

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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authority of
The Honourable Daryl Reid
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, August 27, 2013

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

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

PETITIONS

Provincial Road 520 Renewal

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The rural municipalities of Lac du Bonnet and Alexander are experiencing record growth due especially to an increasing number of Manitobans retiring in cottage country.

(2) The population in the RM of Lac du Bonnet grows exponentially in the summer months due to increased cottage use.

(3) Due to population growth, Provincial Road 520 experiences heavy traffic, especially during the summer months.

(4) PR 520 connects cottage country to the Pinawa Hospital and as such is frequently used by emergency medical services to transport patients.

(5) PR 520 is in such poor condition that there are serious concerns about its safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to recognize the serious safety concerns of Provincial Road 520 and to address its poor condition by prioritizing its renewal.

This petition is signed by G. Maroons, K. Milne, R. Milne and many, many more fine Manitobans.

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

Provincial Sales Tax Increase—Referendum

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

Through Bill 20, the provincial government wants to increase the retail sales tax, known as the PST, by one per cent without legally required referendum.

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition's signed by P. Koss, J. Ziprick, K. Holt and many more Manitobans.

Hydro Capital Development—NFAT Review

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by A. Wiens, R. Friesen, K. Karlowky and many more fine Manitobans.

**Provincial Sales Tax Increase—
Cross-Border Shopping**

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

This petition is signed by R. Ashton, L. Stoodley, W. Klassen and many other fine Manitobans.

Provincial Sales Tax Increase—Referendum

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition is submitted on behalf of J. Chambers, P. See, K. Hildebrand and many other fine Manitobans.

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by K. Plohman, D. Smith, M. Morantz and many, many other Manitobans.

**Provincial Sales Tax Increase—
Cross-Border Shopping**

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

* (13:40)

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

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

This petition is signed by B. Dyck, J. Graydon, G. Larivière and many other fine Manitobans.

Applied Behaviour Analysis Services

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by M. Taillieu, W. Taillieu, L. Gavrailoff and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Provincial Sales Tax Increase— Cross-Border Shopping

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

And this is signed by R. Matthews, H. Gilleshammer, K. Deslauriers and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Applied Behaviour Analysis Services

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The provincial government broke a commitment to support families of children with a

diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder, including timely diagnosis and access to necessary treatment such as applied behavioural analysis, also known as ABA services.

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition is signed by J. Malanchuk, B. Vedoya, D. Carrière and many more fine Manitobans.

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

And the background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by J. Javier, D. Stepic, T. Dowhan and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Provincial Sales Tax Increase—Referendum

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition signed by J. Ross, C. Asham, E. Porter and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Hydro Capital Development—NFAT Review

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

* (13:50)

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by W. Taillieu, M. Taillieu, L. Gavriloff and many, many others.

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

(3) The \$21-billion capital plan requires Manitoba Hydro to increase domestic electricity rates by up to 4 per cent annually for the next

20 years and possibly more if export opportunities fail to materialize.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by J. McLaughlin, D. Bilodeau, K. Coughlin and many other Manitobans.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today family members of the honourable member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum), his father, Reverend Dr. Walter Allum, and his daughters, Sarah Jean Allum and Hilary Allum.

And also with us today in the public gallery we have Ray Burns and Phoebe Burns who are the guests of the honourable member for St. Johns (Mr. Mackintosh).

And also in the public gallery is Mark Sefton who is the guest of the honourable member for Brandon-East (Mr. Caldwell).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Deputy Premier

Email Correspondence

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, my questions pertain to the unfortunate comments of the Deputy Premier (Mr. Robinson) concerning the alleged ignorance of do-good white people. The minister responded with essentially what was a non-apology and has claimed that his remarks are not racist in nature. The Premier has explained that the minister has done some good things, which we do not dispute, but then he follows with no action whatsoever.

I'm genuinely sorry that the minister has experienced racism as a young man, but that's not an excuse for repeating the behaviour. The minister has stated that he did not believe his comment was racist. He has said, quote: I don't think so. I've heard worse

things said about me. That does not justify his comments.

Does the Premier acknowledge that his deputy's comments were racist in nature?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Premier has withdrawn his comments. He's expressed regret and he's apologized for it. This is a very significant contrast to the Leader of the Opposition; when he makes inappropriate comments he flat out denies them. And so I want to give credit to the Deputy Premier for stepping up, acknowledging that he could have had a better choice of his words even though he was concerned about the fundraising activity with respect to this particular agency. But he did step up and he did acknowledge that he could have had a better choice of words and he did apologize for it, and I think he set a good example in doing that.

Removal From Cabinet Request

Mr. Pallister: I'd encourage the Premier to deal in the reality and not fantasy, Mr. Speaker. It is a never-ending cycle. We cannot here in this province or anywhere in this world combat racism effectively if we allow racism to be used as an excuse for racism.

Now, the Premier is making inexcusable excuses. He's deeply misguided in doing so. He has said it was a private communication of a—and why would a private communication of a racist nature be blacked out at all in a freedom of information response? Should we be expected to accept the argument here that racism in private is acceptable behaviour for a senior government minister? The Premier seems to believe that the solution to his problem is damage control or deflection, more privacy, more limited access to information, perhaps more black markers. But that is not the answer.

Will he do the right thing today, show some leadership and remove from Cabinet his Deputy Premier?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, unlike probably any other member in this House, this particular member of the Legislature, the Deputy Premier and the Minister for Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, has been a champion for victims of violence since the earliest days of his presence in the House and even before that. He was one of the first people that met with the family of Helen Betty Osborne to acknowledge their suffering and the loss of their loved one. He was the one that championed that

cause over many years, and now we have a Helen Betty Osborne foundation.

He was one of the first leaders—political leaders elected anywhere in Canada that championed the case of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and moved that issue forward. And now today, across the country, including in Manitoba, we have police departments working with communities to do proper investigations, and they're starting to get to the cause of how these women have disappeared. And where they see the sufficient evidence, they're bringing charges, and there's much more attention being paid to this issue.

This is a man that has provided leadership across this country. I think we can all, in this Legislature, be very proud of what he's accomplished on behalf of all of us.

Mr. Pallister: Whatever work I may have done over a decade in my life for matrimonial property rights for Aboriginal women does not entitle me to make a negative or disparaging comment about any race, any person of a different creed or colour. That is not an excuse that has any justification to it.

The Premier is setting the bar so low that his Cabinet members cannot possibly get under it. The Deputy Premier (Mr. Robinson) has said, and I quote: What I'm talking about is a general statement, and I'm entitled to say that.

He is not. That is stereotyping. That is an oversimplified opinion, a prejudiced attitude and uncritical judgment, and Manitobans deserve more than that. They deserve more than an Education Minister that labels her opponents on a bill as homophobes. It deserves more than a remark by the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) directed to me yesterday during my question, calling me a homophobe. It deserves better than that.

We all deserve better than that in this province and in this House. The Premier's inaction invites a repeat of this represent—reprehensible behaviour, Mr. Speaker. We need a better workplace here; I agree with your observations.

Will the Premier do something to better this workplace? Will he remove his Deputy Premier from his Cabinet today?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Premier, as I said earlier, has made and continues to make a very significant contribution to reducing the risk for missing and murdered women throughout this

country. He chaired the Aboriginal affairs ministers meeting in Winnipeg this spring where a unanimous consensus was reached that there needs to be a national inquiry on missing and murdered women. This set the stage for the premiers to discuss this at the Council of the Federation in Niagara-on-the-Lake just this last month. And for the first time in the history of Canada, the premiers unanimously, and I mean unanimously, all 13 of them, supported a national inquiry on missing and murdered women within this country. It was because of the leadership of Deputy Premier Robinson that that occurred.

The leader opposite stands up here with all his sanctimony; when he makes disparaging comments in this House and is called on that, he denies it. When he does it a second time, he denies it. He doesn't take responsibility for his behaviour. He has such a sense of immunity from any accountability for his behaviour, and at the same time, he thinks he can levy judgment on other people. Mr. Speaker, that's—

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

Deputy Premier Email Correspondence

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): An email received last week revealed a racist comment made by the Deputy Premier. He referred to do-good white people when referring to volunteers and the women who run Osborne House. He then, on APTN, refused to apologize, suggesting it was because we know there is a lot of those people around—another racist remark, Mr. Speaker.

He then sent out a statement with an insincere apology late Friday. To top it all off, yesterday, the minister appeared to retract his apology by defending his racist comments because he believes he is entitled to make such comments.

* (14:00)

Mr. Speaker, wouldn't it be more becoming of a minister of the Crown to take steps to stop the chain of racism rather than perpetuate it by claiming he is entitled to say such things?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): That's where the Deputy Premier deserves credit. He recognized that his words could have been chosen more carefully. He regretted the expression of those words, whether private or otherwise, and he apologized for that, which puts the bar far higher for him than any member on the opposite side of the House who have

never admitted, ever, that they've ever done anything wrong. They've never admitted it, that they've made an inappropriate comment, ever, in their lives, and certainly not in the Legislature. That is a denial of reality from what we've seen in the House. And Mr. Speaker, you know full well that we've had to do a lot of work to bring this House under a better code of conduct, and that is something that we all have to do.

I say this to the member opposite, that the very reason that we're here in this Legislature is to try to further human rights, not only in this province but across the country, which is, for example, why we put Bill 18 forward on antibullying, which is why we think it's important for the public to have a say on that and which is why we will continue to find ways to move forward. And where we make errors we will take responsibility for them and then find ways to improve the way we behave ourselves.

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

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, racism in any and all of its forms is not acceptable, including racism inflicted on the minister or anyone else in our society. But the Deputy Premier (Mr. Robinson) obviously feels he is entitled to say whatever he wants, including racist remarks.

Does the Premier agree with the Deputy Premier that he is entitled to further inflict racist remarks on others?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I believe I've addressed this question. The Deputy Premier made an apology for his regrettable remarks. That sets a high—'farstar'—higher bar than any member of the opposite side of the House has ever achieved for any negative comment they've ever made, either under their breath or on the record, in public or in private. We've never seen them ever accept that they could possibly say anything wrong.

There's never been an error that they have made. It's always been something relating to something else. It's always been a form of denial, and this form of denial—they said that we should stop building the floodway, and then they denied that they're opposed to the floodway. They said that they're in favour of Bill 18 on antibullying, but they're not prepared to hear the public speak on Bill 18 or let the bill come to debate in the Legislature.

Look, everybody is a human being, and everybody's going to make errors from time to time. It's how you deal with that. When a member stands

up and apologizes for that, that means he's done the right thing.

Removal From Cabinet Request

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, it's time to stop the chain of racism, not encourage it. By allowing this minister to get away with such comments sends a message to Manitobans by this government that it's okay to do that.

Will the Premier do the right thing today, Mr. Speaker, and remove his minister from Cabinet?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I know the member from Tuxedo has a carefully prepared question. The member who made the inappropriate comments has taken responsibility for them. He has expressed his regret about them, and he has apologized for them. But he still continues to be a champion for people that are the victims of violence, particularly women. He still continues to be a champion for missing and murdered women across this country. That contribution has made a signal difference in the way police do their business across this country.

I wish the members opposite had somebody that was championing a cause as noble as that on their side of the House. I wish the members opposite could admit that they could possibly say something wrong and apologize for it. I wish that they could do that. I do know that we make errors on this side of the House, and when there's an error made, we fess up to it, we take responsibility for it, we apologize for it, and then, with that full reality in front of us, we try to do better.

Deputy Premier Email Correspondence

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, in an email obtained through FIPPA, the following quote by the Deputy Premier was blacked out, and I quote: "It also further demonstrates the ignorance of do-good white people without giving it a second thought." End quote.

The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act office said its decision to redact the minister's inflammatory comment was covered under section 23(1)(a) of the act, to protect against material that would, and I quote: "reveal advice, opinions, proposals, recommendations, analyses or policy options developed by or for the public body or a minister."

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask this Premier: Is this, in fact, the advice or opinion of his government?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Again, Mr. Speaker, it's very clear that the minister has taken responsibility for the comments and apologized for them. So he's regretting what has been said.

And it is also very clear under freedom of information and 'protectioncy' privacy act, which the member has quoted, 23.1(a), that there is the possibility of redacting advice, opinions, proposals, recommendations, analysis or policy options developed by or for the public body or a minister. But that, quite frankly, is beside the point because the minister has now accepted responsibility for that comment, has apologized for that comment and, therefore, he has tried to correct the record and he's done that publicly in a very responsible way.

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to have to take that answer as a yes to my question.

I find the whole sad situation quite disappointing. The Deputy Premier (Mr. Robinson) continued in an interview with APTN to say, and I quote: Because you and I know there are a lot of those types around. That is straight stereotyping. He was referencing his initial quote.

So I ask the Premier again: Is this, in fact, the advice or opinion of his government or of his own?

Mr. Selinger: The short answer, Mr. Speaker, is no.

Removal From Cabinet Request

Mr. Ewasko: The Deputy Premier goes on to then excuse himself of what he said by saying that he feels entitled to make racist comments about non-Aboriginals. Mr. Speaker, does the minister or the Premier realize the Pandora's box they might have opened with this very disappointing statement? If another person comes from an abusive family situation, does it give them the right to abuse others? If a person was bullied, does it give that person the right to become a bully? Of course not.

Will the Premier do the right thing today and remove the Deputy Premier from his Cabinet?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the member knows the answer to that question, and the short answer is no because we have a person here that has a stellar career of defending people that have been the victims of violence, and I have to say he championed those causes long before they were popular with the media or the public. He championed those causes because of his own experiences, because of his contact with families that have been victims of violence and families that needed support, and he's done that

consistency over many decade. I challenge any other member of the House to show a record like that.

Deputy Premier Email Correspondence

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): Yesterday the Premier defended the email exchange between the Deputy Premier and a political advisor on Aboriginal women's issues. In response to the email exchange, the Premier stated, and I quote: It was never intended for public consumption nor was it intended to single out anybody in the community. This is a very serious issue and Manitobans are demanding a better response from this Premier. To indicate he believes it's just an error in judgment is unsettling.

Does this Premier believe his Deputy Premier is not responsible for his words because an error in judgment was actually the fault of a political advisor breaching government email protocol?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): The short answer, Mr. Speaker, is no. The member took full responsibility for the words that he put on the record. He apologized for those words. Then, again, I just have to say, that's a far higher standard of responsibility, both public and private, than any member on the opposite side of the House has demonstrated when they've made untoward and unfortunate and disparaging comments about anybody. They've always gone into flat-out denial about that. That may be their approach.

The approach on this side of the House—and it's an approach that's reflected on how we try to do business. There was a time, for example, when an error in the health-care system used to be covered up by members opposite when they were in power. We now have a critical incident process where that kind of an error is investigated, a report is made and a disclosure is made all for the very purpose of learning from mistakes, to be able to do things better for the future. We've done that on an individual basis. We've promoted those policies in terms of good public policy and that is the way forward in a system where things aren't perfect every single day.

* (14:10)

Mrs. Rowat: The Premier yesterday stated, and I quote: The Deputy Premier's statement was made in a communication—a private communication to a staffer. Yet, the email exchange took place during regular hours, work hours and was sent through regular government email addresses. Mr. Speaker,

this is a government minister in a position of authority giving advice to a political advisor through government resources on government time.

Mr. Speaker, were the minister, his senior staff and his political advisor not clear in knowing their comments, at minimal, were representing the NDP government's policy position on domestic violence?

Mr. Selinger: Again, Mr. Speaker, they're pursuing a line of questioning which ignores the fact that the minister has taken responsibility for his comments and apologized for them. In the—if that were not the case, their line of questioning might have some more serious credibility to it, but in the absence of them ever taking responsibility for having ever done anything wrong in their entire careers—it's always been flat-out denial from day one; whether it's public or private matters, it's just denial, denial, denial, denial, and then if there's any doubt about it, more denial.

On this side of the House, the member has taken responsibility for his comments. He's apologized on the public record for that, and we're all learning from that. But the most important thing is we continue to be champions for people that are victims of violence to make sure that we prevent those situations from happening anywhere in the country, in the community, and the more that we dedicate ourselves to that, the more results we'll get for all members of the public.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, domestic violence is a very serious issue facing so many families in Manitoba, families from all walks of life, regardless of social and economic status. It is so disappointing that once again we see this NDP government violate standards that are in place to protect and support vulnerable Manitobans.

Can this Premier confirm that his unacceptable communication between a Cabinet minister and a political adviser on women's issues will be sanctioned, or is he prepared to own the comments made by the Deputy Premier (Mr. Robinson) of Manitoba?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, again, I remind the members opposite that the Deputy Premier has taken responsibility for his comments and apologized on the public record, a far higher bar of ethical conduct than we've seen from any member of the opposition, including the Leader of the Opposition, who has been called to account for in—unfortunate and disparaging comments he's made in this Legislature,

and it's just flat-out gone out to a denial approach. And that really isn't constructive because if you're denying things all the time, you can't make improvements on it.

The Deputy Premier has acknowledged the ill—his unfortunate choice of words. He's taken responsibility for it, and he will continue to be a champion for victims of violence, missing and murdered women across this country. We need that leadership in this country. We need that leadership in the province of Manitoba.

Deputy Premier Email Correspondence

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): But they—wasn't just a poor choice of words, it was a racist comment. Mr. Speaker, it makes no difference whether racist comments are made publicly or privately; racist comments are unacceptable. They cannot and should not be defended. Yet this Premier continues to stand in his place and defend his Deputy Premier who made racist comments.

How can the Premier defend his actions?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I support the member who took responsibility for his comments and apologized for them. That's why I think there's been an important move made here. And I also support him on his lifetime quest to reduce violence to women and to reduce—to make sure that missing and murdered women are—have justice brought to their 'spersonal' circumstances and their families who he's met with on many occasions.

And this is an important issue as we move forward all across this country, and that's exactly why I've taken the position I've taken, because on this side of the House, unlike members on the opposite side of the House, there is a willingness to confront errors that have been made. There is a willingness to take responsibility for them, and there's a willingness to continue to move beyond that and make sure that we make our communities safer for all Manitobans and all Canadians.

Removal From Cabinet Request

Mrs. Mitchelson: But this Premier stands in his place day after day and defends a Deputy Premier who has made racist comments, and he accepts his apology. Mr. Speaker, the member for St. Norbert (Mr. Gaudreau) apologized for his homophobic comments, yet the Premier stripped him of his responsibilities as a backbencher in his government.

Yet he does nothing to a senior Cabinet minister who makes racist comments.

Will the Premier stand up today, show some leadership and remove the Deputy Premier (Mr. Robinson) from his position?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the short answer is no, and the members know that. And the short answer is the member took responsibility for his comments.

And the long answer is that the member has a record of adult service to protecting people from violence, starting back in the days of the 1980s, when the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry looked at the circumstances of Helen Betty Osborne. This member was the person that went and worked with that family on the fact that their daughter had been murdered and championed that cause at a time when it was extremely unpopular and there was no media attention on that. And then when times moved forward he was of-early leader on missing and murdered Aboriginal women not only in Manitoba, but across this country, and as recently as this spring and this summer he has championed that cause further. He's making a major contribution to the country along with other ministers across the country, along with people in the community and national Aboriginal organizational leaders, as well as other leaders across the country. They're all working together to create a safer environment for 'peeper' in our communities. That's something to be supported.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for River East, with a final supplementary.

Mrs. Mitchelson: But the Premier continues to try to defend the indefensible. Mr. Speaker, a racist comment was made by a senior Cabinet minister within his government. He has shown absolutely no leadership on this issue. He continues to defend the indefensible.

Will he stand up today, show some backbone, take some leadership and remove the Deputy Premier from his Cabinet responsibilities?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, you've canvassed my response to the issue. My response to the issue is that we have an individual in the Legislature with a lifetime of adult service to protecting victims of violence, a member who, when he makes comments that he understands are inappropriate, has taken responsibility for them and apologized for them. But given his lifetime record and the contribution he's making today-today-right now in real time all across this country and in Manitoba on protecting and

ensuring that people that have missing and murdered daughters who have disappeared, that they get justice and support and healing. Those are important contributions to the community, contributions that would be sorely missed.

The members opposite, really, if they want to be as judgmental as they are, I ask them to start with themselves and ask why they deny every error in judgment they make, ask why they deny and refuse to acknowledge every inappropriate comment they've made. Really, Mr. Speaker, what we're seeing in the House today is a gigantic double standard.

Deputy Premier FIPPA Reply

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, under the freedom of information rules government has the opportunity to hide information if it believes that it is the opinion of government or if it is the advice to government. The NDP decided to hide the phrase, ignorance of do-good white people. That means that it was either the opinion of government or it was advice to government, or there's a third option, that they were trying to hide that phrase, that racist comment to try to protect the Deputy Premier.

Can the Premier tell us today: Was it hidden, was it redacted because they were trying to cover up for the Deputy Premier?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Short answer, Mr. Speaker, standard procedures were followed for the FIPPA information request, and those procedures include officials in the department signing off on it, including at the senior level, and as the member knows it's covered under section 23.1(a) which has been read into the record by his own members.

And the most salient point, the most pertinent point is the member has accepted responsibility for the unfortunate choice of words. He has apologized for that which, I have to say again, is a higher standard than any member on the other side of the House has ever practised with any indiscretionary statement they've ever made in this House or elsewhere.

Mr. Goertzen: Under our freedom of information laws in this province, Mr. Speaker, the government can hide information if it believes that the information is the opinion of the government or advice to the government. Now, earlier in question period the Premier said that this wasn't-this racist comment that the-was not the opinion of government.

Was it advice to the government or were you simply trying to cover up for the Deputy Premier (Mr. Robinson)?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, let me be succinct in my answer: neither.

Mr. Goertzen: Can the Premier try to identify, under the freedom of information laws, what the rationale and reason was for covering up the phrase: ignorance of do-good white people? It would seem, on a common-sense reading, the only reason to cover that phrase up was because it was a racist comment and to try to protect his Deputy Premier.

* (14:20)

Can you try to explain, under our laws, under our freedom from information laws, why that was redacted and covered up if it wasn't to protect the Deputy Premier?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I gave him a very succinct answer on that, on his question just before this one. I said it was neither of the above. It followed standard procedure conducted by public servants inside the government.

The minister has taken responsibility for the comment. He has apologized for the comment, which again is a far higher standard than any member opposite has practised in any untoward comments they've made in this Legislature or outside of this Legislature.

The way we move forward on learning how to protect human rights and learning how to protect citizens is to recognize any errors we may make in this regard, to acknowledge them and then to continue to devote our energies as public-elected public officials to making our communities safer, which is one of the reasons why we have Bill 18 in the Legislature—which does not explain why the members opposite refuse to hear that bill, wish to have a proper debate on that bill.

And the reality is, Mr. Speaker, that bill has been called many, many times. And if we really want to make Manitobans safer let's get on with legislation that will protect all Manitobans.

Osborne House Government Funding

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, at a time when vital issues like the health of women and children in our province should be our focus, we're being distracted by this burlesque sideshow.

You know, Mr. Speaker, burlesque dancing is but an example of one of the many cultural expressions in our province. And you shouldn't be targeted inappropriately by Cabinet ministers.

It's troubling how this NDP government has failed to stand up and support Osborne House, failing to increase its funding when needed and insulting the very support services badly needed by the vulnerable women and children trying to escape domestic violence in Manitoba.

Will the Premier guarantee that his government will not turn its back on the women who need the services of Osborne House by pulling away funding as a result of this issue?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, we continue to advance issues of protecting women who are the victims of violence.

I recently was at an event where, for the first time ever, we enlisted the support of the Winnipeg Blue Bombers on sending very clear messages that domestic violence is unacceptable, and some of the people that were stepping forward to do that, had seen that, had those experiences in their own lives, and now we're standing forward as leaders in the community to do that. We provide significant funding to our domestic shelters in Manitoba and we'll continue to do that.

I only need to remind members opposite that they wanted to cut all those programs this year, that was their proposal—indiscriminate, across-the-board cuts, tough love and a chill on public services. They would have cut domestic-violence services in Manitoba. They would have reduced those services. They would have put people on layoff. That's not the approach we chose, Mr. Speaker. We chose to protect those services.

Nutritional Deficiencies in Children Reduction Strategies

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, continuing on women and children's health in Manitoba, there are many reasons for concern. But one of these is the government's own report which says with respect to First Nations people in Manitoba that vitamin D levels in most pregnant women and their infants are in the deficient or insufficient range.

Dr. Bob Schroth reports 80 per cent of the pregnant women in inner-city Winnipeg have low vitamin D levels. Not only is vitamin D badly needed for healthy bones and teeth; low levels of

vitamin D may lead to the development of type 1, insulin-dependent diabetes.

I ask the Premier: Will he admit that this is a problem and will he commit to the all-co-ordinated all-party approach to delivering a solution to this as soon as possible?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I thank the member for the question. This is a question he raised with us last week. He does know that in Manitoba we invest up to \$400 million for children in the preschool phase of their life.

And one of the things we do is we provide prenatal benefits to women in Manitoba who are going—in the process of having a child. We have home visits that go out and visit them frequently, public health nurses that do that. We have family resource centres, of which we've invested significant millions of dollars to create safe spaces in communities where young parents can come and learn the skills of parenting and to be able to support each other as they go through that important part of their roles in life.

And, Mr. Speaker, we are very committed to that; that includes nutrition, that includes proper nutrition including vitamin D and we're very interested in finding ways to ensure that people have the nutrients they need to support healthy children and to support themselves.

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

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is doing a lot of things, but they're missing a target because the deficiencies are still there in extremely high proportion.

Mr. Speaker, at a hearing of the healthy kids task force in 2005, Lisa Kehler described children whose teeth hurt so badly that they could hardly eat. It was evident from stories like these that we need to do far better than what the 2005 task force proposed. Indeed, in the eight years since, efforts have had little impact with no improvement in the rates of early childhood tooth decay. We now need a commitment to eliminate nutritional deficiencies in Manitoba as soon as possible and with an effective plan to do this.

Are the Premier and his ministers ready to participate in an all-party co-ordinated effort to do this, because his effort to date has failed?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has voted against every additional resource we've tried to

provide to Manitobans for healthy foods. We had about a handful of community gardens in northern Manitoba a decade ago. We have close to over 900—*[interjection]* I hear the minister responsible saying close to a thousand now. These are gardens that provide nutritious vegetables to people in their communities. They're growing those vegetables. They're doing it together. They're developing their sense of neighbourhood. They're learning about healthy foods. These are very important investments.

We were the lead donor to The Winnipeg Foundation who has set up a permanent fund called Nourishing Potential. That fund has invested at least \$400,000 to date on a variety of food security programs all across Manitoba: breakfast programs for children, community gardening projects, a variety of innovations connected to what people in their local communities and schools and neighbourhoods think will make a difference for their people.

We just announced last week, up at NorWest health clinic, a program to help people learn the skills of healthy cooking and how to do that together and how to provide proper nutrition to themselves. We're very interested in food security. It's one of the planks of our poverty reduction strategy, and I invite—

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

Divided Highway Improvements Government Investment

Mr. Clarence Pettersen (Flin Flon): We know that under this government we have seen historic investments in the roads and bridges that our economy relies on. The new Manitoba Building and Renewal Plan will make a record \$622-million investment in provincial highways and bridges. We have taken a balanced approach that makes investments in flood protection and critical infrastructure, stimulating the economy and creating over a hundred thousand jobs over the next decade.

Could the Minister responsible for Infrastructure and Transportation please update the House on improvements currently under way on recent highway improvements?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Well, Mr. Speaker, it is summer in Manitoba, also known as construction season, and I'm—again, I'm going to apologize for significant construction-related delays on our highways this year.

I am very pleased that we are moving on some very significant projects, the upgrading of the Trans-Canada in Headingley; in Brandon, Victoria Avenue. In fact, you look around this province, we're involved in historic investment, and I want to put on the record, by the way, that we've gone from about \$85 million in capital spending from the Tories when they were in government in the 1990s to \$468 million.

Now, we know their position because not only do they not ask questions on highways, they vote against a budget that provides the funding for that, and I want to say to the member for Flin Flon, we're also working on the long-term issues including in his riding on Highway 10. In fact, our budget and our government is about infrastructure. They are against it. That is our record, and that is their record as well.

Mr. Speaker: I want to caution members of the House, please. I know I've said this quite a few times before but when we're asking questions and we're answering questions, I'd like to have the comments come through the Chair, please, both ways.

The honourable member for St. Paul has the floor.

Keeyask Community Centre Project Update

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): I have pictures to table for the Legislature. Three weeks ago, the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro said that in two weeks there would be a second sod-turning for the TCN Keeyask Centre.

If you look at the photo, skulking in the back is the member for Thompson. He was at the first sod-turning. Seeing as the minister doesn't seem to be able to tell us when exactly this second sod-turning is going to be, perhaps it could be the member for Thompson could tell us, seeing as he was at the first one.

When will the second sod-turning be for the TCN Keeyask Centre sod-turning?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): And, Mr. Speaker, I had occasion to talk to the chief and through the chief to the council who are responsible for that, and he was quite disturbed and upset with some of the comments by the member for St. Paul, but the member is entitled, I suppose, to his opinion. But what he did advise me is that he would be communicating directly with the member for St. Paul

to try to clear up the member's misunderstanding of the relationship that occurs up in that community.

* (14:30)

Deputy Premier Resignation Request

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, Manitoba has the dubious distinction of a high rate of violence against women, over twice the national average. Most violent crimes against women are the result of domestic violence, and these statistics remain high despite the NDP government's lip service to this problem. Behind those statistics are real victims. Women's shelters in Manitoba attempt to help those victims break this cycle of violence. When those shelters are attacked by racist comments made by a Deputy Premier (Mr. Robinson) it demeans their good work.

Will the Deputy Premier stop trying to defend his racist comments and resign today?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, a focus on domestic violence is a very appropriate focus for members of this Legislature. There's a million dollars in capital improvements going into shelters and other family violence facilities owned by the Province as we speak. We are working with communities on very specific strategies.

The member in question is providing national leadership on this issue at the ministerial table which has been able to translate into all the premiers for the first time in the history of this country taking a stand on a national inquiry for missing and murdered women all across this country, Mr. Speaker. That is profoundly important progress that we're making in our society, and in Canada we want to make that kind of process—progress and we want to do it across party lines, which is why I was very pleased with the ministers and the premiers from provinces where governments are of different political stripes came together on this issue.

The member may—has, again, taken full responsibility for his comments, but let's not denigrate the enormous progress he's made providing national leadership on this question.

Mr. Helwer: Mr. Speaker, this NDP government pretends to be concerned about victims and the cycle of domestic violence, but when they reduce programs aimed at dealing this perpetrators—the perpetrators and the victims, then it falls flat. The Deputy Premier's racist comments and the Premier's

unwillingness to deal with the issue tarnishes all the good work done by women's shelters to break the cycle of violence.

Will the minister do the right thing and resign?

Mr. Selinger: If the particular member or any member of his caucus was sincere they would withdraw their threat to across-the-board cuts to domestic-violence services. That's what they wanted to do, Mr. Speaker, they wanted to deliver cuts to domestic-violence programs in Manitoba. They made that extremely clear. Across-the-board indiscriminate cuts, tough love including women's shelters, a chill, that's what they wanted to do. If they're sincere about this, they should stand up and the very next question reverse themselves and say they want to provide adequate support to those facilities.

Mr. Helwer: Mr. Speaker, incidents of violence against women are a—highest in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. There are many people doing good work to try to break the cycle of violence against women. The Deputy Premier's (Mr. Robinson) racist comments damage this good work.

Will the Deputy Premier take the right step in breaking the cycle of racism, apologize and resign?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, at the risk of being repetitive, the member has taken responsibility for his comments. He has apologized and he continues to devote significant, very significant leadership to the cause of reducing violence among all women across Canada, missing and murdered women in particular.

And members know very well that one—some of the things we've done is to reduce violence in Manitoba. The roots to empathy program in our schools is an award-winning program which teaches people how to respect each other in terms of resolving conflict. The PAX program, which is a fancy term for teaching children how to resolve conflicts, again, without resorting to violence is a very important program in our schools. The investments we make in HOUSINGFirst to allow people not to be on the street and to find a pathway back to self-sufficiency is a very important program, and the sporting programs that we put out there which teach a respectful approach to sport are all initiatives that we have funded and supported, and the members opposite want to cut them. Where's their sincerity on this issue when they want to cut these services?

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

Speaker's Rulings

Mr. Speaker: I have a ruling for the House.

Order, please.

During oral questions on August the 8th, 2013, the honourable Official Opposition House Leader (Mr. Goertzen) raised a point of order regarding an answer provided by the honourable Minister of Education (Ms. Allan).

The honourable Official Opposition House Leader suggested that the minister's answer reflected on members of the Legislature and on this House. The honourable Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan) spoke to the point of order before I took the matter under advisement to review Hansard.

I have reviewed the Hansard transcript from the date in question, and although there were strong differences of opinion in the House, I must indicate that there was no breach of a rule or practice in the comments made by the honourable Minister of Education.

As O'Brien and Bosc stated on page 510 of House of Commons Procedure and Practice: "The Speaker ensures that replies adhere to the dictates of order, decorum and parliamentary language. The Speaker, however, is not responsible for the quality or content of replies to questions." End of quotations.

Several Manitoba Speakers, including myself, on many occasions, have upheld this principle in a number of rulings made from this Chair. Accordingly, from a strictly procedural point of view, I would rule that the honourable Official Opposition House Leader did not have a point of order. However, I would like to take this opportunity to comment on the conduct of members in this House in recent weeks and to address the honourable Official Opposition House Leader's point regarding the reflecting on members and on this House.

I am aware that there are currently many important issues before this Assembly, issues on which members hold strong and divergent views and 'op'—or, pardon me—opinions. It is entirely appropriate for members to hold these strong and divergent opinions on these issues. One of the basic principles of democracy is the fact that elected representatives can disagree in a place like this. Despite these disagreements, though, members should still conduct themselves in an orderly manner and show respect for one 'anonner'—'oth'—one another and for the institution they serve.

It is on this last point where I must raise a concern. As members know, I believe strongly in the principles of a respectful workplace, namely, the right of everyone in the workplace to expect to be treated respectfully and to respond—and the responsibility of everyone in their workplace to refrain from disrespectful behaviour. As your Speaker, I try every day to hold everyone, including myself, to that standard.

I would like to—I would like all members to consider these sentiments and to strive to set a new and better standard for our behaviour in this historic place by showing respect for each other and especially for this institution, even when disagreeing on important issues.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank you for your ruling.

Mr. Speaker: I have another ruling for the House.

Order, please.

Following the prayer on Monday, August the 12th, 2013, the honourable member for Riding Mountain (Mrs. Rowat) raised a matter of privilege, contending that her privileges were violated by government staff members who were interrupting and interfering with a media scrum where the honourable member for Riding Mountain was answering questions addressed by the media.

She asserted this prevented her from carrying out her duties as an MLA and that it impacted her freedom of speech and served as an attempt to intimidate her. The honourable Government House Leader (Ms. Howard), the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) and the honourable Official Opposition House Leader (Mr. Goertzen) also offered commentary on the issue. I took the matter under advisement in order to consult with the procedural authorities. I thank the honourable members for their advice to the Chair.

*(14:40)

There are two conditions that must be satisfied in order for the matter raised to be ruled in order as a prima facie case of privilege. First, was the issue raised at the earliest opportunity, and, second, has it been demonstrated that the matter's privileges have been breached in order toward putting the matter to the House.

The member indicated that the actions complained of occurred on the previous Thursday

afternoon after oral questions, but did not elaborate on her inability to raise the matter of privilege in the House on that same Thursday afternoon, after the activities in question had occurred. It would be helpful if, in the future, the honourable member and, in fact, all honourable members raising privilege would provide additional information to the Speaker to demonstrate that the matter is being raised at the earliest available opportunity. I'm not saying that this matter is out of order, due to timeliness. I'm merely requesting that members provide more detail about the earliest opportunity to the Chair when raising the matter.

On the second issue, whether sufficient evidence has been provided to demonstrate that a prima facie breach of privilege has occurred, there are a number of considerations that must be taken into account. As always, when dealing with privilege, the Speaker only considers the procedural aspects and does not rule on the substance of the issues involved.

First, in order for a breach of privilege to have occurred, Joseph Maingot advises on page 222 of the second edition of *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada* that the activity in question must involve a proceeding in Parliament, which means taking place in the House or in a committee. This concept is supported by rulings since Speaker Rocan in 1988 and 1991, by rulings from Speaker Hickes in 2003 and 2008 and by rulings that I delivered in this house on May 13th and May 21st, 2013. As I noted in my May 13th and May 21st, 2013 rulings, activities such as debate in the Chamber do constitute a proceeding in Parliament, while events taking place outside of the Chamber do not fall within that purview. A news scrum taking place in the hallways of the Legislative Building would not constitute a proceeding of Parliament.

Maingot also advises on page 224 that parliamentary privilege is concerned with the special rights of members not in their capacity as ministers or party leaders, whips, parliamentary secretaries or critics, but strictly in their capacities as members in their parliamentary work. From the description provided by the member, it would appear that she had spoken to the media in her capacity as a critic for a specific government department, so she would not be covered by the protection of parliamentary privilege in that role.

In her submission, the member also made reference to her freedom of speech being impacted by actions she complained of. With respect to this

aspect, O'Brien and Bosc advise on page 91 of the second edition of the House of Commons Procedure and Practice that the privilege of freedom of speech is generally regarded as being limited to proceedings in Parliament, meaning that members are not provided this protection for comments made outside of the Chamber.

Regarding the issue of intimidation of a member, O'Brien and Bosc advise on page 109 that in order to find a prima facie breach of privilege, the Speaker must be satisfied there is evidence to support the member's claim that he or she has been impeded in the performance of his or her parliamentary functions and that the matter is directly related to a proceeding in Parliament. As identified earlier in the ruling, media scrum taking place outside the Chamber is not classified as a proceeding in Parliament.

For the reasons cited, I must therefore rule there is no prima facie case of privilege.

That being said, the member raising an issue that does appear to have merit as a complaint or grievance, as both she and the honourable Government House Leader cited difficulties with MLAs and staff at press scrums. The Government House Leader has already expressed a willingness to sit down with the member to discuss the issue and I would encourage such a meeting to take place.

As Speaker, I do have concerns about members—making sure members treat each other respectfully and that staff working for members or caucuses also provide respectful treatment to MLAs on all sides of the House. If discussions between the two sides are unable to resolve the situation, I would be willing to facilitate discussions and meetings in my office to ensure that members are treated with both—with courtesy by staff on both sides during scrums.

Now, we'll proceed with—

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Morden Corn and Apple Festival

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Morden on its successful 46th Corn and Apple Festival. There's truly something for everyone. Is what has become known as the premiere street festival in Manitoba whether you come for the midway, the Saturday morning parade, the farmers' market, the crafters' tent, the vendors and merchants, or the main stage entertainment and fantastic food. Of course, there's always the free corn and free apple cider.

Under a blazing sun, I worked alongside Mayor Ken Wiebe and Portage-Lisgar MP, Candice Bergen, to give away corn to people who were having fun and enjoying the time with family.

Spoke to one group of visitors from Mariapolis and Somerset who said they made the trip every single year; it's just part of their summer. Another woman from south Winnipeg shared that her father, before he passed, drove his antique tractor in the parade every year, and that now she and her husband attend the festival and watch the parade in his memory.

Behind the scenes of this signature event, 40 committee chairpersons and a thousand community volunteers work to make this festival the success that it is, assisting with parade marshalling, stage set-up, vendor relations and the famous corn giveaway, husking and serving, as well as administrating street space or assisting with one of the three entertainment stages.

The weekend was filled with Canadian rockers hitting the stage. Winnipeg band, Harlequin, played Saturday night. Trooper played to a record crowd on Friday. Stage Manager Gerry Enns said he didn't think he'd ever seen a bigger crowd.

It's the third year that the festival's been supported by Heritage Canada through their Building Communities Through Arts and Heritage Local Festivals funding which helped fund the local youth stage which helps to bring younger people to the festival, as well as the art walk and historic bus tours and farmers' market.

Mr. Speaker, I congratulate Corn and Apple Festival Committee Chairperson, Chris MacPherson, as well as the Morden Corn and Apple executive for their excellent work again this year.

See you all next year at the 48th festival.

Judy Burns

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship): I rise to recognize long-term North End activist, Judy Burns.

Judy was a very determined woman who cared deeply for her community and who got things done. Judy passed away on July 6th at the age of 68. Born in Brighton, England, Judy began a lifetime of social activism by joining nuclear disarmament protests while still a young teenager and after coming to Canada she helped organize opposition to the Vietnam war. When Judy moved to Winnipeg in

1969 she got right to work. She became an advocate for our most disadvantaged citizens, a campaigner for neighbourhood improvements and a true champion of the North End.

We should always take the time to celebrate community boosters like Judy. She epitomized what it is to be a involved citizen. Her work was instrumental in the success of many initiatives and the products of her determination can be found throughout our community. Judy worked for years to get the riverbank trail from St. John's Park to downtown completed. She fought for school ownership and operation of the Gordon Bell High School cafeteria and helped established an alternative flexible learning program in the Winnipeg School Division.

Judy was there at the start of the Luxton Residents Association and made sure of its rejuvenation earlier this year. She was always a supporter of the Luxton Community Centre and helped get Luxton School a new gym and play structure.

Judy was an enthusiastic board member of the Seven Oaks Historical Society and played an integral part in the success of last year's Red River settlement bi-centennial celebrations.

We will always remember Judy's passion for community, her zest for life, her leadership, her dry wit and, most of all, her ability to get things done.

I offer condolences to her husband Ray, daughter, Phoebe, grandchildren, Oliver and Molly, and to her many friends.

Judy's legacy lives on and her accomplishment will continue to impact the lives of people—of the people of Winnipeg's North End and beyond.

I want Judy's activism to continue to inspire others to get involved, to organize and to not take no for an answer.

Thank you, Judy.

*(14:50)

Teulon Farmers' Market

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, farmers' markets link rural and urban population. They're an important social, economic institution as well as an integral part of the community.

The Teulon Farmers' Market is in full swing. The Teulon and Area Farmers' Market is held every

Friday afternoon from 3 to 7, with the last week being September the 6th. They are located on Highway 7 in Teulon beside the Co-op gas bar with ample free parking.

They are a traditional farmers' market, and all their other vendors must make it, bake it or grow it. They have a variety of vendors in attendance with an average of seven to 15 vendors attending weekly. You can find locally grown seasonal veggies such as potatoes, beans, peas, cucumbers, beets, zucchini and much, much more. New vendors are always welcome. Some of the past returning vendors including Blue Skies bake shop and Sweet C Bakery; these ladies really know how to bake.

There is something for everyone from fresh baking, honey, canning plants, fresh, healthy foods and much more.

Mr. Speaker, farmers' markets offer hope for healthy future; good nutrition is an important part of leading a healthy lifestyle.

As the Teulon market has something for everyone, I encourage everyone to visit the Teulon Farmers' Market and see all it has to offer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Dasmesh School of Winnipeg

Mr. Mohinder Saran (The Maples): Mr. Speaker, Manitoba is fortunate to be home to many different cultural communities, each with its own unique language, history and traditions to pass on to the next generation.

This weekend I attended the inaugural function for the new location of the Dasmesh School of Winnipeg. Dasmesh School is the first English-Sikh school in Manitoba. Its founders wanted to provide students with an excellent education in mathematics, science and language arts, while also ensuring that valuable language and cultural traditions were passed on to Indo-Canadian Sikh children.

Dasmesh School teaches the Manitoba education curriculum to students in kindergarten to grade 7, along with the Punjabi, Hindi language and Sikh studies, including Gurbani education and Shabad Kirtan.

Mr. Speaker, this school opened last year in the Gudawara-Singh Sabha with 18 students and has been wonderfully received by the Sikh community. This September, over 100 students are expected to enrol, and Dasmesh School has moved to a new

space in the Punjabi Cultural Centre on King Edward Street.

The board of directors, Mr. Amandeep Singh Sekhon, Mr. Manjinderpal Singh Chahal and Mr. Gurlal Singh Gill; and principal, Mrs. Amandeep Sran have done fantastic work at guiding the school over the past year. In fact, this year, grade 3 student Devan Garg placed top in several national and international math and computing competitions: Brock University's Caribou Cup, the University of Waterloo's kangaroo math contest and mathematica Canada.

Mr. Speaker, a child's experiences during their school years shape the rest of their lives. I invite members to join me in recognizing the directors, administration and teachers at Dasmesh School of Winnipeg for their excellent work in helping our children get not just a quality education but an appreciation and understanding of their Sikh culture. I look forward to this school growing and developing in its new home.

Thank you.

Keeyask Community Centre—Sod Turning

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and today is the second 'weekiversary' of the second announcement of the second sod turning for the TCN Keeyask community centre. And we want to remind the minister that it was over three weeks ago that he said in two weeks that there would be a sod turning for the TCN Keeyask Centre.

And I know that many members of the community were quite excited seeing as today I was able to table a photo in which we can see the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) attending the first sod turning of the Keeyask Centre. And, Mr. Speaker, \$7 million later and members of the TCN First Nation are waiting, not just for the first sod turning, now they're actually waiting for the second sod turning.

And you know what, Mr. Speaker, I think the question really should have been in question period today is how many photo ops does it take to get a TCN Keeyask Centre built? And, more importantly, how many photo ops should a government get for \$7 million?

And maybe it is, if you see the photo that was tabled, perhaps it wasn't a very good picture of the member for Thompson. Actually, it kind of looks he photo-bombed the picture, Mr. Speaker. And maybe

what it is, is they felt that for \$7 million that first photo opportunity wasn't that good. So what they're waiting for is for a second sod turning so they can get a better photo.

But I can tell you that the families and the children are waiting for a Keeyask Centre. They've been waiting for a long time and what—would like to know, for \$7 million, where is their Keeyask Centre?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Grievances. Seeing no grievances—

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Government House Leader): Pursuant to rule 31(8), I'm announcing that the private members' resolution to be considered next Tuesday will be one put forward by the honourable member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff). The title of the resolution is "Investment in Flood Protection Initiatives."

Mr. Speaker: It has been announced that, pursuant to rule 31(8), that the private member's resolution that will be considered next Tuesday is the one put forward by the honourable member for the Interlake, and the title of the resolution is "Investment in Flood Protection Initiatives."

* * *

Ms. Howard: Mr. Speaker, would you please call for third reading debate on Bill 20.

DEBATE ON CONCURRENCE AND THIRD READING

Mr. Speaker: Now resume debate on concurrence and third reading of Bill 20, The Manitoba Building and Renewal Funding and Fiscal Management Act (Various Acts Amended), standing in the name of the honourable member for Emerson, who has one minute remaining.

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

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Well, Mr. Speaker, I brought my fan club with me today, as well, and I don't doubt at all that they are all totally opposed to the 14 per cent increase in the PST.

And just to carry on with the theme that I had yesterday, and hopefully with some of the passion that was left over from yesterday, small-business owners are hurting. Dwayne Marling of the Canadian restaurant association and food services association called it a triple whammy. He said they're being hit from all sides by this government. Businesses are starting to look at other provinces like Saskatchewan. Larry McInnes, the prairie director for Retail Council of Canada, said, and I quote: There's just another reason for consumers to look either online or south of the border to do their shopping. Becky Cianflone, the manager for the Altona and District credits-Chamber of Commerce called it the most blatant disregard for democracy.

And, when these were being made, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) was missing in action. He was not there, Mr. Speaker. I urge the Premier to pay attention to all of the people that made presentations at all of the committee hearings.

Thank you very much for the time.

Mr. Speaker: I'm sorry, I forgot that the member on it, such limited time.

Other debate?

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): It's my pleasure to get up and be able to put some comments on the record with respect to Bill 20 in the third reading.

And, Mr. Speaker, as the member for Emerson has just said, we're talking about a 14 per cent increase to the PST. It is—it's a shocking increase for Manitobans who did not ask for such an increase, who were unaware and very surprised, shocked, when the minister for Finance stood this spring in this Chamber and announced this tax for Manitobans. And, ever since that time, these government members have tried to put on a happy face and they've tried to send a message, oh, it's really not that bad. You know, all things considered, it's not that bad. And, yet, over the last number of weeks and months, we as the PC Party have continued to show that the opposition to this tax is widespread, that the opposition is from every sector and every demographic and every interest group. It has brought together a coalition of the most unlikely groups standing together, toe to toe, shoulder to shoulder, sending a message to this government in solidarity that they oppose this, that they did not ask for it, that it was done without consultation, that it was done illegally, that it went against the very

legislation that is on the books in law in the province of Manitoba that would prevent such an increase.

* (15:00)

And, as a new legislator in this Chamber, I wish that I could say at this point that those groups standing together and the strength of their voice and the message they were sending in concert would have had the effect to change the mind of government. I wish that I could say that that message they delivered had the effect, had the desired effect of having that Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers), of having that Cabinet, of having this Premier take a sober second thought approach to this ill-advised Bill 20, The Manitoba Building and Renewal Funding and Fiscal Management Act, and, indeed, when we went in to committee and we heard from Manitobans night after night after night, in this place, expressing in the most respectful ways very reasoned arguments, carefully constructed, representing the opinion of seniors, representing the opinion of business, representing the opinion of families, representing the opinions of small communities and people who live in urban centres, representing anti-poverty groups, representing the restaurant association, and, Mr. Speaker, I know you've heard the list of presenters.

I wish that I could say today that those individuals who presented at committee had been successful, had actually moved the arm of government. As a new legislator, I wish I could say that that was what we saw in the democratic process. So I guess what we could say is there was no quick win on this issue for those considerable, those formidable opponents to this bill. But it is not to say that our time here is wasted. It is not to say that the breath of those Manitobans who spoke on this issue is wasted. It is not to say that all of those Manitobans who took the time to come to committee, who took the time to write an email and send it, perhaps, to one of the ministers, perhaps, to the Minister of Finance, maybe they chose to pick up the phone and call their MLA, and I know that I have received many of those phone calls and so have my colleagues on this side and, undoubtedly, I know that the—those ministers on the other side have as well received those calls from constituents. And so I know that, at this point in time, we can't say that the government has listened, we can't say that the government has turned back from this course of action, however great the opposition is that has been signalled against—their intent, but it is not to say that there is not time for this government to still do the right thing.

And so, Mr. Speaker, it's on that basis that I make my remarks today. It is with the hope that there is still a lively conversation going on, on the other side behind closed doors in Cabinet, and in the NDP caucus, that there are people there who say, you know, it's not too late for us to listen to the voice of Manitobans on this issue.

As a matter of fact, it was just yesterday when the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) talked about a-juxtaposed the leadership of this current Premier (Mr. Selinger) and the leadership of the past premier and then she talked about the past premier of this province, Mr. Gary Doer, who, at times, undertook an action and went forward in a direction, and there were times at which he changed direction and he stated it was because of what he sensed. He had gauged a strong unwillingness of Manitobans to be led in that direction, to that goal and to that end.

And I think, you know, that, regardless of our ideology and regardless of the partisanship in this place and regardless of the views that, Mr. Speaker, you yourself alluded to today that we hold, often, very strong views which we put forward in very strong terms, even so, we saw the example of a premier, previously, who was not above going back and looking at a position again, measuring it again, re-examining his position and his platform, and there was actually examples in which he backed down. What we have not seen is this Premier's, is this Finance Minister's willingness to do the same, to back down in the face of such strong opposition, not just by our party, but, as I say, by the many, many groups, the individuals that continue to come forward.

So I think, Mr. Speaker, the time that I have allotted to me this afternoon, I will take this time to reiterate some arguments that I've made and to let some voices of Manitobans who live in the jurisdiction that I represent be heard again and allow those comments and concerns to come forward again and to be put on Hansard so that when the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) and perhaps the, you know, the member for Dawson Trail (Mr. Lemieux) who, I see, is also—will be taking note of the arguments put forward, that these ministers and members across can look back at the Hansard and look back at the comments and they can consider the extent to which this tax will negatively impact Manitobans, because essentially that is the argument distilled that we have put forward in the weeks past—in the months past, that this tax will place a burden on Manitobans unfairly. And it is not one that needs

to be placed there, and that burden on Manitobans is one that will be felt by all those groups I mentioned, all those seniors, all those students, all those young people, all those Manitobans of marginal income who are just getting by.

And, Mr. Speaker, as I speak to Manitobans who are just squeaking by, today I believe the Free Press again raises this issue that this tax will unfairly target those Manitobans who can least afford it, who are vulnerable and for whom this 8 per cent or 14.2 per cent tax hike really makes a difference. And maybe to these ministers and members on the other side, maybe they're impervious to the argument that—you know, that that 14 per cent tax increase will really have a difference on their bottom line. But it's not the message that I receive in my constituency office. It's not the message that was delivered to me just yesterday in the few minutes I had at my constituency office before I had to leave again for Winnipeg. And, after signing some documents and making some phone calls, again someone comes in and says, I just need a minute of your time to explain to you what this actually means to me. And so, Mr. Speaker, as I said, you know, there's so many reasons—there's so many compelling reasons why this government should walk away from this path that they have placed themselves on.

We know we have a democratic right in this province to a referendum whenever government wants to raise a major tax. And, of course, we understand the PST increase of 14.2 per cent falls into that category of a major tax. And, Mr. Speaker, I have to say it is so—is such a sad commentary on the sincerity or lack thereof of this government that when I read through the text of the bill it indicates, well, this isn't really a tax that would fall under the taxpayer protection act because it has an end date. It has an end date of nine years and 364 days, I think, if I'm correct. I don't have the copy of the bill right in front of me, but I assure you it's in my desk and I refer to it constantly.

And it seems insincere to suggest that a 10-year tax is anything but a permanent tax measure, and for the government to somehow argue, to somehow try to weasel out of what the taxpayer protection act so clearly says about the necessity for a referendum, the necessity for democratic rights of the individuals, of the voters in this province, of the ratepayers to be respected, it's a sad commentary and it seems to show that the spenDP doesn't have respect or regard for Manitobans. Certainly, they don't have regard for the impact that these taxes will have on Manitobans

for their ability to get ahead, for their—on their ability to pay their bills, on their ability to raise their children and to create opportunities for their children, on the ability of seniors to be able to predicate their retirement in their sunset—that sunset period of their lives with confidence, because this erodes the confidence of all Manitobans.

And, Mr. Speaker, that's precisely why taxpayer protection laws are in place in this province, to safeguard families from governments like this NDP and from decisions like the decisions that have been made by this NDP government to raise taxes. Manitobans didn't ask for this tax. There was no one in the 2011 election when I went door to door who indicated to me that what they really felt like the government needed to do was to raise taxes. People talked about better use or better government spending, more efficient operation by government. They talked about wasted money on projects that didn't have lasting significance. They talked about governments being able to make choices and put money into infrastructure investments that will last and make a difference and instead this government chose not to listen.

* (15:10)

They went forward even after the election and they hosted round table discussions and community consultations. Of course, none of those were done where I live. None of them were done in communities like Portage la Prairie or Glenboro or Steinbach. I don't know if there was—I doubt there was a community consultation in Brandon West—might have been, but I sure missed it. But I can guarantee you that so many Manitobans did not have the opportunity to express to this government that they did not support a tax increase.

And I, having been at community consultations, I would seriously doubt for a moment that the resounding statement made by those people who attended the NDP round table discussions was coming into the room and saying raise those taxes. We just don't have high enough taxes. I am sure that the comments in those rooms were the same kind of comments that we heard where we live and the same kind of comments in the constituency of Morden-Winkler and others where people are concerned about debt. They're concerned about the \$30-billion debt that this province continues to carry. They're concerned with the lack of leadership exhibited by this government. They're concerned about structural deficits exceeding \$500 million

every year—each and every year despite the fact that this government bends over backwards and robs special funds and dips into Manitoba Hydro to try to pay down, to try to reduce the gap between their expenditures and their revenues, and it's not sustainable and it just pushes debt payment further into the future. It's politically expedient, but it is not in the best interest of the ratepayers of this province. And it is regrettable that they do so and it is not—it is certainly has been on—at the forefront of the conservative Manitobans. I'm sure that is the message that they heard when they went into those round table discussions with Manitobans.

So, then, when the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) stood up and delivered his Throne Speech and then delivered his budget in the spring and indicated there would be this tax, Mr. Speaker, it could not have been a good time to be the Finance Minister. It could not. This, even now, as we continue in this emergency session of the Manitoba Legislature, it can't be a good time. And even though it's swelteringly hot out there today and I think that that humidity must be close to a hundred per cent, I'm sure that the pressure on those NDP members and those NDP ministers is—it's—that pressure is equal on them whether they're in the Chamber or whether they're in their constituency or sitting in their air-conditioned basements, it's a pressure that simply is not going away. And we have said, in the strongest terms, we will not allow them to get off easy on this because Manitobans have sent the message that we shouldn't.

So, when the Minister of Finance brought this budget in and indicated that he'd have a 14.2 per cent PST increase, it was amazing how quickly groups stood against this government. It is amazing how quickly groups like the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, like the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, the Manitoba Business Council, Manitoba Heavy Construction Association—and they talked about the fact that this was not what they asked for. They didn't ask for a PST increase. Now, they—some of these groups had asked for a real change in the way this government spends its infrastructure dollars. They had asked for more autonomy at the local level when it comes to municipal infrastructure. They had asked for more support. They kept talking about the effect of off-loading onto smaller levels of government and they talked about the fact that this NDP government wanted to control the infrastructure projects, but not actually meet the needs at the local level.

And so what the NDP did instead is they came back and just raised the tax, did nothing to allay the concerns of these groups, did nothing to divest some of that responsibility to the municipalities to give more local control over projects, things that make a difference. Instead, they basically just bought more ribbon and they've gone into the backrooms, and they've made a decision among a few NDP members where that money will be spent, and it's deplorable. It's regrettable, Mr. Speaker, and, of course, I say again it is not in the best interests of Manitobans.

And, Mr. Speaker, we know—we have to say again that the fact that this government has gone against the legislation that we have in place in Manitoba also suggests that there is nothing stopping them from doing it again. And, indeed, earlier in the session when we asked the Premier (Mr. Selinger) if he would rule out additional tax increases next year, the minister—or the Premier was unwilling to put onto the record, was unwilling to put into Hansard, that he would guarantee there would be no further tax increases. And that is something that every Manitoban must understand. It is something that every Manitoban must realize that we—this is not a one-time deal. Instead, this is now a gate that has been opened, and there is a strong, strong possibility that as this government goes forward, they will do no more to match revenues to expenditures. As a matter of fact, absent in the Finance Minister's speech, when he delivered his budget, was any assurance that he was working to eliminate Manitoba's deficit at the earliest opportunity. We understand he has given different dates at different times stating when he would eliminate the deficit. And then earlier this year, the minister kind of got cute with his language and started to do things like say that he was going to increasingly work to close the gap between expenditures and revenues.

And that language has got to be the work of communicators in the backroom. I mean, that language gets so cute when you can just wink and say that you are going to work to increasingly close the gap between revenues and expenditures. How about some plain language? How about, we as a government will eliminate the deficit by this date, and you can take it to the bank. Oh, I forgot. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) actually did do that. He did provide a definite date by which he would eliminate the deficit. The only problem was he then changed the date and changed it again, and that's the kind of thing that Manitobans have increasingly took notice of. Even in this sweltering

August, it is amazing how attentive Manitobans have been to the fact that this debate has not concluded, that the third reading of Bill 20 has not concluded, that there has not been royal assent on this bill.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I want to say again, the PST, in the simplest form—the PST increase is a broken promise. I know, and I won't repeat at length today, but my colleagues have made clear that every MLA on that side promised not to raise taxes. They broke that promise when they raised the—they expanded the PST last year. That, of course, raised \$106 million for Manitobans alone, just by adding PST to things like insurance and haircuts and hair colourings and esthetician services—I hope I got that word right. I know we even have that kind of program in our local high school, but I struggle to say that 'termino'—term every time I have to use it and even when I visit the program.

So—and we know this year, Mr. Speaker, the NDP goes on and with a subsequent tax hike, this time costing Manitobans \$277 million by increasing the PST by 1 point or 14.2 per cent, the largest tax increase in this province since 1987. Overall and combined, Manitobans are paying almost \$400 million more per year in PST because of the NDP's inability to match revenues to expenditures, their inability to keep their word on what they told taxpayers and voters in the 2011 election, their inability to do the difficult work that other provincial governments around this country are doing.

*(15:20)

Even in Ontario, a few weeks ago, a renewed conversation around driving down government spending—all across this country we have governments—in Saskatchewan, Brad Wall's government has taken such effective steps to drive down government spending. And yet, Mr. Speaker, this government thinks that any party that would put together—put forward any conversation around driving down government spending, that somehow that's shocking and it's horrible and it's horrific. I don't understand why the government so doesn't understand what their mandate is, so doesn't understand their responsibility of the caretakers of the finances of the Province of Manitoba that we have to—it's incumbent on government to constantly look, not just at program spending, but at the effectiveness of the program; to look at how many senior bureaucrats are being added to see what is the extent to which the rate at which we add senior bureaucrats outstrips the national average. And when

they find it does, why don't they do something about it? What is the total envelope for—you know, for spending, in all of their areas of core government expenditures?

And, even last year, when the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) himself came with his Speech from the Throne—or, rather, with his budget speech and said, we will drive down government spending an equivalent of 1 per cent per year. That was the Minister of Finance's own words. And yet this year, when our own party said, you know what, the Minister of Finance actually had a good point there, and it is necessary for government to do it. But, when we speak the same words as the minister, oh, that party's indignant, and, oh, all those MLAs are indignant. They can't believe we're talking about government being more efficient with the resources that flow to them through taxation and other forms of revenue. There could be nothing—there could be no greater disconnect than that.

Mr. Speaker, the time that I have remaining to me—we've made clear as a party that since 2011, the increases to taxpayers, to Manitobans under this government—well, it comes to more than \$400 per year, \$1,600 per year in taxes and fees total for one family, and that hits home.

Earlier in this session I raised the issue of a gentleman and his wife in my constituency who came to see me—a gentleman by the name of Allen Schellenberg [*phonetic*], who should be in the time of his life when he does not have to punch the clock anymore. And I won't divulge to the House Allen's [*phonetic*] age, because I'm not sure Allen [*phonetic*] would appreciate that, but I'll tell you—I've got to say, for his age, he is hard-working, he is so ambitious, he's so driven. And I met him at a trade show in my community and they were there selling all kinds of crafts that he and his wife make and sell at different shows. And I complimented them on their products. They sell these beautiful greeting cards where Allen [*phonetic*] takes the photographs and she does the work to place them in cards, and they write messages inside them. It was a great way to get all of my shopping done for Father's Day and Mother's Day and nieces' and nephews' birthdays. So I bought these cards and I complimented them on, you know, being so energetic. And Allen [*phonetic*] came back and said, you know, Cam, if we didn't have to do this, we wouldn't, but we have to do this. Our finances are so tight, the PST increase creates expenses for us that we simply cannot compensate for in other areas. We know our costs and this

increases them. This is a Manitoba senior on a fixed income who now has to deal with this government's tax hike.

Another one of those individuals was Abe Neufeld, who runs Tektite Manufacturing. And earlier in this session I raised the issue of this company that has done so well manufacturing roll cages for tractors and special equipment for golf carts. They found some niche markets. They've done a fantastic job of marketing this product. We know the extent to which there is ingenuity and lots of ambition in business in southern Manitoba and, indeed, all across this province, and this company has done so well, they've expanded in their location. They were located between Morden and Winkler on the corridor there. And Abe Neufeld contacted me and say—and said, as my MLA, I want you to know that this could be the straw that breaks the camel's back. We are investigating the possibility of moving our business to North Dakota. He says, there is so much government red tape and there is so much taxation. He says, I know I could be so much leaner in my operation. At least there's someone in this province who knows the value of a—about leanness in an operation, that somehow that's not a dirty word. That when we are spending the dollars of taxpayers, it is incumbent on us—it's not a luxury—it is incumbent on us to check and check again that every dollar is being spent to the greatest good and to address the greatest need.

Mr. Speaker, there's another family that contacted me, Nick and Lynda Clayson. And here is a Manitoba family—Nick has done many things in his lifetime, as a matter of fact he was a councillor for an RM and—in southern Manitoba, they've since moved to Morden.

And Nick says he didn't want to be guilty of complaining in the coffee shops without doing the work. So he pulled out his calculator and he went over their family finances from top to bottom. And he included everything from mortgage payments and car payments and MPI registration costs, fuel costs, entertainment, he included the tithe they give to their local church and the donations they give to local charities.

And he submitted it to me and I was amazed that someone would be so transparent with their finances. He did the work and he said when he calculated it all out, even in a single year without the twelve months, only for the, let's say, the six months that that tax would be in effect, the PST increase, he was still

calculating out in their family, a family of two let me say, an \$800 increase. He was saying for that family of two if it was a full year it could be twice that amount. And I won't have the exact numbers in front of me, but I assure you it was right on par with what we had estimated as a party saying \$1,600 for a family of four.

Mr. Speaker, Manitobans have said in the strongest terms that this tax is inappropriate, this tax is illegal, this tax was not asked for, this tax is being opposed by Manitobans regardless of age, of income, of demographic, of geography.

And, Mr. Speaker, I stand optimistically and say that it is not too late for that party—for that government to do the right thing. It—we know it's not for infrastructure, they couldn't make the argument. We know it is not for flood mitigation, they couldn't make the argument. We know it's not for things like hospitals and schools because those things government must do anyways and other governments do them. We know this tax increase makes us less competitive. We know it leads to out migration.

And, Mr. Speaker, I call on this government to do the right thing and to strike down the Bill 20 and the tax on Manitobans.

Thank you.

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and it's a pleasure to rise and put on record a few comments regarding Bill 20 in third reading here.

This has been a bill that we have debated endlessly in this House, and I would hope that some of the members opposite would be coming around and—to our point of view on some of the impacts on this increase in the provincial sales tax or retail sales tax as it's properly known, the 14.3 per cent increase that we're seeing and its impact in many areas. And we've already seen some of the numbers in terms of increased inflation specific to Manitoba, some of the real impacts that increased taxation has done.

And in particular there are a number of sectors that this really does hurt in a major way. In particular, seniors, those on fixed income. And there are a lot of people out there that are living in rental or perhaps in their own homes still and trying to keep—make ends in there, that are living on really not a lot more than old age pension, perhaps supplement and maybe a little bit of Canada pension supplement or some other income supplement. And their income is very fixed, does not increase a lot, though there are

slight increases for inflation in the Old Age Security; they don't keep up to the high rate of inflation that we've been seeing. And they certainly don't keep up to the increase that we just saw in the provincial sales tax—the 14.3 per cent increase in a single year.

Mr. Mohinder Saran, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

On top of that, we just nicely coming out of a year where the breadth of the services that PST is charged on has increased quite widely, a lot of services have been added. And if you look back during the term of the NDP government here in Manitoba since 2000, they've been pretty consistent in broadening the breadth of that PST applying it to many services that are often very essential; things like accounting and legal services and most recently of course, now we're in—and we see increases in fees as well.

* (15:30)

And I happen to check one of the websites—provincial websites, Bureau of Statistics—on some of the costs related to some of their documents. And it—I was frankly appalled when I saw how much they have increased in three or four years since the last time I had reason to check that site. And things like birth certificates, which are \$75 now, are huge increases in the last few years and clearly are a burden for young families that have to go through this process. And we do have—in almost every constituency we seem to have a lot of young families, in particular, single-parent families. They're far more common now than they were a generation ago and that's cause for concern in itself, but it certainly makes it particularly challenging for them. They're on one income, fairly limited, many times there's some other supplement one way or the other, whether it's to help with child care or perhaps it's housing allowance, which is something that we had encouraged the government to look at increasing and they have not done.

So we certainly find that there are many households these days that are counting their pennies very, very carefully. And, of course, here we are coming to a time of year when there is a sudden extra set of costs, that being around the school system starting up. Not only is their costs for materials to take to school, the books and the other associated things, but there's extra clothes that the kids are going to want and costs associated with that. And disposable incomes in the average household have certainly taken quite a kick in the last few years and that has made it very difficult for families. And

associated with that, of course, many households want to look at what activities their kids are going to be in, in the next year. So—and there's some pretty tough choices having been made.

I was talking to a family the other day with four children, and they both work, they're both in the health-care system and they both have pretty good jobs, but they're finding it tough these days. They're paying a mortgage, and the mortgage costs—though as low as they've probably ever seen—they're a burden and they have to deal with that first. Kids are growing and they eat more every day, so it seems. But now they're coming to a point where they have to decide what these kids want to be in, and they're pretty active bunch of kids. The girls are active in figure skating, and that's actually where I know them from because my kids are active in that area as well. The boys are into hockey; they played soccer in the summer months. And, of course, they're a very musical family, so musical education is a absolute essential from their point of view. But, by the time you get adding all of these things up, it comes to a substantial amount of money, and, of course, there's been an increase of cost associated with that. Everyone who provides these services, of course, also wants—they have to make up for their shortfall, so there's been some increases in fees. And one of the questions they actually had for me is how much of the increase in hockey and figure skating was due to something related to the increase in taxes.

And, when you actually get looking at it, there is a substantial amount in every one of those fees. Not so much in the figure skating one, though now they're paying PST on, actually, the service from the coach, which a few years ago they didn't, but that's certainly in there now. But every fee to every association like Skate Canada and Hockey Canada includes an insurance aspect and that insurance aspect now actually has the 8 per cent PST on it that wasn't there two years ago. We went from zero to 7 per cent and now we're at 8 per cent. And so, in a few areas—and I tried to estimate some of the costs just by checking in with these organizations to see how much of that was related to liability and how much was on disability. And disability, there isn't any PST on those insurance premiums. And it would appear in the area of figure skating, it's not a lot there because the risk of getting hurt in that area and long-term liability is actually quite low compared to some other sports, obviously. It's only about \$8 per person, per year, so that's not that much. But when you look at a club like the one in Portage la Prairie

that has just shy of 200 members and you say to every one of those, well, there's eight bucks more, so there's a substantial amount of extra cost passed on to the community.

But, when you look at hockey and sports like that—ringette, which is another one very similar—their increase is actually more in the neighbourhood of \$20 per year because of their increased insurance costs. And, of course, there's in Portage alone there's about 2,000 kids involved in those two sports, so that's a substantial blow to the community. And then I actually took the time to phone our local recreation commission and say, okay, what is it costing you more to insure the facilities because increased costs in our community? And they're estimating something in the neighbourhood of \$25,000 per year, and that will have to be passed on eventually.

They aren't increasing their ice fees this year. Probably the—they'll be going back to the municipal governments which is supported at two levels, both municipal and the city, and they'll be asking for increased support in regards to keeping the facilities running efficiently and open. And they're looking for efficiencies. Isn't that an amazing concept. They're looking for places to watch their costs a little more carefully and yet still deliver the same amount of services. In fact, they're trying to expand services in a few areas, and they think they can do that by watching some costs very carefully, being more efficient, being more careful with their heating dollars, putting it on a heat/cool cycle during the day and doing a little energy salvage from—there's a pool attached to the one facility and there's a lot of heat generated by that pool and the cooling process, and that's something that they could re-use, so they're looking at ways to do that. But, of course, there's times a year when that can be reversed and the rink generates heat that perhaps they could be used to heat some of the pool facilities, so there might be some efficiencies with that. They're being creative in things like that, and we would certainly encourage the government to look at ways that it could be more efficient.

And it was interesting to see what Ontario was doing, and the new premier there inviting, really, anyone that, in a negotiation process with the unions there, saying, well, if you want an increase, you come to us with suggestions on how we might see some savings. And there are definitely unions there that have taken hold of this proposal and are bringing forward suggestions, and perhaps that's something the government here should be looking at, too.

I know, when we were sitting in Justice, we had quite a lengthy lecture from the Minister of Child and Family Services on the obligations that this government has under legislation, and we certainly understand what she's saying. But what she never got to, and perhaps she never gets, is that they—government has an obligation to provide these services. But nowhere does it say at any cost. You do not have to necessarily throw unlimited dollars at these problems to try and find solutions. You can be cost-effective in how you find solutions. In fact, you have an obligation to the taxpayer whose dollars you take that you are obliged to try and spend these dollars in a logical and as careful a way to provide the services you're obliged, under legislation in the province and an obligation to the people, to provide. And we—we really have seen no sign of that from this government.

So it is pretty difficult to take very seriously that they are going to invest all of this increase in the PST wisely in infrastructure. I don't think we dispute that there are certainly infrastructure deficit needs. In fact, there are a lot of private industry and other levels of government that have been pretty clear in stating that there is obviously a huge deficit in infrastructure in this province and we need to do what we can to try and deal with that. But we have not seen a clear indication that that's where these dollars are going to go.

Initially, of course, there were huge promises made—well, we're going to deal with the flood situation and provide safety against flooding. And yet, when you look at the timelines involved, none of this money would be used for that purpose for a long time to come. It's a long development process, and the minister's right; it can be three to five years before anything can be done in terms of the work that needs to be done on a lot of these projects. So I would certainly encourage them to move as rapidly as possible on many of these.

When you look back and see how this government has behaved on their commitment to flood control, you've really got to wonder. You look back and see, in 2004, for instance, that they—they were obliged and they had made an agreement with the federal government to increase the capacity of the Shellmouth Dam. Now, that alone wouldn't have dealt with the flood of 2011, though it certainly would have reduced the impact of the flood, maybe save something like the Hoop and Holler cut which cost, oh, somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$8 million between the work that was done and the

damages that were paid. Eight million dollars is not an insignificant amount of money. In fact, that was the estimated cost of the expansion of the Shellmouth Dam. So perhaps you could have saved that money within a few years had you actually moved on that. But they never did.

The federal government did their bit. Their obligation there was to acquire property for the lake expansion because it actually backed water up into Saskatchewan. Of course, some of that land may have needed to have been expropriated. I don't think in the end, actually, any of it ever was. They reached agreements with the land owners up there, but the federal government actually acquired the land for the expansion of the Shellmouth Dam, and then the Province was supposed to do the work on the dam itself and, of course, never happened.

* (15:40)

And now I hear from engineers that have been looking at the dam recently as part of the ongoing evaluation following the 2011 flood, that there's actually a lot of doubt as to whether they could actually increase the capacity of that dam now because the dam took quite a bit of damage in 2011, and they're concerned about increasing the capacity and perhaps potential failure. So, certainly, the cost of doing the work now, if they did choose to move ahead with that, is higher than it originally was in 2004, not only because of increased cost inflation, if you want to put it that way, but now they have to do more because they didn't do something. The structure took some damage in 2011, and now we have to do even more than we did before, just to get it back to some level of safety if we were to choose to expand it. So that expansion's now in doubt. So that option's off the table.

Back in 1999, at the end of the Gary Filmon era, agreement was hammered out, actually, on turning the lower dikes the like—rather the dikes in the lower Assiniboine, which were PFRA constructed and their responsibility—and that's a branch of the federal government at the time—turning them over to the Province because it actually makes a lot more sense for the Province to be in a position of doing that maintenance than it did for the federal government to do that. And in the process, an agreement was hammered out that so many dollars per year would be supplied to the Province to do the construction, to do the renovations on the dike, and, in return, of course, the Province was responsible for acquiring the property because in that neck of the woods, many

of those are river lots. They actually go back, really, to Manitoba's beginning. And those property rights actually state that people own the property to the water's edge, so the dikes that are sitting there are actually not the property of the Province, they're the property of the landowner. In some cases, there's easements if there's been work done recently. In a lot of cases, there's actually nothing on the title at all, and so doing any work in there requires that some property either be bought or, at very least, an easement be put in place.

So the Province's responsibility was to do that. So, in the year 1999, when that project first initiated, the Province went ahead and staff actually acquired property for the first year's worth of construction, and we had actually some work done on the dikes about as far as Norquay Park is, there on No. 1 Highway, and that, actually, section of the dikes is in pretty good shape. It's probably had the most work of any of the dikes that we've seen because it tends to be that the river dikes, lower river dikes, only ever get any attention and any work in a year of a flood. So what you're doing is you're building a dike with river silt in an emergency basis, and that's not the best kind of dike. River silt doesn't make very good dikes at any time. You need a good clay to do that. So, where it was necessary, they actually replaced the dike with clay acquired from a borrow pit not too far away, and that added somewhat to the cost and slowed down the process.

But that was supposed to be a five-year proposal, and over that time, that whole stretch between Portage and Winnipeg, that was certainly a big risk in 2011, would have been renovated and improved to a level that actually increased the capacity of the river to about 35,000 cubic feet per second, which is—surprise—the goal for any new project, 35,000 cubic feet per second. But this government, in their first-year mandate, decided, we don't need to do this. So, they didn't move ahead with the acquiring any further property, and they lost the matching—or the federal funding because the federal government could not pay for any construction because no one had acquired the property to do the construction on it. So that project went on the wayside. And then, to me, that is very indicative of the kind of commitment we have seen from the NDP government when it comes to flood control in this part of rural Manitoba.

And since—of course, in 2011, there was a lot of work done on an emergency basis. An emergency situation was declared along the river through a

number of municipalities there, which gave them the right to come in on this property that they didn't own and do whatever it is they needed. And they built borrow pits and they knocked trees down and they went through people's yards and they messed up crops and they tore up farmland. And lo and behold, here we are, two and a half years later, and many of these people who were promised compensation for the damages that occurred on an emergency basis have yet to see an adjustor. This is not covered by any program that would—has been announced by the government, so, clearly, it's not in the total that the minister likes to throw out there all the time of over \$1.2-billion cost, because no one's been there to see them. They don't know what the costs are. And we have been able to get, really, very little settlement on that.

And I have dealt with a number of these landowners, and they're pretty frustrated. In fact, they have gotten together as a group and now they have a lawyer, and that's another lawsuit that the Province is probably going to lose, because I don't think there's any doubt that the work was done. The work needed to be done on an emergency basis. If they'd planned a little further ahead, we wouldn't have been doing it on an emergency basis. In fact, we would—we'd have been in a lot better shape and a lot less concerned about that particular spring. But it does reflect very carefully on the level of commitment and the forethought that this government has put into infrastructure and infrastructure necessities. But now they need increased money so that they can actually do all these things that they didn't think were important before and on a—and they need it right now even though they will not start many of the projects for some time to come.

Now, I mentioned earlier the impact on a increase in the PST on—to those on limited and fixed incomes. And through my critic's role I do deal with a lot of people that have housing issues, and many times I've heard from them, you know, it's very tight and it's getting tighter. In fact, there was a survey the other day, I believe it was the Free Press, saying that 82 per cent of Manitobans are feeling the squeeze—is the best way to put it—in terms of tougher to make ends meet. And I don't doubt that for a minute because every time you turn around there's an increase in fees, one thing or the other.

Actually, a friend of mine that is in the funeral services business—and we talked earlier about birth taxes—well, we're about to have a death tax as well,

by the sound of things, and even if they don't put the death tax into place they've already increased death certificates by doubling those costs. And if you think that's relatively minor, in the average estate, usually they get 10 death certificates for a family to help them deal with the probate because all kinds of agencies right from CPP right through all of the insurers and everything need death certificates to deal with that as part of probate. And the average number that they require is about 10. So we've actually added quite a substantial cost at that end of life just on those—on that paperwork alone, and that's certainly a burden and that is not a time when families are in a situation to deal with that.

So I certainly hope they don't move ahead with the so-called death tax because that is actually taking advantage of people at a very vulnerable point in their life.

Now, if you look at the increase to the—of the PST to those towns along the border, and the member for Morden-Winkler (Mr. Friesen) actually spoke earlier about the—some of the impact and the businesses that looked at relocating. And I spent a few years down in Morden area some time ago, actually back in the time when the dollar was quite different than it is now. We were talking about 65 cents on the dollar, and so there was a lot of flow of cash back and forth across the border and a lot of businesses moved one way or the other to take advantage short term of the differential in dollars.

But, when you build in a long-term increase in taxation costs, you are going to drive some businesses across the border simply because the tax situation is better for them because they're not just selling in Manitoba in most cases, they're not even just selling in Canada. They're selling nationwide; they're selling continent-wide; and they're selling worldwide with many of their products.

And they need to be in as competitive a situation as they can so that they can actually do well in the future and grow their business and generate jobs in the community, and so that people can live there and actually be successful and it actually builds the community. You need successful businesses to go with that, and if they have to leave the community because the tax situation doesn't work well for them, well, then they are lost from the community and many things are lost from that community including the people and the services that they require and the money that they *[inaudible]*. So it becomes a bit of a burden long term to that community when that type

of situation arises. And there's certainly—there are many communities along the border like that.

And my sister and her husband actually have an accounting business in the town of Melita, which is right along the border with Saskatchewan. And, of course, these days now it is a booming area because of all of the work in the oil industry out there, not only in the drilling itself but in the services provided and associated with that, which seems to go on forever. And they've reached their point in life where they're probably looking to sell the business—they are definitely looking to sell the business and retire and looking around to see if there's anyone in the community that might be interested to taking over a very thriving business providing an essential service to the community, because they're really the only accounting firm in the town—although there are some that come and go, they're there on an everyday basis. And so there's definitely a need for that, and there's interest in it and they've had discussions with a number of people. But every one of them has said, why would we open—why would we buy a business on this side of the border when we can go across into Saskatchewan, reach the same customer base and never have to pay a lot of the taxes and costs associated with that?

* (15:50)

So it's been tough for them to actually find someone that is prepared to locate, literally, on the Manitoba side of the border, and that's sad because that's a lovely community. We want to see it grow and thrive.

And there are a lot of people actually providing services in the community, that actually just live across the border in Saskatchewan; drive in everyday, but they are Saskatchewan residents. They are paying taxes in Saskatchewan. And they do their business, they do their buying, and look for many of their services as possible on the other side of the border.

And so it really drives home a community like that, that is close to the border, what this government has done with their increase in tax, and the impact that it had on many small rural communities.

I suspect it's had impact even here in the city of Winnipeg, with encouraging people to go to the States with the—to spend their dollars down there.

I'm not a big fan of that actually. I want to see people spend their money in their own local community. But certainly there are people that feel

justified in spending money down in the US. It costs them money to get there. It certainly costs them money to stay there for a day or two. And they spend their money down there, and it is lost to the local community. And that is a shame that they see—feel the need to see that—or to do that.

We used to hear an awful lot about people in Portage driving to Winnipeg to do their grocery shopping. They felt that the local stores weren't competitive enough and that it was worth their trip to come to one of the Superstores in Winnipeg, and they would save enough on groceries, or go to something like Costco, and save enough on groceries that it was worth their trip into the city. You don't hear about that anymore. The cost of transportation is so high. Our local community has become more competitive and some of the firms went through some renovations, increased their stores, made them more modern in terms of design and standard, and you can bring people back to your local community. In fact, our local supermarkets are providing—actually drawing people from some of the surrounding communities around Portage now. So we do hear a few comments about them being tough on some of the smaller communities, and I guess that's one of the competitive aspects that is placed. Certainly, we do not hear about people that feel obliged to drive into the city to do that. So you can bring people back if you get yourself back in a competitive position. And I hope that's a lesson that this government actually takes.

We've also heard a few times about the petitions that we're reading. And they never stop and, you know, accusing us of really wasting time in the House, but do they never stop and think how many people have signed those petitions. I mean, we're reading 15 to 18 a day on the average, and yes, they cover a range of issues. But a high percentage of them have really been around the issue of taxation, either PST or the impact on the border, of the PST. That's an awful lot of people that have signed these petitions while on a long-term basis. And, you know, though it's a bit of work to collect signatures on these petitions out in the community. You take them along with you when you go to community events, make sure that they get a little attention, and people actually line up to sign them. And, you know, it tells me that a lot of people are very concerned on an ongoing basis.

Now the member from Morden-Winkler mentioned earlier how hot it is out today. And it's certainly not too bad in this Chamber here right now,

but it's hot in terms of weather. But it's probably pretty hot for some of the members opposite when they go to community events too. And that they're getting a lot of criticism for the increased costs that they're passing on, in one form to the other, and frankly, probably getting a lot of criticism; well, what are you doing with the money?

You know, you've made a lot of stories. We—I mentioned earlier, Mr. Acting Speaker, that they talked about infrastructure for flooding. Now we hear infrastructure in any form, and they redefine what infrastructure is. It's right down to, really what I would call ongoing annual costs. But that's what they're spending their money on.

And yet we do not see any move to reduce the deficit. And it's been mentioned earlier that we'll probably have a deficit in the range of \$500-plus million again this year. We've only seen three quarters of the numbers come out. And actually, if I remember correctly, in the election year, it was the first week of September when the final numbers came out in 2011. That would be for the 2010 year. And the Premier (Mr. Selinger), at the time, said, well, we're on target. In fact, we're ahead of target to balance the budget. Of course, we don't hear too much about that anymore.

So I'm looking forward, actually, in the next week to 10 days, to the last financial statement coming out for 2012, to see how big the deficit for 2012 really is, because I think this government's been reluctant to bring that forward because they were definitely not on line in the third quarter to be on budget. And we know historically that they very rarely actually meet their budgets and, in fact, usually they're well over their budget, and I'm expecting that we'll see the same type of situation this year and we should be seeing it soon. And, if it doesn't come out soon, we'll certainly be asking why is it being delayed, because, obviously, a delay usually indicates bad news. So we'll be looking for that on the ongoing basis in the near term.

Members also mentioned the time in committee, and I certainly took my turn there, as well, listening to people that came forward to speak about Bill 20 and the increase in the PST, and many of them were very heartfelt, well-thought-out. As the member for Morden-Winkler (Mr. Friesen) mentioned, there was a couple of people that did pretty good numbers in terms of the cost to them.

Certainly, I know our own family feels the impact of the increased PST on a number of issues.

Our kids are pretty active in a number of sports, so, yes, we can make the tough decision of reducing the number of sports that they're active in and saying to them, well, I'm sorry, you can't get to that. Not only is there the cost of the activity itself, but it's the cost of getting them there. And even though we might be able to scratch around and find the time commitment, there is actually a cash cost. I don't live in the city itself, so every time I want to go somewhere there's a 15-minute trip to get there, which comes at a cost because we have to drive. It would be nice to have active transportation, as is often promoted here in the city, but it is not very practical in my part of the world. Certainly, when you're carrying a heavy hockey bag, you're not going to throw that on back of the bicycle and take an hour and a half to get where you're going. It makes the whole trip virtually impossible to do. So, certainly, we have to be aware of that, and we're going to have to make some tough decisions around the kitchen table, as was talked about earlier. I'm not sure what those are going to be yet. We need to sit down with the kids, because they're to the point in life now where they need to understand the value of a dollar, and we're certainly trying to encourage them to look at that.

But I think the government needs to understand the value of a dollar. I think it's a lesson that they need to get, as well. Not only is a dollar in terms of what it will buy for them, which is how they look at it, but whose pocket that came out of and what had to be done to generate that particular dollar.

So, certainly, I have enjoyed my opportunity to speak to this. I know that I have colleagues that are—no doubt want to speak to it as well, but I would really encourage anyone across the floor there to take advantage of the—their opportunity to speak to this.

The Acting Speaker (Mohinder Saran): Order.

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): It gives me great pleasure to rise today and put a few words on the record on Bill 20.

And I—once again, I rose to put a few words on the record and I paused for half a second or so, thinking that there's going to be possibly somebody from the government side standing up to put a few words on the record in regards to Bill 20 in defence of their Finance Minister, Mr. Acting Speaker.

You know, I think back to the election of 2011, and as we speak, Mr. Acting Speaker, we have—or as I speak, I do hear members from the other side of the House that are willing or wanting to possibly stand

up and put a few words on the record, and they're going to have their chance after I spend a few moments speaking to Bill 20. It has been—as the member from Portage la Prairie has put on the record, it has been quite the debate, but it's—overall, it's been quite the one-sided debate because our side of the House has stood up and spoke to this.

And the majority of us have also attended the committee meetings, which was held on Bill 20, where hundreds of people had come and shared their view on the increased—increase to the PST, which is a 14 per cent increase or one point. I know that the Finance Minister often stands up and he says how it's one point, it's 1 cent on the dollar, but the fact is that it's one more cent and it's one more cent per dollar coming out of every taxpayer—hard-working Manitobans' pockets in this wonderful province of ours.

* (16:00)

So I'd like to take us back to the election of 2011, September 2011, when each and every one of the current government-side MLAs plus 20 other candidates had gone around and they had done some door knocking, Mr. Acting Speaker, and had been asking hard-working Manitobans for their support and their vote in the election of 2011. And each and every one of those 57 candidates went to the door and they talked to the people at the door, and none of them had stated at the door that they were going to be raising taxes and fees and then later on raise the PST without holding a referendum.

Matter of fact, to go as far as the Premier (Mr. Selinger) had said in a news conference—the Premier said that the idea of raising the PST or raising taxes was utter nonsense and they didn't know where this was coming from, but we knew that in order to balance the books by 2014, as they had promised in the election, that there's no way that they would be able to do that without having to raise taxes. And, unfortunately, we were right because Budget 2012, just a mere six, seven months after the election, that's just what they did. But they did it sort of behind the backs of hard-working Manitobans. They didn't do it quite so boldly in front of their face. They went ahead and increased fees and taxes to a tune of \$184 million in those various avenues, such as home insurance and auto insurance and the haircuts and pedicures and manicures and all those wonderful things, and various others, Mr. Acting Speaker, to a tune of \$184 million.

So then they weren't happy with that. They went ahead, and in Budget 2013 they didn't hide it; they just straight out said that they were going to raise the PST from 7 to 8 per cent, which is a 14 per cent increase, moving it from 7 to 8 per cent, which was going to bring in an additional \$237 million, just in that one move. So now, when you add that \$237 million for the PST increase to all those fees and taxes that they had put on the previous year in 2012, we're looking at an additional income from those two budgets of \$500 million or a half a billion dollars each and every year coming out of hard-working Manitobans' back pockets.

So, when you take, once again, Mr. Acting Speaker—I know I've said this once or twice before in the House—when you take the 1.2 million people in this wonderful province of ours, and you take that \$500 million or half a billion dollars and you divide by the 1.2, you roughly get \$400 per Manitoban going into the coffers or the chequebook of this spendDP government.

And the fact is is that, you know, we've got one more week of the kids' holidays, and then they all go back to school, and starting to look at various extracurricular activities, and so what does that mean? If it's \$400 per Manitoban, when you look at a family of four, you're looking at \$1,600, and in my situation, that's just it; you're looking at \$1,600 that we're going to have less to spend for this upcoming year.

So there's going to be some hard decisions being made, not only in my household but absolutely every Manitoban's household throughout this great province of ours. And some of those are going to be which extracurricular activities they're going to either have to cut back on or adjust to maybe some less expensive extracurricular activities. And when we're talking extracurricular activities, we're not just talking sporting events, we're talking about the culture and the arts and absolutely everything that kids and youth and family members, for that matter, can be—can get involved in. Mr. Acting Speaker, \$1,600 is a big chunk of change.

But, you know, Mr. Acting Speaker, it seems to me that this is starting to become a pattern with this government. And the pattern is, is when it comes to making changes within legislation, they feel that it's their right to not consult with Manitobans. They failed to consult with Manitobans on the PST hike; they failed to consult with Manitobans on the forced amalgamations. And the fact is, with these—with this

failing to consult—and it comes to these different and various committee meetings that we're going to be holding; we held them already on Bill 20 and, as I said in my start to my speech, there was hundreds of people who came during those hot evenings and had voiced their concerns about the PST increase. And roughly, there was about 95, 97 per cent of those people who showed up were against that PST increase.

And I think it's not only the PST increase that made so many of them so angry, Mr. Acting Speaker. It's the fact that a lot of them had just felt slighted to the point where during the election there was a promise to not raise taxes, and then now, just six months after that 2012 Budget and then 2013 Budget, that's just what this government is doing.

And we could call it arrogance, Mr. Acting Speaker, but the point is, is that this PST increase, they've done it by trying to rip up the taxpayer protection act—and that's exactly what Bill 20 is trying to do—and raise the PST without holding a referendum. Give the people a voice.

So I'm really hoping that during this third reading of Bill 20 that we're giving the government one last chance to sort of have a sober second thought, Mr. Acting Speaker, and pull Bill 20 and hold a referendum.

I know for a fact that there are members on the other side of the House, on the government side, that do have constituents that are voicing their concerns, their opposition to increasing the PST. I know also that there's many, many, many constituents of the government side that are emailing them and cc'ing us as well, in regards to their opposition to the forced amalgamations of municipalities as well, Mr. Acting Speaker.

So, at this point, I'd like to, you know, canvass the House and ask the government members to—by a show of hands which ones actually went door to door during the last election and had basically mentioned to them that they were—that—to the Manitobans that they were going to be raising the PST or any taxes. And so I look across and I look around the House and I know that no one is raising their hands, Mr. Acting Speaker. So you can't tell me that during the election of 2011, all 57 candidates went door to door, door to door promising not to raise taxes and then six months after the fact, they decided to go ahead and raise those fees and taxes in Budget 2012 and then 2013 to a tone of a half a billion dollars.

And there's a childhood rhyme that sort of goes with what that says about the 57 candidates that went door knocking and that has to do with pants on fire, Mr. Acting Speaker. And so those 57 candidates should be ashamed of themselves, going door to door and promising various things.

And I know one of—an additional thing that I know some of my constituents were really hoping for was the fact that the government of the day, the—our the spendP during that election had promised the seniors to wipe out the education tax off their property taxes. And, you know, Mr. Acting Speaker, we're still waiting for that promise to be fulfilled. But we know by this government's track record that, you know, to not hold their breath because it's just not going to be forthcoming.

* (16:10)

You know, I did mention the committee hearings on Bill 20, on how there were hundreds of people who came to the Legislature and came and presented on a daily basis, and many of them put in a lot of hard work. Many of them brought in packages and voiced their concerns. Many of them just spoke off the top of their head, and a lot of them—all of them came and they did speak with passion, and they told some very personal stories on how this was going to affect them and, in some cases, on how angry they were with this government, basically, the government lying to them.

The—I did want to reference a few of the people who did come to those committees, and one of the members, as far as MLAs in the House, that I did not see at the committee and that was the Premier. The Premier did not have the decency to show up and to listen to any of those hard-working Manitobans, and it was sort of sad, because these are the people who elected him to be Premier, and he's supposed to be standing up for all Manitobans and taking their views and opinions into account. I know that there was a—one of the presenters who came his name was Clayton Rumley, and he's—presently lives in the city of Selkirk, and I know that his MLA of Selkirk riding doesn't necessarily live there, but that's okay. The fact is that Clayton Rumley came, and he basically said that he was just angry at the sense of entitlement and impunity that permeates all levels of this government, and he also said that he doesn't generally come out and do any type of public speaking. He had said, and I quote, he was talking to the government, to the NDP's side: Since you have already raised the PST effective July 1st, it really

makes me wonder what the point of this public—what the point of these public hearings are? Are you really committed to hearing and acting on the opinions of the public, or is this just an empty gesture designed to make us feel like we had our say and that somehow democracy was served, because these public hearings aren't serving democracy—you know what would, though?—a referendum.

And this, Mr. Acting Speaker, are the words of Clayton Rumley. He's a—presently lives in the city of Selkirk. He came out to share some of his story and he also mentioned his dad, and he had really wished that his dad was still around so that he could have went with him to the Leg on that evening to also bring forward the displeasure of this government raising the PST without holding the referendum.

Another presenter was David Ennis, and Mr. Ennis brought forward another package and he included his picture of his grandsons on the front, and, basically, Mr. Ennis carries on to talk about how this raise in PST was going to be affecting not only him on a day-to-day basis because he was a senior on fixed income, but it was also going to be affecting his kids, and then, ultimately, his grandkids, because this government, when they took office in 1999, they had a debt of a shade over \$12 billion, and today we're looking at a debt of 30-plus billion dollars. So I concur with Mr. Ennis, and it's going to be interesting on how our—my kids, my grandkids and great-grandkids, God willing, how are they're going to even handle this debt load, but I can assure them that many Manitobans aren't going to forget what this NDP government has done, and they are going to remember.

And that's our job, on the opposition side, is to make sure that they remember, come next election, so that at least we can start to bring that debt closer and down, Mr. Acting Speaker, as opposed to the high spike of it travelling in the last 14 years.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Now, I mention the efforts and the work that these committee presenters had done in preparation for the Bill 20 committees, Mr. Speaker, and I have many, many, many different examples of that. And I know that some people had put together packages of 40, 50, 60 pages getting ready for their presentation. And, when they show up for these presentations, they expect to be listened to. And I know that there is a difference between listening and hearing, and I think that those members from the government side who attended those committee hearings each and

every night, of course, except for the Premier (Mr. Selinger), they were sitting there and listening—or fake listening. They definitely weren't hearing them, because you would think that if the government was interested in doing any consulting with any Manitobans, that they would take some of those recommendations and make a few adjustments to Bill 20.

I know that we have offered, on this side of House, many, many suggestions, 20 to that fact, on amending Bill 20, going from the name to just pulling Bill 20 completely off and then starting from scratch, Mr. Acting—Mr. Speaker—sorry. Start from scratch, consult with Manitobans. What's the plan? Initially, the gas tax, the fee increases last year in 2012 were supposed to go to infrastructure improvements. We're failing to see that, and then when they proposed a PST increase, it was going to go towards the flood that was supposed to be happening in 2013, and I swear that you would think that the Finance Minister was down south in the States trying to do some kind of rain dance just to make that happen.

Mr. Speaker, when we saw that the flood didn't come in 2013, then the Province decided to switch gears a little bit and say that all that money that they were going to be collecting was going to go to infrastructure. Well, there's no plan, and the fact is is they are making—they are forcing hard-working Manitobans, whether it's business people collecting the taxes or the people paying all of those taxes on all of those items, they're forcing them, No. 1, the businesses who are collecting, to be breaking the law.

How are they breaking the law? They're breaking the law by collecting that PST, that extra one point, which was a 14 per cent increase and submitting it to the government and making sure that they submit it on time. I know that the member from Emerson had brought up an example of what happens if you're collecting the PST and you are one weekend late. Well, you get a 10 per cent penalty on those monies that you have to give to the government. I know that we've mentioned many, many topics or examples when the provincial government itself has been late in cutting the cheques over to various groups, and are they paying a fine, Mr. Speaker? I don't think so.

*(16:20)

Now, I know that another presenter had come. His name was Allan Ciekiewicz from the Springfield

municipality, and he, too, had put in a lot of information and had cited various sections of acts and letters that he had sent to the Premier and to the Minister for Energy and also to the Minister of Conservation, and basically disappointed. He's saying how disappointed he was with the fact that his non-replies that he was getting from the government.

And here are hard-working Manitobans who are taking time out of their busy schedules, their family lives, and putting in the time to address concerns that they have and that are echoed by other Manitobans to the government, and the government doesn't want to listen, Mr. Speaker.

I know that just today in the House the government side had brought up a couple bills, and they're putting on the record that we're the ones holding them up. In fact, Mr. Speaker—is that they haven't been calling them. I know for Bill 33, the forced amalgamation, the Minister for Local Government has sat on his hands. I know there's been a couple times he's asked during question period for reasonable amendments to the bill, and we've been giving him reasonable amendments for quite some time. And those reasonable amendments are basically—you didn't have any consultations with municipalities. So we're saying, pull the bill, start from scratch, have some absolute consultations with people, with communities, and redo the bill. I know that the minister for—the Finance Minister is busy talking, and I'm hoping he can encourage the Minister for Child and Youth Opportunities to get up and put a few words on the record in regards to Bill 20, which would be very interesting to hear.

I know that, during the election of 2011, Mr. Speaker, the government added a—one of those new, famous lies. And I mean, the first two are old and dear to everybody's heart, and the first famous lie is that the Earth is flat. And the second one, of course, is the cheque is in the mail. And now, the spenDP government has gone ahead and they've added a new one, and they said, no new taxes.

So I know that the members from maybe Tyndall Park and Elmwood are going to get up after I finish speaking for a few minutes, and maybe they'll put a few words on the record. *[interjection]* And, yes, actually, the member from Elmwood is assuring me that the Earth is round, and I appreciate that fact that he listened a little bit when he was in school, and listened to his hard-working teachers and put that on there. I'll put that on the record.

Now, when we're talking about the forced amalgamation, I'm going to get back to that for a little bit, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that the NDP failed to consult with Manitobans again. They're attempting to eliminate local government in favour of centralization. Now, we're not opposed to amalgamation. We're 'opposed' to the fact that they're forcing various municipalities to amalgamate. I know that the first time that AMM or any of the municipalities that heard about this forced amalgamation was during the Throne Speech, and, basically, they were all taken by surprise. And I must say that there was a couple municipalities—I know in my constituency, the RM of Lac du Bonnet and the Town of Lac du Bonnet—that was willing to go forward with the amalgamation, and they actually had the reeve of the RM of Lac du Bonnet actually stood up at AMM and commended the minister for bringing forth the amalgamation.

Now, the problem with that is that the Minister for Local Government doesn't want to hear that. They don't want to hear about the people who actually want to go ahead and put some time and energy into doing the amalgamation properly. All the Minister for Local Government wants to do is force the ones, the top-down dictatorship down on the municipalities that are under the thousand permanent resident threshold, Mr. Speaker, such as Victoria Beach, which is a hard-working municipality with well over 2,200 taxpaying properties are on the tax roll. And the problem is, is the local—the Minister for Local Government is failing to see that, in fact, that that's how many people actually have voting rights there. There's well over 5,000 people who have voting rights out there. But he is a little bit stubborn, and he's seeing—he's only looking at the fact that permanent residents—there's roughly 367 of them—and these people are part of the municipality that is self-sufficient, self-reliant, hard-working, they're working for the people; they don't operate by any grants of the Province. They're absolutely self-sufficient.

So now the problem is, is the Minister for Local Government is putting a lot of energy into trying to make municipalities like Victoria Beach amalgamate with a said neighbour, and what's happening is you're having the neighbours having disagreements when the puppeteer, which is the Minister for Local Government, is sitting back and watching them dance and have these discussions, Mr. Speaker.

And, when the Minister for Local Government should actually take that energy and go over to

municipalities such as the RM of Lac du Bonnet and the Town of Lac du Bonnet and maybe help them do the amalgamation properly, because a lot of these municipalities are quite old, Mr. Speaker, and to think that you're going to wrap up a municipality and amalgamate or force amalgamate—have them do a forced amalgamation within 10 months is unrealistic.

And it's funny that when we talk about bills coming forward in the House, the minister has failed to call Bill 33 to continue the debate, and so it's been out there for quite some time.

So, Mr. Speaker, I see that I only have just under a minute left so I'd like to conclude. And the fact is, is that it's clear that this government's intent on raising the PST, despite the fact that they don't have a mandate to do this from Manitobans. They're willing to rip up the taxpayer protection act and not hold a referendum, as it is legislated.

So far, we've been in session for over 23 days debating Bill 20, nearly a third of all the House time that we've been sitting here, Mr. Speaker. Instead of focusing on other more important bills, the NDP is intent on raising—increasing taxes, taking that hard-working Manitobans' money out of their back pockets, putting it into their chequing accounts and blowing it.

So I thank you very much for your time.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): A pleasure to rise again to speak on Bill 20. I never get tired of speaking on Bill 20, and there's always lots of opportunity it seems to speak on this bill. It'll go down in the history of the Legislature as one of the most debated bills, if not the most debated bill, in the province. And I think that people will look back at this debate and see it as historic and worthwhile. Maybe not everybody in this room, but certainly I think that historians will look back and look to this and see that it is something that was important, and that it was an important thing to do to have the debate.

Not that that's an easy thing, Mr. Speaker. I recognize that there are many people here who probably had other plans for the months of June, July, August and maybe September, October and November, and I recognize that, and I'm sympathetic to that, and know that this can be sometimes a difficult process for all of us who are involved.

But it's an important process and it's one that our forefathers wanted us to have. When it comes to democracy, it's something that many men and

women in Canada have fought for in various different conflicts around the world, so that we could have the freedom to disagree in a respectful and reasonable way.

Now I know that there'll be people who are commentators, who will look at what happens in terms of the debate in the Legislature, and they'll ascribe value to that debate, Mr. Speaker. And that's fine; that's also a freedom.

We also have many men and women who have fought for the freedom of the press in Canada so that people could—to have that luxury to be able to say exactly how they feel about us as politicians, or the institution of the Legislature and what goes on here. And it's a right that I would always defend. Certainly, as a parliamentarian, I would always defend that right, Mr. Speaker.

*(16:30)

But, regardless of what one believes to be the value or the merit of the debate, I do think it is important, and I do think it is our democratic right and responsibility to stand up when we see things that we believe are wrong, that we believe are not right, when—that are not just and where people, Manitobans, whether they've elected us or they've voted for different political parties or if they didn't vote at all, want to have something said and something done about a particular issue, it falls to us as their representatives and then the voices in this Chamber to bring forward those issues.

So this is, again, a good opportunity to speak to this bill. I have spoken, I think, obviously, on second reading, on the main motion, on the original hoist motion, on the reasoned amendment, Mr. Speaker, and all of those, I think, were important. All of them brought something different to the table in terms of the discussion, and I'm glad we've had that discussion.

I want to talk a little bit about committee, and, of course, that's one of the things that we have to go through, one of the roads and the paths that legislation goes through to it—to get to third reading, which is where we're at now. And committee was a very instructive thing, and I want to say that having so many people come out to committee was a good thing. You know, it was a very good thing. I think it's always important when Manitobans engage themselves in the issue. Whether they agree with me on an issue or disagree with me on the issue isn't really that important; that's not really that important

to me. What is important to me is that they get out and they engage on the issue. And, when it comes to committee, we certainly did see lots of people engaged, lots of people come out to committee and wanted to have their voices heard.

And I didn't keep a running tally, Mr. Speaker, but I guess that 90 per cent of the presenters were opposed to the PST increase, and 90 per cent said that it's not necessary, that there are other ways that this could be handled. Ninety per cent said that they wanted the government to change their mind, and that was invigorating, not just because they were on the same position of our party, although that's always preferable, but because they wanted to have their opinion heard. And often we bemoan the fact that Canadians, or Manitobans, more specifically, aren't as engaged in politics or political affairs as we would like them to, and there's lots of different reasons for that. And it would take more than 25 minutes for me to go through all of those different reasons, and I'm sure at some point we can have a debate, whether that's in a committee or in a parliamentary setting, about why it is that people don't engage in politics.

But they engaged in that committee, and they engaged in a way, I think, that was respectful and meaningful, and I want to commend the staff of the Legislature and our Clerk's office and our Journals branch and others who were involved in getting that process aligned, and it was a new process, and maybe, as you go anything new, there's some hiccups along the way and things aren't always as smooth as you envisioned them to be. But the outcome and watching it at committee itself, I thought, was very good, and it's the—how it got to that point, how the presenters all got lined up, phoned or got there, may have been a little messy, I think, the first time doing it. But the actual committee process itself and the committee hearings were very good, and they were very instrumental, I think, in setting a new course, I hope, in terms of how we'll continue to do committees in the future.

Now, there was one thing that disappointed me, though, Mr. Speaker, and I was quite disappointed about the Premier's (Mr. Selinger) absence at the committees. And I know we don't speak about the absence of members more generally in this House, but at committee, the Premier was missing in action; he wasn't there. And it both surprised and disappointed me. It surprised me on the one hand, because he was the individual who was encouraging people to come to committee. He was the one who was saying—in fact, you know, it's funny because we

still have, you know, I don't know, some 30 bills or so that haven't gone to committee. I'm not sure of the exact number; it'd be in that range though. And we hear government members every day say, well, you're holding up these 30 bills, we're holding up these 30 bills; send them to committee. And then, when we send the bills to committee, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) doesn't come. He doesn't show up. So there seems to be a bit of a disconnect between what the members want and what, ultimately, the—results in their actions.

So we had the Premier, for many weeks, demanding that Bill 20 go to committee. You know, he would stand up in question period—it usually wasn't in relation to the question asked; he was sort of going off on a different path but he would stand up in committee—or in question period, and he would say, send Bill 20 to committee; there are hundreds of people who want to be heard—hundreds of people.

And then we'd ask him, well, are you going to go to committee and hear any of them? And he wouldn't really say. He didn't answer yes or no, but he would demand that all of these committees happen, that the committee hearings proceed so that Manitobans could be heard, but he didn't actually commit to wanting to hear them himself personally.

So the bill, of course, as history will show, went to committee eventually, after a great deal of discussion, Mr. Speaker, and when it went to committee, we looked around. We searched the committee room on the first night, and the Premier wasn't there. But, you know, people are busy, and you don't always know why people can't make everything, and I understand the Premier's got other commitments. I get that. And so we waited until the next day, and then the Premier—well, he wasn't there. And, again, you sort of think, well, he may have had some prior commitments and, you know, busy guy and all that kind of stuff, and so we waited till the third night. And we looked around for the Premier, and we didn't see the member for St. Boniface. And that went on every night until the very last night, and we thought, for sure, there's no way that the very same individual who demanded that the bill get to committee wouldn't actually show up to any of the committee hearings.

So I'm not a betting man, Mr. Speaker, but if I was, I would've put a little bit of money on the fact that the Premier would've come, at the very least, to the last committee hearing—to that very last meeting, and I don't think I would've, you know, bet that he

would've been there a long time, that he would've, you know, shook hands or spent hours there, but I kind of expected him, you know, to pop his head in and do the royal wave or whatever he was going to do and, you know, sit down in committee and maybe ask a question, so he got his name on Hansard.

You know, that was the former trick of our former premier, Gary Doer. You know, he'd be gone for long stretches of the time, and then he'd quickly show up in the House, raise a point of order, so he got his name on the record and he'd leave again, you know, and then could say, I was here—I was here, you know. You know, and it was a kind of sleight of hand and that's fine.

But that's sort of what I expected the Premier to do—that he'd sort of show up and ask a question, get his name on the record, then he'd leave. And then we as an opposition couldn't say, well, he was never there. But he didn't do that. He never came at all—not to one single committee hearing. And he didn't hear one single presentation—not one Manitoban of the hundreds of people who came out to that committee did he listen to—not a single one. And yet he's got the audacity to stand in this House—and he did before Bill 20 went to committee—and say: Send it to committee, send it to committee. We want to hear from Manitobans. And then he doesn't show up. It doesn't make any sense. It's like you're, you know—it's like going to a deejay and demanding that they play a song, and then you leave before they play it and you don't even want to hear it.

So, and I was a little mystified by the Premier's actions, but I do think it speaks to an attitude that, ultimately, when it comes to democracy, the government isn't as interested in the process as they are about the outcome. They just simply want the bill passed. The process doesn't really matter to them that much, you know—how, you know—what people say in committee or what amendments come forward. You know, all of that is just sort of a means to an end for the government. Their endgame is, just pass our bill.

And they get quite offended by the fact that we as an opposition don't just sort of blow over like a flower in the wind and just let it pass. Oh, just let it go. Why don't you just pass our bill? Well, that's not actually our job to just let the government pass bills. And I don't know what it is that they don't sort of get or respect about the role of the official opposition.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there are many members on the government side who have never served in opposition, and so they don't sort of gather that

perspective, but there are a few—the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton), for example, the member for St. Johns (Mr. Mackintosh)—there are a few who have served in opposition, and they should understand, if they don't understand, that there is a role of an opposition. And the role of the opposition is to not just simply oppose, but, where there are issues that need to be opposed, to be vigorous in that opposition. And, if the PST increase—the unnecessary and now illegal PST increase—isn't one of those areas where an opposition would vigorously oppose, well, then, I don't know what would be. So I would encourage the senior members—I mean that more in a parliamentary sense than in an age sense—but the senior members of the NDP caucus, whether that's the member for Thompson or the member for St. Johns, to speak to some of their junior members to explain to them that actually what we were doing as an opposition is what an opposition should do.

*(16:40)

And, if it bothers them, they might want to just hang on for a little bit, because at some point governments change. And I'm not predicting the outcome of any, you know, specific elections, but at some point in our democratic system, governments change. And they may have the opportunity—I won't call it a luxury—but they may have an opportunity to serve in an opposition at some point. And then I suspect that their viewpoint will change somewhat significantly, and then they'll understand that there is actually a real point and a real role for the opposition to have.

But they've been in government so long that they've lost that sense of democracy. They've been in government so long that all of the process towards getting bills through the Legislature are meaningless to them. And in some ways I think they actually have disdain for some of those processes.

We're going to have the opportunity on Thursday morning to debate a resolution on how MLAs, particularly government MLAs, act in committee. And that resolution, which, I think, is a friendly resolution—you know, it might need a little tweaking to get passed, Mr. Speaker—but it basically says that the government should listen at committee, that they shouldn't be sitting on their BlackBerrys, that they shouldn't be on their electronic devices, that they should actually be listening to Manitobans.

Now I actually felt a little bit sheepish bringing in that resolution, I kind of felt a little bit shy about it because you shouldn't think—I know that that might

come at a surprise—but you shouldn't have to bring forward a resolution asking government members—or any members—to do the obvious, which is to listen to presenters. You shouldn't have to bring in something that says, all right, when we have committee hearings, don't insult the committee presenters by calling them howling coyotes, that's a—it's a bad idea. Don't dismiss any of their ideas before you actually hear any of them. Don't say you're not going to listen to them. You know, we shouldn't have to put that in a resolution.

So I kind of felt embarrassed bringing the resolution forward because it's just sort of unnecessary, but it is necessary because that's exactly what happens at committee. We watch the committee hearings and we see government members on their BlackBerrys; you know, they're engaged in some sort of, you know record-setting trend on BrickBreaker or whatever games they're playing on, but they're not listening to the presenters.

And yet, you know, they might be playing solitaire on an iPad for example, Mr. Speaker. Not that I'm asserting that any of the members might be doing that in the Chamber right now and certainly not the Minister of Education (Ms. Allan).

But I would say, Mr. Speaker that all we're asking is that members be respectful—be respectful—to the committee members who are coming forward to present. But, because they're not, because they aren't doing that, it shows that they're not really concerned about the democratic process. They are only concerned about the outcome. And, ultimately, that's why we're here; that's why the Legislature is still sitting. And it might feel like we're in a bit of a logjam, but it's more than that and it has more importance as that.

The reason this bill hasn't passed yet is because the government hasn't respected the process. They've not been listening to Manitobans, not been respecting those Manitobans, not being—wanting to engage with those Manitobans.

And, you know, that could also be applied to different pieces of legislation within the House as well because, ultimately, we're not here as an opposition just to roll the government's agenda through and to say, oh sure, pass this, pass, pass everything, we're not going to have any sort of opposition to anything. That's not our role. Our role is to ensure that bills and legislation get thorough debate and that the public is able to come and be a part of that debate, that the public is aware of what's

going on around different pieces of legislation and that they're respected, Mr. Speaker. And that has been a critical element that's been missing on this particular bill, and it's a reason that I've been concerned, and that our caucus has been concerned, about Bill 20.

So we're going to continue to speak about Bill 20, to put up opposition to Bill 20, in the hope—and I acknowledge that hope is probably fading at this point—but in the hope that the government will, at some point, realize that they are offside, radically offside with Manitobans, Mr. Speaker.

By now I know and this might have been different if we were debating this in April or in May—it seems like a long time ago, Mr. Speaker, but it—by now all the members of the House have heard from hundreds of Manitobans and all the members have heard that Manitobans are concerned and not supportive of the PST increase and they will have heard different reasons for that.

Now I know that members opposite would never admit to me; they will never come to me and say that many of their constituents are concerned or upset about the PST increase. But they know what's happening. I know what's happening. We all know what's happening. So we can play the game of denial here in the Legislature, but all of us know that Manitobans are really concerned about the PST increase, not just because of the fact that there's been that 14 per cent increase of the PST going from 7 to 8 per cent, but more than that. It's the process; it's how it's happened, how it is that the increase was put in place, how it is that the increase went up. That's as much of a concern to Manitobans as I think the increase itself.

Now some of that will be tested out in court, and we look forward to the court proceedings, Mr. Speaker. Always hard to predict what happens in court, and I'm not about to make those sort of predictions. But I think that it is probably the only place that Bill 20 will get a fair legal hearing. Now there's an element of a political hearing, and that political hearing will come at a time down the road. And you can be assured that, whenever the next general election occurs in the province of Manitoba, this will be an issue that will be debated, and it's an issue that will go to the government's credibility, not simply going to be about the increase itself and where the money went or didn't go. It'll be largely about the government's credibility and the fact that they made a promise that it wasn't going to

happen, and this government's going to have a very difficult time going back to the people in the next election and saying, well, we promise this or the other thing, because Manitobans will remember. Overwhelmingly, they will remember, well, you promised us something else too in the past and then you broke that promise.

Now this government and other governments could sometimes get away with those sort of things, but it's going to be very difficult on the increase of the PST. That is something Manitobans are going to remember. It's a very significant breaking of a promise. It impacts all Manitobans, and they will remember that they were promised one thing and that something else happened. So it becomes an issue of credibility. It very much becomes an issue of credibility for this government, and that'll play out over the next couple of years leading up to the next election, Mr. Speaker.

But certainly I know that, when we look at Bill 20 and the stages that it's gone through, it's been necessary. It's been a necessary thing because what you don't want with any government is you don't want the government to believe that they simply have a blank slate. So, when they're sitting down and determining their legislation in the early part of the year prior to the budget and prior to the traditional spring session, that they don't believe, well, this may or may not be a controversial measure, but we don't expect the government—or the opposition to put up much opposition, so let's just bring it forward.

This has been as much about telling Manitobans that we as a caucus are willing to stand up for them, that we're willing to stand by them in this particular fight against the PST increase. It's been about assuring them that we as an opposition will be vigorous in standing with them, but also to tell them that, if we're fortunate enough to win government after the next election, that we will be as vigorous in standing up for their ideas and their beliefs then as we are now in opposition. It's about showing them that there are leaders in the province of Manitoba who actually are willing to sacrifice a little bit to ensure that working Manitobans are—have their interests heard and have their interests defended here in the Legislature, unlike this NDP government which has abandoned the working families in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, and told them something and then not deliver on what they told them.

So, you know, I know that there'll be members on the other side who will be frustrated by hearing

the various speeches from members on this side; they just simply want their bill passed. They are no longer interested in the process of how that happens; they simply want their legislation moved along and they're tired of the debate.

But I don't think we should ever get tired of standing up for Manitobans. I don't think that we should ever say that it's the wrong time to stand with Manitobans. I don't think we should ever say that those working-class Manitobans, who are working hard every day to make ends meet and get a little bit ahead maybe for their families, that we shouldn't stand up for their rights. I never want to have that said about me as a legislator, Mr. Speaker. I don't think any of us should. I think all of us should be striving to be working hard for those Manitoba families who are working hard for their own families.

* (16:50)

And so I would tell the government members: Don't be discouraged by the debate that's happening here in the Legislature. Be encouraged. Be encouraged when you hear that there are MLAs who are continuing to fight for hard-working Manitoba families. Be encouraged by that, and, you know, maybe learn a little bit, maybe step back and go: You know, maybe those are sort of the ideas that we were driven by at one point. Maybe reach back into your memory and think, at an earlier time, were we ever driven by that sort of notion that we should come to the Legislature, here, and work for those Manitoba families, that we shouldn't just try to take money from them and tax them and make things harder for them and just pass down the costs of our misspending or overspending on to them because that's the easy thing to do?

And to think back, that there must have been a time that you wanted to go and to say, we're going to be there for working-class Manitoba families, because that's what we're doing. That's all we're doing. And you know, we do it with the mechanisms and the means that we have as—in the Legislature here, as MLAs. There are a certain amount of tools that we have within our toolbox, if you would, Mr. Speaker, and we've used them—and all of them—and probably a few more. And maybe there are a few more. But we've used those as a demonstration that we are willing to be here for those hard-working Manitoba families, not because it's easy on us as MLAs, on any of us, but because it's the right thing to do, because it's the right thing to do. *[interjection]*

And I see the—you know, my colleague from Agassiz, who is saying, absolutely, it's the right thing to do. He's willing to stand up and to continue to stand up for the residents of his constituency. He's not tired. He's ready to continue on to work hard for those Manitoba families. He's showing me the strength of his convictions, even as I'm speaking here, and he's willing to say, however long it takes. However long it takes, I'm willing to stand up, because he gets invigorated. I know; he tells me he gets invigorated when he goes back to his constituency on the weekend and they tell him, you know, we appreciate what you're doing. You're doing a good job. We appreciate that you gave up your summer, that you're still in the Legislature doing the kind of work that we'd hope that you would do, not because it's easy work, not because it's work that everybody appreciates or that there's going to be a hundred columnists in different newspapers who are going to, you know, send up the accolades for you, but because it's the right thing to do. And so I appreciate the member for Agassiz (Mr. Briese) and all the members of this caucus who know that we're here doing the right thing.

Now, ultimately, Mr. Speaker, we understand that this bill will come to a vote at some point. I'm not going to predict the date of that vote because I've been remarkably poor in those predictions in the past. But, at some point, this bill will come to a vote, and the government will get its ultimate wish if it doesn't change its mind. Now, we're still hopeful. We are people of optimism, and so we certainly hope that the government will change its mind. But, ultimately, this bill will come to a vote, a final vote, and we'll all vote yea or nay, and we'll make that decision. And, if the government doesn't change their mind, of course, they'll say, well, we finally got our way. We finally got the bill passed. Nothing was changed, and so nothing was achieved for the opposition. I would say that that's wrong. I would say that that's wrong.

If the government doesn't change their mind, and they just put Bill 20 through the way it is now, I would not say that nothing was achieved. I would say that for all of those hard-working Manitoba families who want their views heard vigorously here in the Manitoba Legislature, that something was achieved for them, that they now understand that there is a group of men and women, there is a political party who is willing to stand up for them, that there are a group of people who are willing to say, yes, it's going to be a bit of a sacrifice, but

we're willing to make that sacrifice, not just in opposition, but also in government, if we're given the opportunity. That's really what that—that's really what I think the victory will be, that Manitobans will understand—Manitobans will understand—that there are people who are willing, that there are people who are willing to stand up for them, because they don't believe that about this government anymore.

They don't believe that this government is working in their best interests anymore. They've lost faith that this government is working in their best interests. And, when that happens, when a government loses the faith of the people that they govern, bad things start to happen. Those people start to look around and start to say, well, we're not happy with the democratic process and how are we going to change it. How are we going to get involved to change it? And we see that happening already. We see that happening with the people coming out to committee. We see that happening with the people signing petitions. You know, we see that happening with the people who've come to rallies. We are already seeing those signs of people who don't believe that the government is looking after their best interests, and they want to find a government who will do just that. And we're here saying, we're willing to be those people, where we've demonstrated that we're willing to be those people, not, again, because it's easy, but because it's the right thing to do.

So I certainly hope that in this third reading debate that the government will have an opportunity to change their mind. I certainly hope in this third reading debate that the government will take the time to reflect on what they've done on Bill 20, that they'll take the time to reflect on the hearings, the committee hearings, and that the Premier will read the Hansard and look back on the different things that were said at that committee by the people and recognize that the vast majority of people wanted some sort of change.

So I hope, I ultimately hope, that that is what will happen with the government, that they'll take that time, and, in the interest of giving them additional time, I have a motion for the House.

I'd move, seconded by the member for Spruce Woods (Mr. Cullen),

THAT the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "THAT" and substituting the following:

Bill 20, The Manitoba Building and Renewal Funding and Fiscal Management Act (Various Acts Amended), reported from the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development, be not concurred in and read a third time but that it be concurred in and read a third time this day six months hence.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable member for Steinbach, seconded by the honourable member for Spruce Woods,

THAT the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "THAT", in quotations, and substituting the following:

Bill 20, The Manitoba Building and Renewal Funding and Fiscal Management Act (Various Acts Amended), reported from the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development, be not 'conturred'— concurred in and read a third time but that it be concurred in and read a third time this day six months hence.

The amendment is in order.

Any debate?

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): It's an honour to get up today and put some words on record on the motion brought forward by my colleague from Steinbach.

The hoist motion will give the members opposite six months to sit and think about what they should really be doing with Bill 20. [*interjection*] Whatever it may be. February would be good.

But tabling this bill for six months would give the members opposite some time to think of—about this, and I know that there are members opposite who have heard from their constituents and they would really like to support this motion. And I'm sure there's some of them just waiting to go ahead and do this because this six months will give them the opportunity to consult their constituents, to talk to them, to see what they really feel about the PST increase, all the other tax increases, and get a true feeling of what the constituents really want, and I'm sure that if they go ahead and do this, which I have a great confidence that they will, it will show them what the constituents want.

They need to consult with constituents. The constituents were not consulted before Bill 20 was brought in, and I know that not only my constituents are not happy with Bill 20 there are constituents right

here in Winnipeg that are—that have been long-time NDP supporters that are not happy with Bill 20.

I had the great privilege on Sunday to attend a 100th birthday party for a lady here right on Burrows Avenue at the seniors complex she's living in, and this lady, like, of course, like she doesn't have a lot colleagues left. Most of the people there were seniors, and in talking with a number of seniors there, they just are not happy with what is happening. The seniors who are living on a fixed income, they say they can't just afford all the extra costs that are being put on their shoulders, the last year—in last year's budget. They had a number of items that they have to live with every day increased by adding the PST to them. Their house insurance—

* (17:00)

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order, please. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for La Verendrye (Mr. Smook) will have 27 minutes remaining.

And, just prior to adjournment, I want to draw the attention to honourable members in the House

that our two pages that are with us here today, this is their last official duties here today.

Of course, Ryan Sherbo to my left here will be attending the University of Manitoba this fall and will be pursuing a degree in physics. His goal is to become a theoretical physicist, and he also wants to pursue his interest in debating in university, which is not surprising, considering his experience here.

And also Eric Shinnie will be finishing his grade 12 in the fall with a goal of becoming a doctor. Eric carries a 97 average in school and has participated in youth forums for Canada as well as Odd Fellows and Rebekahs pilgrimage to the United Nations.

I wish them both well in their future endeavours, and congratulations. Thank you to both of them and good luck in your futures.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, August 27, 2013

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