

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

Official Report
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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLAN, Nancy	St. Vital	NDP
ALLUM, James, Hon.	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	NDP
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	NDP
BLADY, Sharon, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	NDP
BRAUN, Erna, Hon.	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
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor, Hon.	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
MELNICK, Christine	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	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>	Arthur-Virten	
<i>Vacant</i>	Morris	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, November 14, 2013

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 200—The Legislative Assembly Amendment Act (Democracy for Voters)

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko), that Bill 200, The Legislative Assembly Amendment Act (Democracy for Voters), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, members of this Chamber know, I think, more than most Manitobans, the importance of representation. Manitobans deserve, and it's their democratic right, to have their voice represented here in this Chamber.

This act would ensure that by-elections were held within six months of a seat in this Assembly becoming vacated. The existing legislation allows for one year to pass before a by-election must be called. Because of the honour of past premiers, this one year has seldom been used, but it seems that we can no longer rely on that honour, Mr. Speaker.

I recommend this legislation to this House to ensure that no Manitobans are again left without a voice in this Assembly for more than six months. And, Mr. Speaker, I'd ask for its speedy passage along with, if I could be so bold, an immediate call to the by-election in Morris and Arthur-Virden.

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

Any further introduction of bills?

PETITIONS

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

Provincial Sales Tax Increase—Referendum

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): 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 submitted on behalf of E. Eichler-Graaft, M. Ingalls, J. Ingalls and many other fine Manitobans.

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

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

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 signed by J. Berry, G. Haasbeek, S. Hamilton and many other fine Manitobans.

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): 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 not to raise the PST without holding a provincial referendum.

This petition is signed by L. L'Heureux, D. Friesen, N. Messier and many more fine Manitobans.

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's signed by C. Mayer, T. Simpson, B. Simpson and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Provincial Sales Tax Increase— Cross-Border Shopping

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): 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, 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.

* (13:40)

Both the PST—or 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:

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's signed by V. White, K. Slon, B. Novalkowski and many, many more Manitobans.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I would like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today Luc Imperiali from Switzerland, who is an exchange student with the Rotary program in Portage la Prairie and is the guest of the honourable member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart).

Also in the public gallery we have with us today 23 grade 9 students from W.C. Miller Collegiate under the direction of Mr. Frank Rempel. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Government Record Government Intention

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Does the Premier really believe that past performance is the best indicator of future behaviour, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Infrastructure Investment Government Priority

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): The Premier said this week that his top priority was investing in core infrastructure.

I'm interested in knowing when that became his top priority. Was it Tuesday of this week or was it earlier?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): The Throne Speech announced a five-and-a-half-billion-dollar commitment to new infrastructure in Manitoba.

And we started yesterday with a very significant announcement on Highway No. 75: \$215 million to bring Highway No. 75 to the same level as interstate highways that connect with it. This will dramatically reduce the number of days lost due to flooding. That costs the trucking industry \$1.5 million a week when that road's closed. That road will be much more serviceable now, much more open. It will connect our Manitoba goods producers, the private sector—where all the jobs are being created these days—with

their major export markets, the United States, where two thirds of our exports continue to flow.

Mr. Speaker, it's a very strong story. It's good for Manitoba. It creates jobs for young people, good paying jobs, which will allow Manitobans to live and work in Manitoba and raise a family in Manitoba.

PST Increase Apology Request

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Worst job creation record in the country of Canada over the last year, Mr. Speaker: zero new jobs. But Tuesday, things were going to change. Tuesday a makeover started, a doer-over: restore your lost integrity, make some new promises, rebuild trust, make some more promises.

The Premier, two years ago, made a promise, and Manitobans remember what that was, and he broke that promise weeks after, and then he proposed to raise the PST this year and he broke the promise yet again.

Now, past behaviour is the best indication of future performance, but that being said, his past behaviour hurts the trust that Manitobans deserve to have in their elected officials, who should keep their word but, in the Premier's case, did not.

So if the Premier would like to rebuild the foundation of trust with Manitobans—and I believe that is his aim—would he apologize to the people of Manitoba today for breaking his word on the PST hike?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, if the Leader of the Opposition wants to set an example, he will get up and apologize for selling off the telephone system after he said he wouldn't privatize it. He's had more than a decade to do that. He's never showed any regrets about doing that. He's never showed any regrets about selling off the telephone system. The rates used to be among the lowest in Canada, now the rates are among the highest in Canada, and there's been thousands of less people working there.

Let's lead by example: get up and apologize for breaking his promise and selling off our Crown corporation, the telephone system.

Mr. Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition, on a new question.

Infrastructure Investment Government Priority

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): The gentleman opposite ran on a promise, solemn vow to the people in Manitoba: wouldn't raise taxes and jack them up more than every other province in the country. And he won't apologize for it and that's a lack of character on display to the people of Manitoba.

This week he says his top priority, Mr. Speaker, is to invest in infrastructure.

Now, we know this government has overspent their estimates every year. They've overspent their estimates every year, and last year they overspent by \$200 million more than the half billion they estimated they would overspend by. Mr. Speaker, they overspent in every department of government over the last four years, but not in infrastructure, no, not in infrastructure.

Last year they promised the people of Manitoba they'd spend \$1.7 billion in infrastructure and they spent 1.2, half a billion dollars less on what they claim this week is their top priority.

Now, if core infrastructure was really their top priority, really, really honestly, then why would they promise the people of Manitoba they'd spend \$4 and spend less than \$3?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): The member wants to look at past performance. In the last three years we have spent \$1.6 billion in infrastructure, which, Mr. Speaker, that is more money in the last three years than the Leader of the Opposition and his government spent during the entire decade of the 1990s.

Mr. Speaker, they raised the gas tax and they cut the highways budget. We are spending more with our Gas Tax Accountability Act ever in the history of the province on highways in Manitoba.

Now we're going to continue to make strategic investments which will build our highway infrastructure, protect communities from floods, skill up young people to have the jobs they deserve and need with good wages in Manitoba, and you know what? The Leader of the Opposition and his caucus, not only have they voted against every investment we've made in Manitoba, they will continue to vote against every investment we're making in Manitoba and in Manitobans.

Mr. Pallister: Next thing you know, the Premier is going to tell the kids in the gallery about chocolate bars selling for 25 cents in the '90s.

So what? It doesn't matter that they overspent 20-year-old budgets. It makes no difference.

The key point is this: this week's top NDP priority was not last week's top NDP priority. It wasn't last year's top NDP priority, the year before, the year before that, it wasn't. They spent 28 per cent less than they budgeted last year and they overspent in virtually every other department.

Now, Mr. Speaker, their average overspending since this gentleman became Premier—their average underspending, I'm sorry, on the budget on infrastructure was 27.3 per cent. Now, that's a total not spent on their top priority of \$1.9 billion over four years. That money went somewhere else. The only department that they didn't overspend in, infrastructure, their top priority.

Now, if it wasn't a priority for the last four years, I've just got to ask the Premier: How can we believe him today?

Mr. Selinger: The commitment that we've had in infrastructure is unparalleled in the history of the province. There has never been a government that has spent more on infrastructure than the government that's before the Legislature today.

And past performance is a very good indicator. Leader opposite cut the highways budget when he served in government while he raised the gas taxes, cut the highways budget, did not rebuild infrastructure, did not rebuild after the '97 flood—matter of fact, left the province after the '97 flood, did not stick around to make sure that it was properly looked after.

We did have additional spending in the last three years, and by the way, we had the 2011 flood in the last three years and we made a record commitment to helping Manitobans impacted by that flood. We made very generous compensation payments to people that were impacted by that flood who lost their homes, were displaced from their homes. And, again, the members opposite voted against that support to Manitobans.

They say one thing, they do another; past behaviour is an embarrassment for the members opposite.

* (13:50)

Mr. Pallister: The most red-faced member of this Legislature, Mr. Speaker, should be the Premier.

Past behaviour, a commitment to the people of Manitoba, a commitment made, a solemn vow made to the people of Manitoba that he would not jack up taxes, and then he invokes the broadest tax increase and then the deepening of the PST right after, the two biggest tax hikes in a quarter of a century on the back of that commitment. And what does he rationalize to the people of Manitoba? He says it's for—PST hike, he says, is to invest in infrastructure. And yet over the last four years, this government did not spend \$1.889 billion that they committed to spend on the very thing this week that they claim is their top priority.

Now, they're spending more on everything else. The provincial net debt is up \$4 billion since this man became Premier, Mr. Speaker.

Why would he raise the PST hike and rationalize it was necessary for infrastructure when no other province across this great country has done so? Why?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, you see every jurisdiction in Canada generate additional revenues to look after what they consider to be their priorities. In Manitoba, we have an opportunity to match federal dollars over the next decade to invest in infrastructure. We are going to do that, and we're going to do that without shorting money for schools, without shorting money for hospitals.

The member opposite, when he was in the Legislature right after the '95 election, they entire—they cancelled the entire budget for health-care facilities in Manitoba. They promised a new hospital in Brandon; they never built it. They promised to twin Highway No. 1 to the Saskatchewan border; it never got done, Mr. Speaker. They said they'd do something with the hospital facility in Gillam; it never got done.

Take a look at our record: Highway No. 1 twinned to Saskatchewan border, done under this government; hospital in Brandon, built, done under this government; hospital in Gimli, built, invested in and up and running by this government in Manitoba.

They cut, they slash. We build.

Mr. Speaker: If I might take this opportunity, honourable members may have noticed that we have a new microphone system in the Assembly here, and they're very, very sensitive. So it would be quite

helpful that—when we're making our remarks in the Assembly, if we would make sure that the microphones aren't covered by books or papers. It would be helpful for the recording for purposes of Hansard.

The honourable member for Charleswood now has the floor.

PST Increase Employment Figures

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, the Premier says one thing and he does the—another time after time after time.

Mr. Speaker, in the election, the NDP promised not to raise the PST and weeks later they illegally raised it. It kicked in on July 1st of this year, and so far this government has taken a hundred million dollars away from hard-working Manitobans.

In November—or, pardon me, in September and October of this year, after the PST kicked in, 4.3 thousand full-time jobs were lost in Manitoba after the PST kicked in.

So I'd like to ask the minister to tell us: How much of the PST hike has affected job numbers and job losses in this province?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Jobs and the Economy): I thank the honourable member for the question. Certainly, it's a great opportunity for me to remind her, of course, that the unemployment rate in Manitoba is among the lowest in the nation, indeed, third lowest in the nation. We know, month to month, that, indeed, those numbers fluctuate, but we maintain our place, third lowest in the nation.

And if I can just let the member know, of course, that in the retail sector there was no net job loss whatsoever, as opposed to what she's intimating. And I can also let her know that there was an increase in jobs in the private sector, Mr. Speaker. So there you have it.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the minister to focus, and I'll help her by providing and tabling the Labour Force Survey for October 2013, and it's by Stats Canada. And it already shows in here clearly that Manitoba saw a loss of 4,300 full-time jobs in just one month from September to October, and this is after the PST kicked in. It also shows that a net 3,000 less people were working in Manitoba in that very same month.

So I'd like to ask the minister to tell us: What role did the increased PST play in causing these job losses?

Ms. Oswald: I would reiterate—I thank the member—I would reiterate for the member that we maintain one of the lowest unemployment rates in the nation. I can tell the member that in the last 10 months, private sector jobs total is up 8,300. That is 1.8 per cent and well above the national growth. I can let the member know that full-time employment in the last 10 months is up 2,700 positions, an increase.

Mr. Speaker, we certainly know that the members opposite will try at every turn to point to the PST increase as the downfall for everything. I suggest to you that probably the snow is because of that, according to members opposite.

But the numbers don't lie. In the last 10 months we are up, we maintain that low position of unemployment in Canada, and we're going to continue to grow jobs right here in Manitoba.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, what the minister's doing is skating around the issue, and we are talking about job losses since the PST came in, not where things were a year ago. And I would ask her to focus on this because, obviously, something has run amok in Manitoba.

Full-time jobs are down significantly. Over 4,000 full-time jobs were lost in one month, and this is after the PST kicked in.

So I'd like to ask the minister: If the illegal PST that her government brought in has forced this job loss in this province, is it a job killer?

Ms. Oswald: I want to assure the member opposite that I am absolutely focused on ensuring that we grow jobs and we grow our economy here in Manitoba. I am absolutely focused, Mr. Speaker, on the fact that our labour force over the last 10 months has 5,400 new jobs—that's a 0.8 per cent increase—than 10 months ago.

And furthermore, this Throne Speech is all about investing in infrastructure. When you do that, you need to have skilled workers who build that infrastructure. And when you have skilled workers in Manitoba working on that, it means a good paying job. It means a better economy, Mr. Speaker, which is good for our Manitoba families. Why on earth is she against that?

Morris By-Election Government Timeline

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Obviously, the new down is up when you're bottom of the barrel, obviously, Mr. Speaker.

In the Throne Speech, we saw a desperate, tired government trying to define how they would spend hard-working Manitoba families' money better than they could.

Mr. Speaker, this government made two major announcements in the constituency of Morris—by the way, one of those was already previously announced in 2006—who have no representation in the Legislature.

I'll ask the Premier (Mr. Selinger): Why is it that he thinks he knows better than the hard-working families in Morris and won't call a by-election in Morris and give them representation? What's the problem?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Well, Mr. Speaker, I welcome what was an indirect question on a very significant announcement that was made yesterday and the fact that we're going to be investing more money on Highway 75 than in the history of that highway since it was built.

And I know the member opposite was talking about the town of Morris, the constituents of Morris. I was pleased that we were joined by the mayor of Morris, who can also point to the work that's already been done on Highway 75 to pave the main street in Morris.

But, Mr. Speaker, I know members opposite have no interest in infrastructure. In fact, I actually checked. I was trying to compare our record on 75 and I got to ask them a question: What did they do to upgrade 75 when they were in office in the '90s? It's a trick question: nothing.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, just think if they had representation what they could have got. This minister seems to think they can run anything. How about that?

This First Minister seems to think he can ride roughshod over the people of Morris and Headingley. This money off-taken off the kitchen table, and the Cabinet table for them to decide how they want to spend it.

Mr. Speaker, will the families of Morris deserve a voice in the Legislature today? Will they call a by-election this week, yes or no?

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Speaker, we—they did have representation. We still don't know why Mavis Taillieu left.

* (14:00)

In fact, if you want to talk about by-elections, no one knows more about by-elections than the Leader of the Opposition. He quit provincial politics in the middle of a flood. He quit federal politics when he didn't get appointed to Cabinet, Mr. Speaker. I suspect he probably drove the MLA from Morris out.

We're not focused on internal politics of the Conservative Party; we're focused on building the province. That's why we announced a historic investment in Highway 75.

My message to members opposite, our message, is get on board with the plan.

Mr. Eichler: Why Mr. Doer left and went for a patronage appointment rather than listen to the—Mr. Highways Minister here.

Mr. Speaker, this government spins announcements around like a tornado out of control. They may do what they say, they may not. Their record is not good at keeping their promises.

We need to have fair, equal representation for every riding in this province. This Premier (Mr. Selinger) claims he knows what is better for the people of Morris and Headingley. Without calling a by-election, they have no representation.

Will he do it today, yes or no? Enough is enough. Equal representation for all parts of this province, that's what we want.

Mr. Ashton: Well, I can say that members on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we're more than glad to talk about real representation for that area because we've done more and we're going to continue to do more for Morris, the town of Morris, the RM of Morris.

Let's start off the list with Highway 75, the work that's already been done. Let's look at the work that we've done to flood protect those communities so in 2009 we had one home impacted by water, a flood that was greater than 1950. Let's look at the way we stood up when members opposite supported blocking the Portage Diversion to protect communities in that area.

I say to the members opposite, a lot of talk, but they better get on with the plan, because we're doing more for the people in the constituency of Morris than they ever did in the 11 years they were in government.

Municipal Amalgamation Public Consultations

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): Mr. Speaker, just like the unprecedented tax increase imposed on Manitobans, the NDP did not run on imposing municipal elections in their 2011 election campaign.

Now, with no prior consultation, no mandate and certainly no warning, why is this government so intent on destroying municipalities across this province?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Municipal Government): Well, Mr. Speaker, municipal governments right across Manitoba are valued and respected partners of ours as we move forward to build an economy, to provide jobs for Manitoba and Manitoba families. We have a long record of working alongside and with municipalities, and that will continue.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, the minister should have reported on his meeting in Gilbert Plains last week to see how co-operative that was.

Local government, municipal governments do not—did not include forced amalgamations in their own election campaigns, but now they're being forced by this government to amalgamate without consultation with their ratepayers.

Why will the minister not allow municipalities the ability to consult with their residents prior to any amalgamation plan being imposed on them?

Mr. Struthers: First he says there was a meeting in Gilbert Plains with the ratepayers, then he says there was no consultation with ratepayers. The members opposite should just get their story straight.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, I do have my story straight. The amalgamation plan was imposed on them and then the meeting was called. That is not consulting first.

This NDP government has no compunction about imposing its will on Manitobans, such as the illegal increase in the PST. But to expect local governments to operate in the same manner is disrespectful of Manitobans, out-of local governments by this government.

Will this minister finally show some respect for local governments and allow them to consult with their residents prior to this government's bullying tactics of forced amalgamations?

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Speaker, Bill 33 and our approach to working with municipalities will create stronger, more efficient, more sustainable municipalities. Working with our government and the federal government, we can work together to make sure infrastructure needs are addressed. We who live in rural Manitoba have understood for a long time that we need to strengthen the framework of governance in rural Manitoba, and that's what we've been doing.

We want to work with municipalities to ensure efficiencies, to ensure that we take advantage of economic development opportunities, and this government has shown that we have done that in the past, and we're going to be there to do that for them in the future.

Substation Construction (St. Clements) Public Consultations

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): Well, Mr. Speaker, the lack of respect and lack of consultation, there is a pattern with this government. In fact, yesterday the minister said in this very House in question period, and I quote directly: "... this government became committed to consulting with the people of Manitoba on this and every other project."

Yet Manitoba Hydro is building a substation in St. Clements, the constituency of Selkirk. Mr. Speaker, let's be very clear. There were no public meetings. There were no consultations.

So my question is to the minister: Was the minister wrong with his statement yesterday, or is this again proof that this NDP government cannot be trusted?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): Well, Mr. Speaker, Manitoba Hydro takes very seriously its commitments to consult with people, and they have been doing that.

As we saw yesterday with the Sage Creek Residents' Association, Manitoba Hydro has been reaching out to that group and to other groups to make sure that the concerns of people are incorporated into the plans of Manitoba Hydro. And from that, there will be a meeting with Sage Creek on November 18th. Those kinds of meetings Manitoba Hydro takes very seriously.

We expect Manitoba Hydro to do that because in doing so they learn the concerns of people. They can make changes to their plans to accommodate local folks and local concerns. They take that very seriously, and we support them in meeting with people who are impacted by the decisions that are made at Manitoba Hydro.

Mr. Schuler: Mr. Speaker, the minister says very clearly, from yesterday's question period, that consultations happen, and I quote: "... and every other project."

Yet let's be very clear. Not one councillor from the RM of St. Clements was ever consulted. In fact, Mayor Steve Strang, the mayor of St. Clements, was not consulted. This is direct disrespect to the people of Selkirk and the RM of St. Clements.

I would like to ask this minister: Can he tell us, yesterday, did he get it wrong, or is this just further proof that this government shows disrespect, that it shows that they will not consult, that they disrespect the people of St. Clements and Selkirk and all the other communities that they say they're going to consult with and they don't? Is this the disrespect Manitobans can expect from this government?

Mr. Struthers: Respect, Mr. Speaker, was when this government equalized hydro rates for rural and northern and city consumers. Where was that member and his government? They were the ones who had their opportunity to go to bat for rural Manitobans and they went AWOL.

Mr. Speaker, this side of the government takes seriously our obligations to consult with people. We expect Manitoba Hydro to do the same, and they've been doing that. They've been conducting meetings all across Manitoba in respect to a number of different projects.

Mr. Speaker, this side of the House is willing to move forward with building Manitoba Hydro, investing in Manitoba Hydro infrastructure to build a stronger economy and to put Manitoba—

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

Mr. Schuler: Mr. Speaker, this NDP government has shown the people of St. Clements and, in fact, the constituency of Selkirk great disrespect. Not one neighbour adjacent to the project was ever consulted and not one local government official. Nobody in St. Clements and nobody in Selkirk was consulted on this project.

My question is to the minister: How could this minister put such false statements on the record yesterday? How can this minister show St. Clements and the constituency of Selkirk such disrespect, or is it just further proof that this government simply cannot be trusted?

Mr. Struthers: Well, Mr. Speaker, I didn't see a response to what I said about members opposite going AWOL when they had a chance to equalize hydro rates for rural Manitobans. The very people that this member today gets up and feigns interest in, he wasn't there for them through all those years of the Gary Filmon and Leader of the Opposition government when they had a chance to help rural Manitobans to do something very real for them and they did nothing.

* (14:10)

Mr. Speaker, this government is not going to back off of taking on the big issue of Manitoba Hydro. We are—will in—within 10 years, if we do nothing, we will run out of power and we'll either be forced to invest in hydro or we will be forced to take on natural gas as part of our energy needs. And then we'll see rates go up—

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

PST Increase/Infrastructure Spending Government Promise

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, over the last eight months, the Premier and his Cabinet have attempted many explanations for how the money raised by the extra 1 per cent on the PST, which they've been collecting since July 1, how this money will be spent. I would estimate that there've been about 50 different proposals. Tuesday, in the Throne Speech, the government provided their 51st option for spending the money.

I ask the government: Why should the latest option for spending the PST money be any more credible than any of the 50 which preceded it?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, \$1.6 billion in the last three years on infrastructure in Manitoba, larger than was spent in the entire 11 years when the Conservatives were in government. The actions speak louder than words. We've made very significant investments in infrastructure. We've made very significant investments in flood protection.

Go to the city of Brandon today, one-in-300-year protection for the residential part of that community. That did not exist in 2011. We've partnered with the City to bring that into play. That's just one concrete example.

You can drive around Manitoba and see all the roads that have been paved. You can see the bridges that have been rebuilt. You can take a look at the new schools that've been brought into play in Manitoba, and new hospitals and personal-care homes.

Mr. Speaker, \$1.6 billion on core infrastructure, more schools, more hospitals. Actions speak louder than words. We've got results; they've got rhetoric.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I was looking for some sort of convincing demonstration that they were going to actually pick one and stay with it in terms of how they're going to spend the PST.

You know, the government has promised that the PST dollars will be extra dollars for additional infrastructure in our province and will not just replace general revenue dollars which were spent in previous years on infrastructure.

Will the government, which has changed its mind so often already, provide this assurance again that the PST money will be new money for additional infrastructure spending and that it won't just replace general revenue dollars which will then be used elsewhere by this government?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, we announced five and a half billion dollars in new infrastructure spending in Manitoba over the next five years focused on core infrastructure. Manitobans told us that that's what they wanted the money to be allocated towards; that's where the money will be allocated.

We made a very significant announcement yesterday with Highway 75 and the \$215-million commitment to that. We've made additional commitments on Highway No. 10, Highway No. 9, Highway No. 15 and, of course, Highway No. 1 going east.

The results will show themselves as the money moves forward. As we ramp up the spending over the next five years, we will see very significant investments which will generate jobs for young people which'll allow them to get the skills they need to participate in the economy, put down roots, have good paying jobs to live here in Manitoba.

PST Increase Referendum Request

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): But how many will be really new dollars and not just replacing what they were spending before?

Mr. Speaker, it remains that under our current legislation today, the Manitoba government should have decided how it was going to spend the money raised from increasing the PST by 1 per cent, communicated this clearly to Manitobans and then hold a referendum. And only after receiving a positive vote in the referendum would the PST be legally increased.

Now that this government claims that this is their final decision—you know, sounds like a game show, doesn't it?—will the government hold the referendum they are required to hold under the law as it still exists today?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, \$1.6 billion over the last three years, a five-and-a-half-billion-dollar commitment going forward, thousands of new jobs within a—with a role for the auditor to verify that the expenditure has occurred and that the money has been put in place to pay for it. We'll be accountable to the people of Manitoba. We'll be accountable to the Auditor General.

We'll build the economy and create new jobs for young people, but not at the expense of education and health care. We'll do that in such a way that we can continue to look after the elderly while skilling up young people and building a better Manitoba where even more people will come and—want to come and live. We've seen 125,000 new people come to live in Manitoba. In the '90s, 33,000 left.

Hundred and twenty-five thousand people, highest participation rate in the economy that we've ever seen, third lowest unemployment rate in the country, beautiful assets all around the province, roads, schools and hospitals, that's the future.

Jobs and Skills Development Centre Opening

Ms. Nancy Allan (St. Vital): Mr. Speaker, I feel fortunate that both of my children are independent and contribute to Manitoba's economy because they have good jobs. What they will both tell you, they have their dream jobs. One is in the hospitality industry and the other is an electrician in the construction industry. I know our government has

made significant investments in ensuring that our young people have good jobs.

And I would like the Minister of Jobs and the Economy to tell us about her latest initiative on behalf of our government to ensure that young people find good jobs, skilled jobs, good paying jobs so that they can participate in our economy, work, play and live in this wonderful province.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Jobs and the Economy): Well—and, first of all, I'd like to thank the member for St. Vital for being an extraordinarily fantastic mom and role model that led her daughter to pursuing a non-conventional career for a girl, to become an electrician and to pursue her dreams in that way.

And I want to let her know and all members of the House, Mr. Speaker, that today we celebrated the grand opening of the first Manitoba Jobs and Skills Development Centre, a one-stop shop where we're bringing together opportunities on apprenticeships and training and workforce development for workers that want to bring up their skills or workers that want to develop essential skills so they can enter the workforce. And, at the same time, it's a place for employers to come to look for those skilled workers so that our economy can continue to be steady, can continue to thrive, and Manitoba will continue to be an awesome place to work and play.

PST Increase Impact on Families

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, extracurricular activities are in full swing and families have to make tough decisions when it comes to travelling to games, activities, buying new equipment and even registering their kids. A family of four this year has \$1,600 less to spend on things like gas, new equipment, registration and other fees.

Why does the Finance Minister believe she spends—that she can spend the hard-earned money of Manitobans better than they can?

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I know many of us in this House come from families, come from backgrounds that were humble, that worked hard for their money. I know that. I know from watching my own family make difficult choices in how to pay the bills, make sure they could raise a family.

Now, my family never had \$160,000 a year to spend on things. Perhaps families that the member

opposite is talking about do, and I feel for those families as well.

I will tell you that when we made the decision to raise the PST, that was a very difficult decision. It was a difficult decision because we knew we were going to ask families who work hard for their money to do more. But we also knew that we had a vision. We had a vision to build the province. We had a vision where their kids could get a good job and could stay in Manitoba, and we believe that that vision to grow the province shouldn't come at the expense of a nurse at the bedside or a teacher in the school, and that's why we took that difficult decision, Mr. Speaker. We believe in our vision to grow the economy.

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

Mr. Ewasko: Other fees like hydro and home and auto insurance are going up at the same time as the 14 per cent PST increase.

The Johnson family, a family of six who I mentioned in the previous session, now has \$2,400 less to spend on the things they need the most and the things their children want to participate in.

Mr. Speaker, why does this government believe that the Johnsons' hard-earned money is better spent at the Cabinet table than at their kitchen table?

* (14:20)

Ms. Howard: You know, as I said before, and it is true for each of us who participated in making that decision, it wasn't a decision that we thought we would be faced with. It was a hard decision, but we all ran for the privilege of making hard decisions, and that was a difficult decision to make.

But we also all ran—when I ran, I knew it wouldn't all be easy days. There would be some hard days. It would be necessary to sometimes make a decision because we wanted to build the province, because I want my kid to have the same opportunities I had to live here, to go to school here, to build a family here, and in order to do that we need to grow the economy.

But we are not going to repeat the failed policies that the Leader of the Opposition engaged in in the past. We aren't going to force a choice to close down health-care facilities. We aren't going to face a choice to lay off nurses. We aren't going to force a choice to lay off teachers.

We are going to build our economy. We're going to deliver front-line services to those families and we're going to do it with respect for their hard—

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

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Speaker, this government's own Throne Speech said, and I quote: Spending time at a hockey rink or soccer pitch is a major part of childhood in Manitoba. End quote. Yet fewer and fewer families are able to afford it.

The Johnson family has \$2,400 less to spend on hockey and soccer and dance lessons, and rather than encourage participation in extracurricular activities, this NDP government has decided that they are more important than children participating in extracurricular activities.

Mr. Speaker, when will this government allow Manitobans' money to be spent at their kitchen table rather than their Cabinet table?

Ms. Howard: You know, when I was growing up in the west end of Brandon and listening to my parents sit around the kitchen table and decide what to do, a lot of decisions they made were about giving me a better life. A lot of the decisions they made were about giving our family a better chance, and because of that I have a better opportunity to succeed than perhaps they did, and those are the decisions that we're making.

We're making decisions today so that my kids, so that people's grandkids can build a life here in Manitoba. They can get a good job. We can have a growing economy. We can take advantage of the trade opportunities that we have because we have good roads, we have safe bridges, we have clean water.

That's why we took this difficult decision, so that those kids, so that those grandkids can have a successful future here, so that they can build their future here, have good jobs and—

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

I know the clock shows zero, but I'm going to allow one more question.

Food Bank Usage Increased Use by Children

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): This NDP government created a department specifically for children and youth opportunities in this province. At

that time, child poverty rates were high and food bank usage amongst youth was near the highest in Canada. Since then, these same rates have only gone up. A department that was given \$48 million did nothing but drive up the rate of poverty and food bank use amongst kids.

Mr. Speaker, what does the minister have to say about the fact that, of the 60,000 food bank users in the province, nearly half of them are children?

Hon. Kevin Chief (Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities): I'd like to thank the member opposite for the question. We continue to invest in children and young people in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to let the member know—I know he's new to the House as well—but when members opposite were in government, they cut 56 organizations that were serving the poorest children and they wiped out friendship centre funding. They cut YMCAs. They cut out family services.

What we've been able to do is to continue to invest. In fact, what we're doing right now is not only investing in support for the Prenatal Benefit to giving moms the support they need when they're pregnant, the National Child Benefit we reinstated.

And I'd like to let members opposite know that people like Dave Angus, people like Mark Chipman, people like the Manitoba Business Council are standing with us in the investments we're making, including David Northcott, Mr. Speaker, saying that we are moving in the right direction when it comes to supporting children on poverty.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Mr. Speaker: Now it's now time for members' statements.

Burrows Schools Learn About Terry Fox

Ms. Melanie Wight (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, Terry Fox is without a doubt one of the greatest Canadians to have ever lived. Celebrated nationwide and around the world for his cancer research activism, Terry was born and raised in Winnipeg, and as a Manitoban I am proud to call Terry one of our own.

Despite having lost his personal battle with cancer decades ago, Terry's spirit endures and still

inspires people every day. This year, schools in Burrows took up the cause, many of whom are in the gallery today. This past September, Robertson School, Elwick Community School, Andrew Mynarski V.C. junior high and Maples Collegiate learned about Terry's legacy, raised funds and participated in walks and runs in the community, all in Terry's memory.

We know that a cancer diagnosis is terrifying for families, and that's why our government has been investing in faster cancer testing, diagnosis and treatment. Since the 1990s, Manitobans' survival rate for cancer has increased by nearly 10 per cent, and we want to make things even better.

I'm happy to say that our Home Cancer Drug Program is allowing Manitobans to focus on their health without worrying about the cost of cancer treatment, because we're now covering 100 per cent of the cost of cancer treatment and support drugs.

Our Cancer Patient Journey Initiative will streamline cancer services and dramatically reduce the wait times for patients between the first moment cancer is suspected and getting patients started on effective treatment. We are also focused on supporting rural Manitobans. Our rural cancer hubs will provide families with staff and resources to let them focus on their health.

I am so proud of the dedication of our young people, their school staff and the Terry Fox Foundation. You are continuing the fight that Terry Fox was unable to complete.

On behalf of all members of the Legislative Assembly, I thank you for your dedication and passion. You are doing life-changing work that helps families right here in Manitoba and around the world.

Thank you.

Charlie Clifford

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): It gives me great pleasure today to recognize one of my constituents who is an extraordinary, caring and selfless individual. Mr. Charlie Clifford first came to Portage la Prairie in 1963 and immediately made his mark in the community as an educator, school principal and, within the province, as a leader with the Manitoba Teachers' Society and Manitoba Association of Principals.

However, it is Charlie's varied and unique contributions through volunteerism, accomplished

despite a personal health setback, that truly make him a remarkable individual. Like others, he has coached youth football and hockey at the community club, is also a leader with Scouts Canada and served on the ArtsSmarts committee.

Charlie was a driving force for the establishment of ARC Industries in Portage and supported vocational rehabilitation at the provincial level. As local chair of Habitat for Humanity, Charlie led the construction of four houses in Portage la Prairie.

Charlie is passionate about sports and was co-chair of the Manitoba and senior-Canadian seniors games and the 2010 Manitoba Winter Games, and a key volunteer in the World Junior Curling Championships.

A member of the Rotary Club, Charlie also served on the boards of Central Plains Child and Family Services and the Community Foundation of Portage and District. As an advocate, he continues to serve the board of the Canadian Mental Health Association as president of the Central Region and supports the company of friends program. His ongoing involvement with Sunset Palliative Care goes back to 1998. He is a leader with the local soup kitchen, a driver for CancerCare and a member of Citizens on Patrol. Charlie is also an accomplished singer and a favourite in the community when called upon to entertain.

He recently turned 70 in October and, above all, remains humble. Charlie is honoured to have received awards but the recognition he receives from those he helps is enough for him. The satisfaction Charlie gets by helping out others is his motivation for all of the wonderful work he does in the community.

I would like to ask you—all members to join me in recognizing Charlie Clifford and—who is with us today in the gallery, and congratulate this great Manitoban on enriching the lives of so many others through his long-standing commitment to community service.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Diwali

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): This November, Indo-Canadian families in Manitoba celebrated Diwali, the festival of lights, along with friends and families across the world.

* (14:30)

Diwali is named the festival of lights because it teaches humanity to reject ignorance and to drive away the darkness that engulfs the light of knowledge. The festival of lights is a time to express our gratitude for what we have achieved in the past year and to rekindle the spirit of hope—hope for a better world with a brighter future. It projects the rich and the glorious path of humankind and teaches us to uphold the true values of life which are people, harmony and understanding.

This year, Winnipeg's Hindu Temple and Winnipeg south centre—Sikh south centre celebrated Diwali with sweets, gifts and lighting of candles and lots of fireworks. The Hindu Society of Manitoba hosted one of the largest Diwali events in Winnipeg, the Diwali Mela at the Convention Centre in October.

This event welcomed the Manitobans of all backgrounds to match an inclusive nature of the festival and friendly demeanour of our province. The Mela, meaning gathering, with thousands of people in attendance, showcased the best of Indian culture with highlighted Indian music, dance, food and fashion.

I had a wonderful time along with our Premier (Mr. Selinger) of Manitoba, Mayor Sam Katz, federal Minister Shelly Glover, the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Pallister) and many other dignitaries whose names I'd like to be included, and I seek leave for the House to—their names to be included in the list that I will send later on—the dignitaries whose names should appear in the Hansard.

Congratulations to the organizing committee of the Hindu Society of Manitoba and the volunteers for a very successful event, in particular, the president of the Hindu Society of Manitoba, his board, and master of ceremonies, Ms. Verma.

Mr. Speaker, next year, feel free to go to your neighbour's home and wish them a happy Diwali. This—will appreciate your thoughtfulness and you may be treated with delicious Indian snacks and treats.

I wish everyone in Manitoba happy Diwali. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to include the list of names that the honourable member referenced? *[Agreed]*

Diwali Mela Attendees: Dr. Lloyd Axworthy; MP Steven Fletcher (Charleswood-St. James-Assiniboia); MP Lawrence Toet (Elmwood-Transcona); MLA for Burrows; MLA for Charleswood; MLA for Elmwood; MLA for Lac du Bonnet; MLA for Logan; MLA for The Maples; MLA for Rossmere; MLA for Tyndall Park; Councillor Wyatt; Councillor Mayes; Councillor Sharma (Speaker, Winnipeg City Council); and other councillors and dignitaries.

Diwali Mela

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, November 9th, I was proud to attend along with the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Pallister), the member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger), the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, Shelly Glover, the member from Radisson—to attend Diwali Mela celebrations at the Winnipeg Convention Centre. President Bhadresh Batt, Emcee Shipra Verma and the Hindu Society of Manitoba hosted the event, along with hundreds of volunteers.

Diwali is a five-day festival in the Hindu faith, occurring between mid-October and mid-November. Translated in English, Diwali translates as a festival of lights. The celebrations involve the lighting of small clay lamps filled with oil to signify the triumph of good over evil and the triumph of higher knowledge over ignorance. Sweets and snacks are shared between family and friends, and all celebrants wear their finest new clothes.

We were treated to some great Indian food and were entertained with Indian dance and music. The event was entirely free of charge, thanks to all the volunteers and sponsors who took the time to organize such a vibrant and exciting event.

Attendees came from all over Winnipeg, all over Manitoba, creating one of the largest Diwali celebrations that many of the attendees had ever seen. An estimated 4,000-plus people attended the event, which is truly impressive.

As recently as the 1960s and '70s, very few Hindu families made their home in Manitoba. Diwali celebrations were held at local churches in the community and no temple existed for these families. In 1979, the first Hindu temple in Winnipeg opened on Ellice Avenue, and in 2005, the 30,000-square-foot Hindu centre and temple opened on St. Anne's Road, and many Hindu families call Manitoba home now. As the community has grown, celebrations

have grown, and Diwali is now a great draw in the city of Winnipeg.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of this side of the House, I want to congratulate the volunteers, sponsors and entertainers on such a well-organized event and a very happy Diwali.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Canadian Sikh Soldier: A Little Story in a Big War

Mr. Mohinder Saran (The Maples): Mr. Speaker, Sikhs have a long military tradition, serving at the forefront of militaries around the world. Over 65,000 Sikh soldiers fought in World War I as part of the British army, and over 300,000 Sikhs fought against German and Japanese oppression in the World War II.

History records show that thousands of Sikh soldiers from India fought in France during World War I and participated in many of the war's major battles. However, not many people know Sikhs also fought in World War I as part of the Canadian army.

At a time when the Canadian government was actively preventing Sikhs from immigrating to Canada and were denying Sikhs Canadian citizenship, these men joined with the—with other Canadians to fight in Europe. Of the 10 Canadian Sikh soldiers so far identified, three were wounded in action and three died in—during their wartime service. These volunteers fought and sometimes died for a country that denied them even the basic rights of citizenship.

Winnipeg has a special connection to this story. I would like to recognize the Sikh Canadian soldiers Baboo Singh and John Singh who were both from Winnipeg. Baboo Singh lived on Henry Avenue and moved to Winnipeg from Punjab. He enlisted in 1917 and was wounded in the Battle of Vimy Ridge, where he fought as a Canadian for Canada. His fellow Sikh Winnipegger was John Singh. John also immigrated from Punjab, India, and joined the 2nd Labour Battalion to fight for Canada in 1916.

Mr. Speaker, today we would like recognize these two men's contributions, on behalf of all Manitobans. During this Remembrance Day season, we honour all men and women of our Canadian Forces as well as remember all those who served and made sacrifices for their country in the past.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

ORDERS OF THE DAY
GOVERNMENT BUSINESS
THRONE SPEECH
(Second Day of Debate)

Mr. Speaker: On orders of the day, under government business, to resume the adjourned debate on the proposed motion of the honourable member for Burrows (Ms. Wight), standing in the name of the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition—the honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker, often at this time it seems that when the Leader of the Official Opposition, or sometimes the government leader, or the Premier (Mr. Selinger), has to give a presentation, a speech, immediately after question period, there are some media responsibilities that have to be taken care of. Maybe not always the most pleasant part of the job, but certainly a part of the job, and we appreciate that the government has always indulged us when that has happened and we look forward to the reply by the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, who, I know, is looking forward to giving his reply to the Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, welcome back to the Legislature. I know that you've missed it, and I know many members here have as well. I want to again repeat a—thank-yous to a number of people by name, and, first of all, my family for their love and support in the enterprise that we're all engaged in. And I would say also a thank-you to all the families of all members who are here, because we all know that without the support of our families, this job and the job we engage in every day is not impossible but made much more difficult. So the support of our families means a great deal, I know, to all of us here, and I wanted to begin by saying that.

I also want to say thank you to my colleagues, initially, on this side of the House, for their support, their energy, their ideas, their commitment, not only to their constituents but to their values, because those are essential. The involvement of all of us in this House, regardless of political stripe, is a critical thing to make this democracy work. And it does not work without us here. We need to remind ourselves of that periodically, I think, that the representation that we provide to the people of this province is critical to them and the participation of them in the process is

made possible by our participation in it. And I would, again, encourage—this has been done many times—the Premier (Mr. Selinger) to call the by-election in Morris and show that same respect to those people who deserve representation in this place as well.

I want to also offer my personal thanks to the folks in my constituency, Mr. Speaker, Fort Whyte. It's a wonderful constituency with tremendous people and a tremendous amount of energy and vibrancy right now, a lot of good things going on, lots of challenges too. A lot of challenges that are made more difficult by the policies of this government, most certainly, but challenges that people of Fort Whyte, as the people of Manitoba will, as well, will all face up to, and we will endure and we will do the best we can in the circumstances that we must face. But certainly for the folks at Fort Whyte, it is, again, you know, a wonderful province we live in, and they make it more wonderful by their nature and by their giving back to the community.

* (14:40)

And there's such a great involvement in our province, not just in my riding but in many, of people who give back through charitable activities and donations of their time and money. And again, as I did yesterday, I would encourage all Manitobans who may observe these goings-on to give their support to our Filipino friends who are suffering tremendously right now as a consequence of this unbelievably powerful hurricane that has struck that country and ask for your prayers and your support financially as well, if they would, to give that support because it will be appreciated very much.

I want to say, because I come from a farm family, I want to say congratulations, I guess, Mr. Speaker, though it is never a hundred per cent uniform, of course, in the farming community. This has been an incredible year for agriculture in this province, a record crop, unbelievable yields and prices, and for our farm families who, at many points in the past, have suffered very much financially and who experience the vagaries of the real world in terms of ups and downs in prices and a steady, it seems, increase in intrusiveness by governments of various stripes in their operations and so on. These families have continued the fine tradition of agriculture in this province which is so essential to our future success as a province. And, of course, this year's GDP numbers will show a wonderful spike upward as a consequence of the risks and the

willingness and the courage of farm families to take those risks. This year I think it's fair to say that those families will receive some rewards. So, too, will this government, of course, because the numbers will look great on GDP at the end of the year, and that's what we all want here.

Now, on—in terms of a specific thank-you, I did want to pass on my condolences. We were not in session at the time of Allison Filmon's passing and I would want to say just a special word, certainly from us, I hope from all, of condolence to that family. The loss of a child is just an impossible thing to endure. So, on another note, last Saturday the Filmon family just joined together to celebrate 50 years of marriage for Gary and Janice, and I think that's a wonderful thing too, and I'm sure there were many mixed emotions that day.

As much as I know there is a tendency to want to hearken back to older times and olden days, and I hear the number 99 cited around here more than I used to hear it when Gretzky retired from the Oilers, Mr. Speaker, but I do know there is an element, though it is seldom shown by members opposite, I know there is an element of respect, and genuine respect, for what—who has come before us and the challenges that they've faced in this place, whether it be Howard Pawley or Ed Schreyer or Walter Weir or Sterling Lyon or Gary Filmon or others.

I think the reality is that each time, each generation, poses challenges to us as leaders and each of those generations deserves our respect for the way in which they face those challenges.

We can look back with criticism and condemnation if we choose, but I think we don't learn from that. I think we need to learn from respect, and I was pleased the other day to be speaking to Mr. Pawley and for him to actually offer encouragement to me and reinforce the fact that I have not made a critical statement about Mr. Pawley in this place, nor will I, or elsewhere, and I continue to believe that that is the way we should conduct ourselves in respect of those who've come before us.

I would also say a congratulations and a thank-you to the members for Assiniboia, Riel and St. Vital and for their years of service on the government side in Cabinet and to say that we appreciate that. And we appreciate their commitment to their people, their constituencies, their work ethic, and we thank them for that. And I know all members of the House would like to show that appreciation.

There is a bit of a danger, I think, Mr. Speaker, sometimes. I raised an issue when I was first elected a number of years ago, raised an issue. It wasn't a constituency issue, but it was an issue pertinent to a government department and I asked the question about—of a Cabinet minister, one of my colleagues, in a caucus meeting, which put them on the spot in front of their colleagues, and I guess I, you know, was guilty of just not knowing the nuances as a new member, as a new person, how, you know, one should behave. I probably should have just raised the question privately, but I raised it in a group setting and put the minister on a spot. I didn't mean to do that, but the reality was he came to me after—didn't really answer the question at the time, but he came to me after and he said, you know, I want to apologize to you, Brian, because you just raised a perfectly legitimate question and I think the reason that I wasn't able to address it effectively is that after we've been here for a while we start to think in terms of millions and we stop thinking in terms of the little things, you know. It was a perfectly legitimate little question you raised about a little thing, but it wasn't little to the person who raised it with you and I shouldn't have treated it as a little question myself.

Well, you know, what was the lesson in that? I guess, you know, when we make these decisions or when we are critical of the government, as is part of our responsibility and—in no doubt it is, we talk in millions sometimes, and perhaps too much, and sometimes we forget that a \$5,000 decision or a \$200 decision has a real impact on real people. Sometimes we forget that. We shouldn't forget that.

So I want to start by telling you about Kelly. I've known Kelly's family for a long time. She's in her first year of university now. She has worked part-time since she was 13 years old to help support her mom and her sister and herself. She could not afford not to work, so she had to miss out on a lot of things in her life. She missed out on a lot of school activities. Many of her friends took part in those activities; she wasn't able to. And it wasn't just the additional costs of those activities. It was the time that they consumed.

As a young girl, Kelly—her mom says she was a woman when she was 12. She had to make decisions that it's too bad young girls have to make. She had to make decisions about how she spent her time, how she invested her time, and they were tough. They were difficult decisions and they involved sacrifices and they had consequences. But she gave up and sacrificed many things when she made her choices.

She chose to help her mom. She chose to support her family. She chose to save for the future. She chose to focus on her studies. And those choices weren't easy, but choices with consequences seldom are easy. And now that she's in university, decision time doesn't end. Really, it just begins, and she continues to face choices. Her mom can't help her financially. Her mother's always encouraged Kelly and her sister to pursue their education, perhaps because she herself had to drop out of school when she was expecting Kelly for—and for other reasons when she was a young woman. She was never able to pursue her education. She always said, you girls, you're going to pursue your education.

That's leadership. And she's always emphasized education to her daughters as an enabling factor in their lives, to give them a chance to become independent, to give them the chance to achieve their potential, education is essential.

Her mother has always worked, but there's seldom been any extra money. When she was left to support her two girls as a young mother, she faced that challenge head on. And Kelly and her mom and her sister are going to continue to make difficult choices because that's what life does to you. But they deserve our support. They deserve our support in that, not just because they're wonderful people, though they are, but because they are the future of our province as well. And their future decisions will be made even more challenging than ever before because of the actions of this provincial government.

This present government, their government, believes that the money that Kelly and her mom worked for and have worked so hard to save is better spent at the Cabinet table than it is at their kitchen table. They see themselves as the builders of Manitoba's future, Mr. Speaker. With their misguided high-tax, high-spend approach—their high-tax approach is hurting Manitobans right now. The real builders of our future are not opposite. They are not here either. The real builders of our future, Manitobans, they're people—they're people like Kelly, they're people like her mother.

Now, as much as the members opposite will obfuscate or cite partial statistics, the reality is the Canadian labour survey just out last Friday reveals this government cannot create jobs with the approach it's taking—not effectively, not well. New Canadian jobs, year over year, 214,000; new Manitoba jobs, zero—zero. I don't think so. I don't think that's a result that Manitobans nor this government should be

proud of. This government has consistently placed itself above the people of this province. They have introduced legislation and in the next few days they will force the passage of that legislation which will place the interests of 37 NDP MLAs ahead of the best interests of over a million Manitobans, a million individual Manitobans, a million Manitobans who together comprise hundreds of thousands of Manitoba families.

* (14:50)

And what are these laws? Well, one of them will exempt Cabinet ministers from salary reductions if they overspend. Think about that for a second. If Kelly's mom overspends, she is forced to face those consequences. She'll destroy her dreams for her children, she might be driven to bankruptcy, and so she daily makes difficult decisions. She is someone we should all admire. She is someone I deeply admire and she is responsible. She is responsible, but Cabinet ministers on that side of the House are not. They take her money plus, and they aren't accountable. They're unwilling to be accountable. But Kelly's mom's accountable, and good for her.

New legislation will exempt Cabinet ministers from the consequences of their own actions; they cannot be sued. They will put themselves above the law. Imagine if Kelly's mom put herself above the law—if she even tried. It's unbelievable.

This government will increase the PST, the personal sales tax, but not only that, Mr. Speaker, they'll eliminate the right of Manitobans to vote on the increase. Again, they are saying they are above the law, and in so doing—and to me this is this crux of the matter—they will send a clear message to a 19-year-old young woman, and that message is that she is beneath them, that her vote does not matter. They took away Kelly's right to vote, her first vote to cast her first vote. We on this side of the House believe that Kelly's right to vote does matter and we believe it matters very, very much.

We have opposed this government's initiatives as immoral, as illegal, as a betrayal of Manitoba's rights for a long time, but the government has failed to listen to us. But, more importantly, they have failed to listen to Manitobans. The people of our province, I do not believe, will be misled. They will not be deceived and they must be respected.

But this government has already demonstrated its disrespect for Manitobans. Just two years ago, last month, the government campaigned for re-election

on a promise, on a vow, on a solemn pledge which should not be made light of, that they would not increase taxes, and they were given a mandate based on that promise and within weeks—within weeks—they introduced the largest tax hike in a quarter of a century. That was not a small betrayal; that was a massive betrayal. That was not just disrespect for one Manitoban; that was disrespect for all freedom-loving Manitobans.

Le mois dernier, c'est la marque deux ans que les membres du gouvernement ont fait campagne en promettant nos *[inaudible]* qu'ils ne lèveront pas aucune des taxes. Leurs mandats sont basés sur cette promesse. Cependant, en dedans d'une semaine, ils ont introduit la plus grosse augmentation de taxe en quart d'une siècle. C'est la marque d'une grave trahison aux Manitobains et ne leur montre pas le respect dont ils méritent.

Translation

Last month, we reached the two-year mark since the members of the government campaigned on the promise to our [inaudible] that they wouldn't raise any taxes. Their mandate was based on that promise. Nevertheless, within a week, they introduced the largest tax increase in a quarter of a century. That represents a serious betrayal of Manitobans and does not show them the respect they deserve.

English

The NDP government has a high-spending problem and—acknowledged by them, obvious to all. They're high-spending problem has become a high-tax problem for Manitobans last year and again this year. With the proposed PST hike the government has made life more difficult for Manitoba families, and each of their tax increases and each of their fee increases represents a broken promise, a broken promise made to the very families who must now face the consequences of those higher taxes and those higher fees. Every dollar paid by Manitobans in additional taxes and fees represents evidence of a broken promise made to the people of this province.

The government likes to say that they have made difficult choices. I wonder which was more difficult: the decision to promise not to raise taxes or the decision to raise taxes.

The NDP has made selfish choices that favour the government but hurt the people. A widow pays more for a haircut, but the NDP gets a vote tax to do nothing so they can operate their political party.

A disabled mom struggles with paying her rent and the NDP double their advertising budget. They run ads to promote their budget but they don't mention the PST hike. A struggling family sees their hydro and their home insurance bill skyrocket by 8 per cent one year, and the NDP tax revenues rise more than any other Canadian province, and it's not enough; they have to rise by more.

Higher fees, higher charges for life insurance, car registration, beer and wine, gas and diesel fuel, permits, licences and many, many more, mean that the NDP give themselves a 17 per cent raise and Manitobans get across-the-board cuts, all from a premier who said he would not raise taxes, a premier who called questions about his promises nonsense, a premier who—along with his 36 NDP MLAs—saw fit to remove the voting rights of one million Manitobans and replace those rights with higher taxes on basic fundamental necessities for Manitobans.

This misguided and this disrespectful approach will erode the economic foundations of our province. It is beginning to. When Manitobans' incomes fall, their ability to support themselves through discretionary purchases falls as well.

Retail sales have declined by record amounts, the largest amount since the statistic began to be kept in 1991. Cross-border shopping is going to increase. It's common sense. Smart shoppers look for deals; Manitobans are smart shoppers.

The small businesses will be particularly hard hit, and the impact in communities, especially communities nearer to Saskatchewan, to North Dakota, to Minnesota, where the PST is now 40 per cent lower, Mr. Speaker, will be even more severe. Already we're hearing reports of local shoppers using their hometown stores for convenience but making their big purchases out of province. That's not good.

Quand le revenu des Manitobains échoue leur capacité à supporter eux-mêmes *[inaudible]*, les achats discrétionnaires tombent aussi, les ventes de détail sont en déclin, et les achats transfrontaliers augmentent quand les consommateurs cherchent plus d'occasions de bonnes affaires.

Translation

When the income of Manitobans fails their capacity to support themselves [inaudible], discretionary expenditures also fall, retail sales decline, and

cross-border purchases increase as consumers seek more opportunities for a good deal.

English

The government's admission that it's even failed to consider such consequences is simply a deplorable example of mismanagement, deplorable but not without precedent, and the government has mismanaged so many of its responsibilities, I—as I do not have the stamina of the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), I am forced to summarize at this point—

An Honourable Member: How about speeches?

Mr. Pallister: —speeches, speaking stamina, Mr. Speaker, to be clear.

Let's focus on the important area of infrastructure. As the NDP enters their 15th year in power, they have suddenly embraced the importance of infrastructure. But have they really embraced the importance of infrastructure? *[interjection]* I think this, Mr. Speaker, says more about the listeners than the speaker.

The NDP has attempted to sell their PST hike for some months now by claiming that they need the money for infrastructure but can they be believed? We think not.

For several reasons, for several months, the government has conducted a PST promotional ribbon-cutting tour. This tour, along with an expensive advertising campaign, has been designed to convince Manitobans that the government deserves a pay raise and Manitobans deserve a pay cut. And the tour has been a miserable failure, however, but it has served to instruct Manitobans on the government's true intentions better than they might like to admit.

Yesterday the government respected—repeated its claim that the PST would be invested. This time they said in a new definition of core infrastructure. Now, to most Manitobans, core infrastructure would mean roads, bridges, water, sewer projects. Yet how many of the government's 162 ribbon cuttings over the last eight months have been about core infrastructure? About a third, which begs the question: Does the government really have a strategy for core infrastructure investment? Not really—hasn't been on evidence for the last number of months, hasn't been on evidence for the last number of years, in fact, Mr. Speaker.

* (15:00)

The government definitely has a strategy. What percentage of the \$1.3 billion of promises made by the spenDP have involved spending in target constituencies? Most. It would seem the NDP does in fact have a strategy, but their strategy is designed to help not Manitobans but the NDP.

Secondly, can the government really be believed when they make a commitment of any kind? The Premier (Mr. Selinger), of course, is fond of repeating his predecessor's line that past performance is the best indicator of future behaviour. Okay, good. Perhaps the best indicator of his sincerity doesn't lie in the Throne Speech then. Perhaps, as my old dad used to say, don't listen to what they say and look at what they've done. So let's have a look. Look at it. Back at you.

The best indicator of a person's sincerity doesn't lie in the Throne Speech, Mr. Speaker, but rather in a comparison of the government's actual spending on infrastructure to what they promised they'd spend, their budgetary commitments. Look at what they've done versus what they said they would do. Does the government care as much about its landings as it does about its takeoffs, or is it pretty much focused on its takeoffs? *[interjection]* Pretty much it's takeoffs.

Mr. Pallister: I encourage the member for Osborne to work on skill development in terms of balancing budgets rather than heckle, Mr. Speaker. The reality is that this is the best indicator and it is—*[interjection]* Well, if she was the member for Osborne. I guess she's now the member for Fort Rouge (Ms. Howard).

An Honourable Member: I never was.

Mr. Pallister: Yes. It was a portfolio change, I gather, Mr. Speaker.

This is a government with a spending problem, Mr. Speaker, and I gather that the member for Fort Rouge—and I apologize for giving her that other riding. The member for Fort Rouge needs to listen and she needs to learn and she has a great deal to learn.

The reality is this government has a spending problem. They have overspent, and perhaps this minister can change that trend. Maybe she can break that unenviable record. But the reality is this government has overspent its budget every year and in most government departments. So, under this

particular government, our provincial debt has doubled. Our net debt from—to-'09 to present is \$12 billion, up to now \$16 billion according to the Auditor General. That's a 33 per cent increase in net debt in four years. So the Finance Minister has some work to do, and I hope it doesn't just involve jabberwocky.

In particular, because of her high spending, we have seen a record increase in our net debt, and the reality is during that same period—this is a dangerous comparison because if you're spending like that, if you're spending that much and we do a comparison of what the government said they'd spend versus what they spend, you'd have to assume they must have actually fulfilled their commitments. They must have actually spent more than they said. They must have kept their word on infrastructure, Mr. Speaker. But they didn't, far from it in fact.

Unlike most other government departments, the NDP did not exceed their spending. They did not come close to spending the amount they actually projected. In fact, they underspent by hundreds of millions of dollars in core infrastructure. In the last four years the NDP government underspent by more than 27 per cent in infrastructure. No other department saw underspending of a budgeted commitment to that level, not even close. That's their commitment to infrastructure. Better to look at the words—better to look at the deeds than the words. For example, last year the government budgeted to invest \$1.7 billion in infrastructure, and they invested \$1.2 billion; \$500 million less than the commitment that they made. Despite the fact that these are the largest they have received, the largest yearly increases in tax revenues in decades, more money than ever before coming in and less going to infrastructure.

Now, if past performance is the best indicator of future behaviour, we submit that this government did not keep its word on infrastructure in the past nor will it keep its word on infrastructure in the future.

This government's actions tell Manitobans that this is a ploy, a deceit. This is a shell game. This is a makeover. This is an attempt to cloak a spending addiction with good intentions. Like a lost soul begging money for a bus ticket home that'll be spent on a bottle, the government can't face the fallacies that it peddles. It's come to a point in its journey where viable options for a future direction present themselves, and there are viable alternatives and there are viable options this government could

pursue and they involve making difficult choices, but Manitobans make difficult choices every day, more than ever before because of the actions of this government.

But, rather than having the courage to make those choices and go forward, what does this government do? It turns and it goes backward, back to the old days of tax and spend, of vote buying, of pork barrel politics, of fear mongering and the dull repetition of talking points; a tired government, Mr. Speaker.

This province, our province, was built by dedicated people. These people made sacrifices for themselves; they made sacrifices for their families; and they handed us a wonderful legacy. And we appreciate that. But they did so by demonstrating the capacity to commitment, and a commitment to control their personal finances, a capacity and a commitment to live within their means. These wonderful people, who we owe so much to, understood—whether they understood the words or not—fiscal sustainability. They understood that it mattered. People like Kelly's mother understand those lessons today and they've lived by them all their lives. She and her daughter deserve a government that understands these lessons as well as they do.

Mr. Speaker, we look forward on this side to providing Manitobans with the kind of government, that kind of government, the truthful government, a new government that will define targets and aim higher, balance its spending for today with medium and long-term needs for a stronger future, follow through—not just worry about announcements, but follow through and make its deeds match its words. A new government that will raise the basic exemption, that will restore the right of Manitobans to vote on major tax increases, that will increase—finally—the rental allowance for Manitobans who are struggling and living in despair, that will lower the illegally raised PST, because we understand what the government doesn't get; that a Manitoba government should reflect Manitoba values.

And in this province we help those less fortunate, we respect the democratic rights of one another, we support our personal and familial ability to build our economy and we tell the truth and we keep our word to one another. This is our goal. This is the kind of leadership Manitobans deserve. This is not what Manitobans are getting. This is what the PC Party will provide to the people of this province.

But, because the government is not providing these things, Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko),

THAT the Motion be amended by adding at the end the following words:

But this House regrets:

- (a) That despite hearing from thousands of Manitobans in opposition to raising the provincial sales tax and calling the idea ridiculous during the last election period, the provincial government has chosen to ignore both the will of Manitobans and the law by choosing to raise the PST by 1 per cent, from 7 to 8 per cent; and
- (b) That despite continued calls for respect for the law, the provincial government's approach of continuing to disrespect the tenets of the balanced budget and fiscal management act including raising major taxes on Manitobans without a referendum and exempting ministers from established salary penalties during deficit periods represents a failure to respect the rule of law and the democratic rights of Manitobans; and
- (c) That despite the fact that Manitobans experienced the highest food bank usage in Canada—especially amongst children—an inflation rate that is more than twice the national average, the provincial government continues to impose taxes on Manitobans at a lower level of income than what is found in all but two provinces and has failed to provide an increase in the basic personal income tax exemption to the national provincial average; and
- (d) That despite the many calls from individuals and community groups the provincial government has failed to protect the most vulnerable Manitobans by refusing to raise the rent allowance portion of employment and income assistance to 75 per cent of median market rents; and
- (e) That despite the largest increase in revenue of any Canadian province in 2013 and the highest projected growth in revenue of any province in Canada over the next several years, this House regrets the provincial government's commitment to increase spending in the absence of a comprehensive expenditure review to evaluate return on

investment and program outcomes across all departments of government; and

- (f) That despite the promise to invest in core infrastructure, the provincial government has consistently failed to follow through on past commitments, demonstrating to the House that the provincial government cannot be taken at its word since numerous core infrastructure projects cited in the Speech from the Throne constitute reannouncements of long-standing projects committed to prior to the proposed hike in the provincial sales tax.

As a consequence of these and many other failings, the provincial government has thereby lost the trust and confidence of the people of Manitoba and this House.

* (15:10)

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Pallister), seconded by the honourable member for Lac du Bonnet,

THAT the Motion be amended by adding at the end—the following words:

But this House regrets:

- (a) that despite hearing from thousands of Manitobans in opposition to raising the—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: Wish it read? Okay.

- (a) That despite hearing from thousands of Manitobans in opposition to raising the provincial sales tax and calling the idea ridiculous during the last election period, the provincial government has chosen to ignore both the will of Manitobans and the law by choosing to raise the PST by 1 per cent, from 7 to 8 per cent; and
- (b) That despite continued calls for respect for the law, the provincial government's approach to—of continuing to disrespect the tenets of the balanced budget and fiscal management act including raising major taxes on Manitobans without a referendum and

exempting ministers from established salary penalties during deficit periods represents a failure to respect the rule of law and the democratic right of Manitobans; and

- (c) That despite the fact that Manitobans experienced the highest food bank usage in Canada—especially amongst children—and the—an inflation rate that is more than twice the national average, the provincial government continues to impose taxes on Manitobans at a lower level of income than what is found in all but two provinces and has failed to provide an increase in the basic personal tax—income tax exemption to the national provincial average; and
- (d) That despite the many calls from individuals and community groups the provincial government has failed to protect the most vulnerable Manitobans by refusing to raise the rental allowance portion of employment and income assistance to 75 per cent of median market rents; and
- (e) That despite the largest increase in revenue of any Canadian province in 2013 and the highest projected growth in revenue of any province in Canada over the next several years, this House regrets the provincial government's commitment to increase spending in the absence of a comprehensive expenditure review to evaluate return on investment and program outcomes across all departments of government; and
- (f) That despite the promise to invest in core infrastructure, the provincial government has consistently failed to follow through on past commitments, demonstrating to the House that the provincial government cannot be taken at its word since numerous core infrastructure projects spited in the Speech from the Throne constitute reannouncements of long-standing projects committed to prior to the proposed hike in the provincial sales tax.

As the consequences of these and many other failings, the provincial government has thereby lost the trust and confidence of the people of Manitoba and this House.

The amendment is in order.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): It's a great pleasure to speak

in the Throne Speech debate, Mr. Speaker, and I do want to indicate that when I start my comments here that I do have a bit of a cold. It seems to be going around this Chamber, but I'm not going to let a cold or anything stop me from standing up to say how proud I am to be part of this government speaking in favour of this Throne Speech.

And I do want to indicate first of all, that—as I've always done, Mr. Speaker, I always recognize that the reason I have this privilege is because of the support for the people of the Thompson constituency, the eight communities that I represent in this Legislature. The community of Thompson, of course, the centre of the constituency, but I'm really proud to represent Thompson; represent Wabowden; Thicket Portage; Pikwitonei; Alfred and War Lake, the two communities; the Bunibonabee Cree Nation in Oxford House; the Tataskweyak Cree Nation in Split Lake—and I know the member for St. Paul (Mr. Schuler), I'm still waiting for him to come and visit Tataskweyak, the fine community of Tataskweyak—and, of course, the York Factory First Nation in York Landing. All of these are communities from Wabowden to Tataskweyak that are seeing the results of our government.

And I would point out that, as we speak, work is under way in terms of the interim campsite for the Keeyask dam, and I had to represent three of the four communities that are going to be partners in building one of the most significant investments we've seen in a couple of decades in this province, the Keeyask dam.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to stress that—I'm going to be a little bit political here—I might be a little political in the rest of my speech. But, you know, one thing about northern Manitoba—I've said it before, and every time I see the member for St. Paul (Mr. Schuler), I'm thinking of this again, you know, we know that the members opposite don't care a darn about northern Manitoba. There's been more sightings of the sasquatch in my constituency than there have of Tory MLAs.

But, you know, Mr. Speaker, I wonder why they don't want to come to northern Manitoba, because what is the first thing that the Leader of the Opposition said he would do when he became leader? He didn't even wait for an election. He didn't fight an election on this. He didn't debate it. He didn't come up and talk to people affected. The first thing he said he would do is shut down hydro construction in northern Manitoba.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there's a bit of a precedent here. I know members opposite know I like to ask these kind of questions. Earlier today I asked—actually, I like to ask this question about infrastructure generally—is, like, what did the Conservatives build in the 1990s when they were in government? And there's usually deafening silence from members opposite because even they can't think of one project. It's a trick question. But you know what? Every time an NDP government is anywhere close to building a hydro dam, whether it was Limestone with Sterling Lyon, whether it was Conawapa with Gary Filmon, the first thing they want to do is they want to shut it down.

Well, I got news for members opposite: We're not going to let them shut it down. We're going to build it in partnership. We're going to build Keeyask and we're going to go on building Conawapa.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as I said, I was introducing my constituency in a non-partisan way. It is a fine constituency, but I do want to say that it's also a pleasure not only to speak on the Throne Speech but to follow the Leader of the Opposition. Now, I'm not sure if that was really a speech or a sermon. You know, it lacked a little bit of passion, quite frankly. You know, I still think that speeches are best certainly from a Leader of the Opposition. I would expect, you know, off-the-cuff, not necessarily reading a written speech, but what struck me about it, by the way, was the decided lack of enthusiasm for— from his caucus. Now, there was the mandatory standing ovation at the end, you know, and their declining numbers—I mean, you want to talk about the sequel to honey, I shrunk the caucus? You know, it's the Leader of the Opposition.

And I thought the ultimate in hubris is getting up today and his demanding representation for Morris. Well, Mr. Speaker, we still want to know why the MLA for Morris quit. We know that Larry Maguire is pursuing his federal ambitions. It's interesting—I'm actually going to miss both Mavis Taillieu and Larry Maguire, but the winner of the Leader of the Opposition award has clearly got to be Larry Maguire. Just like his former leader quitting provincial politics to pursue them federally, the only difference, of course, is when the Leader of the Opposition quit, he not only quit provincial politics, he quit in the middle of the biggest flood—the flood of the century.

So we don't need any lectures from the Leader of the Opposition in terms of commitment. But I got to

tell you—I got to tell you, Mr. Speaker, there's some pretty tough positions over there. I want to say, you know, that probably the toughest is being a Tory environment critic. I mean, we all know that when it comes to Conservatives and the environment, that's an oxymoron. I'm actually not even sure who the environment critic is. You know, it's pretty tough being Health critic over there, given their record in the 1990s. I was going to say it's tough being the Education critic. It's interesting—I can't remember last time they even asked a question. I'm not even sure they have a critic anymore—not surprising. And, you know, at bottom line is they're tough jobs, but one of the toughest jobs has to be anybody that's a critic for anything involving infrastructure over there. The member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler), you know, he's had that portfolio—I've got to say, the ultimate in hubris is to get up and ask any question about infrastructure in this House when you're a Conservative, given their abysmal record in the 1990s.

* (15:20)

Now, I got a kick out of—earlier today, Mr. Speaker, the Tories put out a press release. And it was on infrastructure. Now, what was interesting—the interesting part, by the way, the media asked me about a number of things, and one of the things they said is that we had cancelled one out of four projects. I said, no. I said, we haven't cancelled any projects. We deferred some because of the flood; I think people would understand that. Then I challenged, and I said, what projects? And actually I was told by the media at the time that the Conservatives have actually withdrawn that initial press release, that they made a mistake. Well, how about they withdraw the rest of their ridiculous argument. They have no credibility on infrastructure. When they were in government, in 10 years they spent the same amount of money invested by us in the last three years. Under this Premier (Mr. Selinger), with this government, in three years we spent what they have in 10.

Now, I want to just focus in on some of the key projects we're working. And I want to start with Highway 75—Highway 75. Does anybody remember how embarrassing it was to come back if you were visiting the States, Mr. Speaker, or for American visitors going back, when you hit the border? I mean, it was just an absolute embarrassment, the condition of that highway.

An Honourable Member: Take your false teeth out.

Mr. Ashton: Now, Mr. Speaker, I've got to tell you, the—the member for Dawson Trail (Mr. Lemieux) has put it rather graphically. I tell you, there was no need for—no need for speed bumps on that highway. But one of the first things we did when we got into government, we actually—we started investing in that highway. And I actually asked the question—I actually asked the question—what the Conservatives had done on Highway 75. Now, let's understand—let's understand—they represented Highway 75, they represented from St. Norbert all the way to the US border. And, if you include the surrounding constituencies, every single one of them were Conservative MLAs. And I want to tell you what those Conservatives delivered: nothing.

Some Honourable Members: Nada.

Mr. Ashton: Oh, I'm not going to go there, the member of Dawson Trail—but I got to tell you, they're a—they didn't have a single major project on Highway 75. They didn't have a single project. The bottom line is the members opposite—and I'm sure every election, they went in and it was this kind of, you know, running around that they love to do, and it's—they love swaggering around, and it's like, you know, Conservatives, rural Manitoba, you know, it's almost like Conservatives, rural Manitoba. They did nothing for rural Manitoba. They ignored the highway network. They ignored Highway 75. And I can tell you, since 1999, we've invested more money in every region of this province, and it's one of the reasons I believe that we're still in government in 2013.

And, Mr. Speaker, it's not just Highway 75. How about Highway 1? Highway 1, as the Premier (Mr. Selinger) outlined earlier, the National Highway System. You know, you hit Virden and it was like, you know, you fell off the end of the Earth. There was no four-laning to the Saskatchewan border. The condition of Highway 1 was pathetic. It was an embarrassment. Now, you know what? Every one of the—those constituents out there were—with the exception of that island of sanity in Brandon, were all Conservatives, every last one of them—every last one of them were Conservatives. And what did they deliver when they were in government? Absolutely nothing. It took an NDP government to four-lane it to the Saskatchewan border from Virden.

Now, Mr. Speaker, our vision also goes east. We still have another portion of Highway 1 that has not been four-laned. And I'm—maybe I'm being a little bit clairvoyant in this one. Well, maybe not. But I get

the feeling that members opposite may be hearing this speech in the context of Highway 1 east soon, because we've already started the work in the constituency of the member for Dawson Trail and we're going to finish the job, because our National Highway System, whether it's Highway 75 or Highway 1, deserves an investment, and we're making that investment, no thanks to members opposite.

Now, I've got other highways, if members opposite want to take my virtual tour of the province. I remember our major routes like Highway 6. I don't think there was a single job on Highway 6 in the entire time they were in government. You know, Highway 7 and 8, Highway 9—Highway 9 was in pathetic shape. What have we done? Mr. Speaker, 6, 7, 8 and 9, major investments in this Throne Speech, even more commitment to investing.

How about Highway 10? Highway 10, I ask that question too, because every so often, you know, you get a member, you know, it goes back forth in Brandon West, and I always appreciate the perspective of this member from Brandon West who, quite frankly, is continuing a tradition of voting against anything and everything that benefits Brandon. The only difference is, unlike the former MLA for Brandon West, a lot of times he actually speaks against it too. The former MLA a lot of times would join with the MLA for Brandon East and put Brandon first, but you know what? Highway 10, we have a historic investment coming up. Stay tuned, more construction delays this year on Highway 10 because we're going south from the Highway 10 to the border, north of Brandon, all the way up to Flin Flon. And I want to put on the record that the member of Flin Flon, please apologize in advance—I know you've already done this—major construction delays for the work we're going to do on Highway 10, south of Flin Flon.

Mr. Speaker, every so often they even try to swagger around certain parts of Winnipeg. You know, they still haven't gotten used to the fact that—talking about shrinking the caucus, they don't exactly have much of an urban focus but they go into parts of the city—and I look forward, by the way, you know, when they go out and actually find their way into some of the areas that they used to represent. You know, I know they still think they have a divine right to represent those constituencies. Periodically, they get up in the House and, you know, go after the MLAs from that area, but when we announce the details of some of the work we're doing on the

Perimeter, I wonder if they will actually go and tell people in that area that it's actually going to be an NDP government, once again, that is going to fix the Perimeter Highway. Because I asked that question too. You know how many major projects they did in the '90s on the Perimeter Highway? Nothing, zero—okay, I'll even say it this time, nada.

But, Mr. Speaker, you know what, it really comes down to the fact that members opposite have a very different approach to government. Let's understand that when they were in government, when the Leader of the Opposition was a key Cabinet minister—and by the way, for members who weren't here at the time, he hasn't changed a bit. He had all the answers. He had all the answers, but if you disagree with him, watch out. Believe you me, by the way, watch out. And I won't get into internal politics in the PC caucus but I can tell you the Leader of the Opposition was—I would say he was the ideological guru of the Filmon government. Now, this was a government that didn't need much, you know, guidance in terms of ideology.

You know, they—when it came to health care, first reaction was to privatize the home care—you know, Connie Curran. The member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) actually was legislative assistant to the Minister of Health.

So, you know what, there's a number of them across the way that have their fingerprints all over that agenda. It took an absolute, you know, uprising from average Manitobans to stop them from privatizing health care.

But who can forget the hundreds of thousands of nurses that they cut? The fact they even cut admission to medical school—but, you know, do you remember what I said about the Leader of the Opposition? You think he's changed? One of the first things he did when he was asked on CJOB whether he supported, you know, a two-tier system including privatized health care, he said, yes, he does. Well, surprise, surprise? No, the member opposite is stuck in a time warp. He doesn't get the fact that that agenda was rejected in the 1990s, and I look forward to us fighting an election with the Leader of the Opposition campaigning on a platform of privatization, on a two-tier health-care system.

* (15:30)

But where else haven't they changed? I think it's very obvious to my mind they don't get the reality facing working people in this province.

I don't know what it is about workplace safety and health that members opposite don't get. I remember when the member for St. Paul (Mr. Schuler) was critic and he held up the Legislature until, you know, not until December like they've done the last few months, but into August to fight against the workplace safety and health bill. What did they do in the latter part of the last session? The amazing part is I sat in committee. I heard the presentations. I heard presentations talk about the perspective of working people who are forced to work in unsafe working conditions, people that are forced to work in unsafe conditions, I—you know, the need for the right to refuse to be actually able to be enforced. I saw the minister of Labour, you know, listen to the presentations that came forward, and, no, I don't think there was a single opponent. Not one opposition, you know, one person in opposition to that.

So what did they do? One of the first things they did when they came back in the Chamber and that bill came up they voted against the workplace safety and health amendments. Now, Mr. Speaker, I don't know what part of their ideology leads them to do that, but let's put this on the record. To my mind, once again, members opposite haven't changed. They don't get the reality facing the working people of this province, and I should say, quite frankly, to vote against something that's going to improve safety, shame on them. Shame on them.

But do you know what? They change their agenda on anything. I'm looking at—I mentioned education before. You know, I'm glad our—the member for St. Vital (Ms. Allan) in her new role actually has the chance to stand up and have a voice because, you know what? I think it's been about a year and a half since they asked her a question when she was the minister of Education on education. Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, what do you—what is it about education that members opposite don't have—*[interjection]*

Well, I know the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) is getting vocal again. We know their entire agenda in the last session for three months they held up the Legislature because they didn't agree with an antibullying bill that will protect all kids including gay and lesbian kids against bullying. Talk about ideology, and I'll put on the record they quoted from some of the presenters at committee. But they never once disowned some of the comments. Vast majority of Manitobans gave recent comments. But there were some comments that were

clearly unacceptable, I think, to all Manitobans in the 2000—the year 2013, and you know what? Again, it speaks volumes about their agenda which is increasingly, you know, very much imposing their views on others on important social issues. I think our caucus represents the diverse view that Manitobans have which they reject that, and I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, I was never more proud than when we stood to vote to prevent bullying against all kids including gay and lesbian and transgender and bisexual kids in this province.

Well, let's look where their agenda also really is very obvious as well. Mr. Speaker, we put a lot of effort over the last number of years in terms of flood protection and fighting floods. I'm really proud of the fact that we spent more than a billion dollars, invested it in flood protection. I'm proud of the work that we have done to protect the Red River Valley, now the one-in-a-hundred-year flood, and how about the city of Winnipeg, one-in-700-year flood protection.

And I recently had the opportunity to meet with my counterpart from Alberta. I just want to put this in perspective and this is really a reflection I think of where they're headed now. I think they've learned, you know, the hard way. The city of Calgary major flooding they faced. They're protected to one-in-25-year flood. Now, Mr. Speaker, they also don't have a sales tax in Alberta, and we do. By the way, it was Duff Roblin that brought it in, just as Duff Roblin put that sales tax to use to protect Manitobans and it was one of the wisest investments ever made. With the one cent on the dollar we're undertaking the same challenge to protect Lake Manitoba, Lake St. Martin, to protect the people in the city of Winnipeg. I say to members opposite, you know, if they have any sense of what vision is about, they would support us in putting that one cent on the dollar in place to protect flood victims.

And I know members opposite still, you know, they still talk in these conspiracy theories about the flooding. You know, a recent report that came out proved actually that during the time which most of the damage occurred in May of 2011 we were actually about a foot and a half below natural level, and I said—the media said, is that vindication of your arguments is it? You know, there's no comfort, given the damage that took place, even if it was a major natural disaster.

But, you know, we hear members opposite get up, flippantly talk about artificial flooding. You

know, they act like it's sort of, you know—I know they've said that—you know, I've accused them of sort of, you know, comes to the moon landing. They think we're shot in a back lot in Hollywood. You know, they really—if you listen to their comments, do they really believe that somebody pressed a button and instantly there was, you know, one-in-400-year flooding?

I mean, really, Mr. Speaker, what it comes down to is you've seen a hyperpartisan approach, particularly since the Leader of the Opposition has taken over the helm across the way. I remember the days when you had a non-partisan—a bipartisan approach on flooding. Even in 2011, I want to give members opposite credit; we worked, you know, collegially on issues. Didn't always agree. But I've got to tell you, don't you think if you really were concerned about flooding, the first thing you'd do is stand up and be counted and support the budget we brought in and the Throne Speech we brought in, that is there for those flood victims. You know, talk is cheap, especially political talk. What really counts is if you prepare to have a plan, and we've got a plan to protect those flood victims.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think there's a bit of a theme here. The Leader of the Opposition hasn't changed. The Conservatives haven't changed. They still believe they have a divine right to govern. You know, they haven't really learned many of the lessons the last several elections. I look—they particularly have a view of rural Manitoba that, I think, takes it for granted. I think they don't get some of the very significant things that are happening all across rural Manitoba.

I'm very proud of the fact, by the way, that Manitoba is probably the unique jurisdiction in Canada, because rural Manitoba is leading the way. And I'm proud, by the way, of what I see what's going on in communities like Morden and Winkler and Steinbach, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud of the growth we're seeing in Brandon. I'm proud of the growth we're seeing in the parklands all throughout this province.

But you know, members opposite are still in this sort of mode where, you know, they have a very limited view of the province. I mean, they still have those old highway maps, I know, Mr. Speaker, that, you know, get cut off after a certain point. They still, you know, run around and they don't recognize some of the things that are taking place. But because of our economic initiatives, not the least of which the way

that we've opened up the Provincial Nominee Program, we're also starting to see, you know, many of the communities throughout the province becoming increasingly diverse. And I love when I travel, making the many announcements that we have to make, when I see that diversity.

But one thing I don't see reflected opposite is the diversity of this province. One thing I'm also very proud of, Mr. Speaker, you look at our caucus, you see the province of Manitoba, from First Nations and Metis people through to the ethnocultural communities that have settled Canada in the most recent times. And we represent every single region of the province, and we will continue to speak up for that great diversity.

So, Mr. Speaker—*[interjection]* Well, you know the member opposite, you know, talks about calling the election, and you know what? I know they're still refighting the '99 election, the 2003 election, the 2007 election, the 2011 election. You know, I'm sure when they go back to their caucus, you know, it's always the same. It's, like, we were robbed, you know. Like, we should be governing.

But, you know, that swagger doesn't really cut it with Manitobans. There's no divine right in this province. And I want to say to members opposite, you know, they can swagger all they want and the Leader of the Opposition—pretty good on the swaggering side. But I can tell you one thing. So long as they continue to recycle the kind of tired ideology of the 1990s—ain't going to cut it. *[interjection]*

Well, members opposite—funny part is I'm not the MLA that said that Gary Filmon was like the greatest premier, and that was the best premier in Manitoba history. The bottom line is, you know, he—it was the Leader of the Opposition—I could tell—this is—the Leader of the Opposition is basically—I think, it's the Filmon government in exile, you know, just waiting for that chance, you know. I mean, they haven't won the last number of elections. They're waiting for their chance to come back. They're—you know, they started with MTS. We all know Hydro will be next. They—you know, they started with privatizing health. They—we all know what happened—you know, if they got back in government.

* (15:40)

But the reality, Mr. Speaker, is the Filmon government left a bad taste in Manitobans. I know people weren't even born then. You ask about the

1990s, they'll—they were—they've heard—they've heard from their parents, they've heard from their siblings, from their aunts and uncles exactly what happened. And here's the reality: there was no growth, there was decline. You wouldn't have started a discussion in the 1990s. It was pretty easy. I'll tell you, around the city of Winnipeg, you know, what's your house worth today? You're a homeowner—down, down, down.

You know what happened in the 1990s? The Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities (Mr. Chief) talked earlier, how many—you know, they cut the friendship centres, the core funding. They cut dozens of other organizations. I remember the minister at the time, he actually said, well, you know what, maybe they should have a membership fee. I mean, you know what, to my mind their view was that friendship centres were like golf clubs, you know, you just sign a membership fee. That was what they did.

I mean, there are people that understand that we had some of the worst population numbers in history. And I'm really proud—and members opposite hate to hear this, but, you know, we've had the best population growth since the early 1970s under this government. That's our record.

Now, the economy, let's put it all in perspective. We've been growing every single year we've been in government. And members opposite like to cherry-pick this month, that month—I love when they pick the employment numbers. The Leader of the Opposition said, oh, employment numbers—employment numbers. He picked a month when the private sector employment actually went up, okay?

Members opposite haven't admitted one thing. And I can tell you, just take a step outside of this building, you know, get out of your caucus, get out of your—you know, your sort of swaggering mode when you go around, you know, check it out, Mr. Speaker. Bottom line is people know that the province is growing.

And you know what? People also know that their roads are getting fixed, their bridges are getting fixed. We got the first leg of rapid transit—more to come. They know, Mr. Speaker, and I know it must drive them nuts, because some of the key opinion leaders in the province know it. I can read Dave Angus's comments, he's validated a lot of what we said. I can talk about Chris Lorenc. I was there at a press conference where he validated our plan for infrastructure. How about Sam Katz, the mayor of

Winnipeg? He's been saying this government's right on when it comes to investments in Winnipeg and rapid transit.

And I know they don't like to hear any of this, Mr. Speaker, but the reality is I believe we've got growth and there's two paths ahead. Their path is to jam on the brakes, shut down hydro, cut \$550 million out of government expenditures.

Ours is two-pronged, and I want to stress this: yes, to continue to invest in growth—that's what an investment infrastructure does. But you know to members opposite and particularly to the opposition, nobody's fooled by his crocodile tears when it comes to poverty. This is a leader when he was in government that slashed welfare rates, cut community organizations, Mr. Speaker, didn't increase the minimum wage unless there was an election coming and then it was 25 cents at best. This government has regularly increased the minimum wage, has invested in social services, and we're going to take on the other challenge of growth, which is poverty as well.

Mr. Speaker, this is a historic time for Manitoba. This government has a vision, and my message to members opposite is get on board, get with the plan, we're growing this province, we're going to have equity in this province—

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

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Infrastructure should get his own bobblehead doll for the speech that he just gave, and maybe he and Rob Ford can hand out their bobblehead dolls together because that speech was deserving of a bobblehead doll.

And, Mr. Speaker, somebody needs to tell him he must have missed the orientation. He does not need to shout in here; we have new microphones. Unless he wants Gary Doer, who quit halfway through his own term—unless he wants Gary Doer to hear his speech in Washington, he really doesn't need to shout in here.

And, Mr. Speaker, before I do go on with my comments, I have to say that there were many parts of his rambling comments that were really quite sarcastic and condescending. And I just have to really, seriously take issue with one part of his speech where he was talking about the reality of the working poor. He hasn't got a clue about that. This party, the NDP party, did not listen to all of the poor

and working poor that came and spoke on Bill 20 about the PST. This Premier (Mr. Selinger) didn't even show up once to listen to the people that came there. There were people that couldn't afford to handle an extra 14 per cent of PST in this province, and then this minister has the gall to stand in here and talk about how the NDP are so committed to the working poor. What a bunch of rubbish. They didn't look at them. In fact, the Finance Minister at the time refused to take any changes to the bill. They refused to listen to anybody, and they didn't. They went ahead with their own agenda. So it had nothing to do about listening to anybody in the public.

Also, somebody needs to tell the minister that just spoke that we are the child poverty capital of Canada. Manitoba does not show well in that. We have the highest child poverty food bank use in the country. What part of that does the Minister of Infrastructure not understand with those condescending and arrogant remarks that he just put on the record?

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

It just shows how out of tune they are. It's all about rhetoric. It's all about the spin that matters to this government, and they totally missed the whole boat when it came to what could be done for the working poor here and for the poor in this province and the seniors now who are going to be pushed into those types of categories because of what this government did with the PST increase. A hundred million dollars already has been taken away from Manitobans with that PST increase—a hundred million dollars—and that's for what? Five hundred thousand adult Manitobans?

That's a lot of money. That money could have easily been spent to help the working poor and the poor maybe by looking at the personal exemption and taking more people off the tax rolls. I find it unbelievable that people in Manitoba have to pay taxes when they only make \$8,800 a year. That is absolutely pitiful. We're not even near the national average. It should be up to, you know, at least the national average, and that it isn't is absolutely, I think, pitiful, and it's embarrassing that this Province should force people that are making such a low amount of money to actually have to pay taxes. If you want to help the working poor, raise the basic personal exemption. That is what this government needs to do.

And they also need to look at rental rates for people on employment insurance. If they want to

help people, at least take it up to the median rate. Instead, since 1992 people that are on income assistance are having to live on extremely low amounts of money because it hasn't changed since 1992. If this government was really committed to the poor or the working poor, they'd be doing more specific things like that that could help the working poor.

So shame on that Minister of Infrastructure for the types of comments he put on the record just now because they were rubbish. It has nothing to do with what's reality out there and it's shameful.

Mr. Speaker, now that I have had my rant I do want to indicate that I do want to welcome everybody back and welcome the Deputy Speaker back to his chair and the Speaker and all the table officers. And I do have to say that I was very privileged the other day to represent our leader at a luncheon here that did recognize all of the legislative staff that help to make this place function. And I've had a chance a couple of times now to represent our party at that luncheon and to see everybody that is part of a team that helps to make the Manitoba Legislature work so that we can all do our jobs. And I just want to again thank all of those people who do work so hard on the—on behalf of people of this province.

There was special recognition given that day and I just do want to acknowledge it, that, in fact, our Clerk was recognized for 25 years of service in Manitoba. So I do want to acknowledge and congratulate her on 25 years of great service to Manitobans.

* (15:50)

I do feel very honoured to be able to represent Charleswood, too, and I want to thank the people there. It is such a wonderful community to represent, and I am really so proud of how people come together in Charleswood to try to make things better. And I'm very proud of our community. And we just are at the tail end of celebrating a hundred years. And it has been an incredible year of working with various people in the community to celebrate our 100 years. And looking back at the history of Charleswood has been quite incredible and to see what it used to be before, when millions of bison roamed the area, when we had a farming community that was Charleswood.

And, apparently, a lot of mink farms were part of farming that took place in Charleswood and in

Headingley. And it's really interesting to hear from people that actually worked with mink in those farms and to hear how difficult that actually was, because apparently they're not very friendly little critters and they don't smell very good.

But certainly the history of Charleswood is one that has so many aspects to it. And I do want to just, in particular, recognize the Charleswood Historical Society for the volunteer efforts that they put forward to ensure that the community did have a good chance to celebrate 100 years, because it was a lot of volunteer effort by the Charleswood Historical Society. And, whenever we talk about Charleswood's history, certainly the Van Roon family's name comes up over and over. And really, we have been able to capture and keep and celebrate our history because the Van Roon family in Charleswood have worked so hard to be such great historians and to keep collections of everything over the many, many years that Charleswood has been a municipality. So I want to say, on behalf of everybody in Charleswood, thank you very much to the Van Roons, to the Charleswood Historical Society, and all the other volunteers that really stepped forward to help us celebrate a hundred great years in our community.

I also want to, at this time when we talk about communities, acknowledge what is happening in the Philippines and to say that our thoughts and prayers are with the people in the Philippines who are directly affected, but also those that are elsewhere in the world and in Canada and Manitoba and Winnipeg, who still have family there and are very, very worried about what is happening there. I heard a story the other day of a grandmother who didn't hear from her 10 grandchildren over the weekend and was terribly afraid of what might've happened to her 10 grandchildren. And it's hard to even imagine those types of situations, so I do hope that, once again, and I suspect it will happen, that Canada and Manitoba and Winnipeg will really step forward with the types of support that is needed to help the people in the Philippines.

Mr. Speaker, the speech itself was, I think, somewhat of a speech of desperation. It certainly looked like what the government was trying to do was to try to put toothpaste back in the tube, after the big mess they've made of the PST announcement. And I think they're in a panic mode. And I think that speech reflected it. It went on and on and on, and they threw everything and almost the kitchen sink in there with it. And I think what this government is trying to do, and we saw it earlier with the budget

announcement, is, basically, it's a government that wants to buy votes. It wasn't a visionary document. It was more about how they could try to protect themselves, protect the power that they have achieved, you know, through being in government. And they've lost sight of who put them there. And they've lost sight of what their role is. And they've lost sight that the money they're working with is not their money, but they behave like it's their money. It's the money of the people.

Now, it's interesting, the Minister of Infrastructure today has basically indicated, and it is something I guess none of us should be surprised at, but the Minister of Infrastructure has indicated that the \$5.5 billion of infrastructure money is not all provincial money. Their big announcement, and the one that the Premier (Mr. Selinger) every day's trying to flog in here and out in the hallway, they're trying to make it look as if it's all their money. A lot of those projects are assuming there is also federal and municipal dollars on the table.

So they are continuing with their narrative of misleading Manitobans, and I guess we just shouldn't be surprised because that's how this government does business. We saw it in the last election and it just flows from this government. The spin is just that and it's all about spin. They have really, really lost their way as a party and as a government, and they really do need to focus much, much better on what they need to do for people.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the NDP shouldn't be surprised that there is such a backlash from the public about the PST hike. And there is a tax revolt and it is happening, and a lot of the people that are revolting are also former NDP. I cannot believe how many NDP supporters are now saying they will not support the government and it wasn't just that they hiked the PST, but it was the fact they did it without the referendum. I think that has insulted more people than the NDP would like to believe. People were lied to, but they also had their democracy pulled out from them by not being able to vote when the law that's currently in place says they should have a vote on whether that tax went up, and especially after the Premier during the election says there will be no tax hike. Read my lips. We're on track. We don't need to do that, and then weeks later, weeks after that he jacks up the PST. Now, there's just something so wrong with that picture.

And when we look at the last two budgets, what this—today's NDP have done is they have gouged

Manitobans with the biggest tax hike in a quarter of a century. Previous budget, they expanded the PST. This budget they made it even worse by increasing the PST, and this—these aren't small numbers, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We're talking right now about a hundred million that have already come in just since July 1st, and illegally too. So this government just seems to ignore legislation that is before them. If they don't like legislation, we've seen it with their ministers, they just ignore it and go on and do their own thing.

Well, now we are seeing them scrambling with infrastructure. That whole Throne Speech was them trying to scramble and fix what they've made a mess of. You know, they have used that PST money, and I asked the Finance minister many times in Estimates and in question period, you know, what their definition of core infrastructure was. What was critical infrastructure? And they started out with one definition, then it switched to another definition and then it switched to including services and the Justice Minister talked about adding police officers. Another minister talked about adding nurses and teachers, and all of a sudden this 1 per cent addition, which is actually a 14 per cent hike in the PST, was going to be used for all kinds of things, and it certainly turned out that splash pads were in there. Murals were in there. Park benches were in there. I don't have anything against splash pads because I think they're good for communities, but they are not critical infrastructure. They are not what you would call core spending.

* (16:00)

And so, when we look at where all those announcements were taking place, too, more than half of them are in ridings that the NDP either hold or want to hold. That has become a slush fund, and the people of Manitoba became very, very aware of what that was and now the NDP are in panic mode. Now they're going to be changing the definition again. So I don't know how many more definitions we're going to have of what core spending is, but there should not be monies raised from the public to be used for a political campaign slush fund for this government to go out and buy votes going into another election. And Manitobans have really tuned into that and they don't like it. And so they are punishing this government and now this government is trying to fix the mess that they made.

The minister of Finance at the time also refused to be transparent about where that PST money was

going to go. He refused to actually say where they were going to put it. And we asked over and over and over again, where are you going to spend that money? Tell Manitobans. At least be transparent, be accountable. But no, he refused—I can't even tell you how many times—refused to tell people up front where that money was going to be spent. And then we saw where they were spending it on their 160 announcements. Only a third of that was for core infrastructure. The rest was a slush fund for the NDP to go out into their areas or their areas they want to secure in the next election and buy votes with public money, with taxpayers' money, with the \$277 million that they're going to get from the PST this year.

And so then the minister of Finance realized, well, we better do something about that, so now they've brought the auditor in. Well, it's going to be really interesting to see the kind of pickle they've put the Auditor in, because this government didn't need to even go that far and should have, in the first place, been more transparent and accountable about what that PST money was going to buy.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they treated Manitobans with disdain, and Manitobans don't like it and Manitobans are now pushing back. And I would venture to say, too, that we could use the word gross mismanagement when it comes to the whole issue of the PST and how this government has handled it, and now the desperate moves that they're trying to make to trying to control it.

Now, it was interesting when we see job numbers and job losses that have been occurring after the PST came in. And certainly when we have seen a job loss of full-time jobs of 4.3 thousand in one month after the PST came in, that does raise some very, very serious concerns. And also when we now see a net 3,000 less people working in Manitoba, that tells us something. That tells us that something has run amok in Manitoba.

Now the NDP are trying to—and they're still saying it, how important infrastructure was to them. Well, where were they for the last four years when they syphoned money away from the infrastructure budget? In Estimates, the minister of Finance was actually the one that pointed out to me that their budget was 1.7, and they spent 320 less—\$320 million less. Well, in fact, that number isn't even accurate because they have—once public accounts came out, it became clear that they spent half a—almost half a billion dollars less this last year of their infrastructure budget.

Well, why was the PST so important, because it was so desperately needed for infrastructure, when this government, if they were so committed to infrastructure, would have not syphoned away a half a billion dollars in their last budget for—from infrastructure? Where did that money go? And all of a sudden they're trying, in a very poor way, to say that, well, we need the PST because we need to protect our infrastructure, our crumbling infrastructure. Well, where have they been for the last four years when this government, the last four years in a row, has syphoned away hundreds of millions of dollars from infrastructure and not spent it as budgeted?

So their argument is actually—is very false and, again, they're trying to pull the wool over Manitobans' eyes, but that is not going to happen because the Manitobans are going to know what this government has done. In fact, 27 per cent of monies budgeted for infrastructure over the last four years did not go into infrastructure. Where did that money go? If it didn't go in for infrastructure, why was the infrastructure budget so underspent? So how can they do that and then claim that infrastructure is so important to them? That just doesn't jive.

So I found it also interesting in the Throne Speech when the government, and I don't know how many times they mentioned it, but they talked about a strong and stable economy. Well, if the economy is so strong and stable, why did they raise the PST? That doesn't make sense, and why did they ignore the warnings by their own experts in the tax department not to raise the PST? Their own tax experts told this government: do not raise the PST. Fortunately—the government didn't tell us that. But the Canadian Taxpayers Federation was able to receive a FIPPA, and in this FIPPA it actually showed this government was advised by their tax experts not to raise the PST and this government chose to ignore it. There's also a troubling aspect in that FIPPA which shows that the government also asked the department to look at numbers higher than increasing the PST to 8 per cent. It looks like they also asked the department to look at what those figures might look like with other higher PST numbers. So it really concerns us that this government may not be finished with their tax gouge of Manitobans, that they may, in fact, still be looking at a further PST increase, and that wouldn't surprise us because the Premier (Mr. Selinger) has not said unequivocally that that will not happen. He's actually left the door open when he went out one day in a scrum, and he's left the door

open that he may consider further tax increases regarding the PST.

So that is very, very scary, and it's really scary because we have a spendoholic NDP government that spends way more money what—than they have and they're not taking responsibility to try to responsibly rein in their spending. They, in fact, have put Manitoba by what they're doing on a very, very dangerous path and that path is creating havoc in Manitoba homes at those kitchen tables, because not only do we have the highest PST in western Canada, we have the highest income taxes. Other than Québec, Manitoba is right up there. So when you add all of that together Manitobans, ordinary Manitobans are paying for all of this spendthrift ways of this government and that is not fair to the people of Manitoba.

The government has also made promises about balancing the budget, and now we hear that—in fact, they've pushed it back, and with Bill 20 they're going to finish killing balanced budget and taxpayer protection. After Bill 20 passes in this session, which we imagine they will ensure that it does, we are not going to any longer have taxpayer protection for Manitobans. It's going to be a free-for-all for this government because that—the last ounce of taxpayer protection will be gone when that bill passes.

So Manitobans, very concerned, and then the Premier is not committing to balance the budget when he said he was, now it's probably. It's becoming very, very concerning to a lot of people.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what is showing with this government is honesty and integrity do not seem to be key virtues that they buy into, and they say one thing and they do another. Nobody is trusting them anymore and nobody should, and it's obviously that this NDP government is going to say whatever they want to get elected. They have no respect anymore for the people out there. The vote tax really speaks to that as well, and now it's all about them. It's not about Manitobans, and the pitiful fear mongering we hear from them shows how desperate they have become as a party.

And there are so many other things I would like address, but I think that my colleagues, I'm sure, are going to cover a lot of the areas that I don't get to today. But, certainly, you know, jobs and the economy are something we're very fearful about. The spin from the NDP gives us absolutely no insurance they know what they're doing. Finances in this province are really in a pickle. When we look at

education, family services, post-secondary education, infrastructure, the environment, you name it, there is a problem just about in every one of those areas, and this government is messing up and they're messing up at the cost of the people of this province.

* (16:10)

You know, it's no wonder that the Premier (Mr. Selinger) of Manitoba was rated the worst premier in Canada for fiscal management, and we see how that is playing out. I fear, you know, if we're rated at the bottom of the barrel now, where are we going to go over the next two years that we still have to put up with an NDP government? And this Throne Speech just reinforced everything that we have been fearful of and I worry for Manitobans. I worry for the kids—the young people in Manitoba who are going to have to deal with the mess that this government is leaving behind.

So I would urge the government to support the amendments that are put forward and certainly to indicate that there is no way that I would support the Throne Speech that this government put forward because it is not a Throne Speech that is about making the future of Manitoba better, and it is not a speech that we can support.

So thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Jobs and the Economy): Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's a great privilege to stand in the House today to offer a few thoughts on this speech for the throne—Speech from the Throne. I know that there is plenty to speak about in the speech itself, its optimism, its forward looking and its very significant approach to looking at what matters most to Manitoba, making sure that we are building core infrastructure that will help our economy continue to be steady and continue to grow and, in turn, being sure that we can create really good jobs for people, good-paying jobs, so that, indeed, they can fulfill their dreams right here in Manitoba with those good wages for the good job, buying that dream house that they want to with their young families, perhaps contemplating buying a cottage in our beautiful province and to be able to live close to mom and dad and grandma and grandpa and to be able to live that life that they've dreamed of living. So I'm very, very proud of the work that has been done to bring this Throne Speech forward, but more on that in a moment.

I want to take this time, before I begin, to acknowledge the terrible devastation that has

occurred in the Philippines and the unspeakable suffering that many, many families living in the Philippines are going through right now. We have such a vibrant Philippine-Filipino community here in Manitoba that is collectively so very worried about their relatives and about their loved ones, wishing with every hour that news would come forward that they are safe and that they are well.

So many of us in this Chamber, both sides of the House, are connected in some way or another to the Filipino community. They're our neighbours, our constituents. Indeed, I had many families with whom I was connected through my teaching career, many Filipino families, and I'm thinking of them today and wishing all the best for them and for their loved ones, knowing that we're all praying for the safe return of their loved ones and for a safe path forward. And so, I certainly do; I wish all the best to the community and we offer our thoughts and prayers for the days and weeks and months ahead.

I also want to acknowledge the constituents of Seine River, who have provided me with this incredible honour to be their representative in the Manitoba Legislature. I continue to be so grateful for their trust and confidence, and I'm going to work hard every day to ensure that I'm doing all that I can to ensure that we're moving Manitoba forward and ensuring that we have a strong economy and good jobs for them so that they can build their dreams and move forward as we go.

I was listening very carefully to the member opposite provide her response to the Speech from the Throne, and I was struck by its negativity—so much information about Manitoba that I believe to be factually inaccurate to begin with. But the overarching tone of negativity and cynicism, it was palpable. And one wonders sometimes that, although we find ourselves on opposite sides of the aisle in the Manitoba Legislature, I'm of the belief that ultimately we're all here to serve Manitobans and we're all here to try to do the best that we can to move Manitoba forward and, of course, to celebrate Manitoba and the many, many, many positive attributes it has to offer. And what I could hear from members opposite, you know, perhaps at its base level was partisan politics but an overarching negativity that I believe helps no one.

I know that when I started in my new post as Minister of Jobs and the Economy, and I began consulting and meeting with people who have excellent advice to offer on the subject of how to

continue to build the economy and how to create good jobs—I will concede the point that these are not people that would be traditionally found in my political universe, that's absolutely true. But what I did find to be true, absolutely to a man and a woman, was a positivity about Manitoba and a strong desire to promote Manitoba to the rest of the country and the rest of the world, for all that it has to offer. And partisan politics didn't play into it at all. It was about talking about the many, many positive things that Manitoba has to offer.

And so, frankly, you know, I'm shocked and disappointed that—you know, even in this beautiful Chamber, that we can't find a modicum of positivity and only cynicism and negativity from members opposite. And I think Manitobans should take a step back and have a look at the furrowed brows of members opposite that seem to be entrenched permanently and wonder is this the kind of leadership that one would want for the province going forward. I suggest not. I suggest, you know, a whiff of optimism from time to time would do us all a little bit of good, instead of the nattering nabobs of negativity that pervasively come across from members opposite.

And let me tell you a little bit more about what I mean. Certainly, I can say to you that we know that in Manitoba, for example, we have one of the lowest unemployment rates in the nation, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And we continue to work very hard to ensure that there are good jobs available to our population, and certainly job numbers are tracked every single month. And in the last month, you know, certainly when there was a fluctuation, we hear members opposite speaking of the kitchen sink, throwing every possible reason, chiefly among them the 1 per cent increase or the 1 cent on the dollar increase of PST, blaming for a loss of jobs, not to mention, you know, a litany of other negative facts. The fact of the matter is that we have seen a steady increase in the number of jobs over the last 10 months. We know for a fact that the labour force is plus 5,400 higher than the same 10 months of 2012. We know that total jobs average an increase of 5,500, driven by the private sector.

For 10 years I've been in this Chamber listening to members opposite winch and whine about the fact that the only thing that, you know, is happening in terms of job creation in Manitoba is because it's all government-funded and government-driven jobs. Okay, I will absolutely concede the point that we have hired over 3,000 nurses more—you know,

certainly three for every one that they fired. And yes, we've worked to restore public education by bringing teachers back to the classroom. We don't apologize for that. This is what's important for Manitoba families. But the fact of the matter is that the private sector job total is up 8,300, 1.8 per cent, above national growth of 1.5 and in the top five provincially. So the very thing that they have been begging for comes to fruition in Manitoba, and they have to find a new way to complain about it. Just pervasive negativity and cynicism. It helps nobody in Manitoba.

And, you know—and we know full well our population grew by over 15,000 last year to a total of over 1.2 billion. This is really, you know, in stark contrast to the number of people that left during what the Winnipeg Free Press described as the no-growth '90s.

We know that, you know, MoneySense magazine ranks Winnipeg as in the top five most-desirable places to live among large Canadian cities.

*(16:20)

And KPMG in 2010 and 2012, in their Competitive Alternatives study, again ranked Winnipeg No. 1 in the North American Midwest for the cost of doing business.

Now, this is their universe. This is the place that they claim to dwell and care about. And when we know KPMG is saying Winnipeg No. 1 in the North American Midwest for the cost of doing business, ahead of 25 other Midwestern and western Canadian cities, wouldn't this be a moment? Wouldn't this just be one little bar in the symphony that they create? One little note, even, that they could say, you know, here's something really positive that we can say about Winnipeg and we can say about Manitoba. But nay. Over and over again, we hear cynicism and negativity. And, again, when I speak to people in the business community, in industry, that are working hard to promote Manitoba as a great place to come and do business, I don't think that this kind of rhetoric helps anyone. And I think that perhaps members opposite ought to do some reflection on that very fact.

So about the Throne Speech, what I want to say, is we know that the five-year, \$5.5-billion plan, focused on core strategic economic infrastructure, is going to work very hard to develop Manitoba's key highways, you know, ensure that we have safe bridges—of course, ensure that we have safe, clean

water. Those are the things, of course, that help drive an economy. Those kinds of things help us ensure that goods are moving swiftly. It helps us ensure that we can maximize opportunities for trade, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we know that by doing that and ensuring that we have a steady economy, we can continue to work to enhance those things that matter most to Manitoba families, like good health care, strong education, excellent daycare.

And I will, of course, acknowledge that members opposite have mentioned the 1-cent-on-the-dollar increase to the PST. I've heard them mention it. And will acknowledge for the members that it was, without question, a very difficult decision to make, one that we never thought we would have to make. But making that decision, enabling us to build this critical infrastructure, this core infrastructure, while at the same time protecting those services that matter so much to Manitoba families, was an important thing to do. We know the choices of members opposite, and those choices would be no different than when their leader sat at the Cabinet table in the 1990s. When faced with a similar situation, there were decisions that were all about halts and cuts and stopping growth. That's why the Free Press called them the no-growth '90s—this isn't me, this is the Free Press saying that.

So, we knew that we had to take this difficult decision to ensure that we have to build that key infrastructure, getting excellent advice from some individuals in Manitoba who are very experienced and knowledgeable in this area, you know, helping in offering strategic advice about which core infrastructure should serve as a priority, making sure that there's a good understanding about our history, our roots as a trade and transportation hub, paying close attention to the vision of CentrePort Canada, making sure that we are right—very well-positioned in that mid-continent trade corridor, making sure that we're taking advantage of all of those things.

We are not Toronto; and, certainly, when it comes to municipal politics, today we are all grateful. We are not Calgary or Edmonton, certainly, in that province, you know, swimming in oil. Sure, we have oil in Manitoba, but not to that measure.

But we are at the heart of the continent. And we can take advantage of that location to ensure that we are building and we are investing to be part of that trade and transportation corridor and use that to our greatest advantage. So we're getting excellent advice and making that decision to raise 1 cent on the dollar

to be able to invest in those things, to help our economy soar, while at the same time protecting the services that we know members opposite—not just because they did it in the '90s, which isn't a bad predictor of future behaviour, but because they told us that these would be their policies, hacking and slashing half a billion dollars from the kinds of services that our families rely on. This was just not a decision that we would choose to make.

So, yes, we understand making a difficult decision to raise 1 cent on the dollar, you know, that was not easy. But we know that working hard to be visionary in developing that infrastructure while, of course, taking advantage of the two-for-one dollar. I am a good Manitoban and I like a bargain just as much as anybody does and when there's an opportunity with federal dollars on the table that we can work to match to build that critical infrastructure, we need to ensure that we take advantage of that and that none of those federal dollars, if possible, get left behind and that we can work to develop that critical core infrastructure to help Manitoba's economy soar.

So we made that decision and we believe that Manitobans are quite right in saying to us, okay, not so crazy about paying taxes in any circumstance, but when we know where that money is going to go, when we know that it is going to be dedicated to those things that will help our economy soar and that you can show us that, you can show us in print, you can show us through a third party validator, then we're—you know, we're going to be good with that. Because, frankly, what I hear from my constituents and my friends and my acquaintances, certainly the parents of the kids at my son's school, is that what we hope for our children is that they have as many, indeed more, opportunities here in Manitoba than we ever did. I know that that was what my parents wanted for me.

Neither of my parents attended post-secondary education. Indeed, one of my parents didn't finish high school. This was not to be in the economic times and work had to be the priority in order to help the family survive. And I know for both of my parents, my mother, in particular, who was an incredibly smart woman gifted with language—she used to look at the New York Times crossword, you know, the time that was allotted for people to do that, and she wondered what people were doing, were they doing their laundry and going to shovel the driveway in between crossword answers, because she could do it so fast. It was frightening actually.

What she wanted for me was a chance to go to school and a chance to fulfill my dreams as I saw fit, and I know that what I want for my son is no different from that. I want him to have opportunities to choose a path, to choose who he wants to be and how he wants to be and to pursue a career that is interesting to him and that will compensate him in a way that will allow him the life that he wants to live, and I have no shame in saying that I also want him to do that right here in Manitoba. And so for me, certainly, I consider helping our economy grow and soar as my professional responsibility in this new role, but I will say to you, it's personal. I want for my son a soaring economy and opportunities to abound so that he can raise his family here right next to me, if possible. Maybe he could get the house next door, it's lovely, and we could grow and just generally have a great family times together. And that's exactly what my neighbours want and that's what the parents at the school want for their children.

And so, as we continue to work together, it's all about ensuring that our young people have those opportunities. And the way that they're going to have those opportunities is by working together and being positive, being optimistic and being visionary and ensuring that we are building the core infrastructure that many wise people in our community are advising us to do, and ensuring that we also invest in opportunities for training and that we set that infrastructure of the human variety in place so that individuals like my son and like the children of all members of the Legislature can choose to pursue a path. And the way that we can do that and be creative and imaginative is by ensuring that we have resources and a strong economy, and this will be critically important for our future. So, yes, it is a professional responsibility. But, yes, it is indeed personal.

* (16:30)

I wanted to say in particular about the Throne Speech, some specific things of note that I think will help achieve these very goals and help us ensure that our children have lots of opportunities here in Manitoba, you know, right here at home.

The multi-year reconstruction of Highway 75, which is going to better protect this route from flood-related closures, and also major upgrades to the Trans-Canada Highway to Ontario, will really help us work to solidify our place as a trade and transportation hub. Investments, major investments, in the Perimeter Highway and a new Trans-Canada

Highway bypass around Headingley, that's going to improve traffic flow and also, very much so, help realize the full potential of CentrePort Canada Way.

We know that investments outside of the city of Winnipeg, like Highway 10 from Brandon to the US border, north to Minnedosa and the redevelopment of Brandon's Daly Overpass are critically important for our friends and for our neighbours that live and work and travel around Manitoba.

We also know that a really important focus and commitment to expand Winnipeg's rapid transit project will be crucially important for students and for those living around the southwest corridor to the University of Manitoba—will be critically important for students as well as many, many individuals that are working to commute from those areas of the city to downtown.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

I also think that it's really important, Mr. Speaker, that we pay attention to the fact that investments will be absolutely critically important to work on flood mitigation. We know here, like, very well, in Manitoba, over the last few years, that it's so important that we're making those investments to protect communities from future flooding and the incredible cost that happens after a flood. And that doesn't even capture the emotional cost of what these families go through when they are displaced, when their homes and their belongings are ruined. And so working on that critical infrastructure to try to mitigate any sort of flood damage will be so important.

Other portions of the Throne Speech, Mr. Speaker, of course, focused on the importance of training for tomorrow's workforce. We know that earlier this year the government announced a new skills strategy, which is going to help to get Manitobans the training they need to build that better life of which I spoke.

And we're going to work very hard with employers to help them grow their businesses by ensuring that we work to add 75,000 new skilled workers to the workforce, and we've set an aggressive target of 2020 with which to do that. Investing in education and training is so important because we want our young people to take advantage of the steady growth in our economy and, of course, the incredibly good jobs that are going to be available as a result of this increased focus on core infrastructure.

I also wanted to take a moment, Mr. Speaker, to note that we're going to work to expand access and opportunities for Manitobans that are looking to learn a trade, and we're investing now over \$21 million annually in apprenticeships. We know that, since we began our journey in government in 1999, the number of active apprentices has more than doubled for a total of 9,885 active apprentices. We know that a high school apprenticeship program has seen an increase to 1,142, and Aboriginal apprenticeships now total nearly 800.

Mr. Speaker, it wasn't that long ago when the Business Council held a summit speaking about the future of Manitoba's economy and how we were going to have that economy thrive and grow. And, certainly, there was consensus at that summit that it was critically important that we provide as many possible on-ramps into the workforce for our Aboriginal people. This is a group that has been traditionally disadvantaged and under-represented in the workforce, and some of the best business minds came together to say that we need to ensure that we're providing all that we can in terms of basic education, essential skills and opportunities for learning a skill trade and doing apprenticeships.

And it's for this reason that I would take a moment to note that we have very serious concerns with some of the decisions made by the federal government concerning our labour market agreements and, in particular, what it is that they are purporting to do with the Canada Jobs Grant.

Mr. Speaker, those labour market agreements were designed—and rightly so, and I praise the federal government for creating them—they were designed to assist those that are underrepresented in our workforce to gain entry into the workforce to enable them to have experience and afterwards skill-up and be able to take advantage of the kinds of jobs that are going to be available as a result of the investment, \$5.5 billion over five years. And the changes that are being proposed are going to leave these people at the side of the road on the curb—these decisions that are being made by what Minister Kenney refers to as perpetual welfare recipients—a more heartless phrase I haven't heard in a good long time.

These people are going to be excluded from the Canada Jobs Grant. They're going to be small businesses that are going to be excluded from gaining access and advantages as a result of these changes, advantages that they're gaining today because of the labour market agreements and how

they are structured. These changes, simply put, Mr. Speaker, are going to hurt people. They're going to hurt people in Manitoba.

I said earlier, of course, that we have a low unemployment rate, third lowest in Canada, and so it's not as if we have a vast population of people with tons of skills sitting around looking for a job. People in Manitoba are working. More people in Manitoba are working than ever before in its history, but we do have a segment of the population with a variety of disadvantages that can use some support to gain essential skills to get into the workforce.

And these changes to the Canada Jobs Grant exclude those people, and this will have a devastating effect on the very goals that the Business Council set for all of us here in Manitoba and that is to tap into that population, in particular, our young Aboriginal population, see the unbridled potential that is there, support them and help them to fulfill their dreams in the way that other Manitobans are doing today.

And so I say to my colleagues across the way, should they have any influence with their federal cousins, I would implore them to have this conversation and say that in the Manitoba context, no, perhaps not the Ontario context, but in the Manitoba context, the changes that are being proposed will hurt people here in Manitoba, and we absolutely can't stand for that. The provinces are united on this front, and certainly we hope that the federal government will hear us because we know that we want to continue to keep our economy moving forward.

Mr. Speaker, as I wrap up, again, I would reiterate that when you hear things from members opposite, words like political slush fund and vote buying and other cynical kinds of comments, I'm always, you know, a little flabbergasted by the fact that people across the way believe that funding cancer drugs in their entirety is something that would come from a slush fund. It's an investment. It is a life-and-death investment.

When we're talking about investing in schools and hiring nurses and hiring more teachers, there isn't a piece of slush in sight. It's about building the future for our young people. And, again, I would reiterate that while, certainly, we have differences of opinion on many things, I would hope that on the subject of the potential of young people in Manitoba, on the subject of the beauty of Manitoba, on the subject of where we are positioned as a trade and transportation

hub, on the subject of the people here in Manitoba who have hopes and dreams and work hard every day, I would hope that this Legislature could be united in optimism and positivity for the future and not in the despair that I hear from members opposite, because, frankly, I would have to say that I think Canadians broadly are getting tired of that. I think that they expect more from us as legislators and their elected officials—to have disagreements to be sure, but when it comes to promoting Manitoba to the rest of the world, Mr. Speaker, I would hope, for once, for members opposite, we could hear a little optimism because I believe in Manitobans and I don't know why they don't.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

* (16:40)

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and certainly listened with interest to—I, first of all, I want to congratulate the member for Seine River (Ms. Oswald) on her new position, Minister of Jobs and the Economy, I'm sure that's certainly a large change from being the Health minister, from spending the most money to giving away the most money. So it's a—and I certainly want to congratulate her; she's lost—Manitoba's lost 4,300 permanent jobs since she became minister, so got a lot of work to do. And I know one of her favourite terms as Health minister is a lot to do, and so there certainly is a lot to do for her there.

So, and obviously, the, as has been said, best indicator of future action is past performance. And, as I reread this Throne Speech and—was a long read, but I got through it and—[interjection]

I see the Minister of Education wants to educate all of us, so that's good. I'm sure he'll get his turn.

So, but, as I reread that, I—what I had in mind was thinking how my constituents in Midland would be affected by the Throne Speech and by the government's plan of action for the coming year.

And, of course, first of all, I want to pay tribute to my constituents in Midland. They—it's a fantastic group to—area to represent in Manitoba, it—certainly with our agricultural and industrial base. The ag industry has been good this year. There's always challenges within the ag industry—and within any industry—and certainly our—my constituents face challenges every day. But, Manitobans being Manitobans, they will face to the challenges that are there and we will persevere.

But, as I reread the Throne Speech, I did keep track, 84 different topics—84 different topics, all promising to do better. So I had to ask, like better than what? Better than the last 14 years? Better than what they've done before? But there was really—they're just promises.

And we know again as we look back to best indicator of future action is past performance. So, when you take—when you decide on priorities and you take too many priorities on, you don't get any of them done, and that's just a fact of life. You need to cut it down into manageable pieces and trying to placate every absolute group, or persons of interest, or sectors within the economy, it just—they will end up not being—doing any of these—fulfilling any of these promises.

And I also noticed the word jobs was mentioned 28 times, and, boy, if there was one word that was well used by the Lieutenant Governor, it was jobs in this Throne Speech. So—*[interjection]*

Well, yes, that is true; that's, you know, you take the 28 mentions of the job; if they'd only put half as much effort into retaining those 4,300 jobs that we lost, maybe we would be better off. But that's where we see this.

And the reannouncement of projects through this entire Throne Speech, and there's so many reannouncements and vague promises. All it does—and, as the member before me speaking about skepticism of Manitoba, it only fuels the skepticism of the Legislature when you've put out all these vague promises and you haven't fulfilled them in the past, so why would people believe you now?

And the one—a couple of points that really came through to me rereading this Throne Speech was that tax increases do not stimulate an economy. And that's something that this government does not believe. They talked about difficult choices in terms of the PST increase—difficult choices. I've heard a number of the members speak about that. The Finance Minister mentioned that today in question period: difficult choices. So, really, the question is what was the most difficult choice? Making—implementing the PST or breaking the promise that you wouldn't do that? When you called the—when the Premier (Mr. Selinger) called a tax increase nonsense, he broke his promise. Was that difficult or was that easy for him? And so that's where the skepticism comes in. If it was that easy to do, what will be the next promise that they'll break?

The other interesting thing about rereading the Throne Speech was that the words—and keep in mind that they mentioned jobs 28 times and they went on ad nauseam about all the great things that they're going to solve—but the words deficit or debt were not mentioned once. Not once did they touch on deficit or the debt.

So we know, obviously, from what they're not saying is that they have no intention to curb their deficit spending. They have no intention of at least curbing the debt—the provincial debt—never mind building on it again. So as I reread this document, I was able to see the impact it would have on my constituency, and impact and the lack of impact from what they will not do.

As I said—first of all, it was just the lack of reference to the growing fiscal deficit, and my constituents are the same as any other Manitobans. As they sit around their kitchen table, they have to decide how they will make ends meet, how much money they can allocate for whatever they are going to spend it on, and they have to make difficult choices. They really do have difficult choices to make. Continuous deficit financing for a family is just not an option. It happens. Sometimes you run into a deficit on your family budget, but it's not an option that you can do continuously. It's not an option for a small business, and it should not be an option for a government.

But this government has made it an option that they are going to take. They are going to continue to run an annual deficit. On top of that, they continue to grow the debt, and that will affect all Manitobans, including the good people in Midland constituency, because once the interest rate begins to rise—and it will rise, whether—whenever it does, and it will, because it's at rock bottom; it's been at rock bottom for a number of years—this will affect every Manitoban, because you can talk about all the services you want in Manitoba, but the banks always get paid first. And anybody who has ever had a mortgage knows that the banks always get paid first. You will have to cut back somewhere else.

And the Province is no different. They will have to cut back somewhere in order to pay the interest costs of this ballooning debt that Manitoba is carrying now. And there's no mention in the Throne Speech about these issues, how they will address these issues. These are very real issues, but no mention at all about how they will address these issues. So the net effect of this is that it will mean my

constituents will pay even higher taxes in the years to come. Eighty-four different topics, but not one mention of the issue most directly affecting all of us.

In this Throne Speech, there was no mention of the office closures that have happened across Manitoba. In my own constituency, the Agriculture office used to be called MAFRI. Apparently it's called something different now. The—in Treherne, it's been closed. Manitoba Hydro is closing offices in both Treherne and Carman. In the Carman office, this was—I am told the Hydro office in Carman was—had one of the highest walk-in traffic offices in Manitoba, and yet without any consultation to the community, without any consultation to the employees, it has the—Manitoba Hydro, through the direction of this government, is now closing the office.

* (16:50)

And the impact is huge on people living in these communities. It means longer commutes over deteriorating roads. It means families making decisions whether to stay in their communities or whether they need to move where the job is. Do they want to commute 40 minutes, an hour, over some less than desirable roads, or do they want to move to where their job is and cut down their commute costs? And, when they move, that affects the communities that they were in, and it affects everything from schools to the stores to the recreation facilities within that community. That impacts our communities.

In terms of Manitoba Hydro closing offices, if there is a service call, which quite often comes in the middle of the night, but whenever it does come, our employees—Manitoba Hydro employees will now have to travel longer distances to attend service calls. If they need additional equipment to fix the outage, it's going to take even longer to get that equipment in, and time is critical, whether that person that's affected has health issues that they need hydro, they need power in their home, or whether it's an industrial site that needs power.

Most of our livestock operations of any sizeable now have backup generators just because they know that they cannot depend on Hydro to get there in time, and air movement and equipment operation is critical in these livestock operations. So they've already hedged themselves against poor service within Manitoba Hydro.

I noticed that rural development gets a vague promise of renewal in that Throne Speech, yet this is

the same government which cut funding and cancelled all rural development corporations just a year ago. So you cut them a year ago; now you're making a vague promise to do rural development? Why would people be skeptical? They know that this government has no intention of doing that. It was just another one of these feel-good announcements and there's no credibility from this government, because we know past performance are indicators of future actions.

But my constituents, like all Manitobans, are feeling the direct impact of the increased tax load just in the past two years. The broadening of the PST to include items such as home insurance has a huge impact on everyone. Homes, farms, businesses, have seen their insurance bills increase 7 per cent last year and a further increase with the PST going to 8 per cent this year. This is a direct cash flow on whether it's your home budget, whether it's your business budget, whatever. This is directly in a cash-flow requirement. You shouldn't be making decisions not to carry insurance just because it's costing you more, but this government will force some people to make that decision, particularly low-income Manitobans.

The increased registration fees on vehicles hit rural residents and businesses the hardest, and I realize that this government doesn't understand that, but they should. Transit services just aren't an option. You need vehicles in rural areas. And businesses and farms often have multiple vehicles, so they're hard hit by this new tax, alongside of the increased costs in their business insurance.

The gas tax increased last year 2 and a half cents per litre. When you need a vehicle to go somewhere, now your gas costs are even higher, and now we're learning that they're not even taking this gas tax and putting it into roads and bridges. We would like to know where that money is actually going.

Mr. Speaker, in my constituency of Midland, there are 17 municipalities, both rural municipalities and towns of various sizes. Twelve of these 17 municipalities are affected by this government's unilateral decision to force amalgamations. I just don't think that this government understood the level of which municipalities work with their neighbours, with their neighbouring municipalities. Whether it be fire and emergency, waste disposal, conservation districts, there are so many shared services that—these shared services were not dictated by government: You shall do shared services. This is a general

outcome of municipalities working together. They realize that there is—it's better for them to do this.

But, for this government to come in now and unilaterally decide that municipalities must merge, what they've done is they've destroyed the working relationship—and will destroy the working relationship—that many municipalities have built up with their neighbours because of the unrealistic deadlines imposed upon them.

These arbitrary new boundaries that the Province is decreed upon them affects their working relationships, their shared services with other municipalities. All their shared services will have to be rewritten because of this—and they were working. They had them—the reason that these municipalities did it was because they were working.

It's a lack of respect by this government. They're unworkable timelines. And I think what's—what really hurts municipalities the most is the lack of reasons for doing this. I know the previous minister of Local Government was asked this many times, what is the real purpose? They had some vague answers about, well, this is going to reduce your overhead costs, and the municipalities shot right back and said, no, it's not going to; and they said, show us how, but of course he wouldn't do it that.

And so this government has set back the process of working together due to the stress of these timelines and the imposed new boundaries. Municipal councillors are very aware of the community needs; and, just as we have seen in imposed mergers of the school divisions and the regional health authorities, bigger is not necessarily better. It can be and that's where they've worked together on these shared services to become more efficient, but just the idea that bigger is better is not true. The false claim of lower administration costs does not—has not held true for school divisions and for regional health authorities, especially when you factor in the travel costs, the office overhead and the compensation to these employees as they do their travelling.

This government's agenda seems to be intent on total control of municipalities to the detriment of local communities. The Throne Speech, again, fails to outline their true intent. The Throne Speech went on at great length on hydro development and compared today's development plans with that of

50 years ago. Unfortunately, there are a number of factors which have changed, making a direct comparison flawed. First and foremost, the energy market has changed dramatically in just the past few years. Natural gas deposits on tap have created a clear alternative energy source in North America. Wind power development, massive wind power development in northern US has dramatically increased in production and continues with even another recent announcement in North Dakota.

Another significant fact here in Manitoba is the capital cost projections and the actual costs of those capital projects by Manitoba Hydro. Manitoba Hydro now has a dubious record of underestimating capital costs, much—very similar to this government, which have, in fact, doubled their original cost projections. Wuskwatim is an excellent example of this: first projected to cost \$800 million, finally came in the neighbourhood of \$1.6 billion, doubling the original cost, and is now projected to lose a hundred million dollars a year for the next 20 years. That is not a capital program to build your projects on.

The current capital plan of Manitoba Hydro imposed by this government on Manitoba Hydro is in excess of \$30 billion, and, given Manitoba's record on Wuskwatim costs alone, the capital costs become unfathomable. This is why we continue to call for a complete independent review of all Manitoba Hydro capital projects, including Bipole III. This review would also analyze the export markets and projected domestic energy needs; taking this government's word, which we can't believe them on the viability of these projects, is simply not good enough, given the size and the scale of these projects. And it's only after this review should the decision be made how to proceed on this. And Ed Schreyer, Tim Sale, Len Evans all agree with the idea that a decision based—must be based on sound research, not on government spin.

So, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Midland (Mr. Pedersen) will have 10 minutes remaining.

The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, November 14, 2013

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