

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

Friday, May 8, 2015

The House met at 10 a.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 morning, everyone. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Mr. Speaker: Introduction of bills?

PETITIONS

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

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

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

(1) Every day, hundreds of Manitoba children walk to school in Oakbank and must cross PTH 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 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 M. Page, D. Lutz, H. Ryzebol and many, many other fine Manitobans.

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

**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 livelihoods 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 H. Nevakowski, A. Hopkins, M. Middleton and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Government Record—Apology Request

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

Government members have been quoted as stating that Manitobans no longer trust the current government.

Sadly, these same members have reportedly stated that since 2014 the government has been focused on its own narrow political interests, ahead of what was once a government plan and what would indeed the priorities—would be indeed the priorities of Manitobans and the Premier is driven by his desire to hold on to his leadership rather than by the best interests of Manitobans.

According to comments from government members, the caucus is divided by fundamental differences and animosity and that deep divisions are not just amongst the MLAs and caucus, but they exist at the staff level as well.

Regretfully, the dysfunction and infighting within the provincial government has nothing to do with addressing the fact Manitobans are paying more and getting less. A Winnipeg family pays \$3,200 more in sales and income tax than they would in Regina but receives some of the worst results in health care and education in this country.

Government members have said in the media that caucus dysfunction is entirely related to internal politics that indicate that they are in annihilation territory, saying that, our numbers are down and the status quo is not good enough anymore; our own party pollsters have told us we're facing oblivion.

Little has been done by the government members to end that infighting with the Premier, claiming retaliation is justified because of public comments such as, people have civil rights, but we also have an organization to run. Government members acting on behalf of the Premier have said publicly, we are not on a witch hunt, and have also said, we have to look at who caused this and who are the ones that have damaged us the most.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Premier of Manitoba to take responsibility and apologize to the people of Manitoba for the social and economic damage created by his failed leadership and the disgraceful conduct of government members that has destabilized the provincial government and hurt Manitoba businesses and families.

This petition is signed by C. Johnson, D. James, A. Berg and many, many other fine Manitobans.

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

(1) Government members have been quoted as stating that Manitobans no longer trust the current government.

(2) Sadly, these same members have reportedly stated that since 2014 the government has been focused on its own narrow political interests, ahead of what was once a government plan and what would be indeed the priorities of Manitobans, and the Premier is driven by his desire to hold on to his leadership rather than that of the best interests of Manitobans.

(3) According to comments from government members, their caucus is divided by fundamental differences and animosity and that deep divisions are not just amongst the MLAs and caucus, but they exist at the staff level as well.

* (10:10)

(4) Regretfully, the dysfunction and infighting within the provincial government has nothing to do with addressing the fact that Manitobans are paying more and getting less. A Winnipeg family pays \$3,200 more in sales and income tax than they would in Regina but receives some of the worst results in health care and education in the country.

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To urge the Premier of Manitoba to take responsibility and apologize to the people of Manitoba for the social and economic damage created by his failed leadership and the disgraceful conduct of government members that has destabilized the provincial government and hurt Manitoba businesses and families.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by J. Ferguson, D. Filmon, M. Silicz and many more fine Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: Committee reports? Tabling of reports?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

70th Anniversary of VE Day

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I have a statement today on VE Day.

I rise today to speak to the 70th anniversary of VE Day. Mr. Speaker, today marks Victory in Europe Day. Seventy years ago, the free world rejoiced at the liberation of Europe and the beginning of the end of World War II, one of the darkest chapters in human history.

Last June, I had the honour of joining a Manitoba delegation to the beaches of Normandy to mark the 70 anniversary of the D-Day landing. Everywhere we went, there were cemeteries to honour our Canadian heroes, many from units right here in Manitoba, heroes who signed up by the thousands from every corner of our nation, heroes who answered the call to fight for peace, security and freedom, heroes who made the ultimate sacrifice.

It is difficult to imagine what our men and women faced as they went into battle, the courage it demanded of them and the hardships they endured. For that, we owe our members of the Canadian Armed Forces an endless debt of gratitude. They will be forever remembered and cherished in our memories.

It is not an understatement to say that the rights we enjoy as Canadians, rights like freedom, democracy and free speech, we owe to the bravery, valour and sacrifices of these men and women. The

sad but ironic truth is that there is nothing free about freedom. The young men and women of this nation who served during this conflict paid a very heavy cost. It is something we must always remember, honour and protect.

As we pause today to reflect on one of the greatest victories in the history of the free world, let us never forget the price that was paid on our behalf.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all members join in a moment of silence to pay homage to the brave men and women, past and 'prevent'-present, who have served this nation with honour and with dignity and sacrifice, after we hear from members of the opposition.

Thank you.

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): I am pleased to rise today to mark the 70th anniversary of Victory in Europe or VE Day.

Manitobans all across the province, and indeed, Canadians all across our country, will pause today to pay tribute to the tens of thousands of men and women who fought for peace and for freedom during the Second World War.

I know you're aware, Mr. Speaker, but it's important to remember that Manitobans led all Canadians in volunteering to put their lives at risk and their lives on hold to serve the cause of peace, not only in the second war but as well in the first war.

And Canada itself has played a key role in liberating Europe, and our efforts to liberate the people of the Netherlands, in particular, are often regarded as one of the greatest military achievements in our nation's great history.

Our efforts didn't come without great cost, of course. More than 47,000 Canadians died as a result of the Second World War, and today we recognize those individuals, their sacrifices and the legacy of peace they left us.

Today provides the members of this House a special opportunity to recognize and respect the great contributions of Canadians and of all members of the Allied forces, many of whom made the ultimate sacrifice for their country and for our freedom. I'd also like to recognize the active members of the Canadian Forces for their great contributions to community and to country.

Canada's efforts in war and in peace are not motivated by greed or power or by threats but rather by the promotion of international peace and security. And generations of Canadian military personnel and veterans have helped to ensure that we live in a free and a peaceful country. Freedom is never free; it comes to us at great cost, and those costs have been paid by Canadians certainly throughout our history.

Today on the 70th anniversary of VE Day, we pay special tribute to those whose sacrifices allow us to do our work here and to allow Manitobans and Canadians and people around the world to live lives of freedom.

I want to thank, especially, our veterans and their families and those who lost loved ones in Canada's efforts to liberate Europe.

Thank you.

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

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

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, 70 years ago, Victory in Europe, or VE Day, was an amazing day.

For the first time in Britain and much in Europe, cities that had been blacked out for more than five years as a precaution against air attack were suddenly brilliantly lit. It was a signal, and a signal with glowing lights, of the change that had happened.

Canadians and Manitobans can be justly proud of the tremendous role that we as Canadians and as Manitobans played in ensuring that victory. We need to pay tribute to the veterans from Manitoba and from Canada who contributed so much and remember those who lost their lives in sacrifice in that effort.

We need, as we look back, also to remember in moving forward that the measures taken after VE Day, not only to punish those who perpetrated atrocities during the Second World War, through the Nuremberg trials, but that they were paralleled by efforts like the Marshall Plan, which reached out and helped the people of Germany recover. And so after the Second World War, in sharp contrast to what happened in the First World War, when, after the war, it was very punitive, after the Second World War, when we had reached out and helped the people in Germany, we now have a situation where today, Germany, which was our greatest enemy then, is

now one of our strongest allies. It's an important message as we look to build peace more broadly around the world and a more stable global society.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to observe a moment of silence? *[Agreed]*

Members will please rise.

A moment of silence was observed.

* (10:20)

Mr. Speaker: Are there any further ministerial statements? Seeing none, I have no guests to introduce this morning.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Speaker: So we'll proceed right to oral questions.

NDP Political Staff Compensation Packages

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Last week, the government introduced their seventh consecutive deficit budget with no end in sight, no plan for balancing the budget. Why? Because of waste, and the Premier doesn't seem able to tackle the problem of the wasteful spending that has crept into his government at an increasingly rapid pace, it would seem. He's able to divide his caucus, he is able to divide his party, but he cannot divide the waste. He multiplies the waste instead.

And we have learned that this Premier has now expended massive amounts of bonuses to departing political staff. This Premier is making Manitobans pay a new tax, Mr. Speaker, a departure tax to his dysfunctional government.

Could the Premier provide the House today with a better example of his wasteful spending than this?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): It is a very strong story about the economy in Manitoba, as the member has mentioned, and we've generated efficiencies in government in many respects, and the member knows that.

One example is they had 13 regional health authorities with many officials at the top. We reduced those down to five. We took the savings on administration, multi-up to \$17 million, Mr. Speaker, and we invested that in a cancer drug program which made cancer drugs available free to Manitobans so they could stay close to their families

and their employment and their homes. That's an example of efficiencies we generated based on the inefficient system that the member opposite put in place.

Mr. Pallister: A straightforward question. One hundred and ninety-three communicators and those are his talking points? The NDP has doubled the number of political staff and communications people during their time in office. This is costing Manitobans hundreds of millions of dollars, and that's what they get for the investment.

This departure tax is another example of his laser-like focus on spin over substance, and so was that answer. His spinners help him focus on blocking access to information while spinning it as transparency. His spinners focus on raising taxes on Manitoba families and spinning it as caring. And his spin department helps him focus on doubling our debt and spins that as a balanced approach when nothing could be further from the truth, Mr. Speaker.

Let's see how he spins this: This departure tax is an example of this Premier yet again placing his selfish priorities ahead of the real priorities of Manitobans. Spin that.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the best way to deal with misinformation put on the record by the Leader of the Opposition is to state the facts.

Families in Manitoba today on average pay \$4,200 less taxes than when the Leader of the Opposition was a member of the government Cabinet in the '90s. That's for families.

Senior citizens used to only get \$250 as a property tax credit. They now get over \$1,000 and we are moving further towards eliminating the requirement that they pay education taxes when they are seniors.

Members opposite, they actually reduced property tax credits; we've increased benefits for seniors.

When it comes to small business, members opposite had a small-business tax rate of 9 per cent. We have the lowest rate in the country at zero per cent.

Mr. Speaker, in every domain we have generated efficiencies and moved the resources from excess administration into front-line services for people of Manitoba. They spent \$4 million on a consultant to come in that recommended the firing of

1,000 nurses. That is inefficient and that hurt Manitobans.

Mr. Pallister: This is a Premier who ran on a promise, well, several, in fact: one to balance the books, which he's failed to do for seven consecutive years; another not to raise taxes, and has done that. And Manitobans are paying \$1,600, each household, in just the broken-promise tax and fee hikes that that Premier has introduced. And that is a fact, Mr. Speaker.

Now, he spoke about front-line civil servants. Manitoba's front-line civil servants earned one week of severance for each year of work. Our information reveals that this Premier has paid his BFFs, his best former friends, as much as one week of severance for every two months of work. Now, he's disrespecting the work of front-line civil servants by rewarding his political staff approximately six times as much, apparently, in some cases.

Now, NDP waste is threatening front-line services, and this Premier appears to care more about the backroom than he does about the front line.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, it's the members opposite that put a motion in front of this House to cut front-line services by over a half a billion dollars, Mr. Speaker. They're the ones that voted against the budget which added more doctors to Manitoba.

We said we would increase the number of physicians in Manitoba by 200. We've exceeded that promise; we're well over 220. We have 'more'—more doctors per capita in rural Manitoba than Saskatchewan, a very significant investment in rural physician care. We have more nurses practising in Manitoba now than ever before. We have added over 300 teachers in this province on our smaller class-size initiative to help young people get off to an earlier start.

Mr. Speaker, that contrasts very dramatically with the approach of the Leader of the Opposition: 700 teachers removed, 300 teachers added; 1,000 nurses fired, thousands of nurses added. Over 250 doctors left the province when they were in office; over 640 doctors have been added while we've been here.

The contrast is very clear. They get rid of people; we add people. We increase the prosperity of Manitoba.

NDP Political Staff Compensation Packages

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Well, he's certainly increased the prosperity of a few political staff, Mr. Speaker, that is true.

Every time this Premier breaks a promise, Manitobans end up paying. When he broke his promise on the PST, Manitobans had to pay. When he's broken his promise on balancing the budget, ultimately, Manitobans have to pay.

And now he's broken his promise again. He said to political staff that they had the civil right to work on other leadership campaigns, and he broke that promise, because now he's ensured that they were removed, and Manitobans are going to have to pay nearly \$700,000.

How come every time this Premier breaks a promise, Manitobans have to reach into their pockets—Manitoba families have to reach into their pockets and pay more?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): When you spend \$4 million on a consultant that recommends firing thousands of nurses, that is bad public policy, Mr. Speaker. That was a private consultant.

When you take a promise that you will not privatize the telephone system and then promptly go ahead and privatize it and then see hundreds of jobs removed from that organization after it's privatized, that is bad for Manitobans. And the rates go from the third lowest to the third highest.

The members opposite need to account for the extra costs they put on the shoulders of Manitobans for less nurses, for higher telephone bills, for less jobs. And those people at the telephone system, they had to go to the Supreme Court to get their pensions take-back, Mr. Speaker, after they were clawed away from them.

That's their record. Our record is better pensions, more jobs and more services for front-line people.

Mr. Goertzen: Returning to this century, Mr. Speaker, this is a Premier who made a promise, and, really, there's a question about why Manitobans should have to pay for this broken promise at all. This was an NDP family feud. This was an NDP leadership dispute. Everybody at that convention, where they had their little fight, was an NDP member. But now Manitobans have to pay out of their pocket for the broken promise that the Premier made to those political staff.

Why should Manitobans have to pay anything for the NDP family feud? Why should they have to pay for the dysfunction with the—in the NDP party, Mr. Speaker?

* (10:30)

Mr. Selinger: When staff leave in any government, there's arrangements that are made. They're made on the best advice we get from our professional lawyers and human resource people. Mutually agreed separation agreements were arrived at. And I can say, Mr. Speaker, they compare very favourably to other levels of government. At the federal government level, the costs of people leaving there was over \$4 million. In other Conservative provinces to the west of us, the cost of people leaving was well over \$2 million.

The difference here, Mr. Speaker, is we have kept our focus on doing things that improve the economy in Manitoba. We've increased the number of jobs in this province year over year, the best record in the country. We've put motivation out there and incentives out there to grow the number of jobs and increase the economic growth: 60,000 jobs with our Building Manitoba Fund and our five-year, 5-and-a-half-billion-dollar jobs fund for infrastructure.

And what would the members opposite do? They say they will cancel that, Mr. Speaker. They will put people on the unemployment rolls; we will put people back to work.

Mr. Goertzen: It wasn't legal advice that these staff were following; it was the Premier's advice. The Premier gave advice that they could work on other NDP leadership campaigns because they had civil rights. That was his words, Mr. Speaker. He broke that promise, and as a result of him breaking that promise, just like he broke the promise on the PST, just like he broke the promise on balancing the budget, as a result of breaking that promise, Manitobans now have to reach into their pockets and pay \$700,000.

Now he says he has no choice. He always says he has no choice. There was a choice. He could have kept his word. He could have told the truth.

Why didn't he take that choice, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Selinger: We made a very clear choice, Mr. Speaker, and that was to grow the number of jobs in this province of Manitoba. That was to increase economic growth. Our labour force has grown

by 2 and a half per cent versus 0.6 per cent for the country. Our total employment has grown 2.9 per cent versus 0.8 per cent for the country. Private sector jobs have grown 3.4 per cent versus less than about a half a per cent for the country. The full-time jobs in this province have increased by 4.6 per cent versus 1.2 per cent for the country.

Mr. Speaker, on every statistic, Manitobans are better off. More people are working; they're getting wage increases. We have less unemployment. Our economy is growing and the member opposite wants to focus on other matters. We're focusing on the priorities of Manitobans: a stronger economy, better health care, better education for young people, more prosperity for Manitoba.

Unemployment Rates Government Policies

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Clearly, the dysfunction of this NDP government is costing Manitoba taxpayers. This NDP government cares more about themselves than they do about Manitobans. It's shameful, Mr. Speaker.

And this is reflected in the latest StatsCan monthly job report that says that Manitoba was one of only two provinces to see an increase in the unemployment rate, Mr. Speaker, dead last yet again.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister just admit that this NDP government's self-serving policies are having a negative impact on jobs in Manitoba?

Hon. Kevin Chief (Minister of Jobs and the Economy): I do want to thank the member for the question, Mr. Speaker.

I do want to say that Manitoba's job performance is still one of the best amongst all of the provinces. Manitoba has one of the strongest private sector job growths amongst all of the provinces. Manitoba maintains one of the lowest unemployment rates of all the provinces.

But she doesn't have to take my word for it. BMO Capital Markets Senior Economist Robert Kavcic said in a note to investors, first we must praise the often overlooked but now rising star on the regional labour force map, Manitoba. And I don't know who he was talking about when he was saying people are overlooking us. All I can say is it sounds a lot like he was talking about members opposite.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, this month alone saw a decline of 1,100 full-time jobs, 2,100 jobs overall in decline.

Now, it may be these numbers are somewhat inflated as a result of the mass exodus of NDP staffers to Alberta. I don't know; maybe that's the case.

But, Mr. Speaker, will the minister just admit that his self-serving policies are having a negative impact on jobs in our economy?

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

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Kavcic, once again, noted about our labour market in Manitoba, not only did he say employment growth now leads the country, at 3.1 per cent year over year, by a wide margin, he went on to say: Employment growth led the country in March at a very strong 3.1 per cent year-over-year clip, the best pace the province has seen in 13 years. At 5.4 per cent in March, the jobless rate is now second lowest amongst the provinces.

That is an independent private sector forecaster. There's multiple independent private forecasters that are saying that Manitoba leads not only in terms of the economy but also in job growth.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, let's talk about private sector employees. In fact, in the last month Manitoba is one of two provinces that saw, in fact, a decline in private sector employees, 800 fewer employees. Clearly, this government's policies are going in the wrong direction.

Will the minister just admit that his self-serving policies are having a negative impact on jobs in our economy?

Mr. Chief: Mr. Speaker, 20,000 jobs in the past year, three out of four of those jobs come from the private sector, not said by us but said by independent private sector forecasters. Four out of five of those jobs are full-time jobs.

I can tell you we are seeing not only the private sector doing incredibly well, one of the things that we know is when you talk to businesses, what they want to do, they want to be able to give back. The best way they can give back is by hiring local people.

We're standing, you know, standing with businesses. We're standing with workers. The plan that we have is working.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we are seeing down in Innovation Alley is aspiring entrepreneurs are recognizing, young people are recognizing that they can make an impact anywhere

in the world and still have the biggest impact here in their hometown.

Investment in Mining Industry Inclusion in Budget 2015

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): Mr. Speaker, it's painfully clear the NDP family feud has had a negative impact on many Manitobans.

Now, when the NDP were focusing on themselves and payoffs for their staff, the needs of many Manitobans were being ignored, and we'll take the mining sector, for example. This sector is currently facing significant challenges. We do know the mining sector provided a submission to the government prior to the budget with ideas that could've helped the industry during these challenging times. However, the NDP have been focusing on themselves, payoffs for their staff, and they actually failed to even mention mining in the budget.

How could such an important sector be ignored in this budget?

Hon. James Allum (Acting Minister of Mineral Resources): I thank the member for the question.

You know, this government is focused on investing in Manitoba and investing in infrastructure to create good jobs for Manitobans. Mining development has been part and parcel of that equation and, for the member's benefit, in the mining industry and in the oil and gas industry in Manitoba last year we employed over 6,300 people.

Those are good jobs for Manitoba. Why does the member opposite make criticism of that?

Mr. Cullen: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's clear that with this government Manitobans are certainly paying more but getting less.

Hopefully the—this new minister will recognize that investment in mining goes where it's wanted, and clearly under this NDP government it's not being shown that it's wanted here in Manitoba.

Now, Mr. Speaker, under this NDP government Manitoba's share of exploration dollars have dropped to 1.6 per cent of the Canadian total. This is the lowest in decades, and this really speaks to the future of Manitoba mining.

Now, given this poor record in attracting mining exploration dollars, is that why this government chose to ignore mining in the budget altogether?

Mr. Allum: Mr. Speaker, this government is focused on the priorities of Manitobans. We're focused on what matters most to Manitoba families: good jobs and steady economic growth.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the member knows that last year Manitoba has experienced unprecedented growth in the mining industry with the development of two new signature mines that resulted in 900 new jobs.

I ask the member again, why doesn't he get on board and vote for the budget and continue to invest in the growth and development of the Manitoba economy for all Manitobans?

Mr. Cullen: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government continues to send the wrong message. This budget does nothing to restore confidence with the business community, and in particular the mining sector. Not one mention of mining in the budget. This government should be embarrassed.

* (10:40)

Now, we know that the few prospectors that are actually left in Manitoba have actually taken this government to court because they can't get permits to do work in Manitoba, and this is an embarrassment, Mr. Speaker, and it's just a terrible message to send to the community.

Why does this government move forward with their own political agenda and not work on behalf of Manitobans that actually want to move the economy forward?

Mr. Allum: But, Mr. Speaker, the evidence is quite clear that we are moving the economy forward: the No. 1 economy in the country, among the lowest unemployment rates in the country.

Last year in the mining industry and the oil industry, we employed over 6,300 Manitobans. As a result of the two new mines that are going up in the North, we had over 900 new jobs going forward. In addition to that, we are expanding the Mineral Exploration Assistance Program, we're working with First Nations, we're growing the economy, we're employing Manitobans.

The members opposite have one plan and one plan only, and those are reckless cuts to our economy that will not only hurt the mining sector, Mr. Speaker, but all Manitobans.

**Green Acres School (Brandon)
New Gymnasium Announcement**

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, in 2011 the NDP government shamelessly used Brandon School Division students as pawns in their election campaign. They announced two new gyms for Brandon in a school with young students present. Yesterday the NDP reannounced one of those gyms.

Now, when students hear announcements like this on new gyms, they're excited and they think it's going to happen tomorrow. But, no, some of those students from 2011 will be graduated from grade 12 by the time this new gym may be built. Who knows?

Mr. Speaker, this is another fine example of Manitobans paying more and getting far less.

Why did this NDP government continue to use pawns in their announcements and tease them with facilities that they may never see?

Hon. James Allum (Minister of Education and Advanced Learning): Well, Mr. Speaker, that's an incredible question coming from the member for Brandon West.

The members opposite might want more of that, but no government has invested more in Brandon, in Brandon schools than this government on this side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) was in Brandon yesterday to talk about expansions to schools at George Fitton where the gym is complete, at Green Acres School where other investments are taking place. We're renovating small classrooms to make sure that there's more one-on-one time between students and teachers so that our students have the fundamental skills they need to go on to be successful students.

Only the member opposite would stand up in this place and complain about investments in Brandon. What he should do on Monday is vote for the budget—

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

Mr. Helwer: Mr. Speaker, when the Premier was in Brandon yesterday, did he ask those students if he could borrow from them to pay off his staffers that he's gotten rid of? Did he ask those students if he

could borrow from them to pay for the debt that he's created?

Mr. Speaker, those students are used as pawns by this government and by the member from Brandon East, very sad to watch. They expect, when announcements are made, as most Manitobans, that we're going to see construction. But, again, many of those students will have graduated from grade 12 prior to this construction of this facility. Another broken promise, more payments to political staff.

When will this NDP government finally follow up on its promises and make it happen?

Mr. Allum: You know, Mr. Speaker, our investments in schools since we were first elected is second to none in this country. Thirty-five new schools have been built in this province since we were first elected, \$1 billion in capital investments in schools across Manitoba, not only in Winnipeg but in Brandon, across our rural communities and in the North as well.

The result of that, Mr. Speaker, is that we have smaller class sizes, we have more teachers, and as a result of both of those things, our graduation rates have gone from 71 per cent in the early 2000s to 87 per cent today.

Mr. Speaker, the member from Brandon West should get on board. He should vote for the budget and he should make—keep Manitoba students performing well in our education system.

**Provincial Deficit
Reduction Priority**

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): Oh, we've opened the budget and it makes it clear that the NDP is spending more and Manitobans are getting less.

Mr. Speaker, this is a budget that shows what the NDP is not focused on, and what they are not focused on is driving down their skyrocketing debt. We know that this is a debt that has escalated to \$36.3 billion, and it is doubled under this NDP in just the last seven years. Their signs could just as well adequately read, steady growth in debt for Manitobans—debt that has to be repaid.

Mr. Speaker, I ask this Finance Minister: Why has he not made a priority of reining in his wasteful spending and addressing his skyrocketing debt?

Hon. Greg Dewar (Minister of Finance): I have a sense there's a bit of confusion in the members

opposite, Mr. Speaker. The member for Brandon was demanding more gyms. Then the member for the Finance critic got up and said, no, don't build any more gyms. There's obviously some confusion, members opposite.

Mr. Speaker, we came into government, we were paying 13 cents on the dollar to service the debt. Now we're paying about 5.6 cents on the dollar to service the debt. And net-debt-to-GDP ratio is lower than what it was under the—under members opposite.

We're focusing on growing the economy. As you know, with 20,000 new jobs we created last year, No. 1—we're No. 1 in the country. We have the second lowest unemployment rate in the country and we've doubled the size of the GDP since we formed government.

They, Mr. Speaker—our plan is to grow the economy; their plan is to kill jobs.

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Speaker, the budget makes clear this NDP Finance Minister is focused on waste and mismanagement and soaring deficits.

Mr. Speaker, the election pledge from this NDP was to eliminate the deficit by 2014, but they broke that promise even though they said, we're ahead of schedule. Then they stated it as 2016-17, we are definitely getting rid of this deficit. But they broke that promise too. And now, in this budget, it makes clear that there is no plan, no target, no date in sight where they can identify that the deficit will be gone. They are headed in the wrong direction.

My question for this Finance Minister: Will he admit that his priority is political payouts to former staff members while Manitobans are saddled as a consequence of his out-of-control spending practices and escalating deficits?

Mr. Dewar: Mr. Speaker, I'll—as I said yesterday, I'll admit to none of that.

Mr. Speaker, we always said that we would restore our—a path to balance in a responsible way, and we're doing it. We're not going to do it like when members opposite would do is cut \$550 million out of the budget in one year. That would put our plan to grow the economy in jeopardy. That would mean the firing of nurses and doctors and teachers across this province. We always said that we'd return to balance in a fiscal way, and that's what we're doing.

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Speaker, the priority of this NDP government is obviously not affordability for Manitobans. We understand that right now, under

their PST hike, they already make more than \$500 million additional each and every year on the backs of hard-working Manitobans, and yet we still pay in this province \$3,200 more for the average Manitoba family than the same family in Saskatchewan. And we know their priority is not low-income earners, because a low-income earner in Saskatchewan gets to keep \$700 more than the same earner in Manitoba.

Where is their priority, Mr. Speaker? I assert it is on internal political fighting, on trying to make the pain of that go away with severance payments to staff that Manitobans must pay for. These are political payments over the priorities of Manitobans. Manitobans pay more; Manitobans get less.

Mr. Dewar: That is utter nonsense, Mr. Speaker. There are more doctors in Manitoba. There are more teachers in the province of Manitoba.

I—Mr. Speaker, this budget has tax cuts for seniors, doubling the property tax credit. This budget has tax cuts for small business; another 2,000 small businesses won't be paying any taxes. This budget has tax cuts for volunteer firefighters. This budget has tax cuts for caregivers.

I want to refer the member—he talked about low-income Manitobans, and I want to refer the member to page 38 of *The Manitoba Advantage*, Mr. Speaker, where we're comparing household costs and taxes throughout the country. He mentioned Saskatchewan. A single parent here in Manitoba with—earning \$30,000 pays living costs of \$13,000; in Saskatchewan, that's \$15,600. And I also remind members this—you can also refer, if you wish, to go to the documents provided by the Saskatchewan government, which will confirm these numbers.

* (10:50)

Lake St. Martin Evacuees Mental Health Services

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): This week is Mental Health Week, and today is the fourth anniversary of the day that people were evacuated from Lake St. Martin. These two come together in the traumatic story of what has happened to the people evacuated from their flooded communities. The continued stress of displacement has led to mental anguish, suicides, premature deaths from a variety of sources.

I ask the Premier today to tell us what has been done to care for the mental health and well-being of

those who were evacuated four years ago from Lake St. Martin, Little Saskatchewan, Dauphin River and Pinaymootang First Nation.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question.

Operation Return Home is a program between the First Nations communities themselves, the federal government and the provincial government for which we have set aside \$100 million.

We want to ensure that this kind of flooding and dislocation and the hardship and pain that these communities have suffered does not occur again, so we're rebuilding these communities on higher ground with brand new facilities. I was talking just recently with one of the major firms in Manitoba that is going to be doing the new schools in those communities, and they're advancing on that.

These families require support and need support and have received support and will continue to receive support. There have been a great deal of anguish that these communities have experienced, and I can only say that we want to make sure that when we resolve this matter that we do it in such a way that there will not be flooding occurring again.

When the original flood works were built, there was no consideration of the impact on these communities in the Lake St. Martin, northern Lake Manitoba area. Now we have to do it right. We have to make sure that there is protection for those communities. We have to make sure that those communities will not flood again, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gerrard: Is the Premier saying that the mental health services are coming from the \$100 million they promised for infrastructure?

Today, Mr. Speaker, the Free Press reports that there has been, and I quote, a lack of community mental health services.

We've also heard from Marg Synyshyn, the CEO of the Manitoba Adolescent Treatment Centre, that there has been somewhat of an erosion in mental health services for children in care. This is while the number of children in care has been increasing, and as the people who've been evacuated from the four years tell us, CFS has to be called more often.

Why is today's NDP government doing so poorly in providing mental health services at such a time of great need when we have so many displaced people and so many children in care?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, these are important questions, and these people in these communities deserve the support that is being offered and any additional supports that can be made available. The rebuilding is a process that has taken far longer than anybody wishes would have.

The supports to these families are critically important. They need to be in schools. They need to be in safe housing. They need to have access to support services for mental health and any other issues they may be experiencing, including services from child and family services agencies under the authority of First Nations communities, Mr. Speaker.

And we will continue to work with them. We will continue to work with them to provide services they need and make sure that as we rebuild these communities that these kinds of occurrences will not happen again, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gerrard: The Premier's all talk and very little action.

The government must realize what the stress has been for the children and families who were evacuated. For Lake St. Martin alone, after only two years, there were a reported 17 who committed suicide, and for all the communities, I have heard a number as high as 40.

The mental health effects of evacuation have been running deep for four years, and they are still counting.

People who have been away from their homes for four years ask: When can we go home? People are also asking: Will the Premier commit today to ensure that there are appropriate counselling services for those—to help the people in these communities to heal?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we will work with these communities on healing as required. They have gone through tremendous anguish. They have gone through pain. They have lost members of their communities.

When people are in communities that have constantly flooded because of lack of foresight when these projects were originally built decades ago, we see the long-term impacts of thinking about some folks while not thinking about other people, and that's why when we take a look at the solutions and the major investments we're making in these communities we're going to do it in such a way that they're on higher ground, they're on safer ground

with new facilities. And in the meantime, we have to support these families.

And I can tell the member opposite that this is one of the items I regularly discuss with the federal government when I meet with the Prime Minister. We always have this discussion about how we can further move forward on Operation Return Home to help these people get settled back into their communities in such a way that they will not be at risk of future floods, which is why we're making this very significant investment in flood protection in that part of Manitoba and we'll continue to do so.

And I can only say to the member from River Heights, I wish, for once, he would actually vote for the resources we've put in place to help these communities.

Highway 1 West Speed Limit Increase

Mr. Dave Gaudreau (St. Norbert): The member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) talked about returning to this century. Under the proposed cuts of the member for Steinbach and the Conservative Party over there, we would all be in the 18th century driving horse and buggies and thousands of Manitobans would be out of work. Instead, Mr. Speaker, our party has decided to invest in Manitoba and invest in the roads creating thousands of jobs.

Can the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation please inform the House of what these wonderful investments mean to Manitobans?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Well, Mr. Speaker, June 2nd, put on your helmet, fasten your seatbelt and get prepared to go a little bit faster on Highway 1 west as we increase the speed limit to 110 kilometres an hour.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this didn't just happen. We've invested \$260 million since 2007 improving the highway. We, the NDP, four-laned it to the Saskatchewan border. And if you want something that symbolizes the difference between us and members opposite, the 1990s when the Leader of the Opposition was in Cabinet, they invested about \$90 million on highway capital. This year we're going to hit \$700 million.

So you have a choice. Under the PCs, you get—*[interjection]* Mr. Speaker, they believe in jamming the brakes on, jam the brakes on our investments in highways and our economy. Under the NDP, you

can travel safely. You can travel a little more fast. Starting June 2nd, get ready for 110 kilometres an hour on Highway 1 west.

Conservation Office (Brandon) Hours of Operation

Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris): Mr. Speaker, on April 24th Harvey Sawchuk attended the Brandon Conservation office at 1129 Queens Ave. The time was 2:25 p.m., and to his great surprise the doors were locked. He finally got the attention of staff who told him, and I quote, due to a lack of office reception employees, they were forced to close the doors. End quote.

Mr. Speaker, why are Mr. Sawchuk's and others' front-line services unavailable under the NDP?

Hon. Thomas Nevakshonoff (Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship): Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for the question. It gives me an opportunity to speak about the good works that we're doing in the Department of Conservation going forward.

Parks in western Manitoba are very important to all of us, as we all know, and we're doing a number of investments in that particular area. We've put over \$61 million into our parks over the last five years, and under our new Building the Parks Province, going forward we will be investing over \$100 million in the years to come, including things like waste water treatment plants in parks, drinking water facilities. Spruce Woods park in the southwest of our province is going to benefit by these types of—

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

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the minister would like to put some of that laser-like focus to 1129 Queens Ave. in Brandon. Perhaps if the NDP weren't diverting hundreds of thousands of dollars for political payouts because of their internal feud, you might actually have the money to fulfill the basic needs of Mr. Sawchuk when he attends a government office at 2:25 in the afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, why are political payouts a higher priority for this government than keeping government offices open in Brandon?

* (11:00)

Mr. Nevakshonoff: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again I thank the member opposite for the question.

And if he wants to talk about government offices, I should just let him know that I'm driving off to Lac du Bonnet shortly after this to do the opening on a seven—more than a \$7-million investment in a new facility down there to service the fighting of forest fires in our province, something that's very important. It's going to be a dry summer by the looks of it, so investing in protection of infrastructure such as our forks—our forests and our parks, very important.

So stay tuned for further announcements, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, this shouldn't be news to the government. Mr. Sawchuk wrote the Premier (Mr. Selinger) almost four weeks ago to alert him to the situation and he asked, and I quote, for a non-generic response. Perhaps the minister can offer Mr. Sawchuk what the Premier couldn't.

Could the minister offer a non-generic response as to why the office, the Conservation office at 1129 Queens Ave. in Brandon, Manitoba, at 2:25 in the afternoon is closed because, I quote, staff is not available?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Nevakshonoff: Well, Mr. Speaker, speaking of parks, we also have to extend the conversation to our protected areas, something that members opposite pay very little attention to. And I look—a prime example of that would be looking to the east side of Lake Winnipeg, the investment put into the protected areas there.

The objective of establishing a UNESCO World Heritage Site on the east side is something that future Manitobans will look back upon as a historic moment. What are the plans of members opposite in this regard, Mr. Speaker? They want to build huge construction projects through there instead, thereby jeopardizing this natural ecosphere.

This government is committed to our parks, protection of areas, and we will continue, much unlike—

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

Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Mr. Speaker: It is now time for members' statements.

Jane's Walks

Hon. James Allum (Minister of Education and Advanced Learning): Every year during the first weekend in May, Jane's Walks takes place in cities around the world. From Mumbai to Whitehorse, people go on free tours of their own local neighbourhoods to discover completely new ways of looking at them, and what makes Jane's Walks so special is that they are led by volunteers from within the community.

Jane's Walks are held in honour of the urbanist and writer Jane Jacobs, who'd—whose ideas about walkability, mixed-use neighbourhoods and mindful development have shaped city development around the world.

Here in Winnipeg there were around 30 themed walks being held last weekend. Urban explorers were out and about in every corner of the city, enjoying the sunshine and learning about our urban environment.

On Saturday, volunteer walk leader Jino Distasio led his Jane's Walk group up and down south Osborne, teaching them about Riverview's rich history of breweries and brawls. Jino showed his group how the community's working-class roots helped it develop into the very progressive neighbourhood that it is today. And, on Sunday, I had a decidedly relaxing time walking through Wildwood Park, led by long-time community center volunteers and Wildwood Park residents Sue and Bob Piper. I got to learn about the architectural evolution of our unique, park-oriented community.

For those members of the House who have never taken a Jane's Walk, I highly recommend that you mark off the first weekend in May for next year. It's a great way to get out, meet your neighbours and learn some new things about your community.

Winnipeg owes its thanks to all of the volunteer organizers and walk leaders who make this event so special. We're lucky to be joined in the House today by Jane's Walk leaders Jino Distasio, Sue and Bob Piper, as well as Matt Carreau, who is Winnipeg's city co-ordinator for the Jane's Walks.

On behalf of all members, thank you for engaging with our community in such a meaningful way. Thank you so much.

Kelvon Smith—Virден Citizen of the Year

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Arthur-Virден): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to honour Kelvon Smith for Virден's Citizen of the Year.

This is nothing like a crisis highlights a character and reveals those who are leaders at heart. Winner of the Virден 2014 Citizen of the Year award goes to Kelvon Smith. He was recognized as his volunteer hard work throughout the—through the—throughout the community, but it was the worst flood of the—on record on June 2014, that put Kelvon Smith, co-ordinator of the Westman Emergency Plan to the test.

In 2011, Kel stepped up to fill the void for the community emergency co-ordinating of the town of Oak Lake, Elkhorn and Virден, along with RMs of Wallace and Sifton. This became known as the Westman Emergency Group.

Calm, cool and collected was how Vaughn Wilson, a volunteer co-ordinator of transportation for the emergency plan, characterized Smith. Kelvon took charge, screened calls and delegated responsibilities during the flood of 2014.

Since the age of 13, Smith was part of the cadet corps, later offered to help with the XII Manitoba Dragoons and Virден's cadet corps where he took a turn as CO. He became leader, and in Brandon he was the commander officer of the sea cadet corps.

A teacher for 39 years for the Fort la Bosse School Division, retired now for five years, he's now a tour organizer for the teachers' association.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to applaud Mr. Smith for his spirit, his leadership, hard work and dedication for our community.

Sami Jo Small

Ms. Christine Melnick (Riel): In Riel we are lucky to have an amazing athlete and stellar role model for our community. Sami Jo Small is a multi-sport athlete whose career is an exceptional example of the opportunities sports can offer young people, and I would like to welcome her parents who have joined us today in the gallery.

Sami grew up playing hockey on outdoor rinks at the then-Norberry Community Club, playing in boys' leagues minor hockey. She played hockey for the St. Vital Victorias and Winnipeg Warriors. Sami was the first female player in the midget AAA game

and to play in the Manitoba Major Junior Hockey League.

While attending École Norberry and Collège Jeanne-Sauvé, Sami won provincial titles in track and field, volleyball, badminton, water polo and team handball. She received a scholarship to Stanford University to participate in discus and javelin until she injured her shoulder. She then returned to the game she grew up loving—hockey. She's played for the Stanford University men's team while she earned her degree in mechanical engineering.

In 1988, her childhood dream became a reality when she joined Canada's women's hockey team at the Olympic Games in Nagano, Japan—the first female hockey team she ever played on. It was then that Sami learned that not every player got their own changing room. She is now a three-time Olympian and has been part of two Olympic gold medal-winning teams. She has since become a five-time world champion and twice been named championship MVP. That means most valuable player, Mr. Speaker.

Her long list of accomplishments doesn't stop there. She was one of the founders of the Canadian Women's Hockey League and is their current vice-chair. She's involved with the Right to Play, a global organization that empowers children and youth through playing sports, and is currently their athlete ambassador. In 2013, she was inducted into the Manitoba high school sports association hall of fame.

She is currently working as a motivational speaker where she helps show audiences that a team needs all of its members, regardless of their role, if they are to succeed.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join me in congratulating Sami Jo Small for exceptional hockey career and many outstanding—

Mr. Speaker: [*inaudible*] this opportunity just prior to recognizing the honourable member for La Verendrye (Mr. Smook).

I'm starting to see a trend here with respect to the timing and the amount of time consumed by individual members with respect to private members' statements, and I'm going to ask honourable members to please make sure that their remarks are confined with the time—within the time limits that we have allowed for those respective statements, which is two minutes. And I'm going to start and tighten up

a little bit on that process, but I want to make the House aware of that, please.

Youth Parliament of Manitoba

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): Last night, along with my colleagues, the member from Lac du Bonnet and the member from Portage la Prairie, I had the pleasure of attending the Youth Parliament of Manitoba Speaker's Night. Mr. Speaker, I know you were there as well, but I would like to inform the rest of the House about the event and organization.

The Youth Parliament of Manitoba is one of the oldest model parliaments in the Commonwealth. It is a non-profit, non-partisan and non-denominational corporation and registered charity that has held sessions every year since 1922. This means that the upcoming winter session will be the 94th sitting of Youth Parliament.

* (11:10)

The winter session is the premier event of the year, as youth 16 to 20 from all across Manitoba come during the last week of December and spend five days debating issues in the same beautiful Chamber we are now—we are in today.

Their motto is By Youth, For Youth. The youth truly do run everything with the organization. There is a five-person parliamentary executive which acts as the board of directors. Members of the parliamentary executive are directly elected by members. The executive selects around 20 members to make up a Cabinet, and together they put on the whole session.

Last night was their annual Speaker's Night, their largest fundraiser. Wab Kinew was the featured guest speaker, and he challenged audience members to go above and beyond to strive for greatness.

It was encouraging to see so many young future leaders at the dinner last night. Past members of Youth Parliament have gone on to serve in both provincial and federal government Cabinets, and our wonderful Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, Patricia Chaychuk, is an alumnus as well.

Hopefully, one day, some of the 'curlent' youth-current Youth Parliamentarians I met last night will go on to sit as members of this Legislative Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Brenden Cowan

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): Mr. Speaker, it's—is a pleasure for me today to pay tribute to Brenden Cowan, a resident from Plumas, Manitoba, who has been selected to play football for the University of Manitoba Bisons. He has committed to the U of M and will join the team for the 2015 season.

At the age of 14 Cowan moved out to Plumas, attended school in Gladstone and drove to Neepawa every day just to play nine-man football.

Now Brenden is about to realize his childhood dream of becoming a Bisons football player. At six foot-three, 197 pounds, this 18-year-old has excelled at quarterback, running back, wide receiver and defensive back. He was named a Rural Manitoba Football League North Division All-Star in 2013 and helped Neepawa Tigers reach the finals in 2014.

In his last season with the Tigers, he amassed 700 passing yards, over 1,000 rushing yards, scored 11 rushing touchdowns, seven passing majors, threw eight two-point conversions and scored on six two-point conversions.

Bison football head coach Brian Dobie noted that Cowan's 'perseverance' and enormous potential once he gains more football experience.

Brenden's parents and residents in the small community of Plumas can be very proud of this young athlete's accomplishments and hard work. We wish him all the best with the University of Manitoba Bisons and all his future endeavours.

Mr. Speaker, I hope all honourable members will join me in congratulating Brenden for his hard work and dedication to the sport of football. I know that he will be successful in any future challenges that he takes on, and I wish Brenden and the Manitoba Bisons all the best for a successful 2015 season.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: On a point of order.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, on a point order that I want to raise to your attention and to the attention of the House.

As you know, we've been selective, unusually selective some might say, on the issues of points of order, and also matters of privilege. And so we want

to assure that members recognize the severity and the importance of this when we do raise points of order.

I'll be referring in some of my comments, Mr. Speaker, to a book that you're familiar with, the House of Commons procedural practice, edition 2000, by Marleau and Montpetit, the procedural book that we use now as our guidance generally here in the Legislature to augment other procedural books but is the primary book that we rely upon to make rulings.

There was discussion today in question period regarding the payouts to political staff, Mr. Speaker, by this NDP government. And my point of order is in particular to the answers, or the lack of answers, as it were. My point of order is more to how information was obtained or how it was difficult to obtain information, I would suggest.

We as a caucus—and I know, I think the media were engaged in this as well—were seeking information on the level of severance payments that were paid out to political staff who were being essentially purged from the Premier's office as a result of them either not showing the suitable amount of loyalty to the Premier (Mr. Selinger), as he would judge, Mr. Speaker, or the fact that they chose to back different leadership candidates in their recent leadership dispute.

And, in the process of trying to obtain that information, we used the freedom of information procedures that we have here in Manitoba, and there have certainly been disputes and points of order in this House regarding that.

I recall the member for Riel (Ms. Melnick) being involved with this, and emails that were not disclosed, Mr. Speaker, and that became an issue here, of course, in the Legislature because the freedom of information request was faulty, when it was returned to us, and so that became a matter of dispute here in this Assembly.

But this one today that I'm raising, in particular, Mr. Speaker, has to do the arbitrary nature of how we received the request. And I would suggest and I'll be referring to page 86 of Marleau and Montpetit, and, in particular, the issues of obstruction of members. That'll be the basis for my point of order.

But, to give you the background, Mr. Speaker, we filed freedom of information requests with the appropriate department, the clerk of Executive Council, for a variety of different severance packages. The earliest one that we requested goes

back to December when we asked for the amount of severance to pay out given to one Liam Martin, who is now the former chief of staff to the Premier.

It was indicated in that freedom of information request, by way of letter on December 19th, 2014, signed by one Milton Sussman, who you'll recognize as the clerk of the Executive Council and Cabinet secretary, that the payout to Mr. Martin was \$146—sorry, we wouldn't be complaining if it was \$146, Mr. Speaker—\$146,047.

Now, subsequently, we filed freedom of information requests for other staff that we believe were being purged from the Premier's office as a result of them not supporting the Premier in the most recent leadership race that they had, Mr. Speaker. And, in response, we received, just yesterday—and, of course, the information hit the media by way of a government leak—we received responses that we could not receive individual payouts, that we could only receive the collective total. And it's now a matter of public record; the aggregate total was \$670,000. And this particular freedom of information request was also signed by the same Mr. Sussman.

Now, it's important to remember that we filed the exact same request, Mr. Speaker, for Mr. Martin. We asked for the individual severance pay that he received. For the variety of other staff that we understand had left the Premier's office, we filed specifically for their severance packages as well, and we received two different answers. For Mr. Martin we were told the amount that he received as a severance. For the others, even though it was the exact same request and only separated by a few weeks, it was advised to us by way of letter that it's considered to be an unreasonable invasion of an individual's privacy to release information that relates to the third party's employment or occupational history and describes their income or financial circumstances.

So we have an arbitrary result, Mr. Speaker. On the one hand, when we asked for Mr. Martin's severance pay, we were given the exact amount. On the other hand, when we asked for the other staff by name, who were severed or released from the Premier's office or within government as a result of them not supporting the Premier, we were told they could not provide that specifically; they could only provide it in the aggregate.

Now, Mr. Speaker, how it relates to obstruction, of course, through Marleau and Montpetit, obstruction isn't just physical obstruction, although, of

course, it does include that. When we look at past rulings by Speakers, we know that physical obstruction can be the inability for somebody to do their job, by not being able to physically do that, but it also refers on page 86 that for members their privileges are violated by any action which might impede him or her in the fulfillment of his or her duties and functions. So the obstruction isn't just a limitation of the physical ability to do one's job, there's also obstruction in other manners and forms.

* (11:20)

And I would argue, and I am arguing to you this morning, Mr. Speaker, that the inability to get a consistent answer on freedom of information requests, even though we're filing the exact same thing, is, in fact, an obstruction. It's an inability for us as members of the Legislature to do our job, because we are uncertain, at different times, how it is that we should be filing requests, how it is that we should be asking for information, because one time we'll ask for the information and we'll be told that it is, in fact, able to be provided and it is provided, and then on another occasion we ask for the very same information, the exact same information at least in the form of the information. In this particular case we were asking for different individuals, but the request of the information was exactly the same in terms of substance, and we were told it couldn't be provided.

Now, I've done some checking. There's been no legislative changes. I don't believe there's been policy changes to how freedom of information requests are processed between December of last year and the current time we're in now, Mr. Speaker.

So, if there's been no changes in terms of the rules, why would there be a change in terms of the answer, Mr. Speaker, and that it makes it very difficult for us, for all of us as MLAs to be able to fulfill our responsibilities. All members—now, I know that government doesn't traditionally file for freedom of information requests at this point, but there might be members at some point who will, for a variety of different reasons, whether they occupy different seats in this House or for whatever circumstance they might find themselves in, and so we all rely upon that. We all rely upon the ability to get information in a consistent form, and it truly is an obstruction for us to do our job that the public relies upon.

This is no matter of small importance, Mr. Speaker. This is a matter of great public debate. There's been a great amount of debate regarding the

payouts from the NDP to political staff as a result of the NDP family feud. It's not something that the public is disinterested in. In fact, I suspect if you're in the coffee shops this weekend or otherwise, you'll hear about it because people are talking about this particular issue.

But there is some amount of obstruction in this, because we aren't able to get specific results in terms of who got what when it comes to the severance packages where we were with Mr. Martin, Mr. Speaker. Now, if there was an error in providing Mr. Martin's severance pay, that was not indicated. That was not told to us that somehow the rule was misappropriately applied. All we were told was that it couldn't be given other than in the aggregate, even though it was given in the specifics for Mr. Martin.

So I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, on my only point of order so far this session, that this is something that does provide an obstruction for me as a legislator, for all of us, and we rely upon not perfect information, but freedom of information to be able to get that information when it's legal and when it's requested and when it's consistent.

So I've raised this as a point of order. You might suggest that it's better framed as a matter of privilege, Mr. Speaker. There are always challenges, of course, when things are phrased in that particular way because it limits us in our ability to ask questions if there's not a—an immediate ruling, and I know for matters of privilege that yourself and previous Speakers often like to reflect on it and to consult authorities. So, if this is raised in the improper form, I would accept that admonition, but I certainly do think that it's an important point to raise and I look forward to your favourable ruling.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Acting Government House Leader): Well, first of all, I think it's very clear this is not a point of order, and it's not a point of order for a number of reasons.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, if the member's point is that there's some issue related to FIPPA requests that have been made, there is a process for that. It's the Ombudsman. In fact, I do believe that members opposite have, on occasion, gone to the Ombudsman in terms of freedom of information requests, disputes. So it's clearly not something that's within the purview of this House.

I'd say, second of all, Mr. Speaker, again, and I know it was not raised in question period in regards to any specific answer, but, again, it's quite

appropriate for members opposite to raise questions, if they wish, in question period, but I point out that answers have been given and a clear commitment has been made to provide a response which is required under legislation through FIPPA. In fact, that has been made very clear by the First Minister both inside and outside of this House, and, in fact, some of the information has already been provided.

I point out that members opposite have submitted a huge volume of FIPPA requests, and we have, Mr. Speaker—[interjection] Well—and I hope they will be equally enthusiastic in indicating that we have responded to that. In fact, we have some of the best freedom of information legislation in the province.

So it is, third of all, not obstruction. The member knows that, in fact, he even referenced the specific reference is there to obstruction. What we're dealing with here is at most a dispute over a FIPPA request. Members should know that that should be something dealt with, with the Ombudsman and, quite frankly, I'm not quite sure why the member has—as he pointed out in his only freedom of—his only point of order in this session, spent quite as much time.

And I don't know if he was looking at the clock on occasion, but when matters of order are raised, I would say that you, Mr. Speaker, would know that time is of the essence. Normally, matters of privilege, we do have a, you know, a greater opportunity and a greater necessity to provide detailed information.

So the fourth point I would raise is really, Mr. Speaker, this is really nothing more than, I would say, attempt to debate the matter, and if that's what the member wants to do, I would suggest we dispose of this point of order and move to the budget debate where the member and members opposite can talk about whatever they want.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), and I thank all honourable members for their advice on this matter, I listened very carefully to the discussion that has occurred here and I am at a loss to understand because there didn't seem to be an explanation on whether or not there was a breach of a particular rule or 'proceeding'—procedure in this House itself, so I did not note or detect that.

This is something, I believe, is a matter that the honourable member for Steinbach referenced, which appeared to be—and the term obstruction was used

with reference to the providing of information that members of the House may be seeking, which would, I believe, be more appropriately be raised as a matter of privilege and not as a point of order. So I must respectfully rule that this is, at this point, not a matter of a point of order.

* * *

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, with the greatest of respect, I challenge the ruling and ask for a recorded vote.

Mr. Speaker: The ruling of the Chair has been challenged. Just give me one moment, please.

The question before the House is: Shall the ruling of the Chair be sustained?

Voice Vote

Mr. Speaker: All those in favour of sustaining the ruling in the Chair, please signify by saying aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

Mr. Speaker: All those opposed to the motion—or the ruling of the Chair, please signify by saying nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Speaker: In the opinion of the Chair, the Ayes have it.

Recorded Vote

Mr. Goertzen: And still with the greatest of respect, Mr. Speaker, I challenge the ruling.

Mr. Speaker: We'll—a recorded vote having been requested, we'll call in the members.

The question before the House is: Shall the ruling of the Chair be sustained?

Division

A RECORDED VOTE was taken, the result being as follows:

Yeas

Allan, Allum, Altemeyer, Ashton, Bjornson, Blady, Caldwell, Chief, Crothers, Dewar, Gaudreau, Howard, Irvin-Ross, Jha, Kostyshyn, Lemieux, Mackintosh, Maloway, Marcelino (Logan), Marcelino (Tyndall Park), Melnick, Oswald, Pettersen, Robinson, Rondeau, Saran, Selby, Selinger, Swan, Wiebe, Wight.

Nays

Briese, Cullen, Driedger, Eichler, Ewasko, Friesen, Gerrard, Goertzen, Graydon, Helwer, Martin, Mitchelson, Pallister, Pedersen, Piwniuk, Schuler, Smook, Stefanson, Wishart.

Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk): Yeas 31, Nays 19.

Mr. Speaker: The ruling of the Chair has accordingly been sustained.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The hour being 12:30 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, May 8, 2015

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