

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

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The Honourable Myrna Driedger
Speaker*

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

Wednesday, June 1, 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? Ministerial statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Seine—oh, pardon me, no. The honourable member for Southdale.

Athletics Programs

Mr. Andrew Smith (Southdale): Madam Speaker, I rise in the Legislature today to speak about the athletics in my community, most notably, the J.H. Bruns Broncos athletic program and the Southdale Community Centre hockey program.

Athleticism helps shape teamwork. It gives young adults responsibility and a sense of setting and achieving lifelong goals. It instills discipline and prepares the youth in our community to be leaders of tomorrow.

The Southdale Community Centre has actually sent a contingent today, and we are honoured to have them join us here in the gallery. I'd like to welcome the administrator and program manager, Joyce Webinger; hockey player and official, Kevin Webinger; hockey coach, Jason Thor; female director, Teri Moffatt; vice-president and equipment manager, Tamara Bauknecht; age group convenor, Jim Collins and volunteer, Colleen Bilyk.

The Southdale Community Centre, which is our hockey central, consists of a mix of male and female teams that play in the St. Boniface Minor Hockey Association house league. Our female hockey

program continues to expand, as we have one of the largest female programs in the province, consisting of 18 teams last season alone.

Within this league, which includes all of St. Boniface, over 70 per cent of the players reside in my riding of Southdale. Our teams have consistently been very successful in tournaments within the province of Manitoba. This speaks volumes to the dedication of our volunteers, coaches, association, convenors, community club staff, parents and, last but not least, the players.

Southdale's other proud athletic accomplishment is J.H. Bruns Broncos athletics, which represents a proud tradition of sportsmanship in our community. The Broncos are a diverse and multi-faceted club with competitive sports that pretty much cater to every student's interests, diversity for which our community is very proud.

Every year, the Broncos host an awards banquet which, this year, I was honoured to attend. These young achievers stand out, but let us not forget that they are part of a team, a team that consists not only of athletes themselves but the dedicated teachers, coaching staff and families that nurture and support their efforts.

Madam Speaker, I ask leave that these names be submitted to Hansard.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to include the names in Hansard? *[Agreed]*

2016 J.H. Bruns high school athletic awards winners: The top athletic awards went to six athletes of the year; grade 9 girls, Camryn Kolson; grade 9 boys, Blake Treffner; junior varsity girls, Nicole Davis; junior varsity boys, Noah Derksen; varsity girls, Emily Kananjola; and varsity boys, Matthew Lehmann. There was also an award for outstanding achievement in leadership, the Bronco Pride Award, which went to Laura Stoyko.

2016 J.H. Bruns high school athletic awards finalists: Griffiths, Alondra; Kolson, Camryn; Kriegl, Melissa; Lysack, Maggie; Mailey, Jordyn; Myshkowsky, Camryn; Opoola Gloria; Peters, Alexa; Andromidas, Johnathon; Doan, Ben; Paul, Nathan; Peterson, Josh; Pooley, Charlie; Pries, Javan; Tessmer, Joshua; Treffner, Blake; Tulloch,

Liam; Binne, Lauren; Cathers, Tess; Davis, Nicole; Eden, Sydni; Follows, Cara; Handel, Shawnee; Hyseni, Ajshe; Medeiros, Kaity; Nero, Erin; Rohatynsky, Tristan; Basic, Matt; Breckman, Josh; Bridges, Colin; Derksen, Noah; Do, Khoa; Forrest, Connor; Lugsdin, Zachary; Andromidas, Demi; Campbell, Sarah; Mestito, Thea; Zamonsky, Arianna; Fedorchuk, Marty; Hernandez, Jason; Magri, Josh; Pyo, Matt; Winnicky, Shane; Caputi, Alyssa; Hadder, Claire; Kananaja, Emily; Mailey, Malissa; Peterson, Alexa; Stewart, Vanessa; Stoyko, Laura; Treffner, Rachel; Bauer, Blake; Cathers, Seth; Cripps, Aaron; Hinton, Andrew; Lehmann, Matthew; Loewen, Kevin; Magri, Jordan; Murphy, Aidan.

Merchants Corner Project

Mr. Kevin Chief (Point Douglas): Madam Speaker, I'm a big believer that the best ideas come directly from the community. The Merchant's Corner project is transforming the Merchants Hotel into a place for gathering and learning. It's driven by families in the neighbourhood and supported by organizations like Urban Circle and the North End Community Renewal Corporation.

Our neighbourhood has faced challenges, but a growing group of community members has breathed new life into the area. Back in April of 2012 a community coalition purchased the Merchants Hotel, along with nearby parking lots located on the corner of Selkirk and Andrews Street.

The new facility will feature 30 units of affordable housing and will be an educational hub hosting the University of Winnipeg's Department of Inner-City Studies and the CEDA/Pathways to Education program. It will also include a common space, open to the community, where literacy programs for preschoolers will be offered, along with many other activities.

When I was a young boy, my friends and I had a ritual on Saturday mornings of collecting empty beer bottles and taking them there to the vendor at the Merchants Hotel to make a few dollars. Today, we can look forward to a generation of young people bringing books there instead of beer bottles.

Madam Speaker, students will have a new place to learn and see that post-secondary education can be part of their future. What a positive change.

Merchants Corner is part of a vision for a North End community campus on Selkirk Avenue, include the University of Manitoba's Inner City Social Work

Program, the Urban Circle Training Centre and the Makoonsag intergenerational child-care centre.

Congratulations and thank you to everyone who is helping make this dream a reality. There's an energy in Point Douglas right now, a sense that we appreciate our history, but we want to keep moving forward. The redevelopment of the Merchants Hotel is an important step towards a healthier and safer community.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Henteleff Park Foundation

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage): I am so proud to rise today to recognize the Henteleff Park Foundation. This non-profit park is located along the pristine banks of the Red River and Normand Creek in south St. Vital in the heart of Riel.

The Henteleff family has a rich history in the Riel community dating back to 1924. Nathan and Rose Henteleff were one of the first Jewish market gardeners in western Canada. They worked on the land until 1967, and, in 2002, the City of Winnipeg designated this land as a public park.

Madam Speaker, the roots of our city and province stretch back to the banks of the Red River two centuries ago. The first Metis families settled here, and the Henteleff Park's nutrient-rich soil was an ideal setting for family farms.

Madam Speaker, the Henteleff Park Foundation was established with a mandate to enhance and protect the park. I thank Yude Henteleff, the president of the foundation, for all his hard work and perseverance, for making this a jewel in our community. Since its inception, a city-wide network of dedicated volunteers have worked tirelessly to make this dream happen. Volunteers have planted thousands of trees and have established a unique blend of trails to enjoy. This park could not be what it is today without the tireless effort and leadership of the Henteleff family. The foundation receives financial assistance from the City of Winnipeg, Province of Manitoba and donors from right across Canada. This 50-acre serene park provides an opportunity for the community to enjoy the beauty of nature and to relax and explore the beautiful scenery.

On June 11th, the Henteleff foundation will have an annual tree-planting event, and on August 27th, the Henteleff Park Foundation will be opening a new interpretative centre. I encourage all Manitobans to

experience this hidden historical gem in the Riel community, and I am so pleased to have Yude Henteleff and Gord Elvers in the gallery today.

Thank you.

* (13:40)

Domestic Violence Leave

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Experience physical or emotional abuse from someone close to you is destabilizing. It often requires making difficult decisions, making drastic changes to one's life.

Starting today, Manitobans facing domestic violence can now take time to protect themselves and their families without worrying that they will lose their jobs.

Changes to the Employment Standards Code come into effect today. Manitobans facing domestic violence can now take up to 10 days of leave from their job, all at once or as needed, for up to 17 weeks in a continuous period per year. Up to five days of this leave can be paid. Employers have to keep the matter confidential. People taking this leave might use it to seek medical attention, mental health services, law enforcement, legal assistance or relocation.

When the previous NDP government passed Bill 8, Manitoba became the first province in Canada to bring in these types of protections. I'm proud of the NDP's leadership in passing this groundbreaking legislation. Starting today, Madam Speaker, victims of domestic violence face fewer barriers in doing what is necessary to protect themselves, to protect their families and to rebuild their lives.

Thank you.

Provincial Mine Rescue Competition Banquet

Mr. Kelly Bindle (Thompson): Over this past weekend, I had the pleasure of attending the 2016 Provincial Mine Rescue Competition banquet held in Thompson, Manitoba, on May 28th, 2016. I want to extend thanks to the organizers, sponsors and volunteers that helped to ensure this year's competition was memorable.

Mine rescue is all about brave, selfless teamwork, focusing on the fundamentals and helping others. And this government is thankful for the sacrifices made by all rescue personnel.

After winning their local competitions, four mine rescue teams were represented at the provincial

level: Hudbay Minerals, Flin Flon; Hudbay Minerals, Snow Lake; Tanco Mine, Lac du Bonnet; and Vale, Thompson. I was particularly pleased to attend this event not only because it was held in my hometown of Thompson but also because I was previously a member of Inco mine rescue 20 years ago, in 1996, and this was a chance to meet plenty of new and experienced rescue personnel and catch up with alumni and friends from back in the day.

With sincere northern pride, I want to extend congratulations on behalf of this Assembly to the trainers, coaches and mentors of all the mine rescue crews and, particularly, to the winning team, Vale, Thompson, consisting of director of operations, Dave Caswell; co-captain, Tom Flett; captain, Todd Yuskow; gas man, Steve Oniske; No. 3 man, Ian McKenzie; and No. 4 man, Derek Brightnose.

And, on behalf of the people of Thompson, I want to congratulate these gentlemen and thank them for the commitment and dedication to keeping our mines safe.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to oral questions, may I direct your attention to the public gallery where we have from Carberry Collegiate 39 grade 9 students under the direction of Ms. Raegan Dyck, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Indigenous and Municipal Relations (Ms. Clarke).

And also seated in the public gallery from Rock Lake School, 15 grade 7, 8 and 9 students under the direction of Tim Rempel. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member—or the honourable Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade (Mr. Cullen).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Budget 2016 Seniors' Tax Rebate

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): The Premier's first budget had nothing for students, nothing for parents with children, next to nothing for low-income Manitobans. On top of that, a significant tax hike for many seniors who have worked so hard and contributed so much to building our province.

Madam Speaker, the Premier announced on CJOB during the election that he would be keeping the seniors' tax rebate. With this budget we are seeing he had a hidden agenda to cut it. In fact, he's taking the cheques right out of the mailboxes of seniors.

Why is he showing such disrespect for our seniors, the people who built this province?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I thank my colleague for raising the issue of fairness to seniors because it is, of course, what our budget's all about. It's about securing a better future for our seniors and for their children and grandchildren and it's about making sure that we spend within our means at the same time and that we care very much, as evident by the fact that we have taken clear steps in eliminating bracket creep, a very insidious way to sneak money from seniors, especially impacting negatively on low-income seniors, and we've eliminated that.

We've also taken steps that the previous government ignored for 17 years to protect all Manitobans by indexing the basic personal exemption, or the level of tax—level at which an earning begins to be taxed in our province, to the rate of inflation. And we'll do that going forward because we think that's the fair way to protect the incomes of all Manitobans, and in particular protect our seniors.

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

Ms. Marcelino: Madam Speaker, some \$44 million were taken out of seniors' tax rebate.

How could this Premier expect anyone to believe that he is focused on keeping his word when, only weeks after the election, he is increasing the taxes by millions of dollars for our seniors and not replacing it with any form of support? Why did he mislead Manitoba seniors?

Mr. Pallister: Well, the member opposite speaks about misleading seniors, and she is part of a political organization that was very good at doing that. They ran for election in 2011 on a promise not to raise taxes and immediately invoked some very insidious taxes that impact negatively on seniors in particular, things like raising the dividend tax rate, raising the taxes on beer and wine, putting a vehicle tax in place, adding taxes on hairdos.

For heaven sakes, Madam Speaker, the members opposite can't seriously want to be considered as protectors of seniors' best interests when they

themselves invoked many, many taxes immediately after promising not to, right on the backs of seniors in Manitoba. Manitobans remember that.

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

Ms. Marcelino: Madam Speaker, the Premier forgot that he promised not to privatize MTS, but they did.

Madam Speaker, it's becoming more and more obvious that the NDP has a better plan for a better Manitoba for everyday Manitobans with supports for families, seniors, students and everyday working and middle-income Manitobans.

Why has this government brought in a budget that is good for wealthy Tory insiders and management consultants but does nothing for everyday Manitobans?

Mr. Pallister: Well, the phony class warfare battle the NDP engaged in in the last election campaign resulted in the decimation of 60 per cent of their members here in the Legislature, so I encourage the member to think carefully about trying to continue such a battle.

In respect of the indexing of basic personal tax rates, a better plan would have been this plan. It was one supported by a political organization in Saskatchewan in 2003-4, and the quote from their budget at the time was: Indexation of the personal income tax system is particularly beneficial for seniors on a fixed income because the amount of tax payable on a fixed amount of income will decline every year. That was Roy Calvert [*phonetic*]. That was the NDP premier of Saskatchewan, and for the last 13 years since Saskatchewan moved ahead on indexing their tax brackets to protect seniors, the members opposite refused to, raiding seniors' pocketbooks every single year and took money right off the kitchen tables of Manitoba seniors.

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

* (13:50)

Impact on Manitobans

Ms. Marcelino: Madam Speaker, the Premier calls increases to minimum wage symbolic. His token measures simply don't add up. An increase to minimum wage would have provided real benefits. Their tax measures will provide enough for one fast-food meal for those working in low-wage jobs, \$16 a

year. The NDP plan meant hundreds of dollars for over 100,000 Manitobans.

Why did the Premier turn his back on low-income Manitobans?

Mr. Pallister: Well, coming from a low-income circumstance, I can assure the member opposite that I certainly appreciate the circumstances facing low-income Manitobans perhaps better than the members opposite do. And I can say this, that taking thousands of low-income Manitobans off the tax rolls entirely is a very good measure and will continue to benefit low-income Manitobans.

The previous government's plan, Madam Speaker, involved, of course, giving a notional increase in one pocket to working people and then taking significant amounts of money right out of the other pocket. That's because they left the basic personal exemption at the lowest level in Canada west of New Brunswick, so they could raid the pocketbooks of those least able to pay.

It's a shameful record and one the member should not try to defend.

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

Ms. Marcelino: Madam Speaker, like the Premier's Throne Speech and like his Cabinet and his so-called vision for Manitoba, the Premier has left out so many Manitobans. The NDP plan for everyday Manitobans would have added 12,000 child-care spaces, ensuring women can get good-paying jobs. The PC does nothing.

Why did this Premier ignore the needs of everyday Manitoba families for child care?

Mr. Pallister: Well, Madam Speaker, let's contrast a real solution to the child-care wait situation facing 12,000 Manitobans right now, Madam Speaker, with the member's record opposite, okay. So, after 17 years in government, the NDP runs on a promise to eliminate the 12,000-person waiting list that they themselves created.

Madam Speaker, this just doesn't stand up to scrutiny or logic in any way, shape or form. If the members opposite had a solution to the problem they created, they should have introduced it years ago and not waited 'til an election campaign to promise to solve a problem they've ignored for a long, long time.

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

Ms. Marcelino: Madam Speaker, the NDP government provided pension plans for child-care workers. The NDP plan for everyday Manitobans would have given 306,000 lower and middle-income earners a break while asking those making more than \$170,000 a year a bit more.

Everyday Manitobans would have been better off than under this Premier.

Why has this government turned his back on everyday Manitobans? Why has he rejected fairness for everyday Manitobans?

Mr. Pallister: The premier uses an interesting tense—or, premier, I'm sorry. The leader—the interim Leader of the Opposition—I'm sorry, Madam Speaker. To clarify, the interim Leader of the Opposition uses an interesting tense; it's called the future hypothetical—the future hypothetical: would have. The NDP proposed plan would have done this and would have done that.

Well, actually, interestingly, the real plan, not the hypothetical plan, the real plan the NDP had was to raid the pocketbooks of Manitobans who struggle to make ends meet, introduce to them the highest rate of new taxation in the country of Canada in their last six years in office, create the longest waits for child care, create the highest levels of poverty. And now, with a future conditional tense, they talk about imaginary plans to solve problems they themselves created here in Manitoba, that we, this government, will address in a real way.

Budget 2016 Seniors' Tax Rebate

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. In yesterday's budget press release the government said that Budget 2016 will include no new taxes or tax increases. But let's be clear—but, Madam Speaker, the other shoe's going to drop. When you claw back a tax credit, that's a tax increase.

Will the Finance Minister simply concede today that he misled this House and misled the people of Manitoba and that he raised taxes yesterday?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): The new government of Manitoba was proud to deliver a budget yesterday in the Legislature, a budget that delivers for all Manitobans, a budget that demonstrates our commitment to getting Manitoba back

on a responsible fiscal track after years of overspending by our predecessors. It's a budget that actually gives real evidence to Manitobans of the path that we will choose, that goes down the road of lowering taxes for Manitobans while building our economy and making sure services are there for Manitobans.

Mr. Allum: But, Madam Speaker, this is a matter of trust and accountability and transparency.

The Finance Minister had said that he would not raise taxes, but, when you claw back a tax to the tune of \$44 million, on the backs of seniors, that's a tax increase.

Will he agree, yes or no, that he raised taxes yesterday?

Mr. Friesen: The approach we're taking is one that is principled, it is practical and it is positive. And Manitobans will benefit as a result.

Madam Speaker, contrast that with the unprincipled approach that the NDP take when, in a last gasp of a desperate government that would do anything to buy votes, they tried to procure votes from trusting seniors by promising, in light of a \$1-billion deficit, a promise that they never intended to keep, a promise that would cost our children and our grandchildren. They choose that approach.

We choose an approach of principle that keeps that tax credit there for the seniors who most deserve it and most need it.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Garry-Riverview, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Allum: Madam Speaker, you know yourself that the only party that ever tried to fix an election was these guys on the other side of the Chamber.

Madam Speaker, \$44 million were clawed back from seniors yet—yesterday. More importantly, it bears a heavy burden on low- and middle-income seniors.

Will the Finance Minister commit today, in the bid to be open and transparent, that those \$44 million will go back into supports and programming for low- and middle-income seniors?

Mr. Friesen: We're proud of the changes that we have brought in respect of the Seniors' School Tax Rebate that work to retain that rebate program for those seniors who most need it.

I'm struggling to really understand the essential question that the member's trying to ask, because he fails to grasp, and I will offer this for him, that senior households still eligible for the credit are 34,000 households. The average rebate for seniors will still be in the amount, for those seniors, of \$300.

This is a good change, but it's one based on principle, and one acknowledges that what seniors really want is access to the kind of services that we're going to protect and provide.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum), on a new question.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Allum: Last week, I asked the Finance Minister, would he be raising the minimum wage in the budget. And, of course, he refused to answer.

But yesterday, people earning minimum wage got their answer: There will be no increase to the minimum wage.

Why, after 17 years in a grand tradition of Manitoba, did the Finance Minister refuse to give people earning the minimum raise—minimum wage a raise yesterday?

Mr. Friesen: Well, I thank the member for that question.

* (14:00)

And affordability is important for Manitobans, and for too long in this province the government has tried to push a one-dimensional conversation about affordability where they would address issues of wage, but they would quietly step away from their other responsibility as a government: That's a responsibility to make sure to index tax brackets, to make sure to raise the basic personal exemption.

This is the kind of fundamental change that we've taken. Why? Because it's principled. It reflects best practice in other jurisdictions. It was the right thing to do.

Madam Speaker, we need to have a complex and multi-dimensional conversation about affordability. We'll have that conversation with Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Garry-Riverview, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Allum: The tax bracket changes in yesterday's budget give low-income earners about \$16 a year, barely a trip to Starbucks.

Will the Finance Minister commit today to provide real, meaningful support to minimum-wage earners, put hundreds of dollars in their pockets so that they can pay rent and buy food, and will he agree to raise the minimum wage by 50 cents this year as we had suggested on this side of the House?

Mr. Friesen: I'm trying to understand this new-found interest that the member has in affordability when for years and years their government worked—instead of doing the essential work of a government to contain its costs and hit its own spending targets, they instead went to Manitobans, they widened the PST, they raised the PST, they broke their word.

And if he really cared about those seniors now, why would they have raised those taxes on seniors by \$1,600?

More money for haircuts, more money for home insurance, all of those things Manitobans really cared about, we're going to get this job done.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Garry-Riverview, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Allum: You know, tax bracket changes also mean a tax break for the wealthiest in our community. The Premier (Mr. Pallister) has shown his true colours yesterday, as did the Finance Minister. He won't support poverty initiatives unless the rich can also benefit.

So I ask the Minister of Finance to reconsider, and will he agree to raise the minimum wage by 50 cents this year and put hundreds of dollars back in the pockets of the people of Manitoba?

Mr. Friesen: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to try to help this member understand that in respect of the changes we are taking on the basic personal exemption, we will lift 2,770 people immediately off of the tax rolls in this province.

And, moreover, by applying an income test on the existing seniors' school tax credit, we protect those seniors who truly need to take advantage of that additional support.

We are there to protect seniors. They set their sights on seniors. We will protect seniors and all Manitoba income earners.

Northern Manitoba Communities Yes! North Initiative

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas): Yesterday, the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Lindsey) asked for

clarity on the government's Yes! North strategy in the House, and the Minister of Infrastructure (Mr. Pedersen) told him to wait an hour to hear some good news.

Well, many hours have come and gone, and northerners are still in the dark about how this government plans to create jobs, strengthen northern health care and boost economic prosperity. A strategy for Yes! North was promised to appear within the first 100 days, but with the clock running out, northern families are left to wonder if this government cares about them at all.

Without even the word north mentioned in the Budget Address yesterday, I ask the Minister of Indigenous and Municipal Relations (Ms. Clarke): When will her government present a comprehensive, multi-faceted plan for Yes! North?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade): I do appreciate the question from the member. Obviously, we have a new government here in Manitoba and a new government that is willing and able to work with all Manitobans for the betterment of the province of Manitoba.

We've had great discussions with northern Manitoba over the last few years, and we will continue to have discussions with northern Manitobans, and I invite the member opposite to stay tuned.

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

Education and Training Investment

Ms. Lathlin: As a northerner, I'm concerned with what's left out of this budget. As a northerner who knows the impact and value education can have on a community, I'm especially concerned to see how the government—to see the government opt out of additional funding for the University College of the North and the northern mining academy in Flin Flon.

I ask the Minister of Education: What is the government's plan to expand education and training opportunities for northern students?

Mr. Cullen: Certainly, the members on this side of the House have spent a lot of time in northern Manitoba over the last few years, and we look forward to continuing that dialogue.

We know there is going to be some major challenges facing northern Manitoba, especially in the mining sector, in the very near future. We are having discussions with that industry in regards to

those issues that are going to be coming forward. And we certainly believe in training, and training is going to be important for northern Manitobans, as it is with all Manitobans, and we will be working with OCN to—or UCN, pardon me, to correct some of the issues that have to be addressed there. And we will be working with those types of facilities to address training needs in northern Manitoba.

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

Highway Infrastructure Concerns

Ms. Lathlin: This budget cuts highway spending by \$48 million less than the previous budget. This is especially concerning for the communities in northern Manitoba that need significant road renewal projects in order to create jobs, gain better access to education and health care and stimulate the economy with cheaper transportation costs.

This side of the House recognizes how fundamental highway infrastructure is to growing the North. From the little we know about Yes! North, the Tories seem—don't seem to feel the same way.

I ask the Minister of Indigenous and Municipal Relations (Ms. Clarke): If the government was really committed to northern Manitoba as they say they are, why are they making cuts that seriously endanger the future of our northern communities?

Mr. Cullen: I do appreciate the question.

We on this side of the House do believe in northern Manitoba. In fact, just this morning I met with the Manitoba Prospectors and Developers Association, who obviously are interested in northern Manitoba and developing northern Manitoba. And we will continue that dialogue with northern Manitoba in terms of how we develop northern Manitoba. We believe in working in partnership, and those partnerships will lead to prosperity for our province and the really good things that can happen.

There's opportunity in Manitoba, and we are going to be there to provide that opportunity for Manitobans.

Budget 2016 Expenditure Targets

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, the Premier and his government have put forward yesterday a budget which commits the province to a deficit a sliver shy of \$900 million in

core operations and a sliver over \$900 million in the summary budget.

The Premier and his government are also committing our province to an increase this year of \$1.75 billion in our provincial net debt. The PCs, while in opposition, Madam Speaker, claimed that the NDP had runaway spending, and now we see that the PCs are copying them.

To the Premier, I ask: Why did this Conservative government, who campaigned on change, bring in an NDP budget?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): That—those are dangerous words from the member for River Heights.

We're—our budget carves a new course. Some say not soon enough, not enough reduction in spending; others say too much, too soon. The member opposite now claims, you know, the credentials of a fiscal conservative, yet his federal colleagues take over a balanced budget and now we're at \$30-plus billion in deficit. We take over a record deficit budget and are supposed to balance the books next week, according to the member.

He needs to consult with his friends in Ottawa about fiscal management and then come back with a balanced—more balanced view. I'd appreciate if he did that.

Mr. Gerrard: Conservative Finance Minister had three years as critic to get his ready—act in order and be ready, but he wasn't yesterday.

*(14:10)

Madam Speaker, the Finance Minister has confirmed repeatedly that he will meet his expenditure target, which in this budget is \$13.5 billion. We all know that the previous NDP government repeatedly and recklessly blew past its expenditure budgets. Setting an expenditure target and meeting it is economics 101.

What assurance can the Finance Minister provide this House today that he's taken measures of any sort that will enable him to actually meet his expenditure targets?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for the question.

We've been clear that it's a significant challenge that we face not as a government, but as all Manitobans. Remember that it was just a year ago

that the NDP government said that the deficit was 421. Then they revised it and said it was 666. We know now that the real deficit is \$1 billion. But that hasn't stopped us from making real inroads to finding the savings.

I remind the member that even in this initial budget brought only six weeks after we were elected, we have found \$122 million in savings. We are holding that down. The difference, of course, between our predecessors and us is we plan to meet our targets.

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

Mr. Gerrard: But without providing any clue as to how you will do it.

Madam Speaker, the people of Manitoba heard excuse after excuse from the previous NDP government as to why they were never able to meet their expenditure targets. One of the most common reasons heard was that there was an emergency which the NDP failed to foresee or in any way to provide for.

I ask the Premier (Mr. Pallister): What assurances do we have that next spring he will not be like the NDP and tell us that he was unable to meet his expenditure targets because there was an emergency which he didn't plan or provide any contingency in the budget for?

Mr. Friesen: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and for the opportunity to answer this question.

I would remind the member the context is this. Our predecessors would set out spending targets every year, and then they would outspend their own targets each and every year for 10 years.

Now, in the context of that record, we brought a budget yesterday where expenditures increased by 2.7 per cent, but revenues are increasing by 3.5 per cent. Madam Speaker, these are targets that are carefully constructed. We believe they are accurate. We have that confidence. That is the message we will provide to all Manitobans.

And the difference, of course, between our predecessors and us is we're going to keep our word and hit our targets.

Budget 2016 Spending Approach

Mrs. Colleen Mayer (St. Vital): Manitoba's new government is proud to have introduced their budget

yesterday. As we know, however, there is a lot of work to be done when it comes to bending the curve. Yesterday we took our first steps on that journey for a better Manitoba.

Can the minister please explain to the House how this government intends on moving our province forward after 17 years of mismanagement?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): I thank the member for St. Vital for that question.

Yesterday we delivered a budget, as I mentioned, that we believe will get Manitoba back on track. It is a budget that charts a new course after years and years of overspending by our predecessors. It is a budget that seeks to and will actually reduce the out-of-control spending increases, hold them down, and in order to do that it will invest the savings in front-line services that Manitobans depend on. It is an approach based on trust and compassion and common sense.

And we're very proud of the document we tabled yesterday.

Domestic Violence Victims Employment Leave Regulations

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Today a recent amendment to the employment standards act comes into force. The groundbreaking piece of legislation unique in Canada would permit any worker who is a victim of domestic violence the right to access employment leave. This leave may be sought to obtain medical attention services from a victim service, counselling, legal advice and on.

Will the minister tell the House if regulations to this important act will be prepared and when they'll take effect?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade): I do appreciate the question from the member opposite.

I do appreciate his previous statement he made today. Obviously, in terms of domestic abuse, we have a lot of work to do here in the province of Manitoba, and I will certainly take a look at this particular legislation, and I'll let the member know when we are looking at regulation under that legislation.

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

Mr. Lindsey: I know everyone in this House is deeply committed, Madam Speaker, to stopping domestic violence wherever it occurs.

Will the Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade please inform the House what steps he has taken to inform Manitoba employers, Manitoba employees, of their rights and obligations under the act through public education and advertising?

Mr. Cullen: Certainly, we were happy to support that legislation when it was introduced. Obviously, there is plenty of work to do in regards to that legislation. And, also, certainly, from the education perspective, there will be a lot of work to do as well.

It's one of those types of legislation that's been introduced that we hope will not be used but, of course, the case will come forward and it will be used, unfortunately. So there is work to do in this file, and we are prepared to do the work necessary.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Lindsey: Will the Minister tell the House how much money has been budgeted to cover public education, advertising and development of regulation?

Mr. Cullen: Certainly, this is a very important issue for us and our new government.

We have a very good relationship with the unions in Manitoba. We have a good relationship with the business community as well. We've had some very positive discussions to date, and we do look forward to working with the unions across the province and the business community on this very important issue, and I will advise the member that we will be doing work on this file, and it will be happening very quickly.

Budget 2016 Child-Care Funding

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Yesterday, Pat Wege from Manitoba Child Care Association expressed concern for new child-care projects yet commenced and are now left feeling unsure whether they will still receive their operating grants under this new budget.

It's left many child-care programs and parents confused and worried.

What kind of funding can these projects and parents expect when the budget doesn't set aside new supports for new centres and projects currently in the works?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Families): I can tell you this government is absolutely committed to improving the quality and the access of child care here in the province of Manitoba.

I can tell you personally how important it is to me. I have three children, Paige, Brynn and Beck—shamefully name my children this—that have gone through the child-care system. I can tell you how critical it is to working parents to ensure that we have the rights. And we're absolutely committed to a better system of access and quality care for our citizens.

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

Ms. Fontaine: Madam Speaker, the government is planning to review strategic infrastructure projects, including plans for new schools in the drafting stage. Pat Wege has called the strategy to include child-care programs in all construction and renovation of new schools, and I quote, a smart one, and hopes the government will follow through on the commitments made to this end.

Will the government commit to review the affected child-care programs planned for these future schools?

Mr. Fielding: This government is absolutely committed to listening to people, to working with people like the Manitoba Child Care Association.

We know that child care is critical to—not only just critical for our parents but the growth of the Manitoba economy. We want to ensure that we've got great access to it, and that's exactly what we're committed to doing. We're going to work with everyone in the field that can make a difference for our community.

* (14:20)

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

Ms. Fontaine: Pat Wege also raised concerns a \$6-million increase in the annualized cost of operating grants is not enough to alleviate the 12,000 child-care places wait-list in Manitoba.

With the federal government committing to a national child-care framework and the provincial

government committing to so-called consultation and partnerships, how will this government work with Canada to implement accessible, high-quality child care with no additional funding for existing centres and front-line child-care workers?

Mr. Fielding: Well, Madam Speaker, thank the member for the question, very much support that.

I guess the question that I have, being a new person to the Chamber, is how opposite members can stand up and talk about child care, when, in fact, their policies are the ones that led to over 12,000 people on the waiting list.

PST Increase Infrastructure Spending

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): Madam Speaker, my question is to the Premier.

The Premier's made a very big transformation over the last few months. Only a few months ago he was the angry protester. He was not going to take it anymore, and now after the election, he tells Manitobans you get what you pay for.

And when it comes to the 1 cent on the dollar the—of the PST, he's still going to collect it, but he's actually cut the highways budget by \$48 million.

How does this Premier expect anyone to take him seriously when he's continuing to collect the 1 per cent PST and he's actually cut highway spending by \$48 million?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I thank the member for Louise Bridge for the question.

Let me remind the member opposite that when he puts on the record knowingly false information, it doesn't serve him well.

The approach of the previous administration was to underspend on critical infrastructure investments year after year after year. It was the only department in that administration that was underspent. And it was underspent for four consecutive years until last year—coincidentally, the year before an election—at which time the members opposite engaged in a shameless display of conspicuous construction, attempting to prop up their electoral fortunes.

This is not the way we will invest in infrastructure. We will do it systematically. We have made consistent commitments to do so by working effectively on projects that matter to Manitobans, not on projects that matter to affect the political fortunes

of politicians, as was the case under the previous administration.

The member understands that, or should. He could do a modicum of research and it would, I'm sure, convince him that the commitment we've made to infrastructure, critical infrastructure investment, exceeds the average of their commitments in the previous administration and will help build Manitoba's infrastructure effectively.

Budget 2016 Rural Manitoba Highways

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): Madam Speaker, and a follow-up question to the Premier.

After a 70 per cent increase in capital projects over the past two years, the Premier admitted today on CJOB that the government will be cutting infrastructure projects because of the new budget.

It is no wonder that the budget makes no reference to rural or northern Manitoba.

Will the Premier admit that some of the first cuts of this government will be rural and northern Manitoba highway projects?

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

First of all, this government will be open and transparent on all government contracts, unlike the previous government who sole-sourced contracts—not to mention Tiger Dams—who gave jobs to their friends just in order to keep the East Side Road Authority going.

As we begin to untangle the mess that they've created in there we will find substantial savings by merging that back into the Department of Infrastructure. And we will do a much better job than this government did, that—than the previous government could ever hope to do.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

Petitions?

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Madam Speaker: I would like to advise the House that I have received a letter of emergency recall from the Premier calling the House back into session on

Thursday, June 2nd, 2016, due to the reasons of insufficient time following from the April 19th, 2016, general election to accommodate consideration of the budget debate, consideration of departmental Estimates and the government's legislative agenda.

Letters were subsequently sent to all MLAs from the Speaker's office this morning to advise of the emergency recall. As per rule 2(3), the emergency recall period will last for three weeks from tomorrow. As a result, when the House adjourns today it will stand adjourned until Thursday, June 2nd, at 1:30 p.m.

BUDGET DEBATE (Second Day of Debate)

Madam Speaker: Resuming the debate on the budget motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen), standing in the name of the honourable interim Leader of the Official Opposition (Ms. Marcelino), I would like to inform the House that pursuant to rule 34(9), I have been advised that the interim Leader of the Official Opposition is designating her unlimited speaking time in the budget debate to the honourable member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum).

This means the honourable interim Leader of the Official Opposition will have a 20-minute speaking time limit in debate and the honourable member for Fort Garry-Riverview will have unlimited speaking time.

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): Yesterday's budget was not open and transparent. It did not provide the necessary supports to families, seniors, students, women and low-income Manitobans. What we're seeing is just the tip of the iceberg of a hidden agenda of cuts and Harper-style austerity.

Manitobans voted for change, but we're not convinced the Premier (Mr. Pallister) is committed to the kind of change Manitobans care about.

We will continue to advocate for front-line services, equality for all. We will continue to stand up for all Manitobans, especially the most vulnerable.

Madam Speaker, we are deeply disappointed that this government is failing to provide supports for so many Manitobans. What is clear, however, is that the Premier and his Finance Minister are catering to stockbrokers and CEOs, not Manitoba families. And

their secret private sector audit sets the stage to justify job cuts.

There are so many things that my colleagues would like to bring forward, but I would like to raise five right now.

Number 1: No increase to the minimum wage. The Premier's token changes to tax measures will benefit the wealthy more than they do low-income earners. Our plan for increasing the minimum wage would have ensured over 100,000 Manitobans would see real benefit. Their tax measures will provide enough for one fast-food meal for those working in low-wage jobs. Our plan would have helped thousands pay the rent. The Premier is patting himself on the back for buying struggling families a lunch at Burger King when what they need is rent.

Number 2: No plan for child care. Families should not expect any new child-care spaces this year, and the questions were asked from our side and the answer of the minister—the answers of the minister was no comfort at all. This is of deep concern to NDP members. Manitoba NDP governments have made significant investments to ensure good, quality child care.

Yesterday's budget is terrible news for low- and middle-income families, and women in particular. The Manitoba NDP believes women should have equal access to the workforce and children benefit from high-quality early learning.

This ensures that families get support they need. We know that when we have good child care, participation rates in the workforce increases, which helps our economy and helps all of us. Yet the budget will not fund anymore spaces. This is unacceptable.

* (14:30)

Number 3: No plan to keep college and university affordable. We have seen how opaque this PC government has been on the question of student tuition. They refuse to answer what plans they have for keeping tuition affordable in this province. They will not commit to keeping tuition increases frozen to the rate of inflation. And we saw no significant increase to scholarships and bursaries in yesterday's budget.

How can we expect the best from our young people when we can't assure them that a post-secondary education is accessible and affordable?

Number 4: Middle-income Manitoba families lose out. Madam Speaker, changes to their tax measures really are change for middle-income Manitobans. Their income tax bracket changes will save middle-income earners about \$10 per year, yet, despite giving Manitobans next to nothing, this government refuses to make investments in child care and plans for affordable education that would provide real relief for Manitobans.

The NDP plan for everyday Manitobans would have given 306 thousand–hundred thousand lower and middle-income earners a break, while asking those making more than \$170,000 a year a bit more.

Everyday Manitobans would have been better off than under this Premier (Mr. Pallister). Why has this government turned his back on everyday Manitobans? This budget proves a great disappointment.

Number 5: Seniors tax credit. Most egregiously, despite promising during the election that he would not raise taxes and, very specifically, promising that he would keep the seniors' tax rebate, this Premier has taken the cheques right out of the mailboxes of our seniors.

This Premier has put so much focus on keeping his word, yet, just weeks after the election, he is increasing taxes by 44 million and not replacing it with any other form of support for low-income Manitobans.

Madam Speaker, it's becoming more and more obvious that the NDP has a better plan for a better Manitoba, for everyday Manitobans, with supports for families, seniors, students and everyday working and middle-income Manitobans. This government is concealing tax hikes and making it harder for Manitobans to succeed.

Overall, Madam Speaker, I have deep reservations about the tactics this government may take in the future. We know how the Harper government would book money in a budget, only to find that in-year changes decreased the levels of funding.

We're deeply concerned by the Premier's hidden private sector review of government services and what it means for the supports Manitobans rely upon.

Madam Speaker, Manitobans are still waiting for the other shoe to drop. And I believe we're just seeing the tip of the iceberg in terms of their real plans.

Beyond these concerns, if I can appeal to this new government to change their approach on one additional item, it is their meagre approach to the North. Their plan for northern Manitoba was promised as part of their first 100-days' plan, yet there is no mention of the North at all in their entire budget document.

The Golden Boy above this building faces north to signify the opportunity that exists there if we would simply embrace it.

Madam Speaker, I have deep concerns about this government's commitment to real investment in northern Manitoba. And this budget does not give me relief. They refuse to commit to real funding for northern roads and infrastructure and have already eliminated the East Side Road Authority.

I urge them to change their course.

So, Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew),

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

therefore regrets that this budget neglects the priorities of Manitobans by failing to:

- (a) clarify the definition of front-line worker and what services will be protected; and
- (b) make the results of cross-government, private sector spending reviews open and transparent to the public; and
- (c) ensure to the hard-working people of Manitoba that the provincial government's value-for-money audit will not result in job losses; and
- (d) address wage concerns of low-income Manitoba families by not increasing the minimum wage and ensuring that families living in poverty are supported; and
- (e) provide any additional resources for needed early childhood education spaces for Manitoba families; and
- (f) commit to a comprehensive early learning program; and
- (g) address the needs of persons living with disabilities; and
- (h) commit resources necessary to address the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; and

- (i) provide community and career assistance to new immigrants in the province; and
- (j) advance initiatives for northern Manitoba; and
- (k) preserve needed supports and relief for seniors and middle-income Manitobans; and
- (l) provide any supports for safer communities.

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

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the interim Leader of the Official Opposition (Ms. Marcelino), seconded by the honourable member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew),

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

therefore regrets that this budget neglects the priorities of Manitobans by failing to:

- (a) clarify the definition of front-line worker and what services will be protected; and
- (b) make the results of cross-government, private sector spending reviews open and transparent to the public; and
- (c) ensure to the hard-working people of Manitoba that the Provincial Government's value-for-money audit will not result in job losses; and
- (d) address wage concerns of low-income Manitoba families by not increasing the minimum wage and ensuring that families living in poverty are supported; and
- (e) provide any additional resources for needed early childhood education spaces for Manitoba families; and
- (f) commit to a comprehensive early learning program; and
- (g) address the needs of persons living with disabilities; and
- (h) commit resources necessary to address the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; and
- (i) provide community and career assistance to new immigrants in the province; and

- (j) advance initiatives for northern Manitoba; and
- (k) preserve needed supports and relief for seniors and middle-income Manitobans; and
- (l) provide any new supports for safer communities.

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

* (14:40)

I would just indicate that the member's spoken words were different from her written words in two instances: one was just using a (c) instead of an (e) in the order, but the other one, in number (l), was the omission of the word "new supports for safer communities."

And I would ask the member if she would like to have this accepted in written word or in her spoken word.

Ms. Marcelino: Madam Speaker, the one that you're holding would be the latest version.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave, then, to use the written version of the member's amendment?
[Agreed]

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

therefore regrets that this budget neglects the priorities of Manitobans by failing to:

- (a) clarify the definition of "front line worker" and what services will be protected; and
- (b) make the results of cross-government, private sector spending reviews open and transparent to the public; and
- (c) ensure to the hard working people of Manitoba that the Provincial Government's value-for-money audit will not result in job losses; and
- (d) address wage concerns of low income Manitoba families by not increasing the minimum wage and ensuring that families living in poverty are supported; and
- (e) provide any additional resources for needed early childhood education spaces for Manitoba families; and
- (f) commit to a comprehensive early learning program; and

- (g) *address the needs of persons living with disabilities; and*
- (h) *commit resources necessary to address the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; and*
- (i) *provide community and career assistance to new immigrants in the province; and*
- (j) *advance initiatives for northern Manitoba; and*
- (k) *preserve needed supports and relief for seniors and middle income Manitobans; and*
- (l) *provide any new supports for safer communities.*

As a consequence, the Provincial Government has thereby lost the confidence of this House and the people of Manitoba.

Madam Speaker: The motion is in order.

The members may proceed.

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate you on your election as Speaker and commend you on the fine job you are doing.

I can't begin to tell you the sense of pride I have felt since taking my seat in the Legislature on Monday, May 16th, as a member of this new Progressive Conservative government—first, the Speech from the Throne, and this week the first fiscally responsible budget in many years. The Throne Speech reiterated what our Progressive Conservative team promised during election: a clean open government that reflects the values of integrity, caring, inclusion, common sense and teamwork in everything we do. I can relate, as these values have always served me well in life.

The budget delivered by the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) yesterday detailed the spending and cost-saving plans of our government, again, backing up promises made during the election campaign. We are setting a new course for Manitoba, a new course that will lead to lower taxes, better services and a strong economy.

Madam Speaker, I was born in Treherne, which is in the Midland riding served by the honourable Minister of Infrastructure (Mr. Pedersen). My parents, Joe and Shirley, grew up on a family farms north of the community. While my dad's first love was farming, it soon became apparent that with 11 brothers and sisters there was not enough land in the family to allow that to happen. So like many in

the Nesbitt family over the years, he went to work for the Manitoba Telephone System.

Dad was a construction foreman in the '60s and '70s when the province moved to dial telephones, requiring an extensive investment in infrastructure all across Manitoba. We moved a lot, in fact, from Treherne to Portage la Prairie, Dauphin, McCreary, Dauphin again, Swan River, Virden and finally Shoal Lake in 1968. I attended school in four different communities, graduating from the Shoal Lake collegiate in 1975.

Along the way, my siblings were born: my brother Darrell, my sister, Joanne, and my youngest brother Laurie. We didn't grow up with lots of money, but we always had plenty of food on the table and the love of our parents. Dad and Mom worked hard, and that example rubbed off on their children. My parents taught us to humble and be thankful for everything we had.

My dad, who is 83, and my mom, who is 80, made their first ever visit to the Manitoba Legislature to hear the Speech from the Throne and proudly see their son take his seat as the MLA for Riding Mountain. At the reception they were thrilled to meet the honourable First Minister and his wife along with Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor and her husband, along with many of—other of you MLAs. Thank you to everyone, MLAs and legislative staff, for making my parents feel so welcome.

At the unveiling of the budget this week, I was pleased to welcome my friend for the past 35 years, Harold Reid, a CPA who is a partner in Sensus, a professional accounting firm serving western Manitoba and eastern Saskatchewan. Mr. Reid, like an overwhelming majority of Manitobans, knows in order for any business or government to flourish it must be fiscally responsible to ensure future growth and prosperity.

Budget 2016 has no new tax hikes. It gives Manitobans a permanent tax break that will keep up with the cost of living by ending bracket creep and indexing income tax brackets at the rate of inflation. As well, Manitoba's new government will remove 2,770 low-income Manitobans from the tax rolls in 2017.

Madam Speaker, Riding Mountain is a sprawling constituency, stretching from the Manitoba-Saskatchewan border to east of Minnedosa, and from the northern boundary of Riding Mountain National Park to just north of Brandon in the south. Besides

the beautiful national park, Riding Mountain is also home to the Asessippi Provincial Park and Lake of the Prairies, which was created by the construction of the Shellmouth Dam under the Duff Roblin administration.

Riding Mountain is a diverse constituency with a mix of Ukrainian, Polish, British and indigenous residents along with recent immigrants from the Philippines, India and Jamaica. Agriculture is the No. 1 industry in Riding Mountain. A trip down Highway 16 that runs through the middle of the constituency in late July or early August will leave you breathless with the bright yellow canola fields. Many farms are diversified with large beef cattle herds. Our new Progressive Conservative government has strong rural representation in the House and will make agriculture producers a priority.

I call Shoal Lake home. After graduating high school in 1975 and after a brief stint with the Manitoba Telephone System myself—I told you it's a Nesbitt thing—I purchased my community's weekly newspaper, the Shoal Lake Star, at the age of 19. Two years later, in 1979, I added the Rossburn Review, and in 1984 I purchased the Birtle Eye-Witness. I acquired the Hamiota Echo in 1992. In 2002, all four papers merged into one newspaper, Crossroads This Week, to reflect the increasing realities of regional life in rural Manitoba. In 2006, the company added the South Mountain Press which services Erikson, Onanole, Sandy Lake and Wasagaming areas.

I'm proud to say my son, Ryan, has assumed the role of publisher and general manager of our newspaper operation. My daughter, Kayla, lives and works in Red Deer, Alberta. My son, Ryan, and I are also two of four shareholders in Grasslands News Group which publishes newspapers in the Saskatchewan communities of Fort Qu'Appelle, Melville and Whitewood.

I took an early interest in serving on the board of directors of the Manitoba Community Newspapers Association, which represents 50 titles across the province. Over my 39 years in business I have served on the board for well over 30 of those, including two terms as president.

In 2012, I was elected to a two-year term as president of the Canadian Community Newspaper Association which represents over 850 titles across Canada. I finished my second and final year as chairman of the board at the annual Newspapers

Canada conference held last week in Edmonton, wrapping up 14 years of service.

I owe everything I have to the newspaper business, and there hasn't been a day that I didn't want to go into the office. It has taught me that anything is possible with a good work ethic and prudent fiscal management as well as common sense and teamwork, promises made to Manitoba during the recent election campaign and themes our new Progressive Conservative government has reiterated in the Throne Speech and budget.

No two days are the same in the newspaper business, not unlike the life of an MLA. The newspaper business has opened many doors for me outside my region, from lobbying elected officials here at the Legislature or on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, travelling with the Canadian Forces to countries such as Germany, Israel and Bosnia to write stories on the great work our soldiers undertook in peacekeeping operations, to riding second seat in a Tudor aircraft with Canada's famous Snowbirds.

The media business has also allowed me a different view of political life than most have. Rural MLAs depend on their community newspaper to get their message to constituents, either through news coverage or by advertising. Governments recognize community newspapers as a valued advertising medium that reach grassroots Canadians. Community newspapers are read cover to cover as they contain local news, news that is important to their area. I am sure many of you in this House recognize the role that community newspapers can play in communicating your message to constituents. In my experience as a newspaper owner, I have always found MLAs very accommodating in answering questions about area issues and contributing columns or op eds. Community newspapers and MLAs certainly don't have the adversarial relationships that may exist with our daily cousins and other media.

*(14:50)

I remember visits to my office from a former Speaker of the House, the late Harry Graham. Harry loved to talk, and he loved to predict how elections would turn out. He and I often had a little friendly wager on the final 'enection'-election-night results. He wasn't always right.

Glen Findlay of Shoal Lake and Len Derkach of Russell are both good friends and mentors. The two

former MLAs were both respected Cabinet ministers in the Gary Filmon government and still possess very sharp political minds.

Madam Speaker, I want to recognize a former colleague of yours, Leanne Rowat, who retired as the member for Riding Mountain when the writ was dropped. Leanne was first elected in the Minnedosa constituency, in 2003, after the retirement of Harold Gillishammer, and was re-elected in Minnedosa in 2007.

Leanne became my MLA, in 2011, after a boundary redistribution created the constituency of Riding Mountain. Leanne served her constituents well. She was always upbeat and never missed an opportunity to stop in at my office for a chat.

I would like to ask the members of the House to join with me in wishing Leanne and her husband, Brad, all the best in their new home on Lake of the Prairies, north of Russell.

I was first approached to consider running for the Progressive Conservative nomination in Riding Mountain by the honourable Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Eichler). In considering the idea, I knew I would enjoy helping people and I knew a little bit about what the position entailed from my interaction with former MLAs over the years.

After a month of talking with my family and employees, gaining the support of a number of residents from all walks of life, and hearing time and time again from frustrated Riding Mountain residents that it was time for a different style of government in this province, I became part of a three-way nomination race.

Madam Speaker, it is interesting to note that nearly 1,000 members turned out last April to mark their ballot for their choice of the three nominees in Strathclair, Manitoba, which, for one day, effectively tripled the population of the small community.

Over the year leading up to this spring's election, I heard first-hand from the residents of Riding Mountain, how they were tired of paying more and getting less in every aspect of government. I heard the frustration of citizens, not only at the lack of doctors and nurses to keep acute care facilities and emergency rooms open, but the frustration with the layers of bureaucracy in government that was driving health-care professionals out of Manitoba.

I heard about the lack of personal-care-home beds that is forcing the elderly in our communities to

take a bed in communities up to two hours away, putting a definite strain on family relationships.

Our government is committed to tackling these pressing issues and finding real solutions in a cost-effective manner.

Perhaps even more telling than these urgent concerns is that I saw a remarkable lack of optimism in the people I talked to.

On April 19th, Manitobans voted for change, and, in Riding Mountain, over 5,300 electors, a plurality of over 4,200 votes placed their trust in me to serve as their representative.

Madam Speaker, the commitments our party made during the election campaign and the financial initiatives that our government will pursue, as outlined in Budget 2016, to create a better Manitoba has given Manitobans a restored sense of optimism. Things don't have to be the way they were for the past 17 years under the NDP government. Paying more and getting less is now a thing of the past.

I am also the co-owner of two other business ventures that give me great pride and a sense of accomplishment, the Russell Inn Hotel & Conference Centre and the Asessippi Ski Area & Resort. These two ventures have a major impact on the economy of the Russell area, as the hotel complex and associated businesses employ over 150 full-time employees while the ski hill hires well over 1,000—or 100 seasonal employees.

The Russell Inn has proudly taken advantage of the Provincial Nominee Program and has many employees from the Philippines on staff as well as several from Jamaica.

The Asessippi ski area brings in a number of seasonal staff from Australia and New Zealand, giving many young people a taste of Canada and, in particular, Manitoba. Our province is a beautiful place to explore. The Riding Mountain area is an all-season playground, everything from boating to trout and walleye fishing in our many lakes, waterfowl and big-game hunting, camping, hiking, horseback riding, and skiing and snowmobiling.

I am excited that our government is looking forward to welcoming more people from around the world to visit Manitoba and enjoy the many attractions we have province-wide.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Small business is the backbone of our economy, and this government will work to support entrepreneurs. High taxes and red tape are stifling job creation in small businesses. Our government will work with businesses, small and large, to find and reduce unnecessary red tape and will work towards reducing the burden that has resulted from ever-increasing taxes made necessary by the debt accumulated by the former NDP government.

In closing, I would like to pay tribute to a number of people from all walks of life that encouraged and supported me in my new journey. My family: my son, Ryan, and his wife, Jill; my daughter, Kayla; my dad and mom, Joe and Shirley; my brother Darrell and his wife, Cindy; my sister, Joanne, and her husband, Gary Findlay; and my brother Laurie and his wife, Christa Walkden—your unconditional love and support will never be forgotten—my long-time newspaper staff, who are also close friends and helped me on the campaign when asked: Michelle Gensiorek, Connie Kay and Marcie Harrison. Their devotion allowed me peace of mind while I was travelling the constituency during the nomination process and election campaign.

I want to extend my thanks to the following people who helped me with my successful nomination and election campaigns: Ken and Christine Waddell, Harold Reid, Perry Bulbuck, Joe and Dawn Wishart, Glen and Katherine Findlay, Deke and Lindsey Baley, Daymon Guillas, Michael De Mesa, Jim and Eugene Kennedy, Murray Solomon, Merv Starzyk, Paulette Koroscil, Monique Henzel and Canaan Conrad, Shirley Kalyniuk, Ed Zimmerman, Dick Heapy, Judy Snitynsky, Harold Hyndman, Hal Sveistrup, Bruce Dalgarno, Victor Baraniuk, Cate Watrous, Tammy Johnson, Tyler Fulton, Spencer Reavie, Terry Haney and Steve Nixon.

Thank you.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): I rise today to offer some observations about the budget that was presented to Manitobans yesterday. And, if I had to summarize it, I would draw a comparison between yesterday's budget and the responses that we get to issues raised here in question period. I think both the budget and the answers that we get are trying to avoid some really serious issues that deserve much more dramatic attention, starting right now.

In my humble opinion and in the opinion of the vast majority of constituents in my area of Wolseley,

the environment and reducing poverty are the two biggest priorities, and, indeed, we see very little to cheer about in this budget on either of those fronts.

Let me start with some early comments on the environment. I came to the budget speech yesterday, Mr. Deputy Speaker, fully prepared to take notes on all the new initiatives that the government might announce as part of its budget process. We certainly did that. You look back at our throne speeches, you look back at our budget speeches, every single time there were significant new commitments to a wide range of environmental issues.

Yesterday I listened to the entire speech, and I walked out of the Chamber with a blank sheet of paper. There was absolutely nothing new in that budget document, with all the billions of dollars at this government's disposal, nothing in it to indicate any new initiatives coming forward for the health of our planet. I was not the only one who noticed that.

On the issue of climate change, for instance, the energy—Manitoba Energy Justice Coalition's Alex Paterson said the following. He said: Last week some red flags went up for us, and the new Minister of Sustainable Development (Mrs. Cox) refused to identify human-created greenhouse gas emissions as the most important factor contributing to climate change. And we learned it could be longer than a year before we get carbon pricing. It seems like this government is returning to square one on climate change. End quote.

And I thank Mr. Paterson for that summary. It mirrors the same questions that I have asked this government and this minister during question period. And we just are not getting any answers and any indication that they (1) understand the severity of the challenge of climate change, or (2) have any inclination or any idea of how they're going to address it.

*(15:00)

So I want to assure my constituents that I will be keeping a very close watch on what this government does and urging them, at every opportunity, to fully grasp and respond to the challenge that climate change represents in—a very urgent matter.

We can add to this, Mr. Speaker, that climate change is the environmental issue that is probably in the media the most these days. It is by no means the only issue that our government worked very hard to improve. And we heard absolutely nothing, in the budget speech yesterday, on anything related to

water protection, anything related to parks protection or protected areas expansion, nothing on our excellent track record on green buildings, nothing on improving recycling and waste, reducing the amount of waste that is ending up in landfills around the province.

We made significant progress in all of these areas while in government. We would never claim to have solved everything. But, yesterday, it was a blank sheet of paper that I walked out of this Chamber with after listening to the speech. And that is exceptionally concerning and just not acceptable. This government has to realize and, hopefully, will realize that no balance sheet is going to be worth the paper it's written on if you do not have a healthy environment supporting our society and supporting our economy. So the environment was, certainly, a very big concern for me yesterday, as I'm sure it was for many of the members, in our party, in the Chamber here today.

On the poverty end and inequality front, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I mean, we can talk a little bit about some of the concerning pieces that were in the budget and a much longer list of things related to poverty, which were, again, completely ignored by this government. And we have to remember that they just brought in a Throne Speech, and, in our responses to that Throne Speech, we reminded them, time and time again, of the complexity of this issue and of all of the different people and all of the different facets of poverty that they seem to just completely ignore. They have ignored all of that feedback that came both from us and people outside of the building working on these important issues and, again, have 'left' an enormous gap in terms of their plan to address poverty.

In terms of the few things that this government has done that even relate to poverty, they're not making it better; they're making it worse. One example would be the endorsement of this government of the Trans-Pacific Partnership. This is a bad deal. It gives far too many powers to foreign investors. And those rights can be used, as they have in the past, to actually restrict a government's ability to act on behalf of its people. And, when governments cannot or, more often, will not take the action required, it is the most vulnerable in our society who suffer the most.

The government's only item that they have tried to respond with, pointing to it like a fig leaf, in relation to poverty-related criticism, is this tiny

increase in the basic exemption on people's income taxes. That's not a particularly progressive measure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because, when you give away millions more dollars of public funding through raising the basic exemption, everyone in society benefits from that a tiny bit, but that takes money away from government's capacity to provide services and programs which lower income and more vulnerable people rely on the most. Wealthy people will benefit from that increase when it comes into effect. So it's not a particularly progressive approach and, certainly, not sufficient to—for anyone to be taking that seriously as a legitimate attack on the perils of poverty.

There were even quite a few instances, Mr. Deputy Speaker, where positive initiatives that our government had already accomplished were claimed by the government in their speech. The three schools that they made reference to, they're already under construction. I don't really understand how they can claim that that's a new initiative unless they were contemplating marching over to those schools and telling them to stop building them. And, obviously, providing good, quality public education and access to education is a very important service to provide to all Manitobans when we're talking about poverty.

Job creation, also a very important part of addressing poverty, and I notice the government was suddenly very proud of the fact that the organization SkiptheDishes has brought a major new job creation opportunity to Manitoba while our NDP government was in power, yet the new government is now highlighting this. So I want to thank them for acknowledging our good work while in office.

But, really, there's not very much in this budget speech that relates to a serious poverty reduction at all. And I would point out, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that thank goodness we passed legislation requiring our own government and every future government to include in their budget documentation a description, a report, if you will, on how their budget priorities are going to help reduce poverty. I quite worry that if we hadn't done that, there would be no documentation to that effect in the budget this year, because, normally, when we would bring in our budget, the description of all the things that we were doing to reduce poverty would be a 20-page report. It was very comprehensive. Yesterday's was one page, and the only thing of substance that it mentioned, as I touched on already, is this raising of the basic exemption.

We also passed a requirement that 21 different indicators needed to be used by government in order to properly track progress on poverty. A lot of what poverty is, what people often think of it initially, is just relates to income, but it's far more complicated than that. If you have a level of income that might at first glance seem to be not so bad, but if you do not have reliable accessible to child care, if you don't have reliable access to a community health facility, if you don't have reliable access to affordable housing, well, lo and behold, you might very well be living in poverty.

We have 21 different indicators required by law for the government to follow. And I worry very much that they are going to ignore that approach and maybe even cancel it. So, again, we will be keeping a very close eye on their approach to poverty as we move forward.

And just some of the examples, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that—quite glaring omissions—let's start with the minimum wage. For the first time in almost 20 years we have seen a budget for Manitobans brought forward that does not include an increase in the minimum wage. A 50-cent increase, even just a 50-cent increase to the minimum wage would put hundreds of dollars into the pockets of minimum-wage earners. Fifty cents times—let's say you're working part time as—you know, students maybe, or other people working at minimum wage, let's say they're only working 20 hours a week, 50 weeks a year, let's say; that's 1,000 hours. Well, do the math: 50 cents times 1,000 hours, that's \$500 for each person improvement. And the government is going to claim that their \$16 paltry crumbs off the table is a poverty reduction strategy? That's ludicrous.

The minimum wage is one of the most important components in a poverty reduction strategy, and this government, for the first time in almost two decades, has ignored that opportunity completely and they've said to everyone working minimum wage now and everyone who's coming in to the local economy, you don't matter to us. You are not our concern. You're not a priority. What you're making now is what you're going to be making a year from now, even with all of the other cost increases that'll go on. And that's just not appropriate, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Let's also look at child care. We know that child care makes enormous difference in people's lives. When you want to work and when you want to get into a training program, when you might need additional supports that, you know, you're not going

to be able to access unless you have access to child care, well, it's obvious the benefits of it.

The only increase that's listed in the budget that I've been able to find is just a repeat of the operating grant we had already put into place for this year. There's zero dollars for additional child-care spaces, which means, unlike under our leadership where we created 10,000 more spaces while in office, this government has said: If you need child care, you're not going to get it; you're not a priority for us. We don't think governments should be providing the child care that you and your family need so that one or both adults in the household or however many people can properly get the training or properly enter the workforce as they may choose to do so.

* (15:10)

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have to acknowledge that a majority of the people who would benefit from increasing minimum wage and increasing the number of child-care spaces are women. This government is ignoring two of the fundamental barriers that women disproportionately bear when it comes to moving forward in our society.

Obviously, there are men who stay home with their kids; I was one of them. Obviously, there are men who earn minimum wage; when I was younger, I was one of them. But, statistically speaking, women benefit far more from improvements to child-care spaces and to minimum wage increases because there's more of them in those situations. And this government is saying to women those two essential concerns are not shared by this government.

Let's move on to housing. I kind of feel sorry for the members opposite, because in the next couple of years coming up, with the approach that they've identified, I don't know how many of them are going to experience the joy of going to an announcement where we are opening new, affordable and low-income housing units for people who desperately need it.

I look back on our time in office and I feel so blessed that there were multiple times where our government stepped up, provided that capital funding to not just improve Manitoba housing blocks at \$100 million per year in refreshing the units and improving the buildings' operations, we went further and built hundreds of new, affordable and low-income housing units every single year. And I'm so lucky many of those units are in my constituency

of Wolseley. This government is not coming even remotely close to matching that track record, and, as near as we can tell from the budget speech, building new housing units isn't on the radar at all.

Now, I will give the government credit. There'll be plenty of things for us to disagree about in this Chamber when there is some overlap. I think it's good to point it out. They have agreed to continue the Rent Assist program which we brought in. This is a fantastic program that our government initiated, making a huge difference—tens of millions of dollars every year going straight into the pockets of low-income renters. And they have committed to continue that.

I would just point out that our approach here was one of several that we had done already as we moved towards the concept of a guaranteed annual income while we were in office. And this was an issue in the local election in Wolseley, and my honourable colleagues from the Green Party brought forward an idea on that. Their proposal, though, was actually very right wing. It had the richest people in Manitoba paying less to fund that program than people in the middle class. And it had no money coming from anyone in the corporate sector, like, businesses were not going to be required to pay anything, and this was a multibillion-dollar proposal they brought forward. And they also made the mistake of stripping away all of the complexities of poverty and just looking at it from a monetary point of view—exactly the same as what it looks like Conservatives here are heading towards. And it reinforces the well-established history that that particular party, the Greens, do have legitimate concerns on the environment, but a very right-wing approach to many social and economic issues, which is one reason why I would never be voting Green.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in terms of reducing poverty or—and empowering citizens, improving their opportunities in life, we saw no guarantee from this government that our cap on rising tuition is going to be maintained. If I'm a university student, it sounds like this government might have something else up its sleeve and they're waiting for the other shoe to drop.

There's absolutely no mention of reconciliation. I don't think you can find the word in the budget speech—

An Honourable Member: Other than the accounting sense.

Mr. Altemeyer: The accounting sense, yes, thank you. The honourable member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew) has pointed out there.

Reconciliation all over the place when it comes to budget ledgers, indigenous people, indigenous issues, the historic role of the treaties which need to be acknowledged so our society can move forward—none of those issues appears to exist for this government. And, of course, it's intimately related to poverty.

Labour, we had—other than the disappearance, the complete disappearance of the Labour department, there's no mention of labour in this budget. And it is proven that when people are unionized, they earn a better wage; their job site's security and safety is better. And, without any supports on that front, we can expect, again, no progress on the poverty front.

The North was not mentioned, as my honourable colleague from The Pas raised in question period today. The so-called Yes! North strategy of the members opposite seems to actually be, in reality, their ministers having conversations with large corporations, and that's about it. That doesn't even come close.

There's no mention of food security or the role that access to healthy, local food plays in poverty, no mention of the incredible Neighbourhoods Alive! program. I am so lucky, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the West Broadway Community Organization, the Spence Neighbourhood Association, the Daniel Mac / St. Matthews Community Association are all in my constituency. They all have been receiving funding from our government, millions of dollars a year, to help them do the neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood community revitalization work that is so crucial to reducing poverty and creating an inclusive society. This government said absolutely nothing about any of that positive work already going on.

Disabilities—also not mentioned. The government's refusing to define what a front-line worker is. So much left out of this budget speech, Mr. Deputy Speaker. New Canadians, be they refugees or immigrants—nothing there either. We really are going to have to take a very close look at what this government does in the days ahead because there's a whole lot of gaps to still fill in. Thank you.

Mr. Scott Johnston (St. James): I am pleased to speak in favour of the budget. I wish to recognize the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) as well as our

whole PC team for their diligence in presenting a budget, vision and commitment to the people of Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, our province faces its challenges, and our team is prepared to face those challenges. We understand the need to address the deficit we have been left with. We understand we need to balance our approach and address the province's financial situation with a view to maintaining the front-line services Manitobans need and expect.

What we have delivered is a budget that demonstrates our commitment to getting Manitobans back on a responsible fiscal track. That doesn't mean we aren't well aware of the challenges we face, and those challenges are significant. In our first budget, we are setting a new course for Manitoba, one that will result in lower taxes, better services and a stronger economy. We are committed to protecting front-line services now and into the future. We must correct the course of our province's finances and move forward. With that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to move into my inaugural remarks to this Chamber.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I offer you and Madam Speaker congratulations on behalf of my constituents of St. James. I am confident your experience in the Legislative Assembly as well as your proven ability will serve us well.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise in this place of honour, humbled by my presence here. When I reflect on the history and accomplishments of the honourable Manitobans who have sat before me, it is truly inspiring. When I reflect on the governments I am most familiar with, I can't help but be overwhelmed. It is an honour to follow in the footsteps of the governments of premiers Roblin, Weir, Schreyer, Lyon, Pawley, Filmon, Doer and the former premier, the honourable member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger). And now to be a member of our Premier's (Mr. Pallister) governing PC team, it is truly an incredible feeling.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to thank the people of the constituency of St. James. My constituency is very diverse, primarily made up of middle-income, grassroots folks. I was fortunate to receive the support of many of my communities within the St. James constituency, and I am truly humbled.

* (15:20)

I am also thankful to the people of St. James community who have supported me faithfully for the last 26 years as one of their King Edward, Deer Lodge school trustees on the St. James-Assiniboia school board.

I have much to be thankful for.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as all members know we need family support. My family stood beside me every step of the way on this journey. I am so proud of them. My wife of 36 years, Karen, was an inspiration to me. Over the course of my campaign, her father passed away. Karen was not only—Karen not only came to terms with our loss, she managed our family through it and pushed me on in my campaign. Thank you.

My son Steven resides in Brandon, the home of the Brandon Wheat Kings, and spent every weekend helping me in my campaign. My daughter Brett is a university student and was also helping while studying for examinations.

I wish to dedicate my response to the budget to my father-in-law, John—Jack—Peggie. We will miss him.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, my mother and father, Hazel and Frank Johnston, as well as my sisters, Robyn and Donna, and their families were essential in my successful campaign. They were always there for me. My nephew, Bryce Matlashewski, did everything from help manage the campaign, to put up the signs.

Madam Speaker, a campaign cannot run without volunteers. My campaign team were truly amazing. They campaigned through snow, rain, at nights and on weekends, and I'm sure all the other members certainly can relate to the volunteers who helped them.

I am here today due to their commitment and their dedication, and I am grateful to my campaign manager, Luc Lewendowski, his commitment, as well as his family's understanding. Luc fulfilled his young family's commitment while delivering my campaign. I know he may have lacked sleep on many occasions.

My sister Robyn was there day and night. She worked so hard some of my campaign people wondered whether or not they had the right Johnston running.

I would like to recognize Jillian Currie and the Stacey family for not only their hard work, but also their confidence in me.

Madam Speaker, we are a team. I would like to recognize the support I received from my colleagues, the honourable member from Tuxedo, whose constituency twin was St. James was invaluable to me; the honourable members from Arthur-Virden, Morris, Lakeside, who mentored me; Kirkville Park, Assiniboia and Charleswood contributed their time, as well as many volunteers from their constituencies to help.

There were some unsung heroes, also, Mr. Deputy Speaker, such as Laval—I hope she forgives me for maybe not pronouncing her name properly—Palendat, as well as Nancy Cooke and Michelle Redmond, all from 23 Kennedy support team.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to recognize the former member for St. James, Deanne Crothers, for her commitment to the people of St. James.

I would also recognize the former premier, the honourable member of St. Boniface, who grew up in St. James. The member from St. Boniface grew up on Mandeville Street and I grew up a street over on Overdale Street. I'm sure that the honourable member from St. Boniface will appreciate that it's always sunny in St. James, but I'm sure he'll also acknowledge that Overdale is just a little bluer.

I remember my mom taking me shopping at the honourable member from St. Boniface's mother's store. The honourable member from St. Boniface's mother was one of the first female entrepreneurs in the area.

Madam Speaker, my father also grew up on Overdale Street and was a member of the constituency of Sturgeon—was a member of the Legislature for the constituency of Sturgeon Creek from 1969 to 1980-88.

St. James now encompasses a large portion of Sturgeon Creek. It is my privilege to represent the constituency that he was so proud to represent, but he would be the first one to say that he dealt with issues and situations within his area and would say to me that I have to work with my colleagues, in this House, to deal with situations and issues in this area.

My mother, Hazel Johnston, ran our family business at a time when female managers were not as prominent as they are today. My mother deserves a

great deal of credit for our family success. My mother and father are equal partners and have always set an example for their family.

My constituency of St. James is one of cultural diversity, Mr. Deputy Speaker. St. James is bordered on the east side by Valour Road. Valour Road, formerly Pine Street, was named for three World War I war heroes who received the Victoria Cross for acts of bravery.

St. James is one of the most established areas in the city of Winnipeg. Part of Winnipeg's west end, in St. James constituency, takes in the area from Valour Road to St. James Street which is very diverse. Traditionally, an area that was populated by many employees of the Canadian Pacific Railroad, now the west end has a flourishing mix of new Canadians as well as families of legacy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am encouraged by the sense of community I experienced while knocking on doors and meeting with such a culturally diverse community.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the St. James constituency houses one of the largest shopping facilities in Manitoba. Polo Park is a staple to the consumers of Winnipeg as well as attracting many tourists to the city and the province.

Speaking to many of the constituents in the malls is very educating, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As you can appreciate, there's certainly a lot of perspectives. And may I categorically say that people did not feel the increase in the PST was an acceptable one, both business and consumers alike.

The old city of St. James was, initially, a municipality which was established in 1921. As the urban population grew, St. James became a city in 1956.

St. James has a proud history in Winnipeg. The city mothers and fathers were wise enough to plan a city with family as well as commercial development in mind.

St. James is the home to Manitoba's Richardson International Airport. Many of St. James' families were builders of the air transportation industry in Manitoba as well as Canada. I am very enthusiastic and excited about the potential increased trade opportunities. With the participation in the New West Partnership, our air transportation industry, as well as the light industry utilizing the airport, will benefit. St. James houses the aerospace industry of

Manitoba. The aerospace industry is the third largest aerospace industry in Canada.

It is encouraging that our government will partner with business to support and protect jobs in vital areas of our economy. I look forward to our government working with industry, in their initiative to pursue further goals, and I'm optimistic with the potential CentrePort supporting the Trans-Pacific Partnership, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

St. James is serviced by one of our regional hospitals. Grace Hospital has hard-working women and men committed to the citizens' needs. Our government is committed to meet health-care challenges we face. Grace Hospital emergency patients have experienced the longest waits in Canada. We intend to be proactive rather than reactive, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Our government's initiative to establish Wait Times Reduction Task Force will reduce wait time and is welcomed by the people of Manitoba.

The Deer Lodge Centre, located in the heart of St. James constituency, is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. Deer Lodge Centre began, in 1916, as a military hospital for the returning World War I veterans. Since then, a 100-year history has reflected a long, proud history of making lives better for veterans as well as our elderly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I had the opportunity to converse with many residents of Deer Lodge Centre during the recent election. I was always inspired by our seniors who have so much to offer. Many of our residents—many of the residents grew up in St. James. They helped build our community. They raised their families in St. James. They worked in St. James, and now they're spending their twilight years in the community that they built. We can continue to learn from their wisdom.

*(15:30)

In St. James, we have a significant senior demographic. I am encouraged to see the expansion of Sinawik Bay senior housing complex. The demands for senior housing continues to grow. I look forward to working with my colleagues to assess demand and I am encouraged by our government's commitment to add 1,200 personal-care beds in Manitoba.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am very fortunate to have St. James seniors centre servicing the seniors of St. James-Assiniboia. St. James seniors centre—

senior—is a vital resource for our seniors, offering a variety of programs and activities. The seniors' centre has a caring staff with an understanding of our growing seniors' population needs. I look forward to working with them and to continue to meet the needs of our St. James seniors.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am proud to have been a school trustee in the St. James-Assiniboia School Division. I was fortunate enough to have been elected several times. I represented King Edward-Deer Lodge ward for 26 years.

I believe in our public school system. I was fortunate to have served with women and men dedicated to the betterment of our young people. I have a high respect for the teaching prospect—profession. In order to teach, it takes dedication, caring and expertise.

One of the reasons I ran for provincial office was I felt our leader has a real insight into the educational needs of our province. Manitoba education will benefit from that leadership. Minister Wishart will certainly provide leadership also.

Educational results need to be addressed. Manitoba is challenged compared to the Canadian results. According to PCAP results as well as international PISA results, it is our duty to do better, and we will.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our PC team is going to support our leadership.

We recognize that we have to build strong foundations in early years. Early years literacy and numeracy will be reinforced. Our students will read to succeed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, not only is St. James the hub of Manitoba's aerospace and air transportation industry, we also have the honour of being associated with our Canadian military. Many of our courageous women and men live in St. James 17 Wing Canadian Forces Winnipeg. My colleague, the honourable member from Assiniboia, and I share the proximity of this military base. And I also look forward to supporting our forces and assisting the honourable member of St. Norbert, who is appointed our military special envoy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have the opportunity of visiting many community clubs in my constituency. It is comforting to know that a sense of community is alive and well in St. James. Our community clubs always rise to the needs of our children and

neighbourhood. I would like to recognize the hard-working volunteers in our community clubs of Sturgeon Heights, Deer Lodge, Bourkevale, Bord-Aire and the Clifton site of the Valour Road Community Club. Our St. James Civic Centre, Deer Lodge Curling Club, Assiniboine Golf Club continued to enhance our community.

As a former Deer Lodge Curling Club curler, I am excited about the prospects of housing an international curling centre in Manitoba. Manitoba's reputation for curling is world renowned.

We are committed to protecting green space. One of the best kept secrets in Winnipeg is Bruce Park. This pleasant green space which plans Portage—which spans from Portage Avenue to the Assiniboine River is warm and peaceful. Many families enjoy this park with its picnic areas and playground and wading pool.

Bruce Park has a special place in my heart, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My great-grandfather, John Guest, donated the money for the wading pool that exists today. It's an interesting story. A long time ago, when my great-grandfather was one of the first residents of St. James—he was a very affluent man—and the people from the legion at that time were going door to door soliciting funds. And my great-grandfather was a temperance man and indicated that he wasn't interested in donating to beverage rooms, but he would donate the money for a park. And the legion people approached the old City of St. James, and today that pool exists. Bruce Park is the home to the Remembrance Day Cenotaph which supports one of our city's largest outdoor services.

Our government is committed to preserving our environment. We understand the need to protect green space as well as ensure safe environmental practice.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I look forward to working with my neighbouring constituencies. I extend an invitation to the honourable members from Minto and Tyndall Park, as well as Kirkfield Park and Assiniboia, to work together. I note that my honourable friend from Minto also grew up in St. James.

The people of Manitoba has given our government a historic mandate. I am honoured to speak in favour of our government's first and visionary budget. And I thank the members for the opportunity to speak to them, my inaugural speech.

I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before we continue, it fits to remind members that when it comes to referring to a minister not by name but by their portfolio or by their constituency, okay. Thank you. We'll continue.

And the member for—the honourable member for river right—River Heights.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yesterday, the Conservative government delivered their budget. Much to the surprise of many, the budget was a typical NDP budget, with a deficit of \$900 million expected for the coming year.

This, Mr. Speaker, is a very, very high deficit. The Conservative Finance Minister says the finances of the provinces left by the previous NDP government were in terrible shape and that, in six weeks, he had no time to do any better. But we all know that the Finance Minister was the Finance critic for three years. During that time, the Finance Minister had more than 1,000 days to pore over the provincial budgets, line by line—line by line—and to understand all the minutiae of these budgets and all the nuances of provincial budgets.

Finance Minister should have been ready to prepare his budget quickly and to present it, knowing the circumstances and knowing that his party was ahead in the polls. I mean, there's no excuse. Was he actually expecting that he wouldn't be in government and that he wouldn't have this responsibility? Surely, the Finance Minister should have done much better. He should have held the discussions with his colleagues and with the Premier (Mr. Pallister) to know the direction that he wanted to take in the budget.

Indeed, in the Finance Minister's many speeches in the House over the last three years, he has expressed, on many occasions, his views that the budget should be balanced as soon as possible. Eight years doesn't quite meet it. The Finance Minister has said that much better financial management was needed, and yet he brought in a budget with a \$900-million deficit.

The Finance Minister, before he was Finance critic, was critic for Health and for Education, two major portfolios. He should have known these files very, very well. He should have known how the budgets could be adapted to improve things for Manitobans. But he didn't do it. He just copied the last NDP government and changed a few small

numbers. Many Manitobans are now scratching their heads and wondering why yesterday he deviated from his previous script and his previous pronouncement and his previous aspirations and brought in this NDP budget.

You know, last year's budget was a problem; there's no doubt of that. But, you know, a Finance Minister is there to tackle tough problems, not to make excuses or to slough them off. A Finance Minister has to do the job that he's tasked with, and that is make sure that this government and this province is headed in a good direction, that things are being spent in a way that's forward-looking and that money is being used effectively to improve services for people in the North as well as in the south. And, you know, clearly, there are, you know, issues which could and should have been addressed, many of them.

* (15:40)

Let me talk about one. One of the big issues in the high deficit from last year was that the taxes from corporate earnings were down, and so taxes raised in terms of corporate income tax, taxes—various taxes on corporations including the payroll tax, the revenue was very considerably down. And what that suggests is that the economy and the businesses in the province were not doing nearly as well as the NDP have tried to suggest. The NDP have said that the economy was, you know, plowing along on all cylinders, but, clearly, you know, there is a problem, and we have noted this problem that the manufacturing sales have not been—are still lower than they were in June of 2008, many years ago.

Madam Speaker in the Chair

There's been a failure of growth in the manufacturing industry in Manitoba—and compare this to Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan was far behind Manitoba in 2007, and over the last number of years Saskatchewan has caught up, and most months in the last number of years the numbers have been running higher than Manitoba's in terms of manufacturing output. You know, we shouldn't be behind or falling behind Saskatchewan in terms of manufacturing where we're supposed to be, you know, front and centre and, you know, excellent in western Canada.

There are clearly things that need to be done to get things back on track in terms of the economy. If the government had real confidence that they were going to be able to get things back on track in terms of the economy, they would have looked at the projections and figured it out that under their watch—

if it were true that the economy is going to do better under their watch—there should be better results from corporations. There should be more revenue coming in. But you can see that from the numbers that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) has budgeted for revenue from corporations, that he doesn't have much confidence that his budget measures are actually going to be positive in terms of improving corporate business activity and improving corporate revenues.

So it's disappointing that the Finance Minister doesn't actually have confidence in his own budget, that he has to protect—project that the revenues from corporations in the coming year are not going to be, you know, all that good when compared with what they really should be. So, you know, I don't know why that is, but, I mean, that's just the way it is.

As a result the—we've got a net debt which is projected to go up. It's projected to go up from \$21.4 billion, the summary net debt, to \$23.15 billion. That's an increase of \$1.75 billion in the net debt. And so the net debt continues to rise as a percentage of the gross domestic product and it is now up to 33.8 per cent of gross domestic product whereas only a few years ago it was down in the low 20s.

You know, there are problems, clearly, in the fiscal management from the last number of years, but instead of trying to correct these problems this Finance Minister is just going to continue them, increase the debt as a proportion of GDP, have higher deficits than were even projected in the last NDP government, and on we go. And in spite of this, we see that there's a lack of attention to a number of critical areas.

The dedicated stroke unit is not even mentioned. The establishment of this urgently needed stroke unit when there is abundant evidence from many sources that you get reductions in the disability and death due to stroke, and that that—because the costs of disability due to stroke is one of the most expensive costs in all of the health-care area, that we will not have the benefit of improved health of people or in the decreased costs of health care that we could've had by establishing, as urgently as possible, this dedicated stroke unit, which the NDP didn't get done in 17 years. And the Conservatives are now continuing the same pattern and not putting it on their top of their priority list.

We had long waits in the emergency rooms; this points to inefficiencies in the way that things are

being handled in health care. There's a long history of many, many reports. The NDP, in 17 years, couldn't really do anything that was satisfactory to reduce the long wait-lists and to make things more efficient. And here we have a budget where the best that can be done is to establish a task force, at some distant time in the future, maybe this fall when it will be constituted, and who knows when it will report. Maybe it'll report just before the next election, and the Tories will come forward, here, we've finally got some solutions to the emergency room, three months before the next election, when they could have been working on this for four years. You know, it's important—*[interjection]* It's important that the candidate from Emerson recognize that there are real problems out there with emergency-room waits that need attention.

We see a situation, and the budget reports this: rising costs in child and family services. We have an extraordinary high number of children in care, more than 10,000, and yet this budget doesn't address this, doesn't provide a rethinking of how we operate child and family services, how we support families, so that you reduce the number of kids in care, you reduce the legal costs associated and various other costs of having all these kids in care and better support families. And you get healthier kids and we have fewer justice costs, because the kids in CFS care disproportionately end up, sadly, in our justice system. So that there are things that could be done that would improve our society in Manitoba but would also save costs. And this government is not paying attention and seems to have been absent for the last number of years, in paying attention to bring in measures which one would have normally expected.

Sadly, there isn't an implementation in this budget of a surface-water management strategy to make sure that we have water stored on the land and would decrease risks of flooding. The lessons of Blackbird Creek and South Tobacco Creek are not mentioned or included in this budget. There's not adequate reference to Lake Winnipeg and making sure that Lake Winnipeg is in good shape.

We have a government which has committed to reduce the waits in child care. That was one of the major planks, to get rid of these long waits. It's a major problem for people in my constituency and in— all over Manitoba. And yet we would have expected the plan and the resources, in this budget, to be able to achieve that. But, sadly, they weren't there.

And back to this issue of creating wealth. The government has promised that they would bring in an approach which had much better access to venture capital, but we don't see that plan in the budget. Where was it? If you're actually going to make sure that business is growing and that people are doing well, we need to make sure that access to capital is there. We need to make sure that research and development investment is being made so the new products and services are developed here, and there's not the attention to research and development that one would have needed. And, in fact, interestingly enough, this investment in research and development not only provides new products but, often, is very helpful in identifying areas of waste that can be improved upon.

So, Madam Speaker, it is important that we have, you know, a better management of this economy. We're not satisfied with the approach that has been taken by this government.

* (15:50)

And, therefore, Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the MLA for Burrows,

THAT the amended be amended by adding after clause 1 the following clauses:

- (m) commit to addressing the root causes of prescription drugs, alcohol and street-drug addiction in our communities;
- (n) commit to eliminating ambulance fees for low-income seniors; and
- (o) commit to establishing youth justice committees; and
- (p) commit to act immediately to address the long wait times in emergency rooms; and
- (q) commit to helping families stay together and reduce the number of children in care of Child and Family Services; and
- (r) commit to resources to directly establish a dedicated stroke unit; and
- (s) commit to providing the resources and plan to eliminate the long wait times for child care in Manitoba; and
- (t) commit to balancing the budget in four years; and
- (u) commit adequate resources to ensure the health of Lake Winnipeg; and

- (v) commit to lowering the cost of prescription drugs for seniors on low incomes; and
- (w) commit to act immediately in addressing the diabetes epidemic; and
- (x) commit to addressing the high cost of food in remote northern communities; and
- (y) commit to completing the east-side road of Lake Winnipeg.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), and seconded by the honourable member for Burrows (Ms. Lamoureux),

THAT the amendment be amended by adding after clause (l) the following clauses:

- (m) commit to addressing the root causes of prescription drugs, alcohol and street-drug addiction in our communities; and
- (n) commit to eliminating ambulance fees for low-income seniors; and
- (o) commit to establishing youth justice committees; and
- (p) commit to act immediately to address the long wait times in emergency rooms; and
- (q) commit to helping families stay together and reduce the number of children in care of Child and Family Services; and
- (r) commit to resources to directly establish the dedicated stroke unit; and
- (s) commit to providing the resources and plan to eliminate the long wait times for child care in Manitoba; and
- (t) commit to balancing the budget in four years; and
- (u) commit adequate resources to ensure the health of Lake Winnipeg; and
- (v) commit to lowering the cost of prescription drugs for seniors on low incomes; and
- (w) commit to act immediately in addressing the diabetes epidemic; and
- (x) commit to addressing the high cost of food in remote northern communities; and
- (y) commit to the completing of the east-side road of Lake Winnipeg.

And I would just in—the motion is in order, and I would just indicate that there were two instances in what the member indicated verbally that is different from what he submitted in writing. The first one is after clause (l), and the member had indicated clause 1; and under clause (m) the word and was omitted.

So I would ask the member if he wants to leave it as what was spoken or what was actually submitted in writing.

Mr. Gerrard: The written text, that would be fine, thank you.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to accept the written text? [Agreed]

THAT the amendment be amended by adding after clause (l) the following clauses:

- (m) commit to addressing the root causes of prescription drugs, alcohol and street drug addiction in our communities; and*
- (n) commit to eliminating ambulance fees for low income seniors; and*
- (o) commit to establishing Youth Justice Committees; and*
- (p) commit to act immediately to address the long wait times in emergency rooms; and*
- (q) commit to helping families stay together and reduce the number of children in care of Child and Family Services; and*
- (r) commit to resources to directly establish the Dedicated Stroke Unit; and*
- (s) commit to providing the resources and plan to eliminate the long wait times for childcare in Manitoba; and*
- (t) commit to balancing the budget in four years; and*
- (u) commit adequate resources to ensure the health of Lake Winnipeg; and*
- (v) commit to lowering the cost of prescription drugs for seniors on low incomes; and*
- (w) commit to act immediately in addressing the diabetes epidemic; and*
- (x) commit to addressing the high cost of food in remote Northern communities; and*
- (y) commit to the completing of the east side road of Lake Winnipeg.*

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Assiniboia): Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak.

This is my first occasion to have a substantive commentary and I would like to first acknowledge one truism, and that is no person or parliamentarian ever thinks that they're going to be a former parliamentarian—*[interjection]*—and the member from Elmwood is agreeing with me. And I even remember when I was a very young man, young kid, seeing the member from River Heights on TV, watching him in the House of Commons. It may have been even in black and white, but, boy, that was a long time ago. Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), he's not listening.

But anyway, I would also like to acknowledge the members from Assiniboia that preceded me. Jim Rondeau, he did—he was known as a constituency MLA, and I intend to do the same. And Linda McIntosh, who held the seat before that, a dear friend of mine. She was a school board trustee. She's an author. And she has done a tremendous amount of good for Manitoba and Canada. So that's big shoes to fill. And I'll try and do my best.

I'd also like to thank members that were in my federal riding. That's—includes the member—the Speaker, member from Charleswood, the member from Morris, the member from Tuxedo and Kirkfield Park and St. James, and of course, Assiniboia.

Now, Madam Speaker, to understand how someone approaches a budget, it's often helpful to know where they come from. And since this is my first opportunity to speak to the Leg., I may just like to take a few minutes to touch on that and then discuss what my expectations are of myself and of the government and of society.

The fact is, when I was younger I was very interested in the Canadian outdoors. I loved wilderness canoeing. I was an—actually a right-wing naturalist. And yes, I did skinny dip—too much information, I know. But the fact is I have a strong connection with our great Canadian Shield, the blue lakes and rocky shores. And the key to preserve that is a strong economy. And I will discuss that later.

I was also very fortunate to have an excellent education. I did my engineering degree at University of Manitoba, and I had a fantastic job at the Bissett gold mine on the east side of Lake Winnipeg. And at that time I had—or a few years before that, I was provincial kayak champion, went to Canada Games,

you know, things were good. And I was doing well. I was doing very well.

And driving to work one day, one morning, I hit a moose with my car. The car was totalled; you know, it was like a sardine can ripped off. It went into the ditch. And this was before there was even cellphone access on that side of the lake. So it was quite some time before I was found, quite some time before they could get the nearest ambulance, which was at Pine Falls, and then the ambulance had to come out, get me, and then drive me down to Winnipeg.

Anyway, it was a terrible, terrible thing. And I had found myself completely paralyzed from the neck down, unable to breathe. I was told that if—if I were to live, it would be in an institution, and it was a touch-and-go situation. I was literally drowning in my own phlegm, minute after minute, hour after hour, day after day, week after week.

* (16:00)

I spent a year in the hospital and I managed to get out. And I did something that I was told not to do by the experts, and that is I decided to go back to school and continue my education. And I got my—to make a long story short, my master's of business administration degree—no hands—and at that time was able to get involved in student politics and learned a great deal of things and, in fact, got to know the member from Wolseley and the member from St. Johns during that time. So it's quite interesting that we have ended up in the same place.

The reason why I raise this thing about education, my—I humbly will suggest that education is the best investment society can make in an individual and education is the best investment an individual can make in themselves. When you—*[interjection]* Education opens up doors that are unimaginable. It broadens your horizons. And that door that was unimaginable was, for me, getting elected to Parliament, the Parliament of Canada, against a very formidable opponent, a popular mayor of Winnipeg, at a time where the Liberals—or it wasn't my team's time for government.

But it was remarkable in this way. The people of Assiniboia and St. James and Charleswood and Tuxedo and Headingley did not measure me by how I comb my hair or how fast I could run, but the content of my character and my ability to do the job that I was applying to do. Isn't that—what is more Canadian than that? Now, there were some

naysayers, some questions about the disability and all that sort of thing. But the vast majority looked at what I could do for them, and that is what our job here as MLAs are—is: What can we do for the people who elect us?

Now, I will say there are systemic barriers throughout society, be it transportation, housing, attendant care, transportation. These are things that prevent segments of our society from participating fully. So this is another theme when I look at the budget: is—does this budget allow people, more people, to fully participate in society? And, time permitting, I will say, yes.

Another principle is empowerment, empowerment of the individual, the belief that an individual, a competent adult, is able to make the best decisions for themselves, not the government. So where does that lead us? That leads us to people keeping more money in their pockets because they are the best ones to decide where that money should be spent to improve their lives, though we all recognize the importance of taxes and paying them. But it's frustrating when governments do not invest hard-earned taxpayer money in things that bring benefit to the very people who are paying those taxes.

So, through that lens, I would say this budget is in the right direction. If you take—look at the personal tax exemption, it is increased, so people who work hard but are on the borderline will pay less tax; they'll—over 2,000 people will be taken off the tax rolls. This is important because it's about, again, empowerment.

There's money for housing. Having appropriate housing is a form of empowerment. People who look at these things, these, that we call budgets, it's abstract if they're even paying attention. But when it doesn't become abstract is when it's not the parliamentarians or MLAs that are making the decisions, but the lenders, the banks. When you're so far in debt, you have no choice but to do what they say; your costs of servicing the debt far exceed the costs of potentially priority social programs like health care and so on.

Like, that is a real concern that I have, going forward, and I think many people have as—if interest rates go up, running up deficits at this time could cause a great deal of trouble in the future, and we've gone from a relatively balanced situation to heavily in debt in the last decade and a half. And, just like your household, you lose control of your finances,

you lose your house, you lose that car, you lose the perks, and your quality of life goes way down. And that is the direction that Manitoba was under just a few months ago.

Now, when an election happens, there is partisanship. When the election is over, people expect political parties and different levels of government to work together, and I agree with that, and, in fact, I've experienced that. When I was a federal government minister, one of my responsibilities included Manitoba infrastructure. And I am pleased to say that I had an excellent working relationship with the previous NDP government when it came down to the infrastructure monies. Now, I'm probably going to get whipped for saying this, but the fact is, what is good for political party A and political party B is always consistent—or with the people that they're supposed to represent. So you do the right thing for the people, it's good for everyone. And it doesn't matter where you are on the political spectrum. So some examples: We have a big event tonight, True Patriot Love for our veterans at the RBC Convention Centre. Well, that was federal money, and the former premier and I were, I believe, at that announcement.

* (16:10)

Ron Lemieux, who is no longer with us, was the Infrastructure minister; I had a very good working relationship with him. We did Plessis Road. We did the twinning of Trans Canada in Headingly. We did the water supply to—from Cartier to certain portions of CentrePort. And even before I was a minister we had other great investments such as the MTS Iceplex was a joint project. The Prime Minister came in and announced CentrePort. We were way ahead on that project than any other inland port, and I worked with Jim Flaherty ensure that Winnipeg was the one that was mentioned in the budget and no one else was—a little competition there, but, hey.

And that is, again, an example of an economic opportunity that regardless of your political stripe—and I say this to my Liberal friends federally—you know, the elections are over. Please, let's do what's good for the people of Manitoba. The—reaching the full potential of CentrePort is something, I think, this government will be able to do and the new western partnership will go a long way to doing that because we're a transportation hub it, makes sense to—it makes sense that we trade.

We have the only place in Canada where there's three class 1 railways. There's the Burlington

Northern, CP and CN lines merge here. We have a world-class airport and we have a highway system that goes right into the United States, into western Canada and, of course, we have the potential of a northern port in Churchill. Like, there's no better place to invest than in Manitoba, especially if you want to get your product around.

In regard to the people of Manitoba, I started by saying that I was going to be an institution. I think only in Manitoba at that time 20 years ago—and I hope the rest of Canada has come along—but only in Manitoba at that time could it have been possible that that institution for that quadriplegic 23-year-old punk canoeist, naturalist, that that institution would be the Parliament of Canada or the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba. That is the greatness of our province and we're all products of that greatness.

The budget will allow, I hope, every person regardless of who they are or where they come from, to reach their full potential as human beings, and in doing so live long, happy, prosperous lives while making Canada the greatest country in the world to live—and Manitoba being the best part of that country.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): This will be the first time that I've risen in this House to talk about a budget. I'm certainly not going to claim to know a lot about the numbers that go into it. So I'm not going to focus specifically on numbers that are there or aren't there. I'll talk in more general terms as to what I see and what I believe.

This budget has been called an NDP budget by some people in the press and some members in this Assembly. I can tell you that it certainly is not an NDP budget. There's things that are missing from this budget that would have been in an NDP budget, I'm sure. In fact, I know that there was commitments by the NDP for things that aren't in this budget that have been missed that leave people out. This government likes to talk about how inclusive they are, but it appears to me they've drawn a very definite line in the sand as to where their inclusiveness ends, because they certainly didn't include the North in this budget. They've left out pretty much any mention of commitments to the people of Manitoba who live in the North, and the last time I looked, those people were still Manitobans and deserve to have the attention of this government—the attention of this government in a good way.

So what's missing? Well, the previous NDP government had made commitments to spend money on roads in the North, those commitments are missing. But those commitments to spending money on roads involved much more than just building roads. It involved building people. It involved education and training so that people in the North could participate in the economy of Manitoba, could participate with some measure of equality in the world going forward.

This government has left them out. There's no commitment to training, no commitment to education. Some of the community benefit agreements that went along with building roads in the North were about so much more than just roads, although make no mistake about it, Madam Speaker, building roads so that people can access the benefits that the rest of us take for granted is a very important part of the future for those people in the North. The absence of that commitment by this government means that those people will not be able to participate. It means they will not have access. It means that their hope has been dashed.

There's no plan in this budget that I've seen and, again, I don't claim to be an expert in budgets, but there's no plan to address poverty, poverty being one of the biggest issues, one of the biggest problems in the North. With commitments that we'd made as the NDP government, there was things that were going to be done to help alleviate poverty in the North, things like the Northern food initiative that made healthy food available to people in the North, commitments to increase funding for that to help more people in the North access more healthy food.

That commitment would also lead to a lessening requirement for health care because if people had healthy food then they wouldn't be eating the junk food that's cheap to transport and that's prevalent in the North. And I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that when I was campaigning I went to some of those northern communities, and one lady we talked to in a grocery store in Tadoule Lake said, you know, the price of milk up here is terrible. It's \$8 a jug. So we asked her what was it previously before we brought in the Northern food initiative. Well, it was \$16 a jug then.

So we had more work to do, absolutely. You can't solve all the problems overnight, but we were on our way to helping those people achieve their future and being able to afford to achieve their future. By the numbers that we'd talked about

increasing that fund, it would have made more healthy food available for more people throughout the North. There's no mention in this budget about either maintaining that initiative or increasing it as it needs to be done.

* (16:20)

What else is missing from the North in this budget—or for the North in this budget? Well, UCN, University College of the North, and Frontier Collegiate Institute are vital parts of the North and vital parts of allowing northerners to succeed. A couple of weeks ago I was in Cranberry Portage to attend a function that was part of Frontier Collegiate, the Engaged Learners. And what that did was it took people from various northern communities and allowed them to get the skills to enter the job market so that they could then have an equal footing with people from other areas.

The other thing it did, was in the process of providing those people with job-ready skills, is it built houses, houses for other people in communities that Frontier Collegiate served. And I tell you, I was, in a previous life, as a safety representative, I'm very proud to host some of those people from the Engaged Learner program as they toured workplaces and got a better understanding of what was available to them if they could succeed.

With the absence of any talk about funding for Frontier Collegiate or for this very vital program, will those people still be able to succeed? Or will they be subject to abject poverty for the rest of their lives again?

Jobs are very important for the North. I come out of the mining industry. I was very fortunate to be able to work for a mining company for 40 years. That mining company now has one mine left in Flin Flon, which will soon be closed. And, again, the previous government had talked about increasing funding for exploration and doing some different things so that if we couldn't have a mine running immediately, that at least the refinery would be able to survive.

Once again, this government has failed to address any of those needs. As they're touted as being the friends of industry, they seem to not necessarily be the friends of northern industry. There's no mention of a resource development in their plan, in their budget. So I guess even northern businesses are left wanting with this budget, never mind northern people.

Just to change—well, maybe I'll stay with the North for a while yet. There's some other things that are missing.

You know, the government, previous government has been accused of spending money on roads only the year before the election. Unfortunately, that's not true. Or I guess I should say fortunately that's not true. The unfortunate part is that a lot of the members opposite have never been to the North. They really don't realize that there has been money spent on roads going forward.

I'm sure my friend from Thompson can attest to the fact that some of the roads in his constituency have seen money spent on them over the years.

But there's more to do. Highway 10 leading into Flin Flon has gone through a multi-year project of upgrading so that it's safer for people and safer for industry.

Now, we'd made commitments, the NDP government had made commitments to highways such as 391, which is a single-access road leading to Leaf Rapids and Lynn Lake and points north. There's no mention in this budget about maintaining the funding that was committed by us.

There's no mention about funding for Highway 39, there's no mention about funding for Highway 392, which are the single-access highways for Snow Lake, Manitoba.

All of these communities have been left out of this budget again.

One of the really sad things that we've seen lately in northern communities is young people without hope. There's no mention in this budget about funding for sports facilities, particularly in the North. There's no mention about recreation for young people to give them something towards hope.

In my home community of Flin Flon, we have some aging sports facilities that used to be funded primarily by the mining company that now doesn't fund things anymore. Things like our pool in Flin Flon need major upgrades to remain viable. There's no mention of funding for sports, recreation. Again, sorely lacking in this budget for people in the North.

Something that's important for people everywhere in this province is the minimum wage. It's not a living wage. Certainly, if you live in the North, it's far from a living wage. The lack of commitment to raise that minimum wage going forward is another blow to people in the North as it is a blow to poor

people everywhere in this province, but more so even in the North where the cost of food, the cost of transportation, the cost of housing is dramatically higher than it is in the south, and the jobs that are left are minimum-wage jobs. Again, this government has failed to address that.

Moving on to jobs and workers throughout the province, there's some things that are in this budget that concern me as a former worker, a former union guy. I'm not sure what problem it is that this government hopes to address by some of the things that they have included in the budget. They call it forced unionization. The project labour agreements have worked well for this province. They've worked well for this province not just under NDP governments but also under Conservative governments. Flin Flon smelter project, any number of infrastructure projects that have worked well, have come in on time, on budget, have worked well for union and non-union workers who were on those projects.

It appears to me that along with the proposed changes to the project labour agreements is the plan by this government to change the certification vote. Again, it seems to be a solution looking for a problem because there hasn't been a problem. We've had perhaps one of the longest periods of labour stability that any province can have because we've had things in place that protected workers' rights that now appear to be, if not under attack, at least in question. Working people in this province deserve better from this government and from any government. It's working people that have built this province with the sweat of their labour. For them now to be left behind is unacceptable.

There appears to be any number of things that are looking for a problem that doesn't exist. The New West Partnership, it talks about trade and removing barriers to trade. I believe that some of those barriers that this government hopes to do away with are things like workers' rights, things like labour legislation, things like health and safety legislation that I personally have fought long and hard for to make sure that workers in this province have the best regulations and the best protection of any worker in this country, and I won't stand by while that gets attacked by this government.

We have talked a little bit about community benefit agreements. There's so much that's missing from this budget. The government talks about their Yes! North, and yet they left my friend from The Pas

to wait for an hour while she found out what that Yes! North program was. Well, that was yesterday; today we're still waiting. Today we've heard nothing about Yes! North. We don't know what it is.

* (16:30)

Yes! North means no to good jobs. *[interjection]* I've no doubt you do.

The Manitoba government today says that this budget and this government they'll do better. Better for who, I'm left to ask—*[interjection]*—better for their friends, absolutely, not better for average working Manitobans, not better for Manitobans that struggle with poverty, not better for single mothers, not better for anybody other than their business friends, the 1 per cent that already is doing quite well without this government's help. It's time that this government relooked at what they've proposed and included all Manitobans in the future.

So what's missing? I guess when I first came to this Legislature, I listened to a Throne Speech that was very short on details, didn't really lay out a lot. Now I've listened to my first budget, which also seems to be very thin, light on details on what is going to happen to Manitobans going forward.

Some of the things that we need to watch for from a worker's perspective is the insidious creep of privatization in services provided by this government. In a different life, we used to use things that were called weasel words that we needed to watch out for because they didn't really mean what they thought. What you thought they meant, they meant something different. And we've seen those words in this budget, things like social impact, yes, things like fair value for money, efficiencies, those are the things that predictable, all the bingo words that we heard for the last week. Those are all words that mean cuts. They're cuts and they're things that we talked about prior to the budget that we were concerned with and we got accused of fear mongering.

I can remember back in the days when a federal PC government first brought in free trade agreements, and working people, union people, NDP people, people that understood the concept stood up and said, wait this is going to be bad for Canadian workers, this is going to be bad for Canadian people. And we were accused of fear mongering at that point in time, and now all the things that we raised as being concerns back then have come to pass. Our jobs have gone; our chances of competing have

gone; we compete towards the bottom. As this government wishes to pursue its agenda with TPP, once again workers' jobs will be under attack.

We can't have that. I came here to fight for Manitobans, to fight for people in the North, and I will do that.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris): Madam Speaker, I always appreciate the opportunity to speak on a provincial budget, and in this instance the very first provincial-Progressive Conservative budget in almost 17 years, and it's a budget—and I think the title of the budget really says it all. And, as much as the—my colleague across the way would like me to sit down after reading the title of *Correcting the Course*, I think I would add a few more words, partly just to put some facts on the record, facts that, unfortunately, members opposite seem to find foreign to themselves.

It's always interesting, Madam Speaker, listening to members opposite who, just a few short weeks ago, were themselves government, and it's an amazing—the transformation that this—the party that led this province for 17 years has suddenly become a glass-half-full party. It's a party of negativism, it's a party of fear, and it's a party of hollow, empty words that constantly talk of hidden agendas, that constantly try to fear monger, that, you know, the member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum) suggesting that, you know, should we form government that every civil servant in this land will be laid off. And yet this morning, on the drive in, the president of the Manitoba government employees' union was actually heaping praise on this budget, indicating that she was well—she was prepared to work, she was well prepared to work with our government. And we are prepared to work with her as a representative of the Manitoba government employees' union to make sure that we are there to fight for those front-line services.

You know, Madam Deputy Speaker, it's always interesting, too, you know, the interim Leader of the Official Opposition (Ms. Marcelino) led question period today off with a question about the seniors' property tax credit. And yet she seems to forget some comments she made to Bartley Kives on CBC just yesterday, and I'm quoting, her party, that being the NDP, agrees with preventing wealthier seniors from receiving a property tax rebate brought in by the member for Fort—or the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger) government.

So, Madam Speaker, they're—on the one hand, they're saying that they agree with the income-tested policy that this government has brought in as part of Budget 2016-17, and today, in the House, the interim leader stands up and says she disagrees. So it's a classic case of have their cake and eat it too, and it's just another example of this government's—or that former government's attitude when it comes to information. They are never concerned about the truth or the veracity of their comments.

Madam Speaker, it's unfortunate that there's such negativity across the way when it comes to this budget, a budget that reinvests in Manitoba, a budget that sets that course and corrects that course led by 17 years of fiscal ineptitude by members across the way. I'm really surprised that they're not, in speech after speech, actually heralding the elimination of bracket creep. And it's just fascinating just on that one subject alone in that—and I will give absolute full credit to the New Democratic Party, but in this case, actually, the New Democratic Party of Saskatchewan who, almost 20 years ago, said that indexing the tax system, the income tax system, the provincial income tax system, that there was no single tax policy that provided a greater benefit to those individuals on low and fixed income.

So, again, that was the NDP in Saskatchewan. And so, then, subsequent to that and that policy being implemented in Saskatchewan about 20 years ago, we find ourselves under the benevolent yoke of socialism here in Manitoba for 17 years, and during that entire time, they had that opportunity for 17 straight budgets to index this system, and every single time they passed—they bypassed that opportunity.

I remember in one of my former lives, Madam Speaker, as the provincial director of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, I met with the member for St. Boniface when he was the Finance minister. And I brought to his attention the idea, in 2006, I believe it was, that he—that indexing the tax system was the right thing to do, was something that small business community supported in terms of returning more money into the hands of individuals but, more importantly, it was a policy that benefited those individuals on low and fixed incomes. You know what, and it was a policy brought in by their neighbours, the NDP in Saskatchewan. You would think that win-win-win would translate into something coming in in their upcoming budget. And what the then-Finance minister, the member for St. Boniface said to me still resonates to this day.

And he argued to me the reason why the NDP wouldn't bring in the automatic indexation of tax brackets was that organizations like the chambers, like the CFIBs, like the taxpayers, wouldn't give them political credit on an annual basis, that it—if it became automatic, that if it simply occurred every January 1st automatically just based on the previous year's inflationary rate, that people would take it for granted and they themselves wouldn't get the necessary political credit.

* (16:40)

So, by doling it out piece by piece every couple of years, increasing it by \$100 here, maybe \$100 here, skipping a few years, they can maximize that political credit. And it's that kind of political cynicism, Madam Speaker, that led to the situation we have today with members opposite valuing or promoting the idea that the only way we can solve a very large and a very complex issue we have here in the province of Manitoba, and that being poverty, is somehow minimum wage.

And minimum wage, Madam Speaker, if minimum wage was the solution to poverty in this province of Manitoba, there would be no poverty in this province. The members opposite, I believe, under their mandate, almost doubled minimum wage, and yet during the backdrop of an almost doubling of minimum wage under their successive terms in office, we actually saw a sliding in terms of wages earned by Manitobans. We saw Manitoba actually becoming the child poverty capital of Canada under their mandate. One in four children in this province actually lives in poverty, hardly a record that—and it's no wonder that members opposite, when they get up in their throne speeches or in their questions in the House or in their budget speech, never make reference to it because it is a shameful record. And yet they get up and they say, you know what? You need to increase minimum wage, because somehow minimum wage is going to lift individuals out of poverty.

And what they never talk about, Madam Speaker, is something—and maybe it's just because they don't understand the simple economics of how the tax system works, and we'll take members opposite at their word, that somehow, if their fear-mongering had been successful in the last election and that Manitobans were somehow fooled once again into re-voting for an NDP government, they would have increased the minimum wage by 50 cents an hour, and had they have done that,

according to the Canadian Revenue Agency, a full 40 per cent of a minimum wage earner's increased wage as a result of that increase, would actually go to government—40 per cent.

So, really, it was always interesting, Madam Speaker, that when you talk about minimum wage, they never talk about the fact that government itself is a beneficiary of when minimum wage goes up because of that clawback, because of the fact that we have, in Manitoba, under the NDP, one of the lowest basic personal exemptions in the entire country.

And I've always thought it was interesting, Madam Speaker, if the argument is that you can't live on minimum wage, and I absolutely agree with that argument that an individual—I simply—I could not raise—my wife and I, we couldn't raise our three children in the—if we simply earned minimum wage, and I take that as a fact.

And yet, if I can't raise my family and if you can't live on minimum wage, if the choices often comes between, you know, putting food in your fridge or paying rent, which is the stories that they tell across the way, yet, somehow, under their mandate, they had no problem taxing individuals on minimum wage, which I always thought was quite interesting, that even a person on minimum wage, a person who simply can't live and exist on that wage, still must return a portion of those wages back to the NDP under their misguided policies.

The other point that they never talk about when they talk about increasing minimum wage, Madam Speaker, is that minimum wage actually has a detrimental impact on those fixed-income earners, in that minimum wage actually does nothing positive towards fixed-income earners; so, seniors that they've talked about where they defend today in the House, they actually threw those seniors under the bus year after year after year by raising the minimum wage and ignoring the plight of those individuals on fixed income.

I remember once, Madam Speaker, the former—the member from Minto, when he was minister of—I believe they had the audacity to actually call the department the Department of Competitiveness, which I thought was always a bit of a—the premier actually having a little bit of fun with Manitobans. The little tongue-in-cheek ministry that he created, it was a one-year experiment, when they realized that it was just a—it was just too audacious even to Manitobans to suggest that you have a minister of

Competitiveness when we are not a competitive province under the NDP.

So the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) was out and about in my riding. Actually, in the member for Midland's (Mr. Pedersen) riding there is a roadside stand there, one of these summer stands, and he stopped by, and the individual recognized the member for Minto, the minister, as a government official, and they said to them, you know, the minimum wage is a detriment to my business. It's a detriment and a disincentive to me to hire these young people, and there should be some other way to improve that situation. And it is very difficult for I, as a small-business owner; my shop or—my roadside stand is only open for a few months a year to actually absorb this cost.

And so what was the minister, what was the NDP's advice to this small-business owner? Well, just simply raise the price of your services.

So, Madam Speaker, who really comes ahead in all of that if the solution is we are going to raise your wages and we just encourage businesses simply raise the cost of their services to offset any increased labour costs? And, really, who's further ahead? Nobody. And back to my original comment about those individuals on fixed incomes, whether it be seniors, whether it be a individual who, say, has a disability, is on disability income, those individuals on fixed incomes actually get further and further behind as their fixed income has less and less purchasing power, all under the philosophy of members opposite.

Madam Speaker, it's also interesting, too, that, again, under the former government, in 2007, they recognized that our tax system was not competitive, and they laid out a bold vision, a five-year plan. We're going to actually take those tax brackets, and we're going to increase them over a five-year period from the current \$67,000 to \$72,000. Again, it was an effort to recognize that the tax system plays a role, not the role, but a role, in helping low- and fixed-income individuals, and it is an important component of our economy, returning money back into the pockets of individuals to ensure that their buying power remains constant as their wages rise.

And so they put forward this bold initiative, this five-year plan, and after, oh, two weeks after the budget came down, their five-year plan 'ludded'-landed on the floor like so many other promises that the members opposite made, and landed with quite a thud. And we actually have, under them, members

opposite, there has been actually no increases in the tax brackets since 2007, so almost—we're almost 10 full years where there has been absolutely no movement in the tax brackets. And so here we are, Madam Speaker, where the top tax bracket in Manitoba, and I'll let members opposite correct me if I'm wrong because I'm going from numbers off the top of my head, but I believe it's \$67,000 is the top bracket here in Manitoba. Anyone who earns \$1 over \$67,000 is, according to members opposite, under their wisdom, that you are a—the highest income earner. You must pay the highest income tax that we possibly have, and we must apply that to you as an individual.

And yet you go over into neighbouring Saskatchewan, for example, and their highest tax bracket, I believe, is about \$117,000, and I'll allow any of my other colleagues in the House on either side to correct that. I may be wrong in the sense that actually could be higher. And not only do they start taxing individuals at a higher bracket, but they actually tax them at a lower rate.

And the reason why that differential has grown in our tax system that back in 1999 when members opposite assumed office, both ourselves and Saskatchewan actually had a fairly similar tax structure in terms of rates and brackets. We actually even had a slightly higher basic personal exemption, Madam Speaker, but, as the years progressed, Saskatchewan, again, under the former, their former NDP government, brought in a policy of taxation where they took that inflationary rate, they applied it to the tax system every year to make sure that those individuals, their ratepayers, their taxpayers, were protected from the rate of inflation. And now that's why you have such a large gap.

So, while members opposite can be very dismissive of what we started here, they have to remember the cumulative impact of increasing an individual's buying power year after year after year, that this year's inflationary rate will be applied to the increase next year, and next year's rate will be applied to that increase, and it will compound year after year after year. It is a long-term policy with long-term goals, Madam Speaker. And if it wasn't—if members opposite had simply done what they should've done when they took office, if they had simply done what the NDP had done next door in Saskatchewan some 20 years ago, we would be in a far different position. But, again, they didn't, and for my colleagues and my newer colleagues, who may not fully understand, perhaps, it wasn't just their

insatiable desire to receive that political credit for the tax credits, but it's actually, interestingly enough, a former NDP minister, Minister Sale, who said in opposition, that bracket creep was essentially pickpocketing the taxpayers of Manitoba.

* (16:50)

And I remember once filing a FIPPA with the Department of Finance under that very subject. The Department of Finance at that time, and we're going back to probably 2006, 2007, estimated that the NDP had fleeced taxpayers to approximately—to the tune of approximately \$100 million by not indexing the tax system to inflation. So, you know, an educated guess, Madam Speaker, you know, 2007 to 2016, you could conservatively estimate that they probably fleeced Manitobans and denied Manitobans probably closer to about a quarter of a billion dollars' worth of tax revenues. So the classic, you know, they would give at one hand and they would take with the other. But, of course, under the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger), and over the last several years, it was actually more take than give.

And so, while they stand up, Madam Speaker, in their righteous anger and talk about the tax system, the changes, the income testing of the seniors property tax credit, a change, again, and I will quote the interim Leader of the Official Opposition (Ms. Marcelino), saying that her party agrees with preventing wealthier seniors from receiving a property tax rebate brought in by her government. And that was Bartley Kives, CBC, posted May 31st. So that was yesterday.

And so, while they, you know, while they feign outrage about the change in that policy, their, again, silence when they apply an 8 per cent PST where none existed before to those same seniors' insurance policies, Madam Speaker—you know, your house insurance is probably averaging at least, you know, ballpark, at least \$1,000 a person. So, you know, that's another \$80, \$80 to \$100 that individual has to find. But, again, you don't hear members opposite ever mention that in their speeches when they stand up and defend individuals on fixed and low incomes.

You know what, Madam Speaker, you never hear members opposite stand up and defend their policies when it came to, in their 2011 or 2012 budget, where they increased the vehicle registration fees by \$70. They don't mention that. And, again, how does that impact someday on a low and fixed income?

They talk about minimum wage earners, Madam Speaker. A minimum wage earner doesn't benefit for their increases in having to pay and possibly pay for the cost of taking their vehicle to their place of employment.

Madam Speaker, this is our government, and this government over here is proud to bring forward a budget that, again, sets that course as a long-term course. You've heard my colleagues say it; you've heard the Premier (Mr. Pallister) say it; and the Finance Minister say it. We do not underestimate the monumental task ahead of us as a new government. But we received a clear mandate from the people, a mandate that members opposite seem to have an inability to accept when, day after day, question after question, they stand up in this House and they say, why won't you fulfill our commitments that Manitobans so soundly rejected on April 19th?

And yet, despite Manitobans so soundly and historically rejecting, on April 19th, they stand up and they keep perpetuating their failed policies, Madam Speaker, policies that led to almost 11,000 children in the care of Child and Family Services—and I believe 90 per cent of those children are First Nations, Metis or of Inuit background—policies that led to the fact that, according to Stats Canada, one in four children now live in poverty; facts that our economy simply isn't performing to the national standard and it's closer to ninth than it is to eighth.

And it will be a monumental task, Madam Speaker, to dig ourselves out of this hole, but Budget 2016-17 is a start to that movement. It is a budget that is supporting the commitments that we made to Manitobans, commitments that Manitobans supported and gave us a mandate to bring forward; a mandate to bring forward protection of front-line services; to ensure that the educational opportunities for our children are enhanced so that we no longer are at the bottom when it comes to literacy, writing and reading comprehension; that we will ensure that Manitoba families and children are protected under this government and under its services that we provide.

Madam Speaker, Manitobans are tired of the dichotomy that was presented by members opposite—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Wab Kinew (Fort Rouge): Well, Madam Speaker, I recognize that, you know, the hour of the end of the day is running near; you know, people are

starting to think about other things. So maybe I can end on a more positive note than the previous speaker, bring some enthusiasm here at the end of the day.

I would like to begin by—*[interjection]* Oh, yes, thank you, honourable member from Flin Flon. Glad you got my back.

I'd like to, you know, congratulate the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) on a realistic level, and with all sincerity, I was genuinely impressed by his gift of the shoes to the newcomer family here in Winnipeg. I think that, you know, the—generosity is a paramount virtue for all of humanity, and, regardless of partisan affiliation, anytime that I see an act of generosity, I do like to celebrate that. So I do offer my congratulations.

A little more cynically, I'd like to also offer my congratulations to the Finance Minister for tabling a tax hike in his first budget, and also for tabling a deficit in his first budget, which, given all that we've heard, all the demonization that the members of the government side have been trying to portray and, you know, characterize the NDP by, it's now very interesting to see that their record is one of bringing forward a tax hike and bringing forward a deficit.

So, again, I just want to start my remarks by pointing that out. You know, the whole campaign was characterized by these guys have a problem with deficits, these guys have a problem with tax hikes, but now they've brought forward a tax hike, they've brought forward a deficit. So, congratulations, that is now your record; regardless of how you want to spin it, you guys have to own that. That's all yours now, and so I hope that the next, you know, few budgets that we see do actually see a marked improvement in the outcomes that will be felt by all Manitobans. I'm a little skeptical based on what I saw and heard yesterday.

So it's based on that that, you know, I'm very happy to second the amendment brought forward by the official Leader of the Opposition. I'm very happy to second that amendment for a few reasons, first and foremost, because so many people were left out of the budget speech that we heard yesterday, and we heard, you know, the official Leader of the Opposition quite eloquently articulate many of the groups that were left out, be they northerners, be they Manitobans of all cultural communities who are passionate about reconciliation and, you know, the

list goes on and on, Manitobans on minimum wage, for instance.

I'm also happy to second the amendment because I believe that the current course that is being proposed by the government will actually exacerbate income inequality here in Manitoba, and, you know, I do believe that income inequality is one of the defining challenges of our times and we ought to be taking steps towards remedying that phenomena.

And, finally, I, you know, think that given the fact that the government-side members campaigned all this spring on attacking deficits and attacking tax hikes, and then they now bring forward a budget which tables a deficit and tables a tax hike, it creates a credibility problem for them. So I'd actually table this amendment as an act of good faith on their behalf to try and help them with this new credibility gap that they have created for themselves.

I realize I might be going above and beyond in those, you know, sentiments, but again I'm just trying to help out and, you know, do my part, that's reconciliation in action, Madam Speaker. The member from St. Boniface is right when he says that's reconciliation in action, so I'm proud that we can bring the word reconciliation into this discussion on the budget because the only time that I saw it in any of the budget documents, the speech documents, the Estimates documents, was the use of reconciliation in the accounting sense of the word where we're talking about reconciling different budgets from year to year. But, of course—

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.

CORRIGENDUM

On May 31, 2016, page 313, second column, third paragraph, should have read:

Our government will increase supports for residential-care direct service workers through the Community Living disABILITY Services. And we will support Child and Family Services programs with FASD Connections, COACH Expansion, StreetReach expansion, the Families First-Point Douglas pilot project and Resource Assistance for Youth through the Safe Suites pilot project.

The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba Debates and Proceedings
are also available on the Internet at the following address:

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