

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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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	Gimli	NDP
BLADY, Sharon, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	NDP
BRAUN, Erna, Hon.	Rossmere	NDP
BRIESE, Stuart	Agassiz	PC
CALDWELL, Drew, Hon.	Brandon East	NDP
CHIEF, Kevin, Hon.	Point Douglas	NDP
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	NDP
CROTHERS, Deanne, Hon.	St. James	NDP
CULLEN, Cliff	Spruce Woods	PC
DEWAR, Greg, Hon.	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	Fort Rouge	NDP
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Richmond	NDP
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	NDP
KOSTYSHYN, Ron, Hon.	Swan River	NDP
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas	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
MARTIN, Shannon	Morris	PC
MELNICK, Christine	Riel	NDP
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	PC
NEVAKSHONOFF, Thomas, Hon.	Interlake	NDP
OSWALD, Theresa	Seine River	NDP
PALLISTER, Brian	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Midland	PC
PETTERSEN, Clarence	Flin Flon	NDP
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Arthur-Virden	PC
REID, Daryl, Hon.	Transcona	NDP
ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Kewatinook	NDP
RONDEAU, Jim	Assiniboia	NDP
ROWAT, Leanne	Riding Mountain	PC
SARAN, Mohinder, Hon.	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	St. Paul	PC
SELBY, Erin	Southdale	NDP
SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Verendrye	PC
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	PC
STRUTHERS, Stan	Dauphin	NDP
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	NDP
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WIGHT, Melanie, Hon.	Burrows	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 6, 2015

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 and know it with certainty and accomplish it perfectly for the glory and honour of Thy name and for the welfare of all our people. Amen.

Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 18—The Certified Occupations Act

Hon. Kevin Chief (Minister of Jobs and the Economy): I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Mackintosh), that Bill 18, The Certified Occupations Act; Loi sur les professions reconnues, now be read for the first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Chief: This bill is intended to provide training and certification for select occupations that are not recognized under the current apprenticeship act. Occupations will be administered separately from the existing apprenticeship and certification system, but many aspects will be similar, including industry-led standards development, competency-based training model and both classroom and on-the-job training. Standards will be developed through consultation with industry stakeholders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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.

Rights of Manitoba Children

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

The provincial government should uphold the rights of children set forth by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by Canada over 20 years ago, to better protect and promote children and their rights and to ensure the voices of children are heard.

Instead, many children in Manitoba, especially those in the child-welfare system, reveal that they sometimes feel they are—they have no say in what happens to them.

Under the provincial government, Manitoba's children and youth are falling behind on several indicators of well-being and areas that would prepare them for better outcomes in life.

This year, the provincial government's education system was ranked last of all Canadian provinces in science, reading and math.

Under this provincial government, Manitoba also has the second highest percentage of children using food banks of all Canadian provinces and the highest child poverty rate.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government and the minister of child—children and youth opportunities to ensure the rights of all Manitoba children are respected and that the opinions of children take—are taken into consideration when decisions that affect them are made.

To urge the provincial government and the Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities to correct the tragic systemic flaws that have failed Manitoba children in the recent past.

This petition is signed by I. Cameron, S. Cruz, B. Hong and many more Manitobans.

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

**Provincial Trunk Highway 206 and
Cedar Avenue in Oakbank—Pedestrian Safety**

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Every day, hundreds of Manitoba children walk to school in Oakbank and must cross PTH No. 206 at the intersection with Cedar Avenue.

(2) There have been many dangerous incidents where drivers use the right shoulder to pass vehicles that have stopped at the traffic light waiting to turn left at this intersection.

(3) Law enforcement officials have identified this intersection as a hot spot of concern for the safety of schoolchildren, drivers and emergency responders.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge that the provincial government improve the safety at the pedestrian corridor at the intersection of PTH No. 206 and Cedar Avenue in Oakbank by considering such steps as highlighting pavement markings to better indicate the location of the shoulders and crosswalk, as well as installing a lighted crosswalk structure.

This is signed by B. Litkovich, J. Koroscil, C. Joyal and many, many other fine Manitobans.

**Beausejour District Hospital—Weekend
and Holiday Physician Availability**

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

(1) The Beausejour District Hospital is a 30-bed, acute-care facility that serves the communities of Beausejour and Brokenhead.

(2) The hospital and the primary-care centre have had no doctor available on weekends and holidays for many months, jeopardizing the health and livelihood of those in the northeast region of the Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority.

(3) During the 2011 election, the provincial government promised to provide every Manitoban with access to a family doctor by 2015.

(4) This promise is far from being realized, and Manitobans are witnessing many emergency rooms limiting services or closing temporarily, with the majority of these reductions taking place in rural Manitoba.

(5) According to the Health Council of Canada, only 25 per cent of doctors in Manitoba reported that their patients had access to care on evenings and weekends.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government and the Minister of Health to ensure that the Beausejour District Hospital and primary-care centre have a primary-care physician available on weekends and holidays to better provide area residents with this essential service.

This petition is signed by I. Robinson, G. Gering, M. Tymko and many, many more fine Manitobans, Mr. Speaker.

**Bipole III Land Expropriation—
Collective Bargaining Request**

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

On November 19th, 2014, the Premier authorized an order-in-council enabling Manitoba Hydro to take valuable and productive farmland for its controversial Bipole III transmission line project without due process of law.

On November 24th, 2014, the minister responsible for the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act signed a confirming order for the province of Manitoba declaring that no notice to landowners is required for the seizure of property.

This waiver of notice represents an attack on rural families and their property rights in a modern democratic society. There was not even an opportunity provided for debate in the Manitoba Legislature. In many cases, the private property seized has been part of a family farm for generations.

Manitoba Hydro has claimed that it has only ever expropriated one landowner in its entire history of operation. The provincial government has now gone ahead and instituted expropriation procedures against more than 200 landowners impacted by Bipole III.

* (13:40)

Since November 2013, the Manitoba Bipole III Landowner Committee, MBLC, in association with the Canadian Association of Energy and Pipeline Landowner Associations, CAEPLA, have been trying to engage Manitoba Hydro to negotiate a fair business agreement.

For over 14 months, the provincial government and Manitoba Hydro have acted in bad faith in their dealings with Manitoba landowners or their duly authorized agents. Those actions have denied farmers their right to bargain collectively to protect their property and their businesses from Bipole III.

MBLC, CAEPLA has not formed an association to stop the Bipole III project and they are not antidevelopment. MBLC, CAEPLA has simply come together, as a group of people, as Manitobans, to stand up for property rights and the right to collectively bargain for a fair business agreement that protects the future well-being of their businesses.

MBLC, CAEPLA are duly authorized agents for Manitoba landowners who wish to exercise their freedom to associate and negotiate in good faith.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge that the provincial government immediately direct Manitoba Hydro to engage with MBLC, CAEPLA in order to negotiate a fair business agreement that addresses the many legitimate concerns of farm families affected by the Bipole III transmission line.

And this petition is signed by S. Fanzago, W. Taylor, G. Simpson and many more fine Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: Committee reports? Tabling of reports? Ministerial statements?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

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

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today from École secondaire Neelin High School 69 grade 9 students under the direction of Ms. Kerri Malazdrewicz and Mr. William Savoy. And this group is located in the

constituency of the honourable Minister of Municipal Government (Mr. Caldwell).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Rent Assist Program Increase Political Party Financing

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, it was about three years ago that our party took a position—the first position, in fact, since I became leader—to support increasing the rental allowance for Manitoba's most vulnerable people forced to live on social assistance.

And I, like a number of members in this House, understand how tough it is when the money runs out before the month does, Mr. Speaker. And we believe, and I know many members in this House believe, that was the right thing to do. And I want to congratulate Make Poverty History and my colleagues for their great support in making this happen.

Now, my question for the Premier is this. Immediately following the last election, he proceeded to initiate legislation which provided a vote tax subsidy to his party, yet it took him three years to support the most vulnerable of our province.

Why so fast to do the wrong thing and so slow to do the right thing?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I appreciate the question from the Leader of the Opposition because we can put the historical record straight.

When we came into office, the National Child Benefit was clawed back by the members of the opposition, including the Leader of the Opposition, from everybody that was on social assistance. If you were on social assistance with a child, you had no benefit, no program for your children. We reinstated that program for all children in Manitoba—all children in Manitoba—regardless of their source of income. That was a major commitment. Well over \$50 million we made available to the lowest income families in Manitoba that the member opposite clawed back from those families.

We then proceeded to increase rates for people. And the Rent Assist program has now been accelerated to the full 75 per cent of median market rent.

And, Mr. Speaker, there's a big difference between their approach and ours, which I'll be happy to explain on the next question.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I hope the Premier is happy to explain why he waited three years to increase the rental allowance for Manitoba's most vulnerable people too.

I would like to thank the unsuccessful leadership candidates, the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton), the member for Seine River (Ms. Oswald), for taking—for making the effort to include in their platforms this important initiative. We appreciate that and thank them.

It is unfortunate it took the Premier so long to admit he was wrong, but it took him almost as long as it did to admit that he took those Jets tickets, Mr. Speaker. It takes him quite a while to admit he was wrong.

But it took him absolutely no time at all to bring in a vote tax to subsidize his own political party, and while the NDP was filling up at the taxpayer subsidy buffet, other people in our province were struggling to put food on their tables. Other people in our province were struggling to put clothing on their children. Other people in our province were struggling to pay their rent. It took him three years—three years. While he subsidized himself and his party generously, he ignored the plight of those who needed this support.

Mr. Speaker, will he commit today to ending the ridiculous vote tax subsidy and dedicating the 2 and a half million dollars to support Manitoba's most vulnerable and genuinely needy people?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, in the last election, several members of the opposition received public rebates for running in the election. The member for Agassiz (Mr. Briese), over \$7,000; the member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer), over \$14,000; the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson), over \$17,000; the member for St. Paul (Mr. Schuler), just shy of \$16,000.

Mr. Speaker, that is the definition of hypocrisy. They take the money and then they say other people shouldn't have it. They do believe in public financing of elections.

Now, let me tell them the difference between their proposal to assist low-income people. The Rent Assist program is not only available to people on social assistance, it's also available to working

people, people that are participating in the economy, people going to school and getting an education or training. Under their model, if they brought their approach in, the minute somebody got a job or went off to get some training they would be cut off. They would be left out in the cold, just like they left the children out, when they were in office, from the National Child Benefit.

Their approach is narrow. Their approach is exclusive. Their approach keeps people trapped on social assistance. Our approach helps people get jobs—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

New West Partnership Manitoba Participation

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): And the Premier's approach divides and fragments his own party, Mr. Speaker. That's the level of arrogance the Premier displays.

I want to offer our congratulations to Rachel Notley and the New Democratic Party in Alberta for their success. Albertans voted for change, Mr. Speaker, and for hope, and I believe, in a few short months, Manitobans will vote for the same change and hope.

Speaking of change, I ask the debt-doubling Premier to consider this. He's very skilled at growing our debt but very unskilled at growing our economy. That's why we're ninth over the last five years under his misdirection, ninth in Canada, closer to 10th than to eighth, Mr. Speaker.

And I appreciate the Premier belatedly adopting our position on the rental allowance. Will he immediately approach Rachel Notley and will he encourage her to support us in our efforts here in Manitoba to join, finally, the New West Partnership?

* (13:50)

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, Manitoba's economy will be one of the best performing economies in Canada this year. Some forecasters, such as the Conference Board of Canada, say it will be the No. 1 economy. We're going to be No. 1, we're going to be No. 2, we're for sure going to be No. 3 this year and next year. Over the last 10 years, we have been the top three for performing economies in Canada. Last year we created 19,000 additional jobs in Manitoba in partnership with the communities.

When the member opposite was in office, people were losing jobs, people weren't eligible for the National Child Benefit. They had a snitch line on billboards to cut people off social assistance. They had a three-strikes-and-you're-out policy in schools. So kids were being kicked out of school, Mr. Speaker, that's when gang culture started. No job, no income, no ability to go to school, that's the legacy of the Leader of the Opposition.

In our government, more kids graduating, more kids getting jobs, more kids putting down roots in Manitoba. That's the way forward.

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

Economic Growth Government Record

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): More heat than light, Mr. Speaker, much more heat than light.

The fact is this Premier's record, not that of Gary Doer's which he tries to slipstream in on, but his own record is that our economy's grown at the rate of ninth in the province—among the provinces since he became Premier. Only a Premier with a record this deplorable, this truly bad, would go to forecasts to cite his successes because he has to ignore the reality of his own record.

Now, I know Gary Doer. I understand Gary Doer's position. I have worked with Gary Doer as a federal member, as a member of this House.

Will the Premier finally come to grips with the reality that he is no Gary Doer?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, according to Statistics Canada, an agency which still is doing a good job in spite of the fact it's been hobbled by cuts, Manitoba has seen the largest wage growth in the last year, of 4.3 per cent, anywhere in the country, over \$40 a week, over \$2,000 a year, higher wages, more jobs, a stronger economy with a growing population and a higher graduation from high school.

The exact opposite occurred when the member was in office: less wages, less disposable income, less jobs, less people in Manitoba, less doctors in Manitoba, less nurses working on the job, less teachers working in the schools, less children in schools.

A record of shame for the members opposite, a record of progress on this side of the House.

Mr. Pallister: Mr. Speaker, again, not progress, the opposite of progress under this Premier, this debt-doubling Premier, this Premier who ran on an election campaign which was comprised of a promise that he would balance the books—how's that going?—that he would not raise taxes and that he would respect Manitobans' right to vote in a referendum. Broken promise, broken promise, broken promise.

And now he claims that Stats Canada is wrong when they say that his government's record last year was the second worst in the country for economic growth and he wants to fight with Stats Canada about their numbers which prove that since he became Premier his record is the worst in the country in terms of creating jobs, growing the economy and creating security.

Will he admit that the only category that he genuinely doesn't dispute with respect to Stats Canada is the one that proves that more people leave this province as a matter of out-migration than every other province in this great country?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, last year Manitoba saw an increase in population of over 16,000 new people; that's the largest single-year increase since the 1960s. More people are being born in Manitoba. More people are choosing to live in Manitoba as a home.

The average age of Manitobans is around 37 years old now. It's a province that is actually getting younger, even though there are many of our citizens which are living longer and require support in the home-care system, in the Aging in Place policies we have, with personal-care homes and hospitals, all of which we are supporting and expanding in Manitoba in spite of the members opposite voting against that.

The facts are clear, Mr. Speaker: one of the strongest economies in Canada, with a record number of jobs, significant increase in wages, more people living in the province of Manitoba. Private investment is soaring and most of the jobs are being created in the private sector.

The member opposite wishes he could have a record like that, because when he was office everything was going in the other direction.

Basic Personal Income Tax Need for Exemption Increase

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): Mr. Speaker, the facts are clear: This is a budget that shows that the NDP cannot manage Manitoba's finances, and as a result Manitobans pay more.

In this budget revenues are sharply up, \$334 million up, and yet the NDP Finance Minister won't even raise the basic personal exemption. The basic personal exemption is the amount that individuals get to keep before they start paying taxes. Now, in Manitoba the government begins to tax at just over \$9,000, but in Saskatchewan the same wage earner can earn over \$15,000 before the government begins to assess tax.

The Minister of Finance is sitting on rising revenues and yet he won't enact the most basic tax concessions to help Manitobans. Why?

Hon. Greg Dewar (Minister of Finance): We discussed this yesterday, and as I said, Manitoba is one of the most affordable places to live in Canada.

They want a focus, Mr. Speaker? We've already raised the personal exemption eight times since we formed government. We're focusing on, as a government, on a plan to invest and to grow our economy. As the Premier (Mr. Selinger) has said, we have one of the fastest growing economies in Canada. We've got one of the fastest job creation records, and those people are getting paid more.

The Leader of the Opposition—they want to kill this plan, Mr. Speaker. They want to kill jobs in this province. Our plan calls for—the plan will create 70,000 more jobs in this province, and they want to kill it.

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Speaker, again, I don't know where the Finance Minister is taking his information.

The basic personal exemption is not up in this budget. It was not up in last year's budget. In fact, in Manitoba, NDP starts taking people's income far sooner than BC, far sooner than Alberta, far sooner than Saskatchewan, far sooner than Ontario. And because this NDP government doesn't index the basic personal exemption to account to inflation, while other provinces do, Manitoba continues to fall behind the other provinces when it comes to when you start paying income tax.

Now, if the NDP had just, in this budget, raised the basic personal exemption to match the provincial

average, it would've saved Manitoba families \$346 this year.

Why does the NDP government lack the ambition and the effort and the ability to just do the very least and match the provincial average and give a little help to hard-working Manitoba families?

Mr. Dewar: Since forming government, we've—this government here has brought in 89 tax reductions since 1999, saving an average family over \$4,200 a year.

This budget will bring in tax relief for seniors, doubling the seniors' property tax credit, Mr. Speaker. The members 'oppit' will vote against that. This budget brings in tax relief for small business; another 2,000 small businesses won't pay taxes. This opposition will vote against that. This budget has tax relief for volunteer firefighters. They're going to vote against it. This budget has tax relief for—caregiver tax credit's being enhanced. They're going to vote against it.

I say shame on them.

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Speaker, I know that the Finance Minister does understand this: that his refusal to raise the basic personal exemption in this year's budget has the most severe impact on those who can least afford it.

Mr. Speaker, at the current minimum wage level, a full-time wage earner with \$22,000 of annual income pays \$1,400 in income tax. In Saskatchewan, the same wage earner pays just over \$700, a difference of \$700 a year in income tax. Now, that \$700 may not mean a lot to this Finance Minister, but I guarantee you it means a lot to a single parent, a new Canadian or a student just starting out with their first job, or young person.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP has created one of the least competitive tax regimes. Their revenues are up and they pull more income tax out of low earners' hands than any province west of Quebec.

Why—what does this Finance Minister have to say about robbing low-income wage earners?

Mr. Dewar: I'm pleased the member opposite raised the issue of the minimum wage, because this government will be increasing minimum wage October the 1st to \$11 per hour, and they, Mr. Speaker, they will oppose it.

* (14:00)

As I said earlier, this budget has tax cuts for seniors, for businesses, for caregivers, for volunteer firefighters. Member can just—if he wishes to see how we compare with other provinces, he can go to our budget documents. He was talking about a two-earner family of five and earning \$75,000 here in Manitoba, \$39,500. He mentioned BC, \$67,800; Saskatchewan, \$43,500. Our record is one of the best in Canada when it comes to affordability.

Manitoba Housing Applications Waiting List Increase

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): I just want to at the outset congratulate the member for The Maples, who has just been promoted to the Minister responsible for Housing and Community Development, and I wish him well with his new responsibilities.

Mr. Speaker, according to a freedom of information request, in November of 2005, 464 applicants were approved and on the wait-list for Manitoba Housing. Fast forward to February of 2015, 10 years later, and there now—are now 2,742 applicants approved and waiting to get into Manitoba Housing.

Can the minister explain why the wait-lists have increased so dramatically?

Hon. Mohinder Saran (Minister of Housing and Community Development): First of all, I thank the member for congratulating me, and this is a great opportunity, and I also am thankful to the Premier (Mr. Selinger) who gave me this opportunity.

And because—first of all, we—our government investing in safe, affordable housing for Manitoba families. We are investing over \$137 million to develop 500 more social housing, 500 more affordable rental units. That's in addition to the 1,500 social housing and 1,500 affordable housing units that were completed on the schedule in spring of 2014.

We created HOMEWorks! to increase the supply of affordable housing in Manitoba through support for the new rental housing, housing co-operatives, home ownership, down payment assistance to homebuyers and rent supplements and renovation options for—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable minister's time has elapsed for this question.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Speaker, if this government has done so very much for people that require

Manitoba Housing, why have we seen the increase in the number of people waiting, applied and approved? If they've been approved, their application has been approved, obviously they are in need of Manitoba Housing. So why are we seeing the numbers go from 464 applicants to 2,742? That's a 500 per cent increase in the number of people in need.

Why is this NDP government failing to provide for Manitobans who need their help the most?

Mr. Saran: Under our three-year housing plan, we are investing a total of \$402 million in Manitoba's existing social housing stock. Our government is investing \$34 million to renovate housing that will benefit more than 5,559 households in 2014-15 alone; that's what we did.

We are investing \$20 million this year in Manitoba Rent Assist to help low-income Manitobans find stable, affordable housing. We are helping to keep home ownership affordable through more than \$350 million annually in education property tax subsidies.

In partnership with the City of Winnipeg, we announced a new grant to support the creation of up to 900 new units of mixed-income rental housing in downtown Winnipeg. We are investing up to \$40 million in the downtown residential development grant to build 1,200 units—

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

Mrs. Mitchelson: But the numbers speak for themselves: a 500 per cent increase in the number of people and families in need, Mr. Speaker, that require Manitoba Housing, that can't get it.

Mr. Speaker, NDP waste and mismanagement is hurting those in need the most.

When will they just admit that they're failing the very people that they should be supporting that need their help the most?

Mr. Saran: Let me compare what we did and what the PCs did when they were in power. Manitobans looking for affordable housing cannot count on the PCs for the help.

Our important investments in housing and supports for people with addictions would not be possible under the PC leadership commitment to make, Mr. Speaker, *[inaudible]* across-the-board, indiscriminate cuts. During the Opposition Leader's

time in Filmon's Cabinet, no new social housing while there.

On top of that, they are the ones who oppose minimum wage hikes—

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

Child Poverty Rates Manitoba Numbers

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, the demand on Manitoba Housing continues to rise. Could that be because poverty rates in Manitoba have seen no improvement under the NDP government?

Even after the much advertised ALL Aboard poverty reduction strategy, our children poverty rate in—is No. 1 in Canada at 29 per cent. Now, 62 per cent of First Nations children live in poverty in this province; that is shameful.

After 15 years of NDP, why are those on limited and fixed income so badly off?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): Since 1999 we have worked consistently to reduce the rate of poverty and includes—and improve social inclusion. We've done that by taking efforts, by working with our service providers, our different agencies and making a difference by creating more jobs, ensuring that we have a strong economy by providing education. We know that education is the No. 1 equalizer, but we also know that we need to continue to invest in our affordable housing and our social housing, and we've been doing that at record amounts.

When they were in office they built no houses at all. They—right now—what they did is they froze, they tore—they took back the National Child Benefit. They did not raise minimum wage.

We need no lessons from the members opposite.

Mr. Wishart: Well, Mr. Speaker, child poverty rates in this province are particularly troubling; 29 per cent of Manitoba children live in poverty, fully 10 per cent higher than the national average. Is that something to be proud of?

With three out of 10 children in poverty, we are the worst in Canada. This government strategy is clearly a failure.

When is this government going to table real action on ending poverty? Making announcements just doesn't seem to be cutting it.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We continue to make investments. We've made investments over every budget since 1999. This budget is no different.

In our 2015 budget we have increased Rent Assist to 75 per cent of market median rent. We announced 900 more child-care spaces. We made a commitment to build more affordable and social housing. We're continuing to make those investments in education as well as ensuring that we are creating good jobs for Manitobans.

I ask the member opposite, will he be voting for budget twenty thousand fifteen?

EIA Housing Allowance Food Bank Usage

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, it would be very hard to support a budget that has led to a 52 per cent increase in the use of food banks in this province.

Now, the NDP have finally agreed to support Make Poverty History's call to increase the EIA housing allowance, something our party has called for for three years.

Tell me, Minister: Does the minister believe that there might actually be a reduction in the use of food banks if they increase the housing allowance?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): There is a lot to talk about around poverty reduction and social inclusion. We've made improvements. We'll continue to make those improvements.

We are not the drive-by poverty activists that I see on the opposite at all. We have been committed to this for a number of years, and many of us before we got elected, we've been committed to this.

Budget 2015, let me tell you what David Northcott said. He said that moving to 75 per cent of median market rent will have an impact on food bank use. That alone will have an impact on families. I love it.

* (14:10)

Molly McCracken says, I think this is a responsible approach. It is an investment on social services that we depend on.

Make Poverty History says, this benefit, what's really great about it, it goes above and beyond what we called for.

I think we've been endorsed by a number of people.

Manitoba Youth Centres Children Awaiting Foster Placement

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): We've been saying that for three years. Where have you been, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker, I want to welcome the new Minister of Justice (Mr. Mackintosh) back to his old portfolio.

And I know that the first thing that he would have done, because any competent minister of Justice would have done it upon assuming that office, is go to the department and ask why it is that that government has been warehousing children under the care of the Province, warehousing them in jails. He would have gone to his department, he would have said, I want to know how many children have been held in jail when they shouldn't have been, I want to know how long they've been there, and I want to know now.

Since the minister clearly went and asked that question, won't he tell us how many kids in CFS care have been warehoused in jail when they shouldn't have been, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Well, I want to thank the member for the, I'm sure sincere, welcome back. And I also—I noticed that he's popped out of the blue bin himself, Mr. Speaker, as my critic, after all these years, for Justice. *[interjection]* I want to say—yes, well, that's it. I'm perhaps somewhat wiser this time. I'm certainly younger, as the member is, and if I put on some gowns for the swearing-in of a judge or maybe some other change, we'll see how that all fits.

But—just—this is the first opportunity, Mr. Speaker—I just want to thank the—I think it's so important that this House give a shout-out to the Winnipeg Police Service for—and, of course, I'm speaking of none other than the charges that were laid in respect of the death of three people who have been living on our streets. I think that we all felt very strongly about that tragedy. And I think sometimes we take for granted the efforts that are made by law enforcement.

In answer to the specific question, Mr. Speaker, one of the first things I did was ask that question. And every youth is under sentence—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable minister's time for this question has elapsed.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, clearly the minister would have said and would have asked whether or not the fact that judges have been calling the Child Advocate and saying that they weren't able to release children who were under the care of CFS, under care of this NDP government, because they weren't able to release them, because there was no appropriate place to release them to—now, I'm sure he would have asked his department whether or not that's a violation of the Charter, because we know that the Charter says that people can't be arbitrarily detained.

Can he tell us, when he asked his department whether or not there was a violation of the Charter, whether or not he got the answer and that the answer was yes or no, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, some things in this country have changed remarkably; the member has not. He did not listen. He did not hear the answer, Mr.—I know he was probably up late, entirely bewildered and confounded by the progressive shift in Canadian politics.

But I provided the answer. The answer from the department was the youth in the youth centre are all there under sentence or by the order of the court.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, according to the Child Advocate, the Child Advocate indicates that she gets calls from judges who want to release young people from custody because she can't—but they can't, the judges, because there's nowhere it's appropriate to release them to. The minister essentially confirmed that in the comments that she made to the media after.

Is she saying that the Child Advocate was wrong? Is he saying that the judges are wrong? Is he saying that the Minister of Family Services (Ms. Irvin-Ross) are wrong? Or does he not know what he's talking about?

Which one is wrong: the judges, the Child Advocate, the minister or the minister, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, indeed, the member was up late.

My answer was that children cannot be—youth cannot be detained longer than their sentence. And I

have been assured that that, in fact, is the practice today at the Manitoba Youth Centre.

Missing Youth Numbers Group and Foster Homes

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, first I want to recognize the, with sadness, the infant in CFS care who died last night.

Now, the Deputy Premier recently claimed success, saying, and I quote: The vast majority of kids reported missing are returned home. On Friday, it was 405 children returned last year.

I now table a FIPPA which shows that the actual number of youth missing in Winnipeg last year up to November was almost 4,500. That's 12 children each day, on average.

Why did the minister not tell the Legislature the full story of the large number of youth who are actually reported missing each year and that less than 10 per cent are found?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the member—the reports are for the number of persons missing on a specific day. And one child missing or away from a proper facility or proper care is too many.

There—it is true that StreetReach has been very extensively connecting with young people in the community and returning around 400 back to care, Mr. Speaker, and that's an important role that they play in the community. And we will continue to support agencies that work with youth on the front lines in our communities to help them return to safe care.

That's the purpose of the child and family system, is to provide protection for children, and they do that with all the energy and resources they have. And we also support a number of other non-statutory agencies, Aboriginal and indigenous organizations to also provide care for youth and make sure that they have the support they need to live independently and safely in the community.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, the missing persons report that I just tabled shows that an extraordinary proportion of those who go missing go missing from group homes; 15,595 over almost 31,000 youth, or just more than half, were reported missing from group homes.

Indeed, under today's NDP government, the number of youth reported missing from group homes

has skyrocketed from 38 per cent of youth reported missing seven years ago to 57 per cent most recently.

Why has today's NDP government overseen policies which have seen more and more of our youth running away from group homes?

Mr. Selinger: I thank the member for the question.

As I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, if one child is gone missing from any—whether it's their family home or whether it's a Child and Family Services home, we want to be there—we want to be there—with more support for police to do front-line policing services; more work on special projects such as the Block by Block project, which works with families and social agencies and the police department on a neighbourhood basis to make sure families are safe; and programs like StreetReach, as well as other statutory—non-statutory agencies like Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata, Ndinawe, the—and organizations like that who do a tremendous amount of work in the community to provide safe haven for children, safe places for them to be when they're in the community. And we will continue to support those agencies.

As a matter of fact, in this budget, Mr. Speaker, we are providing another half a million dollars of additional resources to non-statutory indigenous organizations to work on helping families stay out of the child-welfare system and have children safely in the community.

Mr. Gerrard: In addition to the over 15,600 youth missing from group homes in the last seven years, there have been over 4,500 children missing from foster homes and another 2,500 children reported missing directly by Child and Family Services. That's a total of more than 22,600, or 73 per cent of those reported missing, are missing from within the government's care in their child and family services system.

When will the government make the desperately needed changes so that its child and family service system is effective in looking after children rather than being the greatest source of missing children in our province?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the statistics are of great interest to us, and that's exactly why we use them to guide program development and to fund the appropriate agencies to make sure that they are out there working with children.

We have the statutory agencies, the child and family service organizations, which are mandated to provide protection for children. The best interests of the child are to come first. We have a number of non-statutory agencies, non-profit organizations that we work with to make sure families have opportunities for prevention. Those organizations, many of them are indigenous-led and -governed now, Mr. Speaker. And we have additional resources in this budget to support those organizations to do even more work in the community to keep kids safe.

And that's not to mention our school programs, Mr. Speaker. With our school programs, we are keeping more children in school now and successfully helping those young people complete high school. An 87 per cent graduation rate is a dramatic difference over when the members opposite were in office and only 71 per cent of children graduated.

*(14:20)

Children in school learning are safe children. Children in school learning are children that are making progress in their lives. Eighty-seven per cent of them are doing that now in Manitoba; when the members opposite were in office, it was only 71 per cent.

K-8 French Immersion School New Construction in South Pointe

Mr. Dave Gaudreau (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, we all want the best for our children, and that means investing in our communities, creating new child-care spaces, building schools, making classroom sizes smaller.

We all know that schools are the heart of a community and that families growing-in growing communities like South Pointe and Waverley West want to make sure that their children can get high-quality education close to home.

Will the Minister of Education please inform the House about a very important investment in my area in south Winnipeg?

Hon. James Allum (Minister of Education and Advanced Learning): I was proud yesterday to stand with the Premier (Mr. Selinger), with my friend from St. Norbert, with our partners in the Pembina Trails School Division, with school administrators, with parents and with teachers to announce the—to break ground on a new K-to-8 school in South Pointe. Now, Mr. Speaker, this new

\$30-million school will provide much needed space to create smaller classes in south Winnipeg and even provide more child-care spaces for families.

You know, Mr. Speaker, our government has invested over \$1 billion building schools, science labs, gyms and shop classes throughout Manitoba. Contrast our approach with building Manitoba with the opposition's plan to cut these programs for Manitobans. We're building the economy, we're creating jobs, we're providing opportunities for young people—

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

Physician Recruitment Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, this Health Minister and her NDP government have a problem with doctor recruitment. NDP waste is hurting essential front-line services.

I would like to commend community volunteers and leaders in the Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority region for taking it upon themselves to recruit and retain medical providers. Twenty-three hundred doctors have left the province and 26-plus doctor positions are vacant in the Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority.

Why are hard-working Manitobans doing this minister's job, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Sharon Blady (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the member for the question. We have said that we want every Manitoban who wants a family doctor to have one, and we're well on track to fulfilling that promise.

And I would like to commend the Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority and all of their partners, including the AMM, all of whom I've had the opportunity to work with, because in meeting together with all of these partners we have found new and innovative solutions for retaining and attracting doctors.

And you know what? It's amazing, the work that's been done, because, in fact, we have seen a net gain of 665 more doctors since 1999, including 250 more family doctors. We're increasing physician training by adding 22 more medical residencies, including new family medicine residencies in Brandon, Steinbach and Morden-Winkler—

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

Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Mr. Speaker: We'll now move on to members' statements.

Flin Flon Community Choir— Les Misérables Production

Mr. Clarence Pettersen (Flin Flon): This past weekend a world-class production made its debut in Flin Flon. In fact, the Flin Flon Community Choir's excellent performance of *Les Misérables* made headlines both in Flin Flon and here in Winnipeg. They were even congratulated by the New York City Broadway cast of the same musical.

Putting on a production as prestigious as *Les Mis* is no small feat; this was a massive community effort. First of all, securing the rights to the musical was a daunting task. Crystal Kolt, the artistic director of the Flin Flon Community Choir, has applied for the rights to *Les Misérables* for the past 15 years. Her determination finally paid off this year.

But that was only the first hurdle the choir had to get over. Next came paying for the rights. Since the last June, the Flin Flon Arts Council has been busy raising the necessary funds. They dreamed a dream and then they made it a reality. The 80-person choir performed in front of three sold-out performances at the R.H. Channing Auditorium. From Javert to Jean Valjean to the revolutionaries in the National Guard, all the characters played their parts exceptionally. We certainly did hear the people sing this weekend.

While there were some impressive productions put on by the Flin Flon Community Choir in the past, nothing could possibly knock the lights out like this show did.

Congratulations to all the volunteers, organizers and singers for putting on such a wonderful production. Thank you to Crystal and Mark Kolt for your indelible resolve, and thank you to the people of Flin Flon for being so supportive of the arts in our community.

Thank you.

Emergency Preparedness Week

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, this week marks the 20th annual Emergency Preparedness Week, and as the federal government recently announced, this year's theme is Know the Risks, Reduce them Together.

Emergency Preparedness Week is a nationwide event that occurs every year during the first full week of May. This week is an opportunity for Manitobans to increase their awareness of potential risks and emergencies that could affect their families and prepare themselves for any emergency situation that may arise. There are three simple steps to help plan for emergencies: know the risks in your region, make a plan and get an emergency kit.

Across the province, Manitobans face a number of natural hazards, including floods, severe storms, blizzards and wildfires. Understanding the risks we face in our communities and taking concrete steps to prepare ourselves and our families is not only common sense, but it also helps ensure that Manitobans can manage through a disaster.

Emergency management is a joint responsibility, and, as such, I would also like to take this opportunity to recognize and thank Manitoba's first responders, volunteers, community leaders, non-governmental organizations and authorities at all levels for their support in emergency management.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mental Health Week—Get Loud Campaign

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): This week is mental health awareness week, an opportunity to speak out about the importance of mental health.

Good mental health starts early. It means acknowledging its importance in our homes, schools and communities. Every community has a role to play in giving our kids the best chance to flourish.

This year, the Canadian Mental Health Association has chosen *Get Loud* as the theme of their campaign, to encourage all of us to speak openly and honestly to one another about our mental health. When someone experiences a mental health crisis, it touches families, friends and communities. We need to work hard every day to prevent them.

The CMHA has co-ordinated mental health awareness week for the past 64 years. This year the theme is *Get Loud*, and I encourage all Manitobans to watch their video at getloud.mentalhealthweek.ca.

We know we still have work to do to raise awareness, reduce stigma and improve mental health supports and we want to make sure young Manitobans especially to grow up healthy and understand how to recognize and address mental health issues.

Today, we are joined by Marion Cooper, the CMHA's executive director for Manitoba, and Tyler Pearce, manager for regional affairs, public policy and communications. On behalf of the House, I would like to thank the CMHA for the fantastic work that you do to help Manitobans enjoy the best possible mental health. And I encourage all Manitobans to get loud for—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member's time for this member's statement has expired.

Wayne Blair

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a resident of my constituency who was recently awarded the Carberry and District Chamber of Commerce Lifetime Achievement Award.

Wayne Blair grew up on a family farm in the RM of North Cypress and currently resides in the town of Carberry. Even at a very young age, Wayne was no stranger to hard work; he had the responsibility of starting coal-burning stoves for 25 cents a day in his elementary school years. After completing his grade 12 in Carberry, Wayne attended the University of Manitoba, studying engineering. He worked for Shilo in the Department of National Defence for 35 years where he started in the drafting room and then moved to the heating plant as a steam engineer. During this time he served as a union rep for the steam plant, was the local president for 20 years.

*(14:30)

Wayne has always been an active sports enthusiast. He was a baseball pitcher and catcher for many years. He was a team manager for several and then became a certified umpire, handling senior games for over 20 years. Wayne played hockey at CFB Shilo team for three to four years, coached atom and peewee hockey in Carberry for four years and has curled for over 50 years. He served on the Carberry Curling Club as president for two years, treasurer for 11 years. He curled in Carberry and several Westman bonspiels for many years and one—

was one of the founders of the Junior Curling in Carberry.

Wayne was on the local recreation board for 11 years, with nine years as president. He also served more than 25 years as a member of Carberry and Area Lions Club. Wayne served 16 years on the Town of Carberry Council, eight of those years as councillor and eight as mayor.

In recognition for his many years as a volunteer and significant contribution to his community, Wayne was awarded with the Confederation of Canada Medal, 1967 to 1992. For 20 years, Wayne volunteered his time with the Austin Threshermen's Reunion, running the Souris Mill and operating steam engines.

Another organization Wayne has been active in is Friends of Camp Hughes. He saw the need to have it developed into a heritage site and has been a promoter for the Carberry Heritage District.

He has been an active member of the Carberry United Church, where he served as a board member and a choir member. Wayne is proud of his Irish heritage, has recently served as ambassador for the Irish Pavilion as the—at the Lieutenant Governor's winter carnival in Brandon.

Wayne has been a resident in Carberry since '66. He has raised three children in the community where he still resides with his wife, Andrea, of 49 years.

Mr. Speaker, I hope all honourable members will join me in congratulating Wayne for his recent Lifetime Achievement Award for his volunteerism and his outstanding contribution to the community of Carberry and surrounding area.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Any further members' statements?

Child and Family Services System

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about the dire situation of the child and family services system under today's NDP.

After 14 and a half years of today's NDP's focus on removing children from their families, rather than on efforts which actually support families, the number of children being apprehended and put in care continues to go up instead of down.

On Monday, I highlighted the atrocity of the NDP approach of putting children who are in their care in jail for throwing water bottles, and even in

jail for weeks without any pending charges. There should be far more appropriate ways of working with children who are having difficulties than housing them in jails.

Yesterday I introduced this Legislature to the fact that a baby is being torn away from its mother each day by today's NDP government. The attachment of a mother and a baby is vital to the successful development of a child. Maternal breastfeeding has been shown to be one of the best overall health benefits a mother can provide for her child. Perhaps it is no surprise that their inability to stay together as a caucus is being reflected in their inability to keep mothers and babies together.

Earlier today I focused on the fact that an extraordinary number of children in this NDP government's care in the CFS system are reported missing each year. Put plainly, in almost all cases, the children run away because the care they receive and the situation they are put in is, to them, not tenable.

Today's NDP clearly need to ask why their system is so bad that so many children are doing everything they can to run away from it. Today's NDP have no compass. Today's NDP have demonstrated no ability to effectively help to nurture children and families. It's time for today's NDP to go.

Mr. Speaker: That concludes members' statements.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

BUDGET DEBATE

(Fifth Day of Debate)

Mr. Speaker: We'll now move on to orders of the day, government business.

And to resume the adjourned debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar), and the amendment thereto, standing in the name of the honourable member for Spruce Woods, who has 22 minutes remaining.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): Again, a pleasure to be able to respond to the budget the NDP just brought forward.

In my 10 years here in the House, I've never seen such a backlash to a provincial budget before and, certainly, Manitobans are quite angered at what the NDP have brought forward. And I think they're tired of the NDP broken promises and are looking forward for a change for the better.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to make mention of community foundations, and I had the privilege to go to a couple of foundation events in my communities. One was in Killarney, and Killarney is actually, I believe, the—it was the fifth foundation formed in—when—western Canada, and they celebrated 35 years just a couple of weeks ago and just a tremendous turnout. Over 300 people in the community turned out for that supper and that celebration of the success of the foundation. In fact, the Killarney Foundation actually is the largest foundation in all of Canada on a per capita basis in terms of their—the funding they have in place. It's been a very successful program and a lot of good people worked hard on that particular foundation over the years. And it was a night to really recognize the accomplishments of the foundation and to provide the grants.

And, if you know about foundations, the concept behind foundations are to put a sum of money away to be able to invest in that community into the future. And basically what they do, well, they will pay out the interest that's generated or the income generated on that pool that they have there to administer. And it's been a very successful program and it's—I mentioned it because the foundation concept is in stark contrast to what the NDP have brought forward in their provincial budget here.

As the Canadian taxpayers point out, this is the seventh deficit budget in a row, which means our provincial debt at the end of this year will be at least \$36 billion, and that's substantial. The decisions the NDP make today have an impact on Manitobans into the future; that represents nearly \$28,000 of debt for every man, woman and child in Manitoba, and the number keeps growing. In fact, it's doubled in the last five years, and what does this mean? What does this debt mean? Well, it means we have to pay interest on that debt. This year we're going to spend almost \$900 million to service that debt, and that's \$900 million that cannot be used for front-line services. It cannot be used in health care; it cannot be used in education; and it cannot be used to fix our crumbling infrastructure. So this represents a substantial amount of money.

And, Mr. Speaker, we're at a—pretty well an all-time low in terms of interest rates and, without a doubt, without question, someday those interest rates will increase. And, when those interest rates increase, we as Manitobans will be owing more and more money to service that debt. In fact, this year alone we're looking at paying—this, again, is each and every Manitoban—\$650 just to service the debt that

we have and, again, that's \$650 per person that can't go to front-line services. And, clearly, the decisions the NDP government have been making over the years has had an impact on front-line services, because more and more of our resources are going to service that debt, and it's quite an alarming rate.

Clearly, this is going to have an impact on our future, and any debt that we see coming forward this year and any deficits we see coming forward are going to result in taxation in the future to cover off that particular debt, and it is quite alarming. So today's deficits are clearly taxes of tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's painfully obvious that Manitobans are spending more and getting less from this current NDP government. In fact, if we look at a family of four paying taxes in Winnipeg versus a family of four paying taxes in Regina, a family of four in Winnipeg would pay \$3,200 more than a family of four in Regina.

And the question remains, Mr. Speaker: Are we as Manitobans getting value for the dollar that we're spending? And I think more and more Manitobans are saying that they are not. Manitobans are consistently saying they are paying more and getting less in terms of services.

I want to just talk a little bit about Saskatchewan for just a minute, Mr. Speaker. You know, Saskatchewan a few years ago—I go back to, I guess, about 2004, 2005—Saskatchewan had a similar debt servicing—debt servicing cost as we did, just over \$900 million, and it was quite substantial. But, obviously, Saskatchewan government recognized they had to deal with that debt load and that—obviously, that interest charge that they were paying each and every year.

* (14:40)

So what they've done, they now have reduced their debt and they have reduced their debt servicing cost to \$546 million. That's a saving of 40 per cent. So, in reality, the government of Saskatchewan now has almost \$360 million extra money to go to front-line services in health care, education and to fix infrastructure, Mr. Speaker. So, clearly, the government recognized the burden of debt, the service costs related to that, and they've taken action to rectify that, and they're certainly headed in the right direction.

Our fear here is the NDP have refused to look at government waste and look at ways to provide services in a more effective—in a cost-effective

manner. And, as a result of the not looking for the waste, we're spending more and more money on those services, and, as a result the increased debt, we don't have the sort of money we should have to provide those front-line services. So the NDP waste is actually affecting front-line services in a negative way, Mr. Speaker.

And just another point from Saskatchewan. I just had an interesting look at the CFIB, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and their Business Barometer that came out. And part of that survey talks about what are the major constraints in terms of expanding your business in the province. And I noticed in Saskatchewan, the tax and regulatory costs, the Saskatchewan businesses said that was only a—I think it was at 46 per cent indicated that that was actually a problem. But compare that to Manitoba, the tax and regulatory costs that are impeding business development in Manitoba, the business owners said it was 64 per cent. So a substantial difference there in terms of the tax and regulatory regimes that are impacting Manitobans and Manitobans' ability to do business, Mr. Speaker.

And, certainly, that report also is a clear sign that the business barometer is certainly down and it's certainly negative in Manitoba. I think the business community doesn't really share the optimism that some of the NDP members have found. And, certainly, when we reflect on the business development by the NDP over the last five years, ninth out of 10 across Canada, not a very good sign in terms of where we've been. I know they're optimistic about some of the future predictions, but we certainly reflect back and look at actually the reality of what's happened and how we relate and how we compare to other jurisdictions.

I know the CFIB also made a comment that they were looking forward to some clear signs that this provincial government is serious about addressing issues that make it difficult to compete with other provinces for businesses, for employees and certainly for capital investment. And they're saying that they're not comfortable with where the government's headed in that regard. And that's just another reason, Mr. Speaker, that we are going to vote against this particular budget.

I know we've heard from the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce. They're certainly not surprised by this particular budget, and they're not surprised that this particular government cannot balance their budget. You know, they—the government has said, we will

balance the budget in 2016, to changes like, well, we're not sure when we're going to balance the budget, potentially 2018. So, from the Chamber's perspective, it doesn't give them a clear indication that the government has put some marks in the sand and intends to balance the budget any time soon.

Mr. Speaker, it's quite interesting, too, and I know the government's talking about changing the balanced budget legislation yet again. They've certainly had a go at it, and certainly that legislation is nothing like it was originally designed to do. In fact, I think it's been about four or five times. In 2008, they changed the requirement to balance the budget yearly to go to a four-year rolling action-or rolling average; 2009, talked about the debt financing again and changed the requirement for a minimum payment to the provincial debt; 2010, it changed the four-year average to five years; and now they're talking about again amending it. And they did amend it, actually, to save some of the members-the Cabinet members there some salary. So here we are-and then in 2013, of course, they completely defanged the law, passing legislation to remove the need to have a PST hike at the referendum. You know, and certainly all that history was pointed out in the Free Press over the last couple of days.

And, you know, we were even hearing from ordinary taxpayers in Manitoba saying that we really can't afford the NDP government anymore. And where, really, is the extra money that you're generating? Where has it all gone to, and how can you still be having a deficit even after all the extra money that you're taking in? You know, this particular budget looks at revenue increases, about \$340 million, and yet we're still looking at a \$420 million deficit.

So more and more Manitobans are telling us they're tired of the NDP broken promises. They're looking forward for a change for the better. They recognize that they're paying more money but they're getting less service for it and, in fact, because of the waste in the NDP government, front-line services are being threatened as well. And that's why for those reasons that we are going to be voting against this particular budget.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Clarence Pettersen (Flin Flon): I just want to thank you in giving me the opportunity, a northern perspective, on the budget 2'15, so thank you very much.

First off, I'd like to signal the historic event that happened in Alberta yesterday. It seems as though the orange wave is on the move and, in fact, I have heard many people say what happened yesterday is more of an orange crush really. It was so exciting to watch the events unfold. I was talking to my daughter who lives in Calgary now. She had a difficult time finding a good school for-program for her child before, but now she is confident that the-with the NDP in she has a better chance.

The former government was doing cutbacks in education, cutbacks in health care, cutbacks in the public service, and I think what the message we're seeing there is that people matter and when you make cutbacks you're not putting people first, and I think the government that was defeated was given a resounding no, and that looked great.

I would also now like to congratulate the member for the Interlake on his new appointment as the Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship (Mr. Nevakshonoff), as well as the member of The Maples, congratulations on your appointment to the Minister of Housing and Community Development (Mr. Saran), and also congratulations to the new member from Le Pas. Thank you again to the member from Gimli; your work as a minister was second to none.

Also, while we made a long drive from Winnipeg-from Flin Flon to Winnipeg is about eight hours-but the people of Flin Flon care deeply what goes on in this House, and need more all-weather roads, safer roads in northern Man. means a more connected economy. Everybody, every Canadian deserves a road to their community, more connected families and better opportunities for all Manitobans.

Our five-year core infrastructure plan includes \$160 million for rural and northern Manitoba. We also include \$84 million for rural and northern clean water projects and an additional \$75 million to repair municipal roads and bridges. And, believe me, in the North we need it with permafrost, with things going. But I'll tell you, you go up, drive on the road No. 10 to Flin Flon you'll see drills blasting rock to put in the new road, and it's like the crane down here. The crane is back in Manitoba and in Winnipeg building and, believe me, the bulldozers and drills out in Flin Flon are back. Thank you.

To improve the infrastructure of our north are nonprofit community organizations. Our government approved, 21 grants in northern Manitoba this year for almost \$665,000 in funding through the

Community Places Program. Last year, over 23,000 of the CPP grant money was approved for Flin Flon organizations only.

Education—but increasing funding as key infrastructure projects is far from the one thing that we're doing for the people of Manitoba. As a former teacher, I can stress enough that the importance of a good education to finding success later on in life. In Manitoba some of the most in-demand and well-paying jobs are in trades. Our government is 'reconine' this and we see that we're doing good work here to help make the lives better.

I hear it all the time from constituents, they're always sure to let me know that I'm doing a good job and when they don't agree with what I'm doing. Last week—and I was excited to go home and to speak to the people on the constituency about the budget because I knew they'd be impressed with the work that our government is doing and a steady-as-she-goes a mentality.

As the budget 2'15 chose, our NDP government has a plan in place to deliver on the priorities of Manitoba families. It meets the needs of people in the province from east to west and south to north. This is important, Mr. Speaker. It's important not only for the family but for everybody. Whether you're single, married, you know, it's important that you have a budget. That means that you have a chance of getting a job and getting an education and having a future. It gives you hope, and that's what this budget's all about—it's about hope.

* (14:50)

One of the key components of our government's budget is investment in infrastructure. Flin Flon, we're seeing these investments as they are making life better for my constituents, and the 2'15 budget builds on the record \$5.5-billion five-year plan to strengthen roads, bridges, flood protection throughout the province.

Did I say \$5.5 billion? Did I—

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Mr. Pettersen: Yes; that's what I thought I said. Work on Highway 10 south of Flin Flon is continuing. This is helping people from 'flim' connect with the rest of Manitoba faster and more safely. We're going to be having up to 40 to 60 semis coming from Snow Lake to Flin Flon, and the road needs to be upgraded, and our government has taken the initiative to spend \$60 million on the road from

Snow Lake to No. 10 Highway and also finish the highway from the airport to Flin Flon, and this makes it safer for everybody, not just for the semi-trailers but the people that live in the lake district and that. So I'm very impressed with how the government has supported the North.

Working to create more opportunities for young people to gain education, training and work experience in trades. The Northern Manitoba Mining Academy in Flin Flon, which we helped build, is so important to the community. We want to make sure that it is used to its fullest potential. It has a lot more potential than we see, and that's my job, is to work and make sure that we can see more potential there.

Our youth job strategy includes a new fund to support more paid work and on-job training opportunities. We've enhanced co-op education and apprenticeship tax credits. Starting this year, students will no longer pay interest on their student loans and owning a car will no longer be a barrier to assessing students' loans.

This is important to me. I've got a daughter going to university at University of Winnipeg. She has a student loan. You don't realize education is something that just doesn't happen. You've got to go around and pick out your spot, see what you want to do in your life. I know my daughter took three years before she decided what she wanted to do, and tried some things and, of course, went in debt. So this is very important for her.

We've increased Aboriginal academic achievement grants and we're increasing the operating funding for colleges and universities like UCN. We want to prepare our youth to enter the job market with a strong set of skills. That's why we are focusing so intently on our investments in education.

We also want the job market to be able to integrate our young people when they are ready to join the workforce. As we all know very well, the Manitoba economy is strong. Recently, the Winnipeg Free Press reported last year we saw nearly—listen for it—20,000 jobs created in this province—20,000, Mr. Speaker. That's the highest employment growth in Canada happening right here in Manitoba. You don't have to load up your truck and move to Calgary. You can be right here and get a job—yes.

In Flin Flon, with Lalor and Reed mines opening, it means 373 new permanent jobs are expected to be created in my own constituency. I'm very proud of that. Two mines opening—that's very

good. We're seeing the positive effects of Manitoba's economic strength in Flin Flon. That's helping to tackle things like wage gap, 'itchels' that we'll deal with and that they make little steps, but we're working on it and we're getting the job done.

But that's not all. According to the Bank of Montreal, Manitoba is stated to be a leader of economic growth across Canada. We are expected to post the third highest growth rate in the country—third highest, with 2.3 per cent growth expected for 2'15. That is well above the national average.

We also want to make sure that our province remains an affordable place to live. That's why we doubled the seniors' school tax rebate so that seniors can save up to \$1,570 on their property taxes this year. We are also increasing the caregivers' tax credit by 10 per cent so that people who care for friends or family can receive benefits of up to \$4,200 each.

Starting in October, we will be increasing the minimum wage to \$11 per hour. To help boost the tourism sector of northern Manitoba, our government has funded powwows across the North and festivals like the Manitoba trappers' festival.

Health care is important. Again, this is another point where people matter. As more and more people move to northern Manitoba to work in the good jobs that are available there, we're continuing to make investments in health care to meet that need. 'Manitahoba' has one of the highest retention rates for rural and northern doctors in Canada. We will ensure that this trend continues by making additional investments in front-line services. We will continue to see increased numbers of doctors, nurses, as well as continued upgrades to emergency rooms and clinics.

Part of healthy living means eating right. That's why we're committed to the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative. Through this program we're making healthy foods, like milk, more affordable in our remote communities.

And, of course, we have \$23 million to upgrade the ER in Flin Flon. This is important to me, personally, obviously, because my family has used the Flin Flon hospital often, and the care and the expertise that is there is great. So I'm really, really—appreciate that, and also being in an industrial community, it's very important that we have an ER that's up to date, and this project, I'm very, very proud of. But it helps not only Manitoba, it also helps Saskatchewan because we're on the border. So

you can still wear your green watermelon heads, you know, when you're—football. It's obvious that this government's doing work for people of Manitoba. Whether you are from Flin Flon, Steinbach, River Heights or St. Johns, our NDP government is committed to working for you and your family. Through our investments in infrastructure, education and health care, we are helping Manitobans prepare for the future and meet the needs of today.

And like I said, I think we should prepare our houses for the mass exodus of unemployed workers in the Conservative government that are going to be moving east. And I begged—I begged my members on this side of the House to maybe open up their house and offer that. I also want to say when I look around Winnipeg, I see the new rink, I see the new stadium, I see the human rights museum, I see the convention centre, and I'm proud of that. I'm proud of the renaissance. And, when I say you don't have to load up your truck and move to Calgary, I'm saying get on the love train. Get on the love train and stay here in Manitoba.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, thank you.

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): It's always a great opportunity to stand in the Manitoba Legislature and address the budget speech. This has been one of several that I've given over the years of my career. And, before I get into my speech, I would like to congratulate the new member for The Pas (Ms. Lathlin).

For those of us who have been through campaigns we know how tough they can be, and having come after a very tough period within her political party, we know that it just added further burden, probably, onto her and her campaign team. And I'd also like to congratulate all the candidates who ran in that election. They upheld what's great about our democracy and what we stand for here, and that's free and democratic elections, and we certainly appreciate all those individuals that put their name on the ballot, went out, and with a great degree of integrity, put their name forward and what they stood for, and we congratulate each and every one of them, including our newest member here in this Legislature.

In the few moments that I have to address the Throne Speech, I would like to begin by saying I'm very fortunate to be representing three of the greatest communities we have in this province, communities of East St. Paul, West St. Paul and Springfield, although since the last election, I only have a third of

Springfield, but still a great part of the province. And I know, Mr. Speaker, you and I, we share quite a bit of boundary together and always wonderful when you're travelling through those communities, you see a lot of healthy growth taking place. I had the opportunity to be in Mr. Speaker's constituency and went to Costco, and I was surprised at the new subdivisions going in behind Costco, off of Nairn, and beautiful homes going up, beautiful apartment blocks, and our quadrant of the city and the province, are—doing remarkably well.

But we know that in many quadrants it is not doing well, and I do want to address some of the concerns I have with what's happening in the economy.

* (15:00)

But I, again, want to say to the people of East St. Paul, West St. Paul and Springfield, I always appreciate the warmth and support and the love that they show myself and my family as we go to events. In fact, I was at an event just a while ago and got to see Kay and Glen Findlay, who I—who is my predecessor. And we caught up a little bit and he saw my children and he couldn't believe it. And he said, you know, the last time I checked, they were, you know, three and four years old, and now they're not teenagers anymore. My oldest is no longer a teenager. So he was quite taken aback, and it was wonderful to see him.

But always great to be out in the community, always great to go out and listen to the concerns and the issues that are on people's minds. It's one thing getting a phone call or an email or a text or even a tweet, but it's way different when individuals get the opportunity to speak to you personally because they tend to connect with you on a different level and express to you a little bit better than they can, perhaps, in an email. And I always enjoy those events, enjoy getting out to them and certainly looking forward to a lot of wonderful events in the summer.

I would invite everybody to the Springfield ag society fair. I believe it's the longest and oldest running fair in the province of Manitoba. They have one of these great things called the Wellington huck-a-boot. It's a great competition. I do fairly well at it. I—the Wellington huck-a-boot, I'll explain some other day to my colleagues what that is, but anyway, it's a great fair, and I know, throughout our great province, individuals are going to go across their constituencies and be able to visit these communities

and these fairs and these events and I certainly enjoy those opportunities.

I do, however, want to address the budget. And, Mr. Speaker, back in 2000, there was a newly elected MLA who got up and on his first speech said the following, and I'm going to quote right out of Hansard. He said: I stand here today with a great degree of concern. The first budget where I have been an MLA, the budget came down and I think a lot of Manitobans—in fact, I would go so far as to say most Manitobans—have a great degree of concern in regard to the budget that was presented.

It goes on to say: I guess it is not much, what it is in, as what has been left out. It's not what's in but what's been left out. And that is the singular—the foundation of any modern society anywhere in the world. The foundation of a democratic modern society is the middle class. If there's one thing that with a great degree of chagrin and, frankly, shame on the government, one has to say that this probably is one of the successive NDP governments that we've had in the last 25 years that are blatantly anti middle class. There's actually an attack on the men and women who are the backbone of this nation. That—unquote, Mr. Speaker. That happens to be the words of the member for Springfield, gave that speech in 2000.

And we've now seen a government after six long, bitter, tough years that has increased taxes on the middle class, has increased costs of living on the working men and women of this great province and although they pay more, the taxpayers pay more, they get less. And that is really what I was saying back in 2000, that my concern was that this was going to be a focused attack on the middle class, on the working class. And that hasn't let up.

Mr. Speaker, we've seen a budget that again increases the debt, which is basically, as the Leader of the Opposition says, when you increase debt, it's just a tax for tomorrow. Some point in time, you're going to have to pay for it. It increases the payments we're going to have to make on the debt. It also raises taxes, whether it's fees on banks, because we know that banks don't pay fees. It's basically our money, so the fees are given back to us as those who use those services. And the fees on banks make it even more difficult for those individuals who open up accounts, who perhaps don't have that much income, and more fees are a direct, direct hit on the family budget. Not just did we see a government—and we've gone over this well enough, the PST increase

and—first of all, the broadening of the PST and then the PST increase itself and the stripping away of the democratic right to vote on it.

But we've seen, basically, every budget that has been presented has been increasing taxes, and those taxes are being paid for by the middle class. As I referenced in my first speech, that you define a modern democratic country on the size of its middle class, and when you start eating away at that middle class that's when your institutions start to get weaker, and I believe that this is a trouble that we've seen for a long time. In fact, years ago I was able to speak to one of the budgets and spoke about the storm clouds coming, and then in the last two budgets we saw that the storm clouds hit. The government hit the perfect storm where their revenues were dropping, their expenditures were escalating; so what they had to do was raise taxes, and that's when you start getting into that perfect storm and we are now in the middle of that storm. We see a government that cannot wean itself off of ever-increasing expenditures, cannot wean itself off of ever-increasing taxes, and if you go out and you speak to individuals you will find that people believe they are getting less. They feel they are getting less. They know they are getting less, although every year they are paying more. We have a government that has proven itself to be out of touch.

I take no joy and no thrill in seeing the events of the last six months which we've all experienced—those of us of this side of the House who sat on the sidelines and watched what was going on or—and those on the other side of the House who were part of that. But, Mr. Speaker, there are individuals from inside the NDP who were pointing out what was going on and what the feeling was in the general public. And we know that for whatever reason things didn't change in the leadership for the NDP, but we do know that even the NDP get it.

And, although every one, all 36 members on the opposite side voted for the PST increase, we now know that a lot of them held their nose when they did that, that they actually didn't agree with their government. Now, they probably should have said something at that time and should've had their say and not waited until the PST was brought in and then had their say publicly. They should've had that say internally and probably should've spoken a little bit more forcefully.

But we know that within the NDP ranks they get—they understand how hard this has been on the middle class. We know and we get that they

understand that it was the wrong decision. And although the outcome didn't change much and that's the way things work in political parties, but not just does the public get it, not just does the opposition in the Legislature get it, I believe the NDP gets it.

And then we thought we have a budget after all of that that the NDP went through, after everything that was said and done you would've thought then we would finally get a budget that would be somehow reflective of what the public is saying, what's being said here in the Legislature and what was being said by members, elected officials of the NDP caucus, and none of that took place. And this budget is just a further tax grab further driving up debt and not responsive to what Manitobans' concerns are. We still have some of the worst education rankings in the nation. We know in mining we've got some of the worst rankings. Health care, we've got failure after failure. And you go list through department by department and this was an opportunity for the NDP, for the Premier (Mr. Selinger) to listen to Manitobans, and if not listen to the opposition, he could've listened to those who were explaining dissent, who were perhaps going out and listening to the general public. It was an opportunity for this Premier to show leadership through his new, new, new Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar) and perhaps put a budget out that would represent what was being put out there by the general public and by members of his own caucus, and that did not happen.

Mr. Speaker, my time has basically run out.

* (15:10)

I would say that, on behalf of the people of St. Paul, I have spoken to many of them. I've had the opportunity to be at a lot of functions and go to a few doors and this is not a budget that can be supported. I would say this is not a budget that the dissidents who spoke up the last three to six year—three to six months—even those dissidents probably know this isn't a budget that should be supported, though I suspect they will. But they, again, will do—probably like with the PST increase, they will hold their nose and they will vote for it. But they should stand up and they should tell their government, after everything that they put the public through, after everything they put the party through, nothing has changed. We have the same tax, tax, tax and get almost nothing for it. The public will continue to pay more and will get less. And, on behalf of the people of St. Paul, I will stand up and be one of those who votes against this budget.

Thank you for this opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): I'm pleased to follow the member for St. Paul (Mr. Schuler) today in the budget debate. And, needless to say, I will have a different view of the budget than he would.

But I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that if I am talking to an undecided voter in my constituency, I have to counter a lot of misinformation that is being put out by the opposition and reported by the newspapers and the media in Winnipeg. And, you know, they do at times a very successful job of confusing the voters out there. So I thought we should, you know, try to put things regarding the budget into a little more realistic presentation than what we hear from the members opposite.

Now, you know, the Leader of the Opposition, you know, talks about the—in his view—the good, old days, I guess, back in the 1950s. And I think his speech took us back at least that far. So I thought I would do the same and, not to be outdone here, I have, you know, information about the budget following the 1950 flood, so the—basically, it's the 1951 budget of Manitoba. And I'm sure the Leader of the Opposition can relate to this.

Now, the revenues of the day were, you know, \$55 million. That was up, like, \$15 million from the year before. And, of course, today, we're looking at, you know, \$15-billion budgets. And at that year, the provincial government, one year after the flood, having an increase of \$15 billion—or \$15 million in their expenses, you know, were spending \$55 million, and they managed to chalk up a \$1.7-million surplus. And that was actually low for the time.

And so the members opposite and the leader would say that, you know, that's the best you can have; you know, we should go back to this kind of financing, you know, in 1951. But what he doesn't take into account is that in 1951 you didn't have bridges; you'd have to swim across the river to get to work. You had no indoor plumbing, by and large. You had a lot of outdoor plumbing. Does he want to go back to that? And so it—things were—the roads were very few and far between as opposed to now.

The point is that they don't recognize that the money that the government spends actually buys things. And the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson), in her 29th or 30th Budget Address the other day—and by the way, I do wish her well in retirement—she pointed out that, once again,

the old Conservative argument that the average voter looks at budgets in terms of their own finances. And that, if she gave her granddaughters \$5, they would opt to put the money in the bank; they wouldn't just go out and spend it. And the suggestion somehow is that we shouldn't be spending money. But the fact of the matter is that the—that even in 1952, the money that the Province was spending was on investments that the public absolutely needs.

So, when the Conservatives say that we should be somehow spending less, the question is, you know, what school—they will go out and say, oh, you know, we're running a deficit in good times, and this is so terrible, and yet they want more high schools being built in south Winnipeg. And, you know, the fact of the matter is they try to have it both ways.

But it's not our job to convince them, because, you know, they have a job to do, and their job is to criticize the government. I mean, that's the nature of the system. So we can't criticize them for, you know, stretching things and stretching the facts here and there a bit.

Our job is to bypass them and go to our voters and talk to them and convince them. And I think that it's not that hard to do, and, as a matter of fact, I'm thinking that we should maybe follow their approach, you know, we should go to our voters and say, well, let's explain the provincial budget in terms of your own finances. And I think that that might in fact work not too well. So now—it might work very well.

If we look at what the assets of the government are today, we have assets of \$41.5 billion, and that includes, you know, the roads and the highways, buildings, waterways, floodway infrastructure, public schools, university, university buildings, housing and—excepting Hydro and assets—and so we have a \$41.5-billion asset, okay? And juxtapose that, Mr. Speaker, with \$20 billion in liabilities. So that would be like having a \$41-billion house, if we could imagine that, and with a \$20-billion mortgage on it. And I think most—a lot of homeowners would be very happy to have an asset that is free and clear for—except for 50 per cent of the value.

So, you know, have to take it into—you know, bring it down into smaller numbers that I can understand and that the average voter can relate to based on the argument of the Conservatives. And I have to take, for example, my own house. And I have to say and explain to them that while we have \$41 billion in public assets and \$20 billion in

liabilities, compare that to your own house. So, in my case, that would be a \$200,000 house in Elmwood with \$100,000 debt—mortgage. And, for the Leader of the Opposition who might have a—more trouble relating to a \$200,000 house, I would use the example of a \$2-million house, one that might have seven garages. I can only count six here, but I believe there's a seventh in here somewhere.

And that \$2-million house in Tuxedo, or wherever it is, would have a \$1-million debt against it—a million-dollar mortgage. Therefore, on that basis, the Leader of the Opposition would have a net worth, based on that house, of a million dollars. And I would have a net worth, based on my house, of \$100,000 in Elmwood. And on that basis, Mr. Speaker, the Province of Manitoba would have a net worth of \$20 billion based on 40 billion—\$40.1 billion in assets, \$20 billion in liabilities—the mortgage—and a net worth of \$20 billion.

Now that is the picture that we have to draw for our voters, because that's the picture that they want to draw for the voters. They pretend that somehow public finances are identical to personal finances. We know that's not entirely true but it's an argument that works for them.

So why does the member get away with saying all of the debts are \$36 billion? Well, what does he do, he adds on all the Hydro debt but doesn't add on the liabilities. You know, I mean, if you're going to use \$36 billion, then take the assets and add them up and you're going to even have a net worth that is larger than the \$20 billion that I'm talking about.

* (15:20)

So the question that I have for these members opposite is what do they think—what would they like to get rid of? You know, which roads would they like to tear up? Which hospitals would they like to tear down? When they were in government, back in the Filmon days, they had plans to close Concordia Hospital. They actually did close the Misericordia. I think the Grace was on a—on the line. Well, that's what they were planning to do. They hit a deficit of \$800 million in Clayton Manness's day, and they just went into straight panic and they started hacking and slashing. That is the way they approach public finances, and that is the way they will approach public finances in the future because, you know, they know that in Ontario, the Ontario government is proceeding to privatize Hydro One in Ontario. They're going about it sort of in a backdoor sort of way, but these guys will learn that really quick,

they'll be doing the same thing and they'll be selling off, through IPO, shares to raise money to fund their expenses.

So the reality is that we have to look at Manitoba in the context of the other provinces. And so what other sort of measures would you look at? There are a number of measures that you use to judge one province as opposed to another or one entity as opposed to another. And you should look at debt to GDP as a very, very good way of looking at how well Manitoba is doing vis-à-vis other provinces.

Now, you know, the Conservatives here would be the first to stand up and praise the federal government for how well they are running their affairs. I know that. I mean, you—each one of them would be up here talking about how great the federal government is doing. But the fact of the matter is that our debt to GDP is slightly up from last year, but it'll be 30.9 per cent, and the federal government, by contrast, is 34.5. Matter of fact, if you look at the chart in the budget books, you would see that the—in terms of debt to GDP, Quebec is the highest in the country, and it's about 50 per cent. And you don't have people, you know, jumping out of buildings over there, worrying about the debt to—now, 50 per cent's a little high, and if you look at the federal debt to GDP, it was in those—in that area in the past, but Manitoba's nowhere near there. So we're three points lower than the federal government right now. We're a way lower than Quebec. Even in 1999, the debt to GDP in—well, in year 2000 was 29.8, and the federal government at the time was 52 per cent. So that is a very, very important judge in how well the province is doing.

Mr. Speaker, we look at the bond-rating agencies. Bond-rating agencies is something—you know, the Conservatives are funny. They wait for a Moody's report or any—you know, one of the bond-rating reports and, you know, it drops one degree and they have a press conference and the province is now going to hell in a handbasket because of the downgrade. But, in actual fact, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar) has pointed out that in actual fact, we are, I believe, two grades higher than what they were when they were last in government.

So, you know—and then, of course, they're quite upset about the interest rates that are being paid. And, you know, the fact of the matter is that this is a perfect time—a perfect time—to be building construction projects, and they know that. In the last number of years—and I had a member's statement the

other day and read a list of projects that Manitoba has been developing, and I can tell you I don't think we've—had seen this much activity since the activity that went on in the early 1900s when Winnipeg was referred to as the Chicago of the North, with all sorts of construction. Then, in the Schreyer years, there was a lot of construction, a lot of activity in the '70s, primarily around building hydro dams. But, in the last 15 years, we have seen an enormous amount of construction activity in the province. We have seen a new airport, a new stadium, a new arena, new hospital, highway construction, all sorts of activities that these people, the members opposite, could only dream about doing when they're in government.

And so I know that it's a tough fight for them, you know, election after election seeing no real progress being made. And the economy being as good as it is and, you know, the public can relate to that. And I can tell you that the—you know, a good economy tends to help the incumbent government. I mean, the Conservative national government right now is advertising like crazy on the, you know, the value of a great economy, and it resonates well with the public. Well, it's the same argument. I mean, you can't go east and west at the same time. You know, they want to go out and knock on doors this fall for their Conservative candidates and say how great the economy is. You know, that Harper says—Stephen Harper has promoted a great economy and things are going well, vote for the Conservative in your area, and then they say, you know, six months later they're going to go out and say, oh, we've gone to hell in a handbasket. It's the same voters. They're trying to sell the same voters conflicting stories.

Well, I can tell you that the voters are not going to believe your story, because they know. The voter knows that if the husband is working, the wife is working, the kids are working; they are happy. They may have some irritant. They may have some Conservative candidate knocking at their door, telling them all sorts of bad that is not necessarily even true. But the—at the end of the day they're going to say, you know, who was that masked man who came here telling me all these fibs, because they're not stupid. They know that they have jobs. They know their family have jobs and, on that basis, I believe that there is a very reasonable chance that we will be certainly doing well, Mr. Speaker, in the next election.

Now, there are other important comments here that I would like to make, but do I have time? *[interjection]* I do.

And the fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, that Conference Board of Canada confirms that the infrastructure investments that we're making are going to create 600,000–60,000 good jobs and give our economy a 0.6-billion-dollar boost. I mean, we have independent—BMO, other respected organizations not NDP organizations saying that this is a terrific economy. It's one of the best in the country.

So it's onward, upward, and let's win the next election.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I want to talk today on one of the most unbalanced budgets in the history of our province. And I speak not just about financial matters, but I speak about the balance that should have been there and should have been there in terms of social environment and economic issues as well as the unbalanced nature of the bottom financial line.

But, before speaking specifically about the budget, I want to refer briefly to the people of River Heights who elected me. I want to thank them for their confidence in me and to let them know that when I speak in the Manitoba Legislature, as I do today, I speak on their behalf, and I will continue to voice the needs and the priorities of people in River Heights as we move towards this future and in the 146th year of our province.

Mr. Speaker, there is a need today for good fiscal management. There is a need today for wise spending and investing. There is a need today to look at where we can as a province save dollars as we move forward to create a better environment, a society which can address the needs of and provide help to those who are least fortunate, and do this in a way that we can afford.

To do this, we need to be sure that every dollar is wisely spent or invested, every dollar collected from taxpayers, every dollar borrowed elsewhere—although that should only be done when we absolutely truly need it. We want to make sure that every dollar is wisely and well spent. And we also need to consider and ensure that all opportunities where we can save on unnecessary expenditures of public dollars where they're not being effective or producing results are evaluated and changed and improved.

* (15:30)

Mr. Rob Altemeyer, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

In this process, we need to ask not just whether the approach to financial management is optimum, but we also need to ask whether the budget is adequately addressing the social needs of our society. For example, the crisis in how today's NDP approaches adequate and appropriate supports for children and families—how today's NDP addresses the overall social well-being of people in our province, social well-being, which it must be said, as the Broadbent Institute has said, is low compared to other provinces. But social well-being must also be balanced in a budget by addressing our economic and environmental well-being also, and, as I will discuss, notwithstanding the rhetoric of the government benches, both our economic and our environmental well-being need attention, for both could be in better shape than they are today under today's NDP.

Let us ask the question: Does this budget have wise spending, saving, and financial management? Let us look at the budget which was delivered April the 30th and see if it meets the test of wise spending. Let's look at the question of whether it balances spending and saving. The budget speech is a good test of this balance. In the speech there were 137 references to items which involved spending more, and one of those references, it should be said, was to spending on hundreds of items. Of these items, 12 were tax expenditures and the remaining many, many items were direct expenditures. At the same time, there were only six references to actions which may save on provincial government spending. This relationship of 137 to six is clearly far out of balance, tilted way over toward the expenditure side and far, far away from the saving side.

One result of the unbalanced approach being taken by today's NDP is that the deficit is going up again. Last year's budget forecast a deficit of \$324 million in core government expenditures. This year's budget forecast a deficit of \$421 million. Since last year's budget spent much more than planned, indeed, some \$207 million more than budgeted, and since it's a pattern of many years for today's NDP to spend more than budgeted, we can expect today's NDP to overspend this year's budget as well and the deficit will likely be higher than the \$421 million projected.

A rising deficit is not a good sign, especially when today's NDP are claiming that they are doing—we are doing well economically. The rising deficit is also a problem when it occurs at a time that NDP today claim that they're making progress on reducing

that very same deficit which is rising. They're obviously out of kilter.

Let us now review where we are with our provincial deficit and a provincial debt. The end of this year will mark the seventh year in a row of deficit financing. Deficit financing began in 2009-2010 with a deficit of \$185 million. This was, coincidentally, the year the MLA for St. Boniface became Premier. Deficit financing has continued since then. Cumulatively when the budgeted deficit for this fiscal year is included, the deficits under this Premier (Mr. Selinger) will add up to \$3.3 billion.

At the same time as we've had large deficits, our debt has also been going up. Indeed, our net debt has gone up even faster and by the end of this fiscal year it will have risen by \$9 billion during the same period. One of the substantial reasons that the debt has been going up much faster than the cumulative amount of the deficits is that today's NDP government is also borrowing extensively to pay for infrastructure spending. What's happening is that today's NDP are not spending the full PST-increased revenues on infrastructure as they promised, starting with breaking that promise, of course, in 2013. They are, in fact, borrowing much of the money to pay for the infrastructure spending and using the PST money on other items.

Thus, as well as dramatically increasing our debt, today's NDP are also breaking the promise that they'd spend all the new PST money on core infrastructure, and it is because the NDP are such—doing such a poor job of being accountable that Rana Bokhari and the Manitoba Liberals have produced a platform which would provide much better and more transparent approach to supporting municipal infrastructure.

One of the substantial reasons that today's NDP are in trouble with high deficits and debts is that they continue a pattern of very poor fiscal management. At the base of these serious problems is the fact that each year they've been unable to keep their spending within their expenditure budget. Each year, they bring in a budget of what they will spend, and each year, today's NDP spend more than they budget for. In the last fiscal year, today's NDP spent more than \$200 million more than budgeted. They are, in short, very poor financial managers.

Next, I would like to move on to talk about the question—whether this budget has a wise approach to social issues, and I want to first talk about Child and Family Services. Let's see if this budget addresses

the critical social issue of today. I will, in this context, look at Child and Family Services which, almost above all other issues, has been a centre of attention and concern in Manitoba over the last several years. We have had a lengthy Phoenix Sinclair inquiry and many recommendations. We've seen the tragic deaths of Tina Fontaine and the recent violence against another 15-year-old girl who was also in care and in a hotel.

It is now widely recognized that we—far too many children who've been apprehended and are in the care of the government and its CFS system. At the latest count, the number of children in care is now well above 10,000 and moving close to 11,000. From international comparisons, we know that this number should be much lower than this, perhaps as low as one-tenth of this number, to put us closer to the per capita numbers of children in care in countries like Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. The consequences of taking so many children into care are not just the abuse these children may have been exposed to but must include as well the thousands and thousands of broken families, the trauma of children being taken from their parents, the fracturing of social networks, the loss of language and culture, the loss of the benefit of a child being nurtured and breastfed by its mother when a child is taken at birth, and much more. The harm to society includes the higher rates of juvenile delinquency and crime which occurs when children have traumatic childhoods and the loss of the potential of these children to contribute to our society.

While this is happening, the piles and piles of extensive reports on Child and Family Services done over the last 30 years are sitting hardly used and gathering dust in front of the minister's door. If there were a lower mark than a fail, this government would receive it for their approach to children and families. There not being a lower mark, we'll have to settle for a fail in this area.

I want now to consider the broad consideration of social well-being, and in the fall of 2013, Jennifer Mason completed a benchmark study for the Broadbent Institute on the social well-being of people in provinces across Canada. Manitoba was exposed as having the lowest social well-being of all the provinces. What is particularly relevant for today's discussion is that the report looked at various indices of social well-being and those where Manitoba was low and where a strategy to address these poor performances could have and should've

been part of the strategy outlined in the budget. I will look at several of the indices where the poor performance should've been addressed.

Let me start with student achievement. As has been noted, scores of Manitoba students on the Program for International Student Assessment have been low in reading, in math, in science and in problem solving, and they've been falling. And while the budget doesn't—does mention efforts in the area of mathematics and some new science labs, it failed to address how our low scores in reading and in problem solving are going to be improved, and there is clearly need for some skepticism about fully addressing the need for science and math given the past performance of this government.

Next, infant mortality: Although Manitoba has performed second worst in Canada, this wasn't even mentioned in the budget and no strategy to improve our performance was provided.

Incarceration: Manitoba has the highest rate of incarceration in Canada. This perhaps is not surprising since we've learned recently that children are care—in care are being incarcerated even when there are no charges pending against them. This issue wasn't mentioned in the budget and no strategy to address it was presented.

Teenage pregnancies: Manitoba has the second highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Canada. This again wasn't mentioned in the budget and there was no strategy provided to address it.

* (15:40)

Mental health: Manitoba fared the worst in Canada on mental health. This was mentioned in the budget speech, although briefly, which is good, but the problem we have is that the current NDP government has talked about addressing mental health issues for many years and so far the outcomes have not improved—until there's justifiable skepticism of the NDP's ability to produce results given their poor performance in so many areas. Indeed, the need, the crisis in mental health has one of the reasons why it has been a focus of the efforts of Manitoba Liberals and Rana Bokhari and, for example, committing to fund psychologists much better under medicare to improve access to psychological services for people in Manitoba.

Obesity: Manitoba was in the middle of the provinces in terms of obesity. From my point of view, even more relevant than obesity is the rate of diabetes which is a disease which needs attention and

which is related to obesity. The prevalence of diabetes in Manitoba is very high and it's gone up dramatically since this government was first elected in 1999. In the recent by-election in The Pas, we were in some of the most severely affected communities in the whole province. Diabetes desperately needs attention and prevention, and yet it wasn't even mentioned in the budget. Today's NDP clearly have no effective strategy to address this.

So, when it comes to addressing social well-being, this budget falls far—far short of where it should've been. This is sad for Manitoba. It's a sad testament to the lack of direction in Manitoba under today's NDP, and even in areas which were mentioned, like child care, we have extraordinarily long waiting lists at the moment. And the NDP, as is typical, are adding a little bit of help but they're not solving the problem of very long waiting lists and many people waiting, and this being a major concern in Manitoba at the moment.

I'll now move to talk about economic well-being. First of all, in addressing the economic well-being of Manitobans it's important to look a little more at the statistics presented by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar) in his budget.

Let me start with the reference which the Minister of Finance and the Premier (Mr. Selinger) has made to 20,000 more jobs in March of this year compared to March of last year. First, in looking at the statistic, it's pretty important to know that following the introduction of the PST increase in July of 2013 there was a very significant fall in employment in Manitoba. Employment fell from a high of 642,000 people employed in Manitoba in June of 2013 down to 613,000 in March of 2014. That's a fall of almost 30,000 people employed. The number of people employed in March is a recovery from the very low level after the PST increase. Indeed, however, it is notable that the number of people employed in March, 63—633,000 Manitobans, remains 9,000 below the employment numbers of June 2013.

And so, if we look carefully at what has happened, we actually have had a loss of 9,000 jobs in this province over the last two years. And, when you talk about the short-run gain of 20,000 jobs, it still leaves us 9,000 jobs behind. So what sounds, in the Premier's words, to be good, in fact is much less impressive when you consider the fall since 2013 in June. And the fact that we are, as of March, still

below the number of people employed in June of 2013, indeed is a considerable and an ongoing problem.

Let us look also at the approach being taken in the budget to economic growth. The budget focuses on investment in infrastructure, but it has little mention of investment in research and development; certainly not a reasoned, effective plan. And, when it comes to improving trade, a coherent approach—which might have been expected—is totally lacking. Further sensible approach, for example, reducing and eliminating the payroll tax to enable our businesses and industries to be more competitive, is also lacking. That, of course, is an approach which the Manitoba Liberals and Rana Bokhari have advocated and would introduce.

The approach in one area, talking about infrastructure, but without adequate attention in other areas, is like sitting on a stool with one leg. It may be possible for a short while, but over a long period, it's much less stable than sitting on a four-legged stool. The government gets overall poor marks for its economic stewardship and economic goal and progress.

Environmental stewardship, there are several areas in environmental stewardship that warrant attention. I will discuss four, including the situation of Lake Winnipeg, recovery of orphan mine sites, the management of wildlife populations, like moose, and a Surface Water Management Strategy. All are important, and the latter particularly important for good stewardship of the land.

Lake Winnipeg, phosphorus levels and algal blooms on Lake Winnipeg are an ongoing concern. The full treatment of the city of Winnipeg's sewage to remove phosphorus is still not complete. And now, it's not likely to be completed for at least several more years. It's important to know that we're now nine years after the report of the Lake Winnipeg stewardship committee, and this was important and was stressed as being vital to be done as soon as possible. But nine years later, we still have the biggest North End plant to address. We are still waiting.

Orphan mine sites—well, there has been some small progress made to reclaim tailing sites at orphan mine sites at Sherridon and Lynn Lake. But these efforts to date are still small, and there remains much to do. The action has been slow, and the need for continued attention wasn't even mentioned in the budget speech.

Wildlife populations—moose, for example, it's well known that in Manitoba moose are not doing well under the management of the NDP. And this, indeed, has been known for quite some time. It's been pointed out that the problems with the moose population in various areas of our province could have been addressed early if the NDP had been providing adequate monitoring and caught the problem early enough. But they waited too long. And, even today, adequate surveys are not being done, and concerns were raised repeatedly by people in The Pas constituency during the by-election recently.

The Surface Water Management Strategy, an effective Surface Water Management Strategy is essential to good government stewardship, to flood and drought protection, to decreasing the phosphorus pollution of our lakes. We've waited for 14 and a half years, and it looks like we'll continue waiting. There was mention of a drought strategy, but little evidence it will be given the priority it needs and the comprehensive approach that would provide and be needed in an overall water management strategy.

Overall, then, when it comes to the environment, what was in the budget was simply not good enough. It needs to be mentioned at this point that we still have many people who were evacuated from Lake St. Martin, Dauphin River and Little Saskatchewan four years ago. And they are still waiting. They don't yet know even when they might be able to go back to their communities because of the many delays and 'preparacations' of this government.

Let me talk for a moment about some of the issues that came up in the by-election in The Pas, issues which are outstanding: housing in many communities; problems with the assessments in The Pas and the RM of Kelsey which are not being addressed and haven't been for many, many years; problems with infrastructure; problems with the road from Saskatchewan into The Pas—not been addressed for many years. Other roads to Moose Lake, to Cross Lake and to Norway House need attention, as well. Child and Family Services, including Jordan's Principle, which we are still waiting for full implementation of—outstanding; and, of course, Jordan Anderson came from Norway House, so that's particularly significant for that area.

* (15:50)

Areas of health which are not receiving the attention they should; some of the highest rates of diabetes in the province are indeed in communities in

The Pas constituencies. High rates of suicides—in fact, there was a suicide during the by-election of The Pas, and I went to the funeral. It was a very sad affair.

For the future, considerations came up about the sharing of resource revenue, about working together on stewardship of the environment. There is clearly much to do and which has not been paid as much attention as it should have been.

Let me mention a moment our candidate, Inez Vystrcil-Spence, who was very experienced, has a—born in Thompson and grew up in Thompson and Nelson House, worked for many years in the North as a social worker and then in health care, a lot of experience as health director for MKO and helping with the flu epidemic, the H1N1 flu epidemic when it occurred. And she talked in the by-election of having a sense of responsibility of wanting to make a difference. She says, I've seen how stalling happens. I've seen denial of service and I could never make sense of it. It is happening and it's happening under this NDP government.

She went on to say, and I quote: I think it's very unfortunate that some of the issues that I was looking at as a young person in the late '80s and early '90s are still apparent. I find that unacceptable. We are not moving fast enough. We are seeing increases in the rate of disease. We're seeing higher rates of suicide with our young people. We're seeing inadequate response for our elders, having to make them travel long distances on bad roads to receive care. We're seeing a movement of people out of the North into areas where there are more opportunities.

She goes on: Having worked in the public sector for over 20 years now, I find that things are getting worse. I find that the conditions are not improving. We have seen some small steps of progress, some small indicators of progress, but overall we're actually seeing more sickness. We're seeing more sadness; we're seeing more despair, and wherever we go in the future, we have to at least start seeing indicators of health and balance and wellness. She continues, and she says, talk is over; we need action. That's what our communities keep saying. She says, I'm tired of looking at numbers. I'm tired of talking about numbers. We are not numbers. We are people and we have a right to receive the care and the services that we're asking for. It's a time to give people hope.

These are things that Inez was talking about in the by-election, and I bring them forward to illustrate

the fact that under today's NDP the attention that has been paid to The Pas constituency in the last number of years has not been adequate. There needs to be more done. There needs to be more attention. There needs to be better action rather than just words.

Let me talk just for a minute about items in River Heights. There are concerns recently about cars having their windows smashed; we will have a meeting May the 13th on this. There are concerns about access to child-care spaces; we will have a forum on this on May the 31st. We are looking to the future in terms of recreational facilities and library facilities. There is much that needs to be done as well as caring for people throughout the province, and people in River Heights are caring people and they are concerned with what is happening in the whole province, not just what is happening in River Heights.

Let me conclude, there can be little doubt that this was one of the least well-developed budgets ever presented in this Legislature. As the pundit Dan Lett commented, and I quote: It looks like a budget written by people who didn't have a lot of time for focus on writing a budget. End of quote.

As I will say today, the budget was not only poorly written, it was also one of the most unbalanced budgets in the history of our province, and that is why I will be voting against this budget.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Merci, miigwech.

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas): Today I am honoured to rise for the first time on behalf of my constituents as the MLA for The Pas in support of our government's budget.

This is truly one of my proudest moments in my life. It is surreal feeling to be standing here today and addressing you today in the same Chamber where my father, Oscar Lathlin, stood when he represented The Pas from 1990 until 2008.

Firstly, I must thank all the people who helped me get to this place. My family and four children, my daughter and my three nieces, of course, who inspire me every day. They are a constant reminder of why it is important to keep building Manitoba—and the North, in particular—to keep our province strong for our kids.

During my campaign I had the support of too many people to name today, but I owe them a debt of gratitude. Those of you—those of who volunteered,

thank you for your energy and dedication. I would not be here without all of your efforts.

Some I must mention by name as they were critical to my success. Mary Johnson, who was my campaign manager. She took care of me every day during the campaign. Every morning we met and she checked in with me to ensure my mental and physical well-being was in good shape and that my family was taken care of. I appreciated her thoughtfulness and caring approach to me and my family. She also rides a Harley Davidson motorcycle; you can't get cooler than that. Thank you, Mary.

Amy Petit [*phonetic*], my fellow northern sister, who is originally from The Pas. She used her vacation time to help with our campaign. I'm truly grateful of her gesture to share her valuable time and help us ensure that we had a successful campaign. Thank you, Amy.

Gordon Landriault, who was our canvassing co-ordinator. Gordon is the hardest working political machine that I've ever had the pleasure of working with. Since I was a young woman, I've worked with Gordon behind the scenes in my father's campaigns, Niki Ashton's campaigns, Frank Whitehead's campaigns. During my campaign, he kept the momentum going in all seven of our communities in The Pas constituency, going door to door to reach our community members and listen to their concerns. He put up our signs and kept us going even when it reached -33° with the wind chill in Cross Lake. Thank you, Gordon.

Brian Roque was the official agent for our campaign. Brian did his due diligence and demonstrated strong organizational skills. He made sure that every receipt and cost was accounted for. He also delivered our campaign team healthy lunches, snacks and dinner prepared by himself and his wife, Sheila Roque. They both ensured that us diabetics were fed healthy food to keep our blood sugars down and our energy up. Thank you, Brian and Sheila.

Len Podbisky, who supported me from the very beginning of my nomination process to serving as our election day co-ordinator. With his background in media, he coached me for my first candidate radio forum for The Pas local radio station and taught me how to speak from the heart. Thank you, Len.

Terra Lynn McKee was also with me since the beginning of my journey with the nomination

process. She volunteered and developed my nomination website that was critical to my success. Thank you, Terra Lynn.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Kimberley Scribe, I want to thank my good friend Kimberley for providing child care during the campaign. What a valuable experience and what a great friend. She joined my family home on day one of the campaign. Without her support, this part of the journey would have been impossible. Thank you for providing my girls your love and attention. Thank you, Kimberley.

Mr. Speaker, I really want to share this with you today. I want to acknowledge the excellent support systems that I received from my respite workers, social workers and daycare workers for my two young nieces. I became their foster parent to ensure all three nieces, who are all sisters, are together in my home. I also wanted to follow in my mother's footsteps, who was also a foster parent herself, and she taught us that we're all brothers and sisters.

* (16:00)

I value our great working relationships with the social workers and support systems provided to my family by Child and Family Services. Thank you all so much for being part of my journey; we made it.

During the last few months I had the chance to visit all over the constituency of The Pas, meeting people from all walks of life and hearing their concerns and priorities. I met with chief-in-councils, mayor-in-councils, elders, trappers, fishermen, farmers, educators, our youth and community members. I feel honoured that these same people have chosen me to be their representative. I'm here to make sure their concerns are addressed and their voices are heard.

On my late mother's side, I want to share that I am the descendant of three generations of residential school survivors. My chapan, Edna Bloomfield [*phonetic*]; my kokum, Emma Young [*phonetic*]; my late mother, Matilda Daniels—all went to residential schools. Their experience has deeply affected my life and informed the way how I see the world. Because of their residential school experience, their next generation, my siblings and I, are still living with the intergenerational effects of residential school experience. Our parents did not teach us our Cree language because they were conditioned that it was wrong to uphold our culture. It pushed me to become more involved in community service.

One of the first major political decisions I made before deciding to run as MLA was to run for band councillor for Opaskwayak Cree Nation. I was one of two women serving with 12 male councillors. During my time as band councillor, I was part of an amazing journey when I asked for help from our MP Niki Ashton to push forward a national petition campaign to extend the funding to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. This funding provided healing services for residential school survivors as they go through their adjudication process. From coast to coast, Canadians of both First Nations descent and a multitude of other cultural backgrounds signed the petition in support of this effort and we helped force the House of Commons into an emergency debate on this issue. Though the funding was ultimately cut by the federal government, I am proud of how many people we engaged in this drive.

It was incredible to see our MPs stand up in the House of Commons and support our initiative. It was amazing how those individuals and communities made their voices heard. This lobbying effort was close to my heart. During our initiative, I kept my late grandmother's and my late mother's memories close to my heart.

I'm committed to helping First Nations communities of Manitoba continue to develop, Mr. Speaker. To do this, our strong role models need to be recognized for our young people. I know this first-hand. Let me tell you how.

When I was eight years old, I was already experiencing racism and discrimination by my peers at school. Just because I was Aboriginal, I was associated with poverty. According to them, I would always be poor and I would never amount to anything; that changed. I went to a summer recreational program provided by my school. It was there for the first time I saw Aboriginal women working in leadership roles. I asked them what they were doing and how had they gotten here, and they told me that they were going to university to become teachers. I was floored by their response. I replied to them, do you mean that we can go to university? It was a big moment for me, seeing two women whom I can relate to who are leading the way.

In my life since, I have met many more strong Aboriginal people working hard for their community. We need to do a better job of telling their stories. This is what Aboriginal—young Aboriginal people need to see. This is how we will help our communities thrive.

In my role as representative workforce co-ordinator at the University College of the North, I was directly involved in making this a reality. UCN is truly focused on the people of the North. UCN is truly representative of the communities we serve. Over 51 per cent of its staff, 71 per cent of its Aboriginal student body—of its student body are Aboriginal. Walking through the halls of the campus was always inspiring. With two major campuses located in The Pas and Thompson and 12 regional centres in northern communities, from Swan River to Churchill, UCN is giving northerners the access to higher education that will help us find good jobs and grow our communities.

And yet, when I read through the opposition's so-called Northern Lights strategy, which was launched in Winnipeg, I noticed that they didn't have a single reference to UCN. I noticed that it didn't have—it's like they're still embarrassed by their opposition's—its creation. There are 12 regional centres across the North with nine on reserve plus the two main campuses at The Pas and Thompson and yet no mention of it in their northern strategy, no acknowledgement of the great work the school is doing for northerners to help them succeed in life.

On this side of the House, we are committed to supporting all Manitobans, including northerners, to get a good education, find good jobs so they can stay and build their lives here in this province. That's why I'm proud to stand and support our government's budget.

We are investing in education, skills training and opportunities for young people so they can build their future in the North. Since we established UCN in 2004, we have made over \$100 million in capital investments in the university. UCN is now partnering with local high schools to allow students from The Pas to train on UCN's state-of-the-art trades equipment before they even leave high school. This gives them a head start on good paying jobs in the trades.

As a mother and aunt, I know how important it is to know your children are being cared for while you're at work or at school. That's why I'm proud to be a part of this government which has funded 74 new child-care spaces at the child-care centre on UCN's campus in The Pas to help community members with their child-care needs.

I look forward to working with First Nation communities on projects that will bring good jobs to

the North while respecting the environment and our natural resources, Mr. Speaker. Programs like Manitoba Works!, which is run through FireSpirit in The Pas, are helping people from my constituency to learn skills and find good jobs.

We are also rebuilding highways 6 and 10 to help get goods to market and make it easier for families travelling between communities. Last year roughly \$16.5 million worth of highway projects around The Pas were either starting or under way, with another \$55 million for northwest roads planned over five years.

Nothing is more important to me than the health of my girls and, as a—as an MLA, I will help our government improve health care in the North. The new regional cancer hub for The Pas is now officially open and helping people in their battles against cancer. We've invested in a new nursing station for families in Mosakahiken Cree Nation and Moose Lake. We are on schedule to complete this project this year.

And our government is building a 15-suite expansion at Pineview Manor seniors home, which will provide more affordable housing for options—more affordable housing options for seniors in The Pas.

And we're building and improving our roads and infrastructure, Mr. Speaker. Last fall we committed \$475,000 for new water and sewer lines for families in Cormorant. This funding will help meet the needs of the service lots in the community.

Mr. Speaker, once again, I have to say how proud I am to support this government's budget. Our plan is working. It's working for the people of the North and it's working for Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar) and his staff for doing such great work for the people of Manitoba. Thank you.

* (16:10)

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Welcome back, Mr. Speaker, to the House. I'd like to thank all of the staff of the Legislature and welcome back—welcome them all back to this glorious place that we have the privilege to work in—the clerks and the Chamber staff.

And I already hear a member from across the way cheering on the Montreal Canadiens, and, yes, we're hoping that they're able to pull one out much

like Calgary did last night to keep that Canadian dream alive.

So, to continue on with the thanks, Mr. Speaker—not only the Chamber staff but also the pages. So, welcome to the pages, those new, bright young minds who are sharing the time here at the Leg. with us over the many, many months to come; of course, our great security within the—within this—the Manitoba Legislature; and, of course, Hansard staff.

I'd like to at this time congratulate the member from The Pas on her first speech in the Legislature and welcome her to this—again, a great place to be working, and it is truly a privilege. And so, with that, I'd also like to thank the constituents of the Lac du Bonnet constituency who had faith in me in the 2011 election and gave me the opportunity to represent them here in this historic building in this great province of ours.

It is my pleasure to stand up and put a few words on the record and to speak in favour of the motion brought forward in the amendment by our Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Pallister). It is disheartening that we stand today in the year of 2015 and we're taking a look at this budget that does anything but hurt the future of our children, our grandchildren, for many, many years to come. This is a government that is out of control in regards to their spending, and for the many, many dollars that each and every Manitoban has to put forward they are seeing less and less for it, Mr. Speaker.

So, basically, Mr. Speaker, a few of the things that I want to put on the record today, I'm going to go through the constituency and talk about some of the shortcomings that this government has put on the backs of all Manitobans but particularly those in the Lac du Bonnet constituency. And so, as we've seen in years gone by, we've seen this government turn a blind eye to opportunity. And so I start with the community—the great community of Bissett, and I know that the Premier (Mr. Selinger)—I'm not sure if he travels the road of 304 to get to some of the great fishing and the lodges out there, but I know he does fly over some of them and land in the community of Bissett at times, and so I hope that he spends some time visiting.

And it's unfortunate that how many ever years ago now—I guess it's coming up to seven years ago—the great community of Powerview-Pine Falls saw that the mill in Powerview had to shut down. And what ended up happening was, Mr. Speaker, that

Tembec decided to cut some of the wages and we lost just over 200-and-some jobs.

And, Mr. Speaker, it'd be nice if the member across the way would maybe shut the phone off in this Leg. It's—I don't think they're a newbie, but it's—it tends for a good reminder.

So back to the topic at hand. We lost 270 jobs in regards to the Tembec closure up at Powerview-Pine Falls, and it took 100 days—it took 100 days—for the Premier of the day to make his way up to Powerview-Pine Falls to hear the cries of those members. And I know that, you know, in some worlds it might seem that it's a fairly long trip, but, from the Legislature, we're looking at approximately about an hour and a half. And I know that he's probably taken a plane or maybe had his driver drive him up there a bit sooner and could've possibly rectified that situation there, Mr. Speaker.

Now what do we find up in Bissett? We find that San Gold has declared bankruptcy and they're on—they were a pillar in the area for supplying jobs to our constituents, not only constituents within the area of eastern Manitoba but also from outside the province as well, and there, Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that the past Conservation minister or the Minister for Mineral Resources even took the time to make that trip up to Bissett. So we've now lost another 200 jobs. As I hear the current government crowing over the—how many of our jobs—and it is NDP math, so whatever number that they throw out you have to divide by a minimum of five and you might get closer to reality. But the fact is, not one trip had any of these ministers made up to those communities to try to salvage or to try to help out those people.

We talk about the community of Bissett. Now if we take a look at the community without the mine, we're looking at various land titles, transferring of titles, and I know that I've sent a few letters and the community has sent many letters on to the various minister departments. We're looking at the Minister of Conservation, the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Robinson), local government, MIT, and none of them, Mr. Speaker, are coming to the aid to try to help the community, try to rebuild and rebound from these travesties, and basically it is—it's quite the remarkable area of this great province of ours in Manitoba. It's very picturesque and the tourism—the possibility, the untapped opportunities for tourism in that area are a—matter of

fact, our entire area of eastern Manitoba, we have lots to offer, and with opening up some of the land so that people can purchase and then would create, of course, land tax, property tax that could go to trying to rebuild that community until they start to find possibly another company to come in and purchase the mine and to reopen it.

I know that we're on a maintenance schedule for approximately eight weeks and we're down to about five or six weeks of that, so I'm really hoping at the end of those two months we're able to reopen the mine and get those people back at work.

Mr. Speaker, the communities of Powerview-Pine Falls and the surrounding areas of the east beaches, we rely—they rely heavily on a hospital, and I know that the Minister of Health felt it in her way to come out and do an announcement and, matter of fact, I was there when we—when she opened up the EMS—brand new EMS garage up at Pine Falls, and during that announcement they also announced an addition, an expansion of the Pine Falls hospital, and we're still waiting to see if that tendering process is ever going to get under way, and with the new Health Minister, the third one since the last election, I'm not going to be holding my breath to see when that shovel's going to hit the ground. It was supposed to hit the ground in 2012—another example of broken promises.

Within the various communities in our—in my constituency of Lac du Bonnet, we do find many roadblocks that are being put up by this government in regards to expansion and creating new opportunities for the various municipalities whether it be housing, infrastructure or to accommodate new businesses coming into the area, and that's because basically their lagoon capacities have pretty much reached its limit in pretty much all of the communities, and to talk about the Powerview-Pine Falls situation, I think it's quite entertaining, and I'm sure the members across the way would see the humour in this.

*(16:20)

When Tembec was running, we had, as I said, 300-plus employees within the community working at the mill. And it was a 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week functioning mill, pumping water and sewage into the lagoon and all that, and it was under this government. And it seemed to be fine that that lagoon was not at capacity, and it seemed to be running fine. And then the Town of Powerview-Pine Falls was told to put in some drainage, some

storm sewer drains to alleviate the amount of runoff into the lagoons. And so, with that, and then the mill closing, all of a sudden, they're at lagoon capacity. So they've had a—an expansion stoppage put on them so that there's no longer any more development in Powerview-Pine Falls. So we're waiting again on the government of Manitoba to step up and to help out those communities.

The community of Great Falls, which is in the RM of Alexander, has been on a boil water advisory now for eight or nine years. That's 80 to 90 people that are on a boil water advisory. And I just find in this great province of ours—and I know the member for The Pas (Ms. Lathlin) mentioned First Nations communities—I know that it is—this day and age, it's hard to even fathom the fact that there are people in this province that do not have potable drinking water, Mr. Speaker. And I don't quite see in this budget anything that's moving towards rectifying that problem.

We get to Lac du Bonnet—the Lac—the town and the RM of Lac du Bonnet. I understand that we're going to—I've had the opportunity of touring the new fire operations centre in Lac du Bonnet, the fire operations centre, which I do understand that the Minister of Conservation—and now, I'm sure that I'm letting the cat out of the bag—is going to be coming up there shortly to do a ribbon cutting. And I've had the pleasure of touring that facility and it is a class 1 facility, so it is nice to see that there is a little bit of—a little bit of development happening there. And, again, it's in spite of this government's shortcomings.

We're still waiting—I know that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar), the member from Selkirk, which now he's—because he's the Minister of Finance, Mr. Speaker, I guess my phone's going to be ringing even more so, because when he was just the member of Selkirk, I had to handle many of the—many of his constituents' concerns. So now that he's Finance Minister, he's got more obligation here at the Leg.; I guess my phone will be ringing even more. But he announced, again, the personal-care home in Lac du Bonnet, and I know that the Premier (Mr. Selinger) had come out for a nice little ribbon cutting when the health—[inaudible]—to do the ribbon cutting with that—with the Health Minister that day but, unfortunately, the Premier came out, which was nice to see the Premier out. But then that gives that false hope again, broken promises.

We're still waiting for that shovel to hit the ground. And I don't know. Maybe we should borrow

one of the many, many shovels from the member from Selkirk, because I know that he's had reannouncements of that Selkirk hospital, I don't know, maybe five or six times. And I'd like to, you know—if I had the opportunity to take leave and ask the member from Selkirk how many times that hospital's been reannounced, and it's finally going up. So he's got about five or six brand new shovels, and I hear the member from Brandon East is crowing a little bit there as well, but I'll—I've got a couple sentences for him yet before the end of my time, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, with those broken promises, we see that this government has—in the 2011 election, all 57 of their members went door to door, and they promised to have no tax increases. And the Premier (Mr. Selinger) said, read my lips; that is absolutely nonsense that there would be tax increases.

What happened shortly thereafter? They got elected on a false mandate and in the budget of 2012, what did they do? They went in behind the backs of all Manitobans and they went and they expanded that PST on many services that Manitobans need on a daily basis, Mr. Speaker, such as insurance, such as haircuts, birth and death certificates—absolutely horrendous, to a tune of about \$187 million.

So wasn't—that wasn't enough for them, Mr. Speaker. They felt, in Budget 2013, that because the expansion of the PST to many of those hard-working Manitobans, those services that they had to add the PST to—what did they do in Budget 2013? They raised the percentage of the PST from 7 to 8. That was a 14 per cent increase, another broken promise.

What did that end up bringing in this government—this government who has a spending problem, Mr. Speaker? I know for quite some time, and it's been a while since we've referenced them as the spendDP, but that's exactly who they are. They break promises and they spend more than what they're bringing in. That PST expansion and the increase brought in a half a billion dollars a year of extra revenue into the provincial coffers.

And the sad thing, Mr. Speaker, is 2015 budget—or, sorry, before I even get to that, in 2011 they promised to balance the books by 2014. That wasn't good enough, so how many Finance ministers have we had? It seems to be they're working in groups of three because we've got now the third Finance minister since the 2011 election. It seems to be a revolving door in some of the major, major portfolios

on that side of the House. We've got Finance, which is—they're on their third Finance minister.

Of course, I know my two NDP colleagues across the way, we've had four—four Education ministers, three actual Education ministers, but four because the current Education minister, this is his second go, and I know his predecessor, the member for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson). I will take this time to wish the member for Gimli, you know, a successful—successful, sort of successful career, I guess, but a warm send-off into his change of potential careers, because I know he's too young to be retiring yet. So I wish him all the best when he hangs up the MLA pin coming this next spring, I guess, Mr. Speaker.

And then we get to the Health Minister. So I think we're on the third Health minister, Mr. Speaker, since 2011 election and it's been a horrendous revolving door. No wonder—no wonder that we are dead last in many of the health-care services. Unfortunately, we're last in reading, science, and math, and it is—it's due to leadership. The thing is we've got fantastic front-line workers—teachers, nurses, doctors, health-care aides, EAs, all staff within the education field—but the problem is that somebody's not guiding the ship or steering the ship over there. As a matter of fact, that ship is starting to sink, and we're seeing—we saw it just yesterday in Alberta, what ends up happening to a government that maybe is there a little too long, stops listening to the speakers, starts to get a little more self-serving and arrogant, and so then the people within that province end up making a change, a change for the better.

And that's what we see coming here as well in the 2016 provincial election, April 19th. I can hardly wait for that day because it is going to be a great new beginning for this province of Manitoba. And we're going to need to, because this Premier, within the last five years, has doubled the debt, has doubled the provincial debt from \$18 billion to \$36 billion.

What does that mean to Manitobans? That means that each and every year \$860 million to \$1 billion probably within the next year, year and a half, will be up to \$1 billion of money that has to go to service that debt. It's not—that billion dollars is not going to go to infrastructure, not going to be going to health care, not going to be going to education. It's just going to be blown away right to servicing that debt because of a self-serving, tired government, and Manitobans are looking for a change for the better, and that's this side of the House.

* (16:30)

We look at some of the examples within the budget that within the portfolio that I have the pleasure of being a critic of, Mr. Speaker, and I often, to take a few words from a few of my colleagues, I am the education and advanced learning advocate. And so it is my job to make sure that the members on the other side of the House are making improvements and moving things forward, but we have not seen that under this government for quite some time. There really hasn't been any kind of major policy advancements in the world of education in the last 15 years, and it's going to be very interesting to see what potential plans they have coming forward in the next election promises.

In fact, Manitobans are paying more and getting far less, and the results are going to be following the students into adulthood. Manitoba's universities continue to rank among the very bottom of the—amongst the bottom in Canada. The latest program for international assessment of adult competencies show Manitoba has the highest percentage of university graduates with poor numeracy skills in Canada. And that upsets me because I know that I look through—around this Chamber and there's many of us that fall into that category, which is—doesn't speak quite well for our post-secondary institutions here in the province. And, again, Mr. Speaker, I blame it on the leadership, the department's leadership.

I know the Minister of Education right now is sitting here and he's enjoying my speech, and I'm sure he's taking this to heart and he's going to try really, really hard in the next few months to maybe make some changes, but I think it's gone far beyond that. I think that what they're going to do is continue to spend money on making promises without any type of actions and they're going to be hoping that they can trick Manitobans into voting for them once again in the spring election. But they're not going to be able to fool Manitobans this time. Manitobans are tired of this government that continues to make—to break its promises and they do want that change.

Now, Budget 2015 allocates a little more than \$3.7 billion towards Manitoba's education system. But we know for that investment, Manitobans are paying more and getting less. Since 2007, Manitoba has had the lowest post-secondary graduation rate in Canada, and Manitoba has the second highest high school dropout rate in Canada. In 2012, most provinces had female graduation rates above

80 per cent; Manitoba only scored 76 per cent and fell towards the bottom again in Canada.

The Leader of the Opposition was himself a teacher, as I was, and so was his mother. Our vision for Manitoba's education system is to empower teachers, to improve outcomes for students because that's exactly what Manitobans and parents and grandparents want for their kids. The 2012 Program for International Student Assessment released the past year placed Manitoba second lowest in reading and science scores in Canada. In addition, be some of the lowest in Canada, Manitoba scores in reading, math and science fell lower than in previous years.

Manitoba's PISA scores for math have declined more than any other province in recent years and are now far below the international level. Manitoba students are now reading below the international average while the average Canadian student is well above the international marker. The NDP continue to fund the current system without looking for opportunities to reform it. Their education policies are not producing results, and that is what should be the defining factor of a quality system of education.

Again, it comes down to leadership. It comes down to the fact that they are putting themselves ahead of all Manitobans. And I just want to close by saying that I will not be supporting the budget. I will be supporting the motion put forward by our leader, the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Pallister).

And I would be amiss for not thanking my family, my wonderful wife, Tracey, and my two boys, Brayden and Jarvis, for supporting, because I know it is difficult. This is a—it is a very difficult job, and I know that all members within the House would share that sentiment, that the family balance sometimes gets a little bit out of whack. And I also would like to thank the support of my family, and when I talk about my family, I also talk about my brother and my mom. And I know that I thank a few of the members across the way and, of course, my caucus here on this side of the House for their many thanks and—[interjection] You're on that list as well. Okay, thank them for the well wishes and the cards and the flowers on the passing of my dad the—near the end of March. And so that's going to bring additional struggles, but we know that he is in a better place, Mr. Speaker.

And so, with that, I'll take this time and give someone else a chance to get up and put a few words on the record. So thank you again, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): Mr. Speaker, it is truly my pleasure to stand in support of Budget 2015. For me, today is a really important day of reflection, having the honour to hear the MLA from The Pas, the first First Nations woman to join this honourable Chamber. And I cannot help but think of her father on—today.

While she spoke on her inaugural speech, I reflected on the first day that I walked into the caucus room, and when I walked into that caucus room, I had the privilege of a chair being empty between—then the member from The Pas and the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs. You have to remember I'm a farm girl from Saskatchewan and never, ever dreamed that I would have these opportunities. And, as I sat in that chair, I was wrapped with a blanket—a blanket that I've carried with me every day. You can't see the blanket, but it was there—the care and attention that they provided me and the guidance that both of them have guided me. I hope to share even a little bit of that with the member from The Pas. And I know that today, as every day, he walks beside her and smiles with much pride of her accomplishments and also what she is doing to support her family every day and the additional responsibility she is taking on. She is a role model for all of us. I have a lot to learn from the member from The Pas, and I look forward to walking this journey with her and providing her with some of the support that I was given.

I have the privilege of being the Minister of Family Services, and I truly say that it is a privilege. Many people would wonder why I would consider it that—partly, is the opportunity that I have to work with families, the authorities and the agencies that are entrusted with providing support to the families.

I've learned a lesson over the last few months as I've been speaking and asking for guidance, and what I've been told is my responsibility is to keep the children at the centre. It's to make sure that, as we move forward, that it's the children that we think of when we're talking about policies and programs and the future of the province. And that's exactly what Budget 2015 does; it keeps the children at the centre. There is a lens that is put on our new initiatives and our ongoing initiatives that support children.

One of the first ones that come to my mind are what we are doing around education. The class-size initiative is one of those examples—the investment that we are making to ensure that children have a good experience and a quality education, what we're

doing to engage the older years and making sure that they also feel a place within our education system and are valued. And, because of those commitments, we are seeing increased graduation rates—87 per cent.

This Budget 2015 will also permit us to hire more teachers to add to the ever-growing complement of other teachers. And you will hear the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar) make a comparison of what's happening in other jurisdictions. Teachers are being fired; they are not getting the same support in the education system.

Another commitment that you'll hear that supports children and families is our commitment to child-care spaces. We have already invested into 14,000 more child-care spaces. We're supporting the workforce by a wage enhancement grant. We are also, in this budget, committing to 900 more spaces. These spaces will be throughout Manitoba where they will welcome infants, preschoolers, before-and-after children to come and participate in a quality child-care program that supports them and their families and really provides an early start.

We also know that there is some opportunities within the child-care field, and right now we are investing money in Budget 2015 to establish what we're calling early childhood development hubs. This will be where groups of child-care centres and child-care providers will come together and they will share resources, they will share field trips, they will go on—do personal—professional training together. There are lots of opportunities that we can maximize their supports.

We also made a commitment and will be supporting it again in Budget 2015—is for a commission. This commission is, I think, vitally important. Our system has been very effective. We know we have more work to do, and what this commission is going to do along with the many community partners that are working with the commissioner, they are going to look at evaluating what has happened, where do we need to go for tomorrow. We know that families and children are changing as technology is changing and the opportunities and their desires for a quality system. We are very interested in establishing a universally accessible child-care opportunity across this province, and we're going to work towards that and that commissioner is going to help us develop that pathway and to enable us to do that.

As well, we're going to be investigating what is the relationship between child care and education

and what are the opportunities. But we don't stop there. We have a robust youth strategy for employment that we're going to invest money in and engage youth across the province, give them opportunity within the education system but also in the apprenticeship and training.

We're going to build more housing. We've already completed 3,000 housing units; 1,500 affordable, 1,500 social. We made a commitment, and in this budget we will be funding more affordable and more social housing, but we're not stopping there. This budget allows for us to ensure that we are investing in our important housing stock. We spend about \$100 million a year ensuring that the housing stock is up to standard, that we are enabled to maintain it so we can have options for individuals.

Housing is a foundation that all families need, and because of our commitment and our relationship with the private sector, we're looking at developing more housing within provincially owned land. We're looking forward to reviewing the RFPs—or the department is—of what the options are. Housing is vitally important for the well-being of families, of children and communities, and because of that we're going to make progress our commitment. But we also know within the private sector, they're an important partner of providing good quality housing. And because of that we have developed a strategy called Rent Assist. We rolled it out last year, and this year we have decided that we are going to be fully implementing it in Budget 2015. It's around \$22 million that will be invested to ensure that there will—that people will receive 75 per cent of market median rent. Those are all extremely important opportunities that we have.

There are many experts that have commented on Budget 2015 and have come up in support of our poverty reduction strategy: the executive director of Winnipeg Harvest, the executive director of CCPA, Make Poverty History has come out in support of it, as well as the Social Planning Council. They realize the importance of these investments and how we're going to move forward.

These investments around poverty reduction and social inclusion have a direct impact to families that we work with within Family Services. We know that one of the indicators for families that are engaged within the system is the issue of poverty. We believe by ensuring that we're able to provide good quality housing, child care, employment opportunities, that

that will make a difference for families. And this budget does just that.

You will hear often, around Family Services, issues that are happening. And we take them very, very important, and we evaluate. And we look at what can we do differently to support Manitoba families, because that is what our objective is. Really, our opportunity is to keep families together. But, in some situations, because of the safety of a child, a child needs to be apprehended. But, when that happens, our goal is the safety of that child, but also the opportunity of reunification.

Mr. Speaker, we are consistently working on the 62 recommendations from Commissioner Hughes. I can tell you that there's been significant progress made on 23 of them. We are joining community partners across the province and working towards the implementation of the remainder. I am in frequent contact with Commissioner Hughes, where he talks about his interest in seeing us move forward and applauds the progress that we've made, acknowledges we have much more work to do and realizes that we are committed to doing that.

When families become involved with Family Services, they come to us for a variety of reasons, and I have mentioned to this House on a number of occasions that I have had the pleasure of walking into homes and to having those conversations, making those evaluations, the fear and the hope that is a part of all of that. When families open their doors, we need to be there to support them.

I also strongly believe in what we're doing within Budget 2015 around prevention and support for families. I know that the Minister for Children and Youth Opportunities worked very diligently with all of the committee members of Health Child Manitoba and came up with a robust strategy that is going to provide a 10-year strategy for mental health and wellness for children and youth in our province. This budget is going to start with a \$2-million investment. That \$2-million investment will go a long way in providing prevention and intervention services for Manitoba youth. That is critically important.

But also what we need to talk about when we refer to Budget 2015 is the preventative measures that have been put in place for over a decade for our government. The first one I want to talk about is the families first program. It's a home visiting program where women are identified pre-birth or prenatal and are offered to be a part of this program where they

will get home visiting and support, linkages with other community agencies. And what they gain from that is confidence as a parent, information, good parenting skills. And that program works with families from the time of birth till that child is school-aged, till they are five years old. That is a major commitment. And we see some very positive outcomes. There are fifteen hundred—or approximately 1,500 families that were served in Families First last year. And I know that that is one of those programs that is making a difference.

We also have innovative programs around our child centres. And the one that I want to talk about is Manidoo, which is in the Lord Selkirk Park complex. It really is a wraparound approach. It includes a family resource centre; it includes a family support worker; it includes outreach workers. It provides services for the children, for the families, as well as for the community. And it's called the Abecedarian model. And this Budget 2015 allows us the opportunity to look at expanding that Abecedarian model and looking at other opportunities.

* (16:50)

There's another really important program that is offered by the community, called the Mothering Project, from Mount Carmel Clinic. It's an outreach and a drop-in program for moms. I've had the opportunity to go to that—to meet with the staff of that program and hear about the success that they are experiencing about keeping children together with their mothers. We know the value of families and communities to children. We know the importance of attachment and that has to happen. You've heard me say often that our child-welfare system is there as a safety net to provide protection to children. But, really, what we need to work towards is families—or children being raised by their families and in their communities whenever possible. And this is one of those great examples.

Also, Budget 2015 will allow us an opportunity to fund a new program in Sagkeeng, called the Circle of Care, and this is a program that was brought to us by Chief Justice Champagne and Justice Roller, who said, we think there's an opportunity. The chief and council of Sagkeeng embraced it and are working together with us to implement it, and in that program, what we're doing is we're working with families, talking about who is your support in this community and coming up with solutions that are local, that are supportive and always with the focus of the

opportunity for reunification. That has to be what we're working towards.

We also have the Healthy Baby Prenatal Benefit, which we provide to moms. And it was a program that we've started since 2001, and we continue to provide support to over 3,500 women every year and providing them with extra benefits so they're able to buy healthy foods. But we don't stop there. We have the Healthy Baby community program, and in that Healthy Baby community program, since 2004, 33,000 women have participated in the program. There are sites across the province that provide them with information around parenting. It deals with other issues such as physical activity and nutrition. It's making a difference.

We also know that we have many children within our care that have complex needs due to trauma that they've experienced, and Budget 2015 will help us to support those children with more psychological services, with special programs such as the COACH program, which is an intensive, supportive program that wraps around services around the children, finds out what their abilities are, works on what their wishes are and helps them to fulfill their dreams.

And those are all very important initiatives that we're having—that we have. I'm very proud of what our government has done around Budget 2015. We are outliers. There are many other jurisdictions that chose differently. They have reduced funding to social programs. They have reduced funding to health and to education. We're not doing that. We're continuing to invest in what matters most to Manitoba families. Those commitments are going to help build a better Manitoba and support all of Manitoba's families and children. I am very proud to stand up and support Budget 2015. Thank you.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, before I start with this budget debate, I wanted to thank my constituents of Arthur-Virden for an interesting year that we actually experienced, one of the worst floodings in all-time history in that area, with many bridges being taken out. We had many other different issues, including health-care issues, including closed ERs in many of our communities. Almost every community in Arthur-Virden—would you consider Virden being partial closures, Melita now being closed for a month. So these are the many, many issues that we have to deal with going forward here.

And, like I said, after one year of—this is my second time around as my budget, and this has been great and it was a great opportunity to be part of this great team here with the leader from the constituency of Fort Whyte and all my colleagues here. I'm really honoured to be part of this team. I've had a really interesting year this year with them. They're a great team, and, unlike—I can see across the aisle there—we had a great year, unfortunately, not so much, though, on the other side.

And, like I said, again, we—I come from a wonderful constituency of Arthur-Virden, and I'm very honoured to be representing them. And I also, being the newest member at one time, now I can honestly say that the newest member of The Pas—I would like to give my greetings to the Legislative Assembly on our—on behalf of the members here.

One of the biggest things I like—I'll start with this budget here. And, when it comes to the budget topic, that is one of my passions. I grew up with budgets. I was in my—when I use my personal life to my business life. I remember taking my first accounting course in grade 10, and I felt that that was one of the courses that I felt that I had the natural gift to, about numbers and accounting, and I took that forward. And about that time when I was taking that course, I experienced some really difficult times on the family farm. We had high interest rates. We had drought. And a lot of the farmers in the 1980s went through a lot in rural Manitoba.

And I remember my father, who was there to make sure that we stayed on the farm and we worked hard—all my brothers, myself, we had to work very, very hard on the farm. And we knew what the value of hard work was all about. And we knew that the province of Manitoba—we—that we were residents of—we knew that if we work hard, we're going to get rewarded.

And, with my budget abilities, I took that into my college life. I actually saved up, I worked, I saved up for college. I didn't have to get a student loan because it was hard work that I—that paid off. And I believe that this is what Manitobans really do believe in.

And, when it came to saving for a house, I—my wife and I, before we got married, we put money away to save for our first home, for the down payment. But, instead, we had an opportunity to buy a business in Virden, Manitoba. And that was such an exciting time for us because we were young. I was 26 years old at the time when I bought that business.

And I was so, so eager to start. Back then it was an opportunity that, you know, a young person can buy a business and thrive and work hard and get rewarded for it. You know, I built up relationships with my clientele in the—in Arthur Virden. And, again, they were very supportive. These relationships continued in when I started to run for—as MLA.

The thing is, it's about relationships that's so important to help out people in this province. I feel so honoured that since I became an MLA, I've reconnected with so many people when I moved away from Winnipeg, and how many more people I reconnected with, and that the honour is how many more people I got to know in this world of politics, and even members on the opposite.

You know, it's interesting how everybody comes from different backgrounds and diversity, and I really believe that our own team here have come back—come from different occupations and industries: member of River East being a nurse, member of Lac du Bonnet being a teacher, and the member from Midland, a farmer. And so we have the diversity—and the member from Steinbach, who was also a lawyer. So the diversity that we have—and I think the important is when—I remember October, every October in my business, I couldn't wait to sit down and do budgets up for the—for that current year.

Mr. Speaker, you know, we grew from a four-person operation to a 17 operation by growing and expansion and amalgamations. And we did budgets. We had a five-year plan, 10-year plan. And we followed that five-year, 10-year plan, and we had success because the fact is, we believed in it and we worked hard and we wanted to make sure that it all happened.

And it was interesting. After I got elected, my daughter's teacher asked me to come and speak to the classroom. And I remember there was a number of questions. Each child actually had to have a question. And one question I remember, it stuck in my mind, and they asked me why did I become an MLA. And the question—I had to think about that. And what I—as a financial planner, and as a budgeter for—in my own personal life, you can't—you have to practise what you preach, and I really believe in that. And so, when I was becoming a financial planner, I really believe that to help out people to succeed, to achieve goals, we had to make sure that they have—that we're on a plan, a five-year plan, a 10-year plan, and making sure that they balance their budgets. And that's where I actually worked on. Then I went further into my

practice where I actually helped business owners succeed and try to create business plans and show them how to project five-year, 10-year plans.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for

Arthur-Virden (Mr. Piwniuk) will have 23 minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 6, 2015

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