changes that we're considering here in Manitoba are not just going to be in direct conflict with whatever comes down the pipe from Ottawa, though, in all honesty, it does seem that the Liberals are back–the federal Liberals are backing away from, you know, the democratic reform project and have given some remarks indicating that most recently.

You know, I have, you know, several questions that I hope to see answered during the debate over this bill. You know, one is, I'd like to know, you know, what sort of consultation was take–was conducted with Manitobans before that this was brought forward. Now, I know we hear every day in this House the greatest hits of the members from the government side where they tell us that, you know, there was this consultation called the election which just took place and therefore everything that they do now is justified on that basis. But, of course, as, you know, participants in a democracy, we ought to be mindful of the fact that it is not just an election which is the consultation that we need to carry out, but rather we need to have an ongoing engagement with the voting public and to continue to take the temperature of those constituents and to continue to ask them, you know, what it is that they feel about the specific laws and bills that are being proposed.

I'd also like to know whether the government plans to continue to bring forward their democratic reform agenda in a manner such as this, which is in a piecemeal way. I personally would welcome that, if we have the ability to consider each proposed change in a very, you know, direct and in a very focused way, because I am, you know, potentially concerned that future changes to the electoral system may be buried in an omnibus sort of legislation. And so, you know, I would like to know whether the government does commit to bringing forward all of their changes to the democratic process in this way and, you know, would allow us for careful consideration and to carefully weigh the possible implications of these changes before us.

Madam Speaker in the Chair

Now, you know, again, the member from Minto raised the prospect of redrawing boundaries, and we do want to, you know, include some of those considerations. So I'd ask whether some of those changes are coming.

* (16:20)

You know, at the federal level, we do see, you know, somewhat arbitrary choices made when we have a massive northern riding such as Churchill–Keewatinook Aski all of a sudden redrawn to include southern First Nations such as the Peguis First Nation and the Fisher River First Nation, where nearby nonindigenous communities are left out of those redistricting efforts, not to suggest that anything untoward was happening there, but, specifically, that it does give one pause and does make us wonder what is going on there, because we know, from our–the experience of our neighbours to the south, in the United States of America, when you redraw electoral boundaries so that results are almost a foregone conclusion, you see an increasingly polarized electorate and then you see a subsequent decrease in the civility of the democratic debate.

And I believe that everyone in this House, notwithstanding the awesome heckling that we hear in question period, does want a very strong and a very robust but yet civilized sort of discussion of the matters that come before this House. And so we do, of course, strive to see ridings that are more competitive, because that drives all parties to compete harder, to work harder, to attract quality candidates, and the end result is that the constituents in those areas are rewarded with a more robust choice presented to them. And, of course, all of those things are good for democracy.

Now, of course, we do also want to give some consideration to, you know, the impact of financing on our elections. You know, it's not my favourite part of an election to have to participate in the fundraising process, but it is a necessary part. And we do need to take some time to consider those implications. You know, judging from some of the campaign messaging that we heard from the Progressive Conservatives during the recent election, I think we can anticipate some changes coming down the pipe with respect to the way elections are financed in Manitoba. But, of course, you know, I have some questions for the way that those changes will be proposed. Again, I would like to see each one of them proposed separately–as separate bills; that way, we can be sure to vote just specifically for the one

matter at hand rather than, you know, having to wade through a bunch of other motions.

And, of course, the ethos that should guide such deliberations should be to encourage the full democratic participation of every Manitoban, and it should be to bolster the sentiment that the voice of every Manitoba should count equally in a democratic election.

You know, I'm very proud of the diversity in the constituency that I'm here to represent, which is Fort Rouge, because, on one side of the constituency, you have very opulent homes, some of the biggest homes in Manitoba, some of the highest assessed values, and, in other parts of the constituency, you have social housing and you have people from every group of socio-economic standing in between. And, you know, it's perfectly acceptable, you know, that people are able to compete in an open market and achieve, you know, the spoils of their hard work. But what I like is that when election day comes, regardless of whether you live in a mansion or whether you live in social housing, your voice counts for exactly the same; however, when we look at the changes to the financing system of our elections, I would hope that we have that same commitment to democratic equity first and foremost. And, again, that'd be the guiding principle that we act on.

So, as I consider the bill that's before us here today, I remind myself that there are, of course, many factors influencing voter turnout and that influence, you know, people's propensity to vote. And, I think, we need to balance that again with the need to have somebody, in this House, representing each constituency, in Manitoba, relatively quickly. And that, you know, to me, I think that the—much was made earlier of the fact that, you know, some constituencies went, you know, some 360 days, but, again, if—you know, 360 days means that an excellent representative comes forward here into the House, then, you know, I don't necessarily find fault with that. And so I wonder why the member from Morris would.

Also, on the flip side, I think that 180 days, that's probably ample time as well, you know. And so I don't find too much to quarrel with there, but I do think that perhaps we ought to give some consideration to whether there should be more flexibility, given the fact that we have fixed election dates coming at the provincial and the federal level. And so perhaps we need more flexibility to be able to worry about those things and to be able to make

sure that there is not voter fatigue and the consequent suppression of voter turnout that may be attendant with that phenomena there.

In addition, I think that the emergency provision in this bill is good—or, under the election law, is good and should be respected and that each of us here in this House should carefully consider this proposed, you know, law, discuss it with our constituents and bring forward their considerations here into the House.

Now, again, you know, all these comments, with, you know, an eye towards making sure that there is a full, reasoned and balanced consideration of these potential changes to the elections law, but I would just close in saying that I hope that none of my colleagues here in the House actually need a by-election and that this proposed law is somewhat of a moot point.

Mr. Andrew Smith (Southdale): Madam Speaker, I rise in the House today, first of all, to commend and congratulate the honourable Minister of Justice (Mrs. Stefanson) for introducing this important piece of legislation. I think it's an excellent piece of legislation, and I'm proud to support it today.

I was also proud to speak on behalf of the Minister of Justice just yesterday at the annual MOVA march that ended at the Legislative Building here around 2 p.m. MOVA, for those of you who may not be aware, is an organization that fights for the rights of the victims and the families of victims of homicide. So, again, I couldn't imagine the devastation and the hurt that you must experience from losing a loved one, especially to homicide.

In that same vein, I thank the honourable members from Fort Rouge and St. Johns for their work on missing and murdered Aboriginal women, and, of course, that is, again, in the same vein as what MOVA fights for, and I would like to see that work continue.

Madam Speaker, I rise in the House today to address an issue that affects Manitobans in how we are represented here in the Legislative Assembly. While door knocking during the election campaign, but also primarily before the writ was dropped, many constituents came to me with concerns that—with concerns. Unfortunately, there was no advocate or MLA for them to consult with. These people need an advocate, and I believe they need a voice.

Madam Speaker, I'm here to address the need for change regarding The Legislative Assembly Act,

which currently requires a by-election be held within one year of vacancy occurring in the representation of an electoral division. This current requirement is unacceptable, as the voters we represent deserve to have their voices heard in the Legislature as often and as soon as possible, which is not the case when an elected official leaves a seat vacant for an excessively long period of time. Previously, just the people of Morris were waiting 350 days for fair representation. This was reported as the longest period of time a premier has waited to call a by-election for a vacancy in Manitoba's history. This is not an isolated incident as the results of the recent case regarding the people of The Pas who were denied fair representation for 341 days and even my own constituency of Southdale where an MLA's seat was left vacant beginning in the September 2015 until I was elected on April 19th, 2016.

Our constituents vote for us in good faith to be there for them. When seats are left vacant for an exorbitant period of time, we are breaking that trust. Our proposal to counter this, Bill 2, strengthens democracy by requiring a by-election be conducted within 180 days after a vacancy occurs. This measure was put forward in 2013 by the honourable member from Steinbach to strengthen democracy and to ensure timely and fair representation, and our government will follow up on this.

When the Southdale seat was left empty nearly—for nearly nine months, there was no representative to address the issues such as funding for community organizations. The residents of Southdale were left with unfinished infrastructure projects and without leadership and direction as a result of the MLA position being left unfilled.

Sage Creek School, being built during that time—the school is still under construction, and many constituents were inquiring as to how long it would take to complete. With no representative for our community to answer these questions, their concerns were left 'untended' for far too long.

Another school in my constituency, école Van Bellingham, which will be a true K-to-8 school in 2017—this will mean an increase in the use of fields and playground area by students. The field and playground area is currently a well-used community infrastructure site. However, in order to continue to meet the community and school needs, the fields need to be improved and playgrounds expanded. This would entail adding elements to current play structures and making the field area a more natural

and safer place to play. The current fields have become worn and deteriorated, thus causing many safety concerns. The drainage is also poor, and the grounds remain unusable after many periods of rain.

* (16:30)

During the MLA seat vacancy period in Southdale, there was nobody there to listen, to communicate with, during this crucial period.

At the same time, there was a school just outside of Southdale that many of my constituents attend. It is in desperate need of expansion and renovations that have been neglected for years. Many petitions have been filed, yet, until recently, they had no one to whom they could address their concerns. Bill 2 would help prevent this from happening ever again.

Our voters must never be left without a representative for an extended period of time. We must remember that elections are the engine of our democracy. The right to participate in fair elections and to ensure that every Manitoba has a representative to be their voice in the Manitoba Legislature is at the heart of what so many Manitobans have fought and sacrificed for. A trust Manitobans bestowed upon past premiers, that fair representation not be delayed any longer than necessary, was broken on more than one occasion. Clean, open government is built on the foundation of respect for voters and a commitment to strengthen our democratic institutions.

Today, we strengthen democracy as the first step in implementing our Open Government Initiative. This commitment to strengthen democracy was part of the PC team Open Government Initiative. It was a promise we made to Manitobans, and it's a promise we are keeping today. Our democracy is one of the most valuable institutions we as Canadians—and our new government will ensure it is strengthened. Today, we strengthen democracy as the first step in implementing our Open Government Initiative.

Madam Speaker, there are Manitobans who have fought for our right to vote, for our right to live in a peaceful and democratic society. These men and women look forward to election day, to exercise the right that they fought so hard to defend. It is unfortunate to see these men and women being disrespected when a by-election is not called within due time.

Madam Speaker, there are people in this House who either experienced, first-hand or through family members, life in a non-democratic country. In fact,

many of these people came to Canada to enjoy our democracy. Bill 2 will help restore good and solid democratic principles that attract so many people to our country and our province.

I call on members opposite to work with us on this non-partisan legislation to help all Manitobans, including their constituents. The member from Minto stated that there is no monopoly on democracy, and I believe he's right. Similarly, our government stresses that there is no monopoly on a good idea. And, in this spirit, I ask that all members in this House support this good idea.

When I go back to my riding, I can look at my constituents in the eye and say that I supported Bill 2 to make sure that they or any other part of Manitoba not experience a prolonged period without an MLA.

As MLAs, we were elected to serve our constituents: the moms or dads, business owners, community volunteers and all those who work hard and pay their taxes. Their taxpayer money should be respected and honoured by being represented by an MLA in this Chamber. I am confident in the abilities of the members of this House to represent their constituents. So wouldn't you, then, want your constituents to be well looked after once you leave politics?

During the most recent election campaign, I had the privilege, actually, to knock on the door of the previous MLA for my—for Southdale. And, you know, I thank her for her contribution to our community. I know public service is never an easy thing, and I do respect the amount of work that she did. But I also wanted to assure her that Southdale will be well looked after.

Madam Speaker, I do support this bill. I think that it would be in the best interests of not only our new government but members opposite and all Manitobans who pay their taxes and work hard in their communities to make sure that, you know, good people come forward and get represented. I would believe that a year is just too long for anybody to go without an MLA, right. I mean, I wouldn't wait a whole year to go see a doctor for an issue. Why should we have to wait that whole time for an MLA to represent us? It's just good democracy; it's good democratic principles. And I stand here proudly beside our government and beside the Minister of Justice (Mrs. Stefanson) as I support this very important piece of legislation. Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, Manitoba Liberals support Bill 2, which will provide for more timely by-elections than we've had in recent years. We've all witnessed the delays in the democratic process which occurred under the former NDP government. More timely by-elections to ensure that all Manitobans are represented in this Chamber are needed, and Bill 2 is an important step in this direction.

Bill 2 deals with timeliness and with fairness, qualities which are very important to the good functioning of our democratic system. It is in the context of these two issues, fairness and timeliness, that I comment on another related matter which is important to our democracy.

Decisions have been taken in recent days with regard to the seating arrangements and the order of asking questions in the Chamber. I want to thank the Speaker for listening carefully to input from all parties, and to thank her for her efforts to search for a unanimous consensus. I note, Madam Speaker, that when it comes to seating arrangements that there's one party that believes in privilege and entitlement for itself, with 86 per cent of their members in the first two rows the NDP has shown that they believe in this privilege and entitlement for themselves rather than in fairness.

In contrast to the NDP, which has put their priority on this privilege and entitlement for themselves, the Conservative party has only 59 per cent of its members in the first two rows while Liberals have got 33 per cent. When it comes to the Speaker's order in question period, timeliness in with which the questions are asked, it's also true that one party sees itself as the party of privilege and entitlement. That party, the NDP, has 80 per cent of the first 10 questions in question period and 89 per cent of all opposition questions in the first 10. Liberals have only 10 per cent of the first 10 questions in spite of receiving more than half as many votes as the NDP in the recent provincial election and thus representing more than half the number of Manitobans that are represented by the NDP. No Manitoban should have any doubt that the NDP have sought privilege and entitlement for themselves above all else.

Madam Speaker, political futures are uncertain for all parties. The NDP may find themselves in a situation similar to ours with three seats at some point in the future, and at that time they will better appreciate the work that the Manitoba Liberal does

day in and day out. Advancing the objectives of fairness and timeliness is central to a strong democracy in our province.

I will, before closing, return to the matter of Bill 2. In their delays in calling by-elections, the NDP showed, as they have repeatedly in this Chamber, that they were more concerned about their privilege and their entitlement for themselves than with a timely and fair democratic process in our province.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, merci, miigwech, ekosi.

Mr. Jeff Wharton (Gimli): I'm, too, honoured to rise in this House today to show support for this bill, and I do thank the Minister of Justice (Mrs. Stefanson) as well for bringing it to this House today.

The residents of the Gimli constituency also experienced first-hand frustrations of not having an MLA to work on their behalf in the Legislature. For the better part of 270 days, or nine months, there was absolutely no—nowhere for the residents to go in Gimli or surrounding area in our St. Andrews area to voice concerns. The former government intentionally ignored and neglected the great residents of Gimli.

Madam Speaker, in June of 2015, recognizing a huge void in the democratic rights of our Manitobans, our PC team opened a regional office in the town of Gimli. The office was opened and staffed with the help of great volunteers working three days a week to assist with the ongoing serious concerns of the residents that were facing on a daily basis. We scheduled regular meetings to help ongoing issues because, as we know, there's always issues that have to be dealt with in our ridings and our constituencies throughout Manitoba.

* (16:40)

There wasn't a day that went by where folks wouldn't drop in to the office and meet and chat on issues like not having a doctor on weekends or after 5—very serious issues in our area. Patients were frustrated not being able to receive their treatments in Gimli hospital; having to travel to Winnipeg for their dialysis three days a week, putting a huge burden and stress on their families and their loved ones, this, in turn, costing Manitobans' hard-earned dollars and the system to clog up even more than it currently is; going to a health-care centre for an emergency and then being told and being shipped by ambulance to all areas over the province for urgent

care; or, even worse, Madam Speaker, being told to drive yourself or your loved one further down the highway; people looking for answers on PCH bed availability; issues like affordable housing and social housing; and the list goes on and on.

Local community leaders met with us in the office in Gimli, in our regional office, our stakeholders sharing their frustration with ongoing issues, issues that, quite frankly, went on for a number of years not only in the Gimli constituency but throughout the province of Manitoba, issues related to infrastructure, sewer and water, tourism and the important gem, the health of Lake Winnipeg. Winnipeg daycare—also Winnipeg—or Gimli, in the constituency, are having issues with daycare spaces, which we heard on an ongoing basis, as well, not only through the campaign but prior to.

Elections, as we've heard today from some of my colleagues, are the engine of democracy. Manitobans have fought and sacrificed for the right to participate in fair elections to ensure they have representation, here, in the Manitoba's Legislature.

In this year, we celebrate the 100th anniversary of women earning the right to vote. We are reminded the importance of voting and having rightful representation in the Legislature.

Gimli, 270 days; The Pas, 341 days; and Morris, as our member from Morris shared earlier, 350 days—this is unacceptable. There is no reason to hold off on this long to fill the Legislature. There are 57 seats—were created and they were created for a reason, to be filled and to ensure that Manitobans have a voice in the Legislature and just not when the Premier decides that it's time to hold a by-election. Manitobans expect representation, which is why we go to the polls. That is democracy.

Madam Speaker, Bill 2 strengthens democracy by requiring a by-election to be conducted within 180 days after a vacancy occurs. This commitment to strengthen democracy was promised as part of our PC team open government initiative—clean, open government built on the foundation of respect for voters and commitment to strengthening our democratic institutions.

Our democracy, one of our most valuable institutions, we have in Canadians—as Canadians, and our new government will ensure it will be strengthened. Clean, open government is built on the foundation of respect for voters and commitment to strengthen our democratic institutions.

And I can share with the House, Madam Speaker, that over a six-and-a-half-year journey, it doesn't—180 days is a good amount of time, because, quite frankly, as a candidate, the day you decide to run for office is the day you start campaigning.

Thank you so much, Madam Speaker, appreciate the time.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): Madam Speaker, rising today to speak to Bill 2, the only piece of legislation the government has managed to put together, which is interesting in and of itself that there isn't a more robust legislative agenda appearing before us. This is a fairly minor amendment, and in the spirit of diplomacy I'll offer my congratulations to the government on bringing a new piece of legislation forward, their first one, probably not the most controversial item we will see from them over the next four years, but it does speak to a rather central issue, the ultimate structure of our democratic processes and how elections are to be conducted. And I think it does give me a very good opportunity to point out some really important history attached to this issue.

As has been said by wiser people than I, those who do not know their history are destined to repeat it, as some would say, doomed to repeat it, and I think an honest look at the work that our government did in office and some of the rather troubling chapters from the Conservative party, both provincially right here in Manitoba in the past—some of the things we've heard already from this new government are very concerning in this regard—and also at the federal level, so let me hit on a few highlights that I think feed into this.

One of the key sources of the cynicism I believe that citizens do have towards some of their governments is this impression, and it's valid, that in many parts of the world and even in our own country that big money has already bought the election to a large extent before the first vote is even cast, and I'm very, very proud that it was the NDP in our time in office who became, if I'm not mistaken, the very first jurisdiction in Canada to ban corporate and union donations. This was an even-handed approach. It took all of the organizational money off the table, and we now have a fundamentally different starting point for our democracy than is the case, for instance, south of the border, which is one of the more extreme examples of the excess of big money controlling the options in a free and open democratic society. You cannot realistically run for a position

such as governor of a state or, heaven forbid, as a senator or as president without many millions of dollars being raised, and that raises the question of, you know, how much freedom is that elected official going to have in making decisions for the public good when they owe their position and their possibility of maintaining their position to very big, deep, private, elite interests.

Here in Manitoba a government can choose, all on its own, to primarily stand up for the interests of big money, and we're seeing that from this Conservative government already, but it is no longer a structural feature of our democratic system because we have taken the big money out of the equation. Just for the record, no organization of any type can make a contribution to a candidate, whether they be a sitting MLA or someone challenging the position, nor can any organization in Manitoba make a contribution to a political party, to its central campaign.

Also very important is at the individual level, individual Manitobans are the only ones who are allowed to make a contribution. The practice that some may prefer where big money could flow in from the banks in Toronto or high-heeled investors from elsewhere to support their campaigns here—not allowed. You've got to be a resident of Manitoba in order to make a contribution. And, if my good friend from Emerson wants to, you know, chat with me on the sidelines afterwards in the loge on the nature of democracy, I'd be more than happy to entertain with very many examples of conservative parties and conservative governments undermining the democratic process, not just here but around the world.

* (16:50)

Or maybe he's just really keen to get up and share some of my same stories and how proud he is of the democracy that we now have in Manitoba, thanks to the great work that the NDP government did previously. He's never shy about sharing his points of view. And, certainly, you know, I have no problem acknowledging that, you know, his comments usually don't go anywhere, but it's exciting to see that he's keen to participate in the same democratic process that we are, in fact, trying to debate here. He hasn't quite learned to wait his turn yet. He's still—you know, the basic rule, everything I needed to know I learned in kindergarten—he might need a refresher. But, that

said, it's always nice to know that he's keen to jump in.

It's either that, Madam Speaker, or maybe he doesn't want me to have a chance to articulate some of the really damning chapters from his very own party's history on the threats to democracy that corporate interests and conservative parties have combined to enact around the world and attempted to enact right here in Manitoba. And the source of corporate donations and individual donations is—cuts right to the heart of it.

In Manitoba, under the NDP law, an individual who wants to make a donation is welcome to do that, but they are capped at \$3,000 per year. That's the maximum. Now, I don't know how many Manitobans have, you know, sleepless nights because they are just not able to make that extra donation above and beyond \$3,000 per year. We're talking about a fairly narrow demographic already who would have \$3,000 potentially to donate.

Now, big businesses—sure, they've got \$3,000; people who are earning elite salaries, absolutely. They would love to have more of a say in our democracy, Madam Speaker, than everybody else. And we would, if we removed that cap, if we remove these provisions, then we would be heading very much towards an American model and there will probably be a lot of policies being proposed by members opposite which mirror elements in the United States. Their party has long been fascinated with many of its features, and this might be one of them, because we would be ending up in a situation where it was no longer one-citizen, one-vote. It would be one-dollar, one-vote. And some people would have a heck of a lot more dollars and a heck of a lot more votes than other people would have.

And, indeed, in case people think that this is, oh, it's ancient history, and, you know, of course they're not going to change that law. Well, I would invite anyone thinking that to go and look at what the leader of the government, the new Premier (Mr. Pallister), said during the election itself. He said he wanted to look at lifting that individual cap of \$3,000.

Now, when you live in a house, as he does, reportedly on Wellington Crescent, one of the more expensive streets in our city and in our fair province in which to live, and, you know, it's rumoured there's a seven-car garage attached to that home, you probably, you know have more than \$3,000 available to donate. I can understand how the Premier might

want to tilt the rules in a way to benefit him and benefit the class that he is making as a priority. This would not be news. It will be a very different tone to the debate if we see a proposal along that line brought to this Chamber floor, I can assure you, Madam Speaker.

The other piece that we have brought in, one of many of the really good changes we've done is we actually have now an independent commissioner to enforce The Elections Act. It doesn't sound like rocket science, but this was a very important change that we made, proud to make it, to make sure that there was an independent voice, someone who would report directly to the Legislature through your office—through Elections Manitoba to ensure that the act is complied with by all parties and everyone involved.

When it comes time to redistribute the ridings in Manitoba, we have a very different process now in place, thanks to our government's work, than was the case previously. Not all Manitobans know this, but the number of MLAs is capped by legislation at 57. We have 60 seats in the Chamber here, but three of them are always vacant because the number is capped. So, as the province grows—and, goodness, we grew in lots of good and important ways during our government's time in office—well, each of us ends up, as MLAs, representing a larger number of people. Those new people don't necessarily spread themselves out evenly over 57 ridings.

And there have been episodes in Manitoba's past, Madam Speaker, where the party of the day who happens to be in power decides they want to try and play around with how that redistribution is going to take place. I remember in the 1990s there was a proposal under the Filmon government that would have cut my constituency in half. There have been no small number of strange proposals that have appeared which would benefit the party in power. Under our legislation, changes that we brought in, whenever boundary redistribution is going to happen—by law, I believe it is every decade, every 10 years, the Elections Manitoba undertakes that—there is an independent boundary redistribution committee—commission established. And rather than have the membership—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Can I please ask that all honourable members that are having conversations with each other perhaps do it in the loge. It is very difficult for the person that's presenting right now to

be heard by the Speaker. So, if you wouldn't mind, that would be very helpful in the last few minutes of the day.

Thank you.

Mr. Altemeyer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. No worries; I'm glad everyone is paying such rapt attention to my important speech happening here.

But we do have a very important change that has been made. As I was saying, when the boundaries need to be redrawn, it is not left to the government to do things as it used to be. We've now expanded representation on the electoral boundaries commission to—by law, it has to include rural and northern Manitobans by adding the heads of Brandon University and of the University College of the North to the commission. This is very important representation.

And I should also point out that we have expanded Elections Manitoba's role not just in administering and overseeing the election, ensuring everything is fair, but in actively encouraging residents of Manitoba, citizens of Manitoba, to exercise their franchise, the franchise that so many people struggled for over so many years. I take note that, federally, the previous Conservative Harper government was opposed to that. They actually stripped that requirement out of the mandate of Elections Canada. So, again, we see the Conservative governments' history ending up on the wrong side of what should be a pretty straightforward democratic process.

We've got much better access to voting now. I know many people in my constituency took advantage of the advance polling option. With the mobility of people's work and their family commitments these days, which will continue to

increase, not everyone's going to be here or in their home province or their home constituency to vote. And it was because of changes that the NDP brought in that we have made it much easier for people to vote in advance and have offered far more locations for that advance voting to take place.

Madam Speaker, people who live in apartment blocks, traditionally underserved in lots of ways when it comes to different types of services, well, our new provision requires any apartment block of 100 units or more has to have its own polling station right there, usually on the main floor, so that it's very convenient rather than inconvenient. We removed yet another important barrier, Madam Speaker.

We also certainly added additional days for the advance voting, and in rural and northern areas, we made it so that, you know, residents in a community don't have to travel more than 30 kilometres in order to cast a ballot in an advance poll. That's a very, very strong step forward for ensuring accessible participation in an election and representation thereof that comes from the final results.

We've also got a whole number of actions that we've taken on the behaviour of MLAs after they get elected. It's fundamentally different here in Manitoba than it is federally. Federally, MPs seem to cross the floor with a fair degree of ease. It's not something I could ever really wrap my head around. But, in Manitoba, you can't do that. You can't run on the banner of—

Madam Speaker: Order.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have 15 minutes remaining.

The hour being 5 p.m., the House is now adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

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