

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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The Honourable Daryl Reid
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

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<i>Vacant</i>	Southdale	—

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, November 5, 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.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if I might seek leave of the House to do a third reading of public bills between 10 and 11 a.m. this morning, mainly Bill 70 and Bill 27. And I'd also seek leave of the House to divide those bills into half-hour portions, that is, Bill 70 to be dealt with between 10 and 10:30 and Bill 27 to be dealt with between 10:30 and 11.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to go directly to concurrence and third readings of public Bill 70 and Bill 27, with the understanding that the debate on these bills will be divided into half-hour segments for each? [*Agreed*]

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

CONCURRENCE AND THIRD READINGS

Bill 70—The Real Estate Services Act

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Mineral Resources): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Tourism and multi other departments, that Bill 70, The Real Estate Services Act; Loi sur les services immobiliers, reported from the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development, be concurred and then be now read for a third time and passed.

Motion presented.

Mr. Speaker: Any debate?

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection): Good

morning, Mr. Speaker. Good morning to everyone in the Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, buying a condo or a house is the biggest investment most families will ever make, and all of us in the Chamber have made that leap at some point and many of us are now watching our children—and a few, our grandchildren—buying homes.

Mr. Speaker, our government wants to ensure that the right legislation is in place to protect Manitobans buying or selling their home, and this legislation will ensure that families are protected and that real estate agents are operating on a level playing field. The bill replaces The Real Estate Brokers Act. This is legislation was written over 60 years ago. Carrier pigeons were still delivering mail; Wells Fargo horse people were still delivering mail. It's long time due, and I know many in this House certainly want to make sure that we modernize the act and also protect consumers.

Most importantly, part of this bill talks about a new code of conduct for many of the real estate—or people in the real estate business. And our government held public consultations without—with—and I'm sure it's more now, but at least to the point where the legislation was introduced, 500, at least 500 Manitobans made their comments known.

A lot of the comments varied, Mr. Speaker, from the selling and from the buying perspective. There are still many Manitobans who would want us to go farther, not only increasing, for example, the fines that would be levied as a result of penalties on agents violating the act. Fines for agents will be increased from \$1,000 maximum to a maximum of \$100,000, and we are adding the prospect of jail time for agents who breach the act more seriously.

So, Mr. Speaker, there are many suggestions coming in from different individuals in the province wanting to talk about government looking at, for example, how real estate agents conduct themselves. Not only will this be addressed by a code of conduct that's recognized around the country and throughout Canada, but also the suggestions that are being made are: should real estate agents, for example, be required to show a seller or buyer the amount of time they're actually putting in? I mean, lawyers do it. Engineers do it. Many other professionals do it,

where, if they're going to be billing you, they're going to be showing you the hours and what they've done actually to sell your home or to assist you in buying your home. What kind of ads have they put out? How much money have they expended? What kind of costs have they incurred as a result?

So many—a lot of the discussion's been going around, around the percentage of what a real estate agent should get. And so, Mr. Speaker, the market generally addresses that, whether it should be 5 per cent, 2 per cent, 4 per cent. And what was made absolutely clear, the consultations between the Securities Commission and the Real Estate Association was that—and I don't think a lot of Manitobans realize this—is that a—that fee, that percentage fee is negotiable. There isn't anything chiselled in stone that says it has to be 6 per cent or 5 per cent or 4 per cent. It's up to the client or up to the homeowner or the seller and/or the buyer to negotiate that with their agent. A lot of people don't know that.

So many suggestions have been raised to us, have been raised about what should be done with regard to the percentage, what agents should get and what should be the requirements on those agents when they are buying or selling a home on behalf of a Manitoban.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I just want to conclude by saying, and thank you for allowing me to say a few words and put it on the record, that our government is extremely pleased to be bringing forward this legislation. Over 60 years since any changes have been made, substantial changes made to the real estate act, and I know as a government, we have made many changes on the consumer protection side.

Opposition, and I don't want to get too political about this, but the Opposition's actually voted against some of our consumer protection legislation, which is a little disheartening, and so I just want to say in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, is that we don't call a consumer protection red tape. We feel that it's really ensuring and helping make sure that families get a fair deal and that they've been, you know, that those that have been impacted by unethical companies or shady operators, this government wants to be on Manitobans' side to make sure they get what they paid for. And it's really important, I believe, that everyone in this House support it.

* (10:10)

So, with that, I just want to say thank you very much for allowing me to say a few words, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): Good morning to you.

I, too, wish to put some comments on the record in regards to this piece of legislation called Bill 70. And, Mr. Speaker, I want to deal with more of the intent of the bill and the kinds of problems that I have and the PC caucus has and I think these are serious issues. It's a concern that I have, certainly as an individual who's been here for some time and I've seen a lot of legislation being passed, and I think we should be very cautious as we go through this legislative process in the kind of legislation we put forward.

And, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that this is not the first time we've seen legislation come forward where the bill has seizure powers in it. And it's not that we're against the ability for civil servants or anybody else that's been designated by the government, whether it's law enforcement or anybody else, to have seizure powers. What our concern is is that there should always be oversight, that we've seen throughout history, often rights are not taken away overnight. Often, rights are taken away piecemeal, and it—it's sort of that—you know, how do you boil a frog? You put him in a cold pot of water and you slowly turn up the heat until they realize it's too late and then they're done. And that's this kind of legislation, that the heat keeps being turned up and, in a sense, people don't understand that their rights are being eroded.

And I would suggest that, as a premise, we should always have that any entry into a premise and seizure of documents must be done with a warrant or oversight by a judge. In fact, Mr. Speaker, when the bill went through committee, we put forward an amendment and the amendment did not take away anything on the intent of the bill. The amendment did not address what the bill necessarily was supposed to do. That was not what we were quibbling about. What we were dealing with was, within the bill, we would like to see a section put in that said search warrant. And I just want to read one caption off it, and it says: On application by an investigator, a justice may issue a warrant if he or she is satisfied by the information on oath that there are reasonable grounds to believe that, and then the amendment continues and lays that out.

Mr. Speaker, this isn't the first piece of legislation we've seen like this. In fact, we have seen

multiple bills that have come forward, and I would caution members opposite and all members of this Legislature that we be very, very careful that we don't lose our rights piecemeal, little by little. We should protect the rights of everyone. And I would suggest to all members of this Chamber, by passing this piece of legislation the way it is, doesn't mean we will wake up in a week or two weeks or a month and find that our roads—our rights have been eroded.

But rather, what we should be doing is looking into the future, Mr. Speaker. What will happen with future governments? Is this now going to be a pattern that we will allow individuals to enter premises without a warrant and to seize documents, to seize items out of a business without any oversight? What is that going to do in the long run for us as individuals who love our democracy, who respect our rights and want to make sure that there are checks and balances in society?

This bill strips away that check and balance, Mr. Speaker. Fact, if you go to the Law Courts building, and every time I drive into work, I come down Broadway and there's that statue on top of the Law Courts building of Lady Justice. And, if you notice, Lady Justice is blindfolded and has a scale to make sure that the decisions being made by the courts are weighed on their merits, and Lady Justice or the court system does not look at who you are, what you are.

And this, by the way, Mr. Speaker, actually takes away that right to go in front of an impartial individual who is not there, no fear or favour, is—doesn't have to go up for re-election, can make decisions. Often, I disagree with some of the decisions; often, others disagree with the decisions, but we understand that we need that impartial judiciary.

And that's why this bill is so troubling is it strips out that component, that individuals are not protected and, in the long run, this is dangerous for us as individuals. For those of us who believe in fundamental rights, it is a small amendment but it is huge when it comes down to protecting who we are and what we stand for.

Mr. Speaker, I would say that we have to be far more vigilant when it comes to rights. And, if you look at history, tyrants—in most part, tyrants got in because they ate away piecemeal at rights, and individuals did not realize what was happening to them. And I would suggest to members opposite, do not allow this to be a pattern. Do not allow this to

continue. Make the proper amendment to it that you have to go in front of a judge and get a sign-off on the warrant because it's not this government that, more than likely, will abuse it, and it won't be the next, and probably not the next or the one after that but, somewhere down the line, there can be this abuse. And when we look back from that point and we look back, it will come down to these kinds of legislation because we know that there is precedent-setting. One legislation set a precedent and other jurisdictions will follow and future governments will follow.

And I can imagine there might be a time when the—as early as April the 19th of next year that members opposite will be sitting in the opposite benches and then they will be the ones looking at this legislation and their words will come back to haunt them, the fact that they stood and voted down an amendment that was reasonable, did not take away the intent of the legislation, did not address the intent of the legislation but was purely there to protect individuals from abuse.

And we know that governments have a lot of power. In fact, I would suggest to members in this Chamber, most people across this province, most people in democracies have no idea how much power even a democratically elected body has, and we should always be vigilant. We should always be watching out for what our governments are doing to make sure that our rights are protected. And I am a little perturbed, Mr. Speaker, that we've not seen individuals in society pick up on this. You know, where are there Libertarians who are looking out for rights? Even within the Democratic Party, there has always been a very strong tradition of making sure that rights are not being subjugated, that rights are not being taken away; and here it is, a New Democratic Party putting this forward.

I would suggest to the minister and the members, we would be more than willing to give leave to address, one more time, this particular issue and look at an amendment. I know we would give leave one hundred per cent to include this. But, Mr. Speaker, this has been a pattern. This has come now on multiple bills, bill after bill after bill, where public servants or those designated by government can enter a premises, can seize documents, can seize computers, can seize financial statements, can seize bank books and all the rest of it and have absolutely zero oversight, and that's a problem. It should be a warning signal for all of us that love our democracy, for all of us that stand up for individual rights, that

we want the protection of rights to make sure that there are some kind of oversight. We need it as a legislative body. It is necessary for us to have it.

And I would suggest to members opposite that they consider one more time. We'd be more than willing to give leave to agree to an amendment. If needed be, we would be more than happy to help them with that. We would strongly recommend to members opposite: Do the right thing. Make sure that you don't start setting a precedent which, alas, Mr. Speaker, has already been set. That precedent is already there but that we stop that precedent; that we break that chain and we say to future governments, no more. No more will we tolerate that you can enter premises and have no oversight. And that we take a stand, as a legislative body, against it.

* (10:20)

And I know that currently there's no fear and we believe we have all the rights in the world and we have a right to our democracy and right to a vote and right to be who we are and right to have everything. Mr. Speaker, my father's family—who had a right to their property, and had a right to their businesses, and had a right to their wealth—one morning, the Russian soldiers walked into their home and said get out, and that was the end of their rights.

And, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest we always, always protect our freedoms and our democracy. And I would strongly once more recommend—and I know I've said this for the third time—please to the government, do the right thing. Amend this that anybody entering a premises that wants to seize documents, that wants to seize items out of a business, that they need the oversight. They must go in front of a judiciary and they must make their case and then get a search warrant.

Mr. Speaker, with those comments, I look forward to seeing where we go from here on with this bill. Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I have a few comments on Bill 70, which has taken a long time to get this far, being introduced many, many months ago for the first time.

I have some concerns about this legislation and some of those have been already clearly outlined by the MLA for St. Paul. Mr. Speaker, there are clearly some concerns and some issues about this bill. However, I have listened carefully to what was said at committee and considered the comments that were made at the committee stage.

I look, for example, and I will quote Mr. Brian Collie of the Manitoba Real Estate Association, who comments that there is a real recognition for modernization of this legislation, that the industry recognizes and appreciates the need for new legislation and has been asking for it for many years. This legislation will help to ensure continuing public confidence in buying—in the buying and selling process and in the services that real estate registrants provide. He comments specifically that he welcomes the changes and embraces the intent and purpose of the legislation.

But that being said, there are clearly some concerns that were raised, not just by Mr. Collie but by a number of the other presenters. One of the things that Mr. Collie had remarked about and was a subject of some discussion, and he said if you're a consumer and you're soliciting services from a real estate registrant, you should know what those services are going to be, and what services are promised, and what they're going to cost you. Our association has absolutely no problem with that concept going forward.

Mr. David Powell, also with the WinnipegREALTORS, said positive things about the direction of Bill 70 proposing a code of conduct for all registrants, but Mr. Powell had a whole series of concerns which he raised, and I think a number of these are quite legitimate.

One of the comments that he talked about was the concern about the proposal to prohibit certain types of remuneration. He says, and I quote, specifically WinnipegREALTORS were concerned about commission caps for real estate services. It did happen in the media that it came out, and we're glad to see the minister's office responded immediately and that this was not an attempt to catch cap commissions and reaffirmed by our association.

Now, I put this on the record that the minister has said that this isn't the objective. I think it warrants very close watching and I'm sure the members of the Real Estate Association will be watching this legislation and how it actually works very, very carefully because of the number of legitimate concerns.

I had raised an issue at the committee stage saying one of the potential unintended consequences—that is, you could have the elimination of the claim for independent contractor business model—and I asked have you received sufficient assurances that this would not happen or is this still a

concern. And Mr. Powell replied, once again, our level of assurance is in the meat and potatoes of the regulation. And, he says, and I feel I'm quite confident that we will be, in part, at least have a voice in the regulation and I think if our leadership in the industry has a voice in the regulation, then we'll be satisfied.

There are clearly concerns here, as one can understand, given Mr. Powell's words. There are some critical, very critical aspects of the regulations which are important and it will be important that the government works closely with the Manitoba realtors in this respect.

There was Mr. Stewart Elston who says, I'm alarmed when I see in Bill 70 that, through regulations, the government can decide what is an acceptable commission and what is not.

Again, I believe a lot of this will depend on having wise regulations and so I'm prepared today to support this legislation but I wanted to very carefully outline a number of concerns before this passes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): I just want to make a couple of comments on Bill 70. Certainly, some of the concerns have been outlined here this morning, and I appreciate the comments from the members this morning and, certainly, the comments that were made in committee over this piece of legislation as well.

Mr. Speaker, I had an opportunity to act as a real estate broker for a few years a few years ago. And it was an interesting time, obviously, dealing with people and, certainly, helping people. And I have a lot of respect for the good work that the people in the real estate industry do, and we certainly support their endeavours.

But, Mr. Speaker, our concern with Bill 70 lies in some of the authority that the government is giving themselves. And this is a—we've seen this in a series of bills in the guise of being consumer bills. And, certainly, we have concerns about the power that the government has given themselves in some of these consumer bills, if you will. And that really is the concern we have with this piece of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, that's why—you know, obviously, there are some good things in this legislation that the realtors agree with. But, obviously, there's also concerns there. And, certainly, moving forward, we will be watching with interest how this legislation impacts real estate brokers and also how some of this

consumer legislation has impacted consumers and will impact consumers and the business community into the future.

So, clearly, we have some issues with Bill 70 going forward, and I just wanted to make those comments this morning, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is there any further debate on this matter?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Speaker: Question for the House is concurrence and third reading of Bill 70, The Real Estate Services Act.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

Mr. Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please signify by saying aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

Mr. Speaker: All those opposed to the motion will please signify by saying nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

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

* * *

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I'm requesting a recorded vote on Bill 70, but I'm also seeking leave of the House to have the bill after debate on Bill 27, so approximately at 10:55.

Mr. Speaker: So a recorded vote has been requested but asked that it be deferred until 10:55 this morning. Is that agreed? [*Agreed*]

Bill 27—The Veterinary Medical Amendment Act

Mr. Speaker: We'll now move on to concurrence and third reading of Bill 27, The Veterinary Medical Amendment Act.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Mineral Resources): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Tourism and responsible for the gaming and lotteries, that Bill 27, The Veterinary Medical Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur la

médecine vétérinaire, as amended and reported from the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development, be concurred in and be now read for a third time and passed.

Motion presented.

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection): I'd like to start off by thanking all those who came out and spoke to this bill the other night at committee and I would like to thank the Manitoba Veterinary Medical Association and the Manitoba Animal Health Technologists Association and all the others who came to speak on the bill.

* (10:30)

I know that department staff in Agriculture had been working with both the MVMA and the MAHTA on this bill, and I'm glad both organizations were there to put their thoughts on the record.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will allow pet owners to be guaranteed clear upfront pricing when they visit their vet. Any pet owner knows how important their pets are in their lives. It's remarkable how quickly a pet can become a part of one's family. Taking your pet to the vet for surgery, calling your local vet to help your farm animals or even something as simple as a checkup can be stressful. The last thing you want to worry about is facing extra or unexpected charges after the fact. That's why I'm glad that we're bringing in this legislation amending The Veterinary Medical Act to ensure pet owners get clear upfront pricing for veterinary care.

Veterinarians, veterinaries are the professionals that provide life-saving animal care, and we know the vast majority already provide clear upfront pricing to their clients. This new legislation means all Manitoba vet clinics will follow this practice.

And, Mr. Speaker, at committee we discussed and talked a little bit about the complaints that come in. And when complaints come in to the Consumer Protection branch, those complaints are forwarded to the veterinary association automatically so they can deal with those issues with their members.

The legislation will not only help pet owners, but it'll also modernize and strengthen the regulatory role of the Manitoba Veterinary Medical Association. Mr. Speaker, The Veterinary Medical Act will improve public protection by adding public representation to the MVMA council, as well as strengthening the complaints and disciplinary

process. It will also increase fines for breaching the act, allow veterinarians to incorporate their practice and better recognize the role of animal health technologists and update their titles to veterinary technologists. On behalf of myself and the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, I'd like to thank the MVMA and the MAHTA for their advice and collaboration on this legislation.

Our government has a strong record on consumer protection, from fair cellphone contracts to upfront pricing for cars and car repairs to protecting your home and new home warranties. We brought in legislation that keeps life affordable for all Manitobans.

And, Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, when both associations came to committee—and we should be very proud of our committee process. We're one of, I understand, two provinces—we were the first and only at one time; I understand there may be two now—that allow the public to come forward and give their comments on whatever bills are before us as members of this legislature.

But—so what we did, a recommendation that both organizations came to us with saying they have to work through their bylaws, so what we did is we extended them a six-month time period to ensure they get all their bylaws in place, Mr. Speaker, and that's something that we accommodated them with bringing forward an amendment that night.

So the process does work. May not be perfect, but it's the best we have, I think, in Canada. And the proof was coming together with those that are associated with this industry to be able to make sure that it's going forward in a way that's very, very positive for all.

So with that, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): Until we got into committee, we probably had less concern about this legislation until we got to committee and then realized that, once again, we have a minister who didn't do his due diligence, which is surprising because the government has 40,000 public civil servants, professional individuals who they can call on to help them with legislation, with vetting the individuals, the different groups that are covered by this. We found out that the work hadn't been done, and there is a pattern with this minister and his approach to legislation and the way he vets things.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, there's a newspaper article from 2013 where he refers to—this is out of the

Winnipeg Free Press, 7th–10th of 2013, where the minister referred to opponents of what he was trying to do as howling coyotes. And he has travelled this province on numerous occasions and he seems to be very frustrated very quickly when it comes to anybody who opposes anything he does.

And probably what he should do is just do his job better. It's not like this is his first rodeo, Mr. Speaker. In fact, he's been around for considerable amount of time. He should know how this is supposed to be done and, in fact, has not done his job appropriately.

We got into committee and we found out that there were organizations and individuals who were not consulted. And, again, the government has at their disposal all kinds of professionals: mediators, groups who can bring individuals together and try to find common ground. He had all of this at disposal, but instead the minister waited for committee to find out what the various organizations thought about the legislation.

By and large, the individuals were less concerned about the legislation and more about the process, which, coming from this minister, no surprise. They weren't consulted; they didn't know what was going to happen. In fact, Mr. Speaker, if I could indulge the Legislature, I would like to refer to some of the presentations that were made at committee.

In fact, there was one by Cindy Sontag; she's the current president-elect for the Manitoba Animal Health Technologists Association, or MAHTA. And, Mr. Speaker, in her presentation she said, and I quote directly: Our communication with the government has been very inconsistent over the past couple of months. We feel that Keir Johnson was a great asset to how technologists were appropriately represented with the amendments of the act during the latest process of trying to find a resolution within details of the MOU. We have had very little support and/or communication from the government. That is likely a result of changing of staffing positions within the MAFRD office, but until yesterday afternoon, we weren't given the opportunity to speak to our situation concerns. We feel this may have added to lack of resolution, as in the past Keir gave us great direction, suggestions to assist our staff and volunteers to identify tools to come to certain agreements. Unquote.

And again, the important part is here, Mr. Speaker, that over the fat—past few months,

communication with the government was inconsistent. And we all read newspapers and know that there were issues that were distracting members of the NDP government. We know what was going on; we could read it splashed on the cover of the newspapers and on TV.

But that still doesn't mean that, if legislation is going through the process, that there shouldn't be a consultation. The minister could've directed his staff. He could have told the public service, go and speak to the organizations, find out what the concerns are, allay their concerns, deal with them and come back and let's see what we can put forward. This shouldn't be about just putting legislation through. We should be putting legislation through that all sides can agree to, or at least to have been properly dealt with.

Fact, I'd like to read—and these are all documents that were presented at committee, but if members would like, I could table them again if they so would like to. There's the—there was a presentation done by Jody Lynn Carrick, president, Registered Veterinary Technologists and Technicians of Canada. And in it, she says, and I quote directly from the document: As proposed, the current document allows one profession, that of veterinarian to regulate another profession, that of veterinary technologist. While both professions often work 'aslongside' one another within veterinary medicine, they're in fact distinct, unique from one another. It is our opinion that by having the Manitoba Veterinary Medical Association govern RVTs in Manitoba, a potential conflict of interest emerges. Such conflict can be managed by continue to have MA—AH technologists or MAHTA remain an integral part of the registration process. And she goes on and on and on, and talks about how—that she was not consulted, that here are two organizations that clearly haven't gotten to some kind of common ground, to some kind of agreement with the legislation.

And, Mr. Speaker, there—I understand there are times when you can't get everybody to agree, and government still must do what they think is best. But I still believe the government owed the organizations at least the opportunity to state their case, to state it fully, to be part of the process and benefit was—still wasn't to their liking. That's the way this system works. However, the fact that they weren't part of it and weren't properly consulted—in fact, I'd like to move on.

And there was a email sent to—or a letter, sorry, and this was presented at committee to

Cindy Sontag, and it was sent by—want to make sure I get this right—by Dr. Roxane Neufeld, who is the president on behalf of MVMA council. And it states: This is an unfortunate—and I'm quoting directly, Mr. Speaker—this is an unfortunate outcome, as this was not MVMA's council's intent. The MVMA council was respectfully asking for additional time so it could respond in a full and clear manner. The MVMA council needed and still needs time to complete a comprehensive review of the organization of the MVMA, its functions and duties. Currently, an implementation plan is being developed.

* (10:40)

And I understand, at committee, the minister did put forward an amendment to give more time, and my question would be to the minister. Why is it that he and the government would have to show up at committee and then figure out that an organization needed more time? Is that not what the public service is there for? Is that not what the minister's department is there for? Is that not why the minister should be showing leadership on this legislation and, ahead of time, be aware that there was a need for more time? Why is it that we have to wait for committee for organizations to come forward and show that they were not part of the process?

In fact, there's another document. This was from Cindy Sontag of MAHTA, and it was written to Doxanne—to Dr. Roxane Neufeld, and she said: Thank you for your response. MAHTA still has concerns with respect to the roles and responsibilities that our two associations as it pertains to animal health technologists. Is it our hope and goal to find clarity on this prior to the committee reading phase, as well as hope that our two associations can support one another when we have the opportunity to address the government.

Well, that didn't happen, Mr. Speaker. How unfortunate. And this isn't the first time the government's done this. Over the years they have repeatedly made this mistake. There was one time—a bill that came forward between the architects and engineers, and the member for St. Vital (Ms. Allan) and I sat in that committee. It was a painful process, and I recommended to the then-minister of Labour, the member for St. Vital that, maybe, committee should be suspended and proper consultations be established. And, actually, we did that. We suspended the committee for, I believe it was about half an hour, for the public servants to take the two

organizations outside and see if they couldn't find some common ground. Needless to say, that kind of leadership wasn't shown by this minister, unfortunately. But, again, this bill was not properly vetted.

I would like to read one more document, Mr. Speaker. And it's—it was written by Andrea Lear, MVMA executive director—Cindy Sontag, and it says, I understand—and I quote directly: Hello Cindy, I understand, through Dr. Sheridan, that a concern regarding an information request would—put forward to him during the last MAHTA board meeting. After this concern was brought to his attention, he contacted me for clarification as he was unaware of this request. Please find my explanation below, as well as potential next steps in this matter.

That was written October 15th, 2015, which was right before we went to committee. Again, Mr. Speaker, what we're trying to do is lay out a pattern whereby this bill was not appropriately vetted. It did not go the appropriate channels. We understand that the government did have their civil war, we understand that they had difficulties within caucus and may still have difficulties within caucus. But, in the end, their responsibility is to this—to the people of Manitoba that legislation that is brought forward is properly written, is properly vetted. More importantly—or, just as important, not more importantly, that when legislation comes to be voted, that it has some degree of unanimity from the organizations that are covered off or, at least, that they were properly consulted.

I would say to the minister it was a failure on his part. He failed in his leadership duties as a minister. He should have properly vetted this. This is something that has happened before and we would say to the minister that it is very unfortunate that organizations—professionals have to come in front of a legislative committee and start indicating their displeasure of the process and start negotiating in front of legislative committees, and start advocating for their organization. And, like the one email said, Mr. Speaker, that their wish was that they would come—I'm sorry, it was in a letter, it is our—and I quote again: it is our hope and goal to find clarity on this prior to the committee reading phase, as well as hope that our two associations can support one another when we have the opportunity to address government.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that did not happen. That was not the case and it should have been. There

should have been some kind of unanimity, and not bring organizations in front of a committee and then have them start negotiating and saying things that, probably, are best said in a boardroom of some kind and not put on the record in Hansard, and not done in front of legislators. And that I lay directly at the feet of this minister. He should have done his job. He should have been focused on his duties here. And if he didn't have the time, if he was too preoccupied with the internal machinations with a civil war going on in the NDP, then this piece of legislation should have been held and he should have done his job appropriately. He should've done his job right.

And when he brought this legislation forward, it should have been properly vetted. And, Mr. Speaker, this is a very unfortunate—and we will not be supporting this legislation. It should not be brought forward until it is properly vetted, and that, at least, even if you don't get agreement, but at least all the organizations have had an opportunity to have their say.

Thank you for the opportunity to put some thoughts on the record.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I want to say a few words about Bill 27. First of all, I'm a strong supporter of pets and pet owners, and I want to give credit to the work that the veterinarians of our province provide and also to the contributions of those who are the Manitoba animal health technologists. We heard the tremendous variety of work that the Manitoba animal health technologists do, and they need to be complimented for their efforts.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, I believe that the act as it's been presented has some significant issues, and I'm not ready to support it at this time. I believe it needs to go back for some more work. And I'll explain the reasons why.

We had a—or I had a letter from Mr.—Dr. James Broughton. He says: Most veterinarians, including myself, will discount fees or waive them completely to make sure we are within the costs expected by the owner. My concern is that this legislation, first of all, paints our profession as being dishonest and requiring government oversight. Secondly, it does not allow for situations where a patient's treatment plan changes dramatically and we cannot contact the owner to approve any new fees, leaving the patient to suffer or worse because the legislation effectively ties our hands before proceeding without an owner's consent.

The concern that Dr. Broughton raised, which was that it painted veterinarians as somehow being dishonest, I had the opportunity to ask the minister, and I quote: I would ask the minister if he'd explain what—was there a specific instance of a specific problem which initiated this bill? The minister said, not so much; there's been huge amounts of complaints. In fact, the minister didn't even bring forward one specific instance of a concern.

And so what we heard from others is that problems are rare, and that's in part because, as Dr. Broughton explained, many veterinarians bend over backwards to work closely with and to help pet owners, and they are very concerned about their pets.

I would take this a little bit further and put on the record some more from Dr. Broughton. He tells me: There can be situations where during the investigation of the problem something is uncovered that dramatically affects not only the course of treatment but the cost. In cases such as these, every effort is made to contact the owner and discuss the new developments. But while we are waiting to get approval of a new updated estimate from the owner, the animal will suffer. Or what if the owner declines the updated estimate? Are we as veterinarians, who took an oath to relieve animal suffering, to sit back and do nothing or absorb the cost of the treatment ourselves? Unfortunately, there are often times when the owner cannot be reached quickly and we as veterinarians must make what we feel is the best choice for the patient, the animal.

Now with this new legislation in place, we as health-care providers will have our hands tied and be faced with either proceeding with a necessary but potentially expensive treatment at the risk of not getting paid for it or letting the animal suffer further or even die. I believe that the government should have addressed this much more carefully because I think it is a significant issue. Cost to owners will increase as veterinary hospitals and staff will need to allow more time because of the preparation of the mandatory estimates, and they will have no choice but to pass on the cost of these added activities to the consumer.

* (10:50)

The legislation will add to difficulties in recruiting veterinarians in Manitoba. I think this is a significant problem as we have a shortfall of veterinarians, so that I think that there are concerns with the way this legislation has come forward which need to be addressed.

It was also apparent that there is not yet agreement between the two associations which have a very important role and are affected by this legislation. The Manitoba Veterinary Medical Association and the Manitoba Animal Health Technology Association include, indeed, as we heard from the—Cindy Sontag, the MAHTA president-elect. She said in her presentation at the committee stage: Our communication with the government has been very inconsistent over the past couple of months. We have had very little support and/or communication from the government.

I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that it would be highly advisable for this legislation to not be passed today, but to go back and have some more work and get better working agreement between the Manitoba Health Technology Association and the Manitoba Veterinary Medical Association so that this can move forward in a more congenial atmosphere.

So, Mr. Speaker, as I have said, I will not be supporting this legislation because I don't believe it's right for now. It should go back and should have some more work.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Any further debate on this matter?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Speaker: House is ready for the question.

The question before the House is concurrence and third reading of Bill 27, The Veterinary Medical Amendment Act.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

Mr. Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please signify by saying aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

Mr. Speaker: All those opposed to the motion will please signify by saying nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Speaker: Opinion of the Chair, the Ayes have it.

Recorded Vote

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): Recorded vote, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Recorded vote having been requested, and we'll call in the members.

Order, please. The question before the House is concurrence and third reading of Bill 27, The Veterinary Medical Amendment Act.

Division

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

Yeas

Allan, Altemeyer, Ashton, Braun, Caldwell, Chief, Chomiak, Crothers, Gaudreau, Irvin-Ross, Jha, Kostyshyn, Lathlin, Lemieux, Mackintosh, Maloway, Marcelino (Logan), Marcelino (Tyndall Park), Nevakshonoff, Oswald, Pettersen, Robinson, Rondeau, Saran, Selinger, Struthers, Swan, Wiebe, Wight.

Nays

Briese, Cullen, Eichler, Ewasko, Friesen, Gerrard, Goertzen, Helwer, Pallister, Pedersen, Pivniuk, Schuler, Smook, Stefanson.

Deputy Clerk (Mr. Rick Yarish): Yeas 29, Nays 14.

Mr. Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Bill 70—The Real Estate Services Act (Continued)

Recorded Vote

Mr. Speaker: Now, as previously agreed, we'll call for a vote concurrence and third reading of Bill 70, The Real Estate Services Act.

Call in the members.

Division

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

Yeas

Allan, Altemeyer, Ashton, Braun, Caldwell, Chief, Chomiak, Crothers, Gaudreau, Gerrard, Irvin-Ross, Jha, Kostyshyn, Lathlin, Lemieux, Mackintosh, Maloway, Marcelino (Logan), Marcelino (Tyndall Park), Nevakshonoff, Oswald, Pettersen, Robinson, Rondeau, Saran, Selinger, Struthers, Swan, Wiebe, Wight.

Nays

Briese, Cullen, Eichler, Ewasko, Friesen, Graydon, Helwer, Martin, Pallister, Pedersen, Piwniuk, Schuler, Smook, Stefanson.

Deputy Clerk: Yeas 30, Nays 14.

Mr. Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**RESOLUTIONS****Res. 19—Manitoba Hydro Rate Hikes
Harming Manitoba Families**

Mr. Speaker: The hour being past 11 a.m., it is now time for private members' resolutions, and the resolution under consideration this morning is entitled Manitoba Hydro Rate Hikes Harming Manitoba Families, sponsored by the honourable member for Lakeside.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I move, seconded by the member from La Verendrye,

WHEREAS residential electricity rates have increased 27 per cent, considerably more than double the rate of inflation since the member from St. Boniface became Premier; and

WHEREAS electricity rates are expected to double over the next 20 years to annual increases of 4 per cent; and

WHEREAS the Public Utilities Board has expressed concerns about potentially larger than anticipated costs at Manitoba Hydro which could result in the possibility of more rate increases in the future.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba acknowledge that these rate hikes compound the financial hardship on Manitoba families imposed by the provincial government through tax and fee increases such as the 2012 broadening and deepening of the provincial sales tax and the 2013 hike of the provincial sales tax from 7 to 8 per cent.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable member for Lakeside, seconded by the honourable member for La Verendrye (Mr. Smook),

WHEREAS residential electricity rates have increased by—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense? Dispense.

Is it the pleasure of the House to consider the resolution as printed in today's Order Paper? [Agreed]

WHEREAS residential electricity rates have increased by 27%, considerably more than double the rate of inflation since the Member for St. Boniface became Premier; and

WHEREAS electricity rates are expected to double over the next 20 years due to annual increases of 4%; and

WHEREAS the Public Utilities Board has expressed concerns about potentially larger than anticipated costs at Manitoba Hydro which could result in the possibility of more rate increases in the future.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba acknowledge that these rate hikes compound the financial hardship on Manitoba families imposed by the Provincial Government through tax and fee increases such as the 2012 broadening and deepening of the Provincial Sales Tax and the 2013 hiking of the Provincial Sales Tax from seven to eight per cent.

Mr. Eichler: Before I start, I noticed the minister got the phone call this morning or maybe he has a camera in my apartment or something and figured out how I dressed today. So I'm glad he's onside, and he'll probably want to—maybe he should have seconded the motion, but we'll see how he fares with this. But, certainly, I know we didn't discuss that yesterday or today, but it's good to see the minister dressed alike.

But, Mr. Speaker, in response to what I want to talk about here this morning in regards to the hydro rates, what this resolution basically boils down to is that we've seen nearly 30 per cent rate increases since this member from St. Boniface has taken power, something we hadn't seen in decades in years before.

What we've also seen is that the impact of the hydro expansion and the upgrades that's being brought forward by this government is \$34 billion, and that is substantial. That's coming out of every Manitoban's pockets. That represents \$27,000 for every man, woman and child in the province of Manitoba, Mr. Speaker. It's an investment larger than the original costs of all hydro projects and proper process capital assets up until this recent expansion. And we know from the hearings with the PUB when the Province brought this in and they went to have its last rate increase, what we saw was that the PUB was

very cautious, very concerned, and what we learned from those hearings is that over the next 20 years we're going to see increases of 4 per cent every year, every year, every year for the next 20 to 30 years.

What we'll see is that Manitobans will be hit hard by these hydro rates. What we've seen to date is that the rate increases I said earlier is nearly 30 per cent. The rate increases that we're talking about is going to be a huge impact on the poor, the low-income families. What this increase is—really boils down is more of a backdoor tax on all Manitobans, of which they're going to have to pick up the slack here, as we see going forward.

Since 2012, \$100 million out of the budgets of families; this has been taken out of the pockets because of the rate hikes. That's a significant amount of money, \$100 million since 2012. What we'll also see is that this will also increase the debt of Manitoba Hydro again, which Manitobans are going to have to pick up the costs for that in order to pay for the interest cost servicing the debt, and we will see that, again, impact a large number—a large number—of lower income and middle-income families that they'll be able to have less money to spend on other things.

We know that a number of families are struggling, and this will impact not only businesses that want to come and have a look at possibly coming to Manitoba. They're going to take a second look and say, can we afford to move into Manitoba Hydro? I know, recently I met with a large number of the—number of businesses represented that use a larger number of kilowatts per hour. They are to the point now where they said when they came to Manitoba and invested in Manitoba in jobs and business growth here, Manitoba was the cheapest. We're not the cheapest no more. Not by far.

What we're seeing is that the hydro rates have increased, increased, as I said earlier, 30 per cent since 2009. The No. 1 issue that these businesses have is not only the payroll tax, but the costs they have to pay for hydro. Well, will that put them at a competitive advantage? The only advantage that they have is the high US dollar. *[interjection]* And I know the member from Swan River's chirping away over there, saying that we want to privatize Manitoba Hydro. Not at all. We're going to save Manitoba Hydro. They're the ones, on that side of the House, that are bankrupting—bankrupting—Manitoba Hydro. This Bipole III that they propose, they can't find one

expert to stand up with them and say this is a good deal.

The member from Swan River's chirping away that we're going to privatize it. What he should be doing is focusing on that good farmland that they're going right through, the best farmland in the country. Where's he been? We've brought up several questions about, not only clubroot, we brought up disease control, prevention, and what has the member from Swan River done? Nothing. Nothing, nada, squat.

We're embarrassed by what this minister has done. So, no, we're not going to privatize Manitoba Hydro, we'll make that very, very clear. And I know the member knows that. He just wants to chirp and have something on the record. And we'll see if he's going to put something on the record. I hope that he does, and he's going to say that we will stand up for those farmers that had their land taken, had their land expropriated, the first time, the first time in history, has Manitoba Hydro went out and expropriated property. Shame on this government. They did it through an order-in-council, through an order-in-council they decided, in the dark of the night that they would come out and expropriate all this farmland. What a way to deal with the public.

The farmers have asked for meetings and they've been in here, and I know the member for Midland (Mr. Pedersen) has had several meetings with them. I've been to meetings with them as well. And I know that they don't feel their voices have been heard. And they don't have a government that's listening to them.

And we're hoping, we're hoping that the reality will sit in for this government and they will change their mind. They had an option. In fact, all the experts, even Manitoba Hydro, said very clearly, let's go down the east side. We're losing so much in hydro loss just for this extra 400 kilometres of line loss that would make a substantial difference to the overall profit and the rate increases that Manitobans are going to have to face.

* (11:10)

So we're hoping—we're hoping—that the government will support this. We know, in all likelihood, they probably will not. It would be admitting—admitting—but what—that's the first thing into—to making things better is admitting you made a mistake, Mr. Speaker. We know that sometimes when we make decisions, we don't do the research that we should, and, obviously, this is something

that's happened. And in regards to the member from Dawson Trail, I've had a number of calls from his area as well, and he hasn't been returning calls to his constituents. He hasn't been standing up for them with this—the transmission line down through Wisconsin and Minnesota. I mean, I can't understand why a member—a member—would want to not represent his constituents, stand up for what they believe in, stand up for what he's being told, but, obviously, what they're not wanting to do is listen to Manitobans.

And I know that—we were down there just the other night at a meeting, and I know that I had 10 people come up to me and say, I just can't reach my MLA—I cannot reach my MLA. He doesn't want to talk to me about this transmission line. So I'll tell you what I'm going to do, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to have him come down to my office. I've got the phone numbers of every member that I talked to. I'll help him; I'll dial the numbers for him. We'll even put it on speakerphone so that I could give him a little advice as he wants to—maybe wants to answer some of these questions about why, why they were not called back and said, what is your position on this, Mr. Minister, the member from Dawson Trial.

So I'm hoping—I'm hoping that they will listen. I'm hoping that they will take a second hard look at this issue. We've asked very clearly that the government instruct Manitoba Hydro to put a halt on the Bipole III. We feel it's ill-thought. We feel it's something that they need to be having a second look at. And talk to the experts about this. Have a second look. Manitoba Hydro has very clearly said to them, to the government themselves, that this is self-inflicted by this government that they want it to go down the west side. So here's an opportunity to right that wrong, listen to those Manitobans that want to have their voice heard.

So I'm looking forward to the debate on this, Mr. Speaker, and I'll give them an opportunity to put that on the record.

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): Mr. Speaker, allow me to also return the compliment to the member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) for his style of dress as well this morning as we listened to his private member's resolution. Indeed, I want to compliment him and the work that he has done and his commitment to what he believes to be true.

We on this side of the House as well also believe that we have a strong argument with the position that

we have taken on several fronts, and, you know, we're not always going to agree on issues. For example—and I'll get to it in a moment—the building of the transmission line down the west side as opposed to the east side. Now, in fact, you know, in my view, we listened to the experts, the experts being the people, the land users that use that part of Mother Earth and how to protect the integrity of our Mother Earth.

The prophecy of indigenous peoples has been that we take every measure that is available to us to protect what little of our sacred land there is for the generations that are yet to be born. Thus, the tremendous amount of work that has been done by people like Eddie Hudson, Sophia Rabliauskas and her husband, Ray, from Poplar River, and all the good people from the east side in the Pimachiowin Aki initiative and the work that they're doing there and their bid to have that area of North America protected as a heritage site under the UNESCO designation.

So we have to take that into—and you know what? I would sooner listen to those experts, the elders, the people that have said to us in no uncertain terms that they didn't want a transmission line down the east side of their—of the province of Manitoba. But—and going down the east side of Lake Winnipeg, we're not only doing exactly what I just said, protecting the boreal forest from the east side, but we're also ensuring the fastest way in achieving reliable energy for our people here in the province of Manitoba.

Today, over \$1 billion has been expended or is committed in signed contracts for Bipole III, with 90 per cent of the land secured for the construction of 1,400 kilometres of line. And cancelling the project at this point would be far more expensive than doing it the way I've heard members speak.

The other thing is that, currently, one in five Manitoba Hydro employees are indigenous. And I've often spoke in this Chamber talking about the adverse effects that hydro development has had on indigenous peoples particularly. Because the practice of the past has been—and I know my colleague, the member for The Pas (Ms. Lathlin) and her people that she represents in that part of Manitoba will agree—that the impacts that hydro development had on our people has been tremendous, to say the least. And tremendous in a sense, not in a good way, but in a bad way in how a way of life has been altered.

But we have learned. I believe we have learned from the past not to repeat those mistakes again, and as we step into the future, that we do things correctly and that we do things properly.

The—we must also remember that Manitobans currently about—pay about \$700 less per year for a home using 1,000 kilowatt-hours per month, than somebody with the same home in the province of Saskatchewan—our neighbours—and about \$500 less than the national average. We're also watching our neighbours to the east of us in Ontario poised to have skyrocketing electricity rates as their government moves to privatize Hydro One.

You know, that is the reality, Mr. Speaker, and as we move forward with Keeyask and other projects in northern Manitoba, we're proud to say that the Keeyask project is an effort not only between Manitoba Hydro, but four First Nations: Tataskweyak, York landing—York Factory, rather—Fox Lake and War Lake. They're a part of this, and for the first time indigenous peoples in the province of Manitoba, our Aboriginal people are engaged and are a part of something that they are also determining will be part of our future.

So we're investing in building the new dams, the new transmission and we're also making record investments in energy efficient programs—efficiency programs, rather, so we can be sure that power's there when we need it. And we believe that Keeyask is critical in the investments we're meeting as we move forward.

I just want to say as well, Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate a gentleman by the name of Kelvin Shepherd, who, as of today through a formal announcement that is being made about this time right now, is going to be the new president of MT—of Manitoba Hydro, formerly comes from—comes to us from MTS Incorporated. And he's been appointed to the—as a—the new president and CEO of Manitoba Hydro starting on the 7th of December. So I want to congratulate Mr. Shepherd on his appointment as a president and CEO of Manitoba Hydro.

* (11:20)

We know that he's committed. He's committed to the public ownership of Manitoba Hydro. We also know that he's committed to further expanding on the relationships with indigenous peoples in the province of Manitoba as we pursue hydro development in a greater fashion. So I'm very happy to relay that to the House.

Our government is not perfect. No government that I ever have been in contact with is perfect. There's a lot of work that has to be done. We indeed are trying to make efforts to correct the wrongs that have been done in the past, thus the notion of reconciliation with First Nations and other indigenous peoples in the province of Manitoba of wrongs that have been done in the past with respect to hydro development. And, you know, we're committed to ensuring that we do things properly as we step into the future because, of all the segments of society, indigenous peoples have always been on the short end and on the receiving end of negative things.

Now you know what really troubles me is this whole matter of expropriation of land. You know, I've been accused of being a land thief in this Chamber, you know, and that really troubles me because that could be the furthest from the truth. I want to put on the record that I'm not a land thief, a land stealer. In fact, it hurts my heart that I would be called as such. In fact, the issue of expropriation—agreements have been reached with over 500 land-owners to use their land, 500 of them. And in about 20 per cent of these cases, agreements have not been reached yet. And there's still some work to do there. And we are doing that work, Mr. Speaker.

But Hydro, on the other hand, is offering a fair and generous compensation package for easements, amounting to 150 per cent of the market value for property, including additional payments for structure impact, construction damage and ancillary damage as well. And at the same time, they have the opportunity of continuing to use that land for farming purposes. So, Mr. Speaker, sometimes there's a bit of exaggeration that occurs in this Chamber.

And I just want to set the record straight that, in fact—

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

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): Mr. Speaker, you'll have to bear with me this morning, as my voice isn't great but I feel strong enough on this resolution that I'd like to stand up here and speak to it a bit.

Manitoba Hydro rates harming Manitoba families; that's absolutely the truth. Manitoba Hydro rates, since this Premier (Mr. Selinger) has come in, have gone up over 30 per cent and they are scheduled to more than double over the next

20 years. I can't see how that is going to help Manitoba families. There's a lot of families who are struggling as it is. And this government says they are doing things to help them, but they're not.

What about the families in the rural areas? As the minister, probably a good percentage of his constituents, the only source of heat and light that they have is with hydro. Now, if we're going to see the hydro rates double, how can anybody afford to pay for that? There's a lot of areas in Manitoba where the only source of—like, we don't have gas in many areas, you know, to heat their homes—the only source is hydro. And this is not fair, especially when all the experts say that this is a very risky, risky thing to be doing: \$34 billion added to what our debt is now. That, I mean, just that is \$27,000 for every man, woman and child in this province. When is this debt going to stop?

It's ridiculous that this government says they're doing things to help the people of Manitoba, but they're not. And a good example of this is going back to the election of 2011. This government, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) got out there and said, hydro will not cost any hydro user one red cent. But yet, last spring, we understood from the CEO of Hydro that the ratepayers of Hydro are on the hook for every cent that there is out there to pay for this expansion of Hydro. And that's the part that's really frustrating, because there's a lot of people out there who are saying listen to the experts, look what's going on. But yet the Premier won't listen. He's just highballing, going full speed. He's going to do everything he can to bankrupt this province.

We can't take any more hydro rates. I know that I've had people talking to me in my constituency who run businesses and who are paying probably \$1,000- to \$1,500- to \$2,000-a-month hydro bills. And if it goes up to four and five thousand dollars, you're going to see people closing because they won't be able to afford to do some of the things.

We have this bundling that they say that is very affordable, it helps Manitoba families. But the trouble is you may have one area that's a little bit cheaper, but if these rates continue to increase at 4 per cent, it's not going to be long before we're going to have some of the highest hydro rates, especially the way technology is changing today. You just have to go down into the States and look how much more they're using solar energy. There's a lot of other energies out there, and then you can see what technology has done in the past 20 years.

Everybody here will agree that technology has come a long ways, and in 20 years from today, can you imagine what the technology will be? A good example was, the other day they had a—the anniversary for the movie Back to the Future, and you take a look what was and what they predicted. There's a lot of technology changes that are coming and we need to be aware of all this. We can't put all our eggs in one basket and then have the people of Manitoba pay for it, because it's just not fair to them.

Bipole III—Bipole III is on the west side where it's costing a lot of extra money to be implemented. I don't see a reason why it doesn't go down the east side. All the experts have always said to put it down the east side. They've expropriated a lot of property. They've done a number of issues. And in the east side—they are building a road on the east side. They have a hydro line up there that's serving the communities of Bloodvein, Berens, Poplar, Little Grand, Pauingassi. So it's—there are hydro and roads up there already. So why not put the line down on the east side where it should be?

The other area is this government just doesn't listen to the people of Manitoba. They've got experts out there citing that the hydro line should have gone on the east side where the road is. But nobody's listening to this in the government. They're just got their blinders on and they're going full blast ahead.

Minnesota-Manitoba power line. They have had at least three sessions where they've gone out and they've talked to people, which is great. They call that, you know, getting information. The trouble is everybody who spoke on it said they're just not listening. All the ideas that came forward, Hydro, which is being talked to by the Manitoba government, is just not listening. They aren't listening to the people of Manitoba. It's Manitobans who own Hydro, not the Premier. It's up to the people of Manitoba to make some decisions as to where that hydro line would go.

The RM of Reynolds has offered to have the hydro line run through that RM, not right through the communities of La Broquerie and other areas, through farmland, close to community schools. Why isn't this government listening to the people of Manitoba?

We talk about all the promises this Premier has made during the election of 2011. Not only did he promise not to raise the hydro rates because they would be paid for—Manitobans wouldn't be paying

for any construction of hydro. They also went door to door promising no tax increases. But that didn't—they broke that promise too. And not only did they break the promise of raising the provincial sales tax, they also put a lot of items that weren't taxable to have provincial tax on them. One of them is home insurance. So there's people out there who can't even afford to insure their homes, and I'm sure if you talked to a lot of agents, insurance agents, you'd see that there's a lot of people out there who don't have proper home insurance because they can't afford that extra money on it. They're paying—Manitobans are paying more and getting less. The government is just not listening.

* (11:30)

This brings forward an issue that I feel really strongly about, is the credibility of this government. In the election of 2011, they made several promises and they've broke them all. How do we know that this government isn't going to more than—maybe it's going to triple or quadruple the hydro rates in order to pay for their bungling of what they've been doing out there.

Anyways, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank you for the time.

An Honourable Member: No, no. You've got time. Keep going.

Mr. Smook: I've got time? Okay.

Where's this Premier's (Mr. Selinger) credibility, as I was—as I started going up with? He has no credibility because of all the promises he's broken. So Manitobans can't trust him. When he says, believe me, Hydro is—this is the best thing for Hydro, why should Manitobans trust him? He has taken so many dollars out of the pockets of Manitobans. He feels that the NDP know better how to spend Manitoba's money than Manitobans, which is not right. He is not—he should not be in control of everybody's pocketbooks. Manitoba's debt, since this Premier has come in, has more than doubled. Who's going to pay for that? Is that what our children have to look forward to? Is—

An Honourable Member: Our children's children's children.

Mr. Smook: Children's children—our grandchildren, our great-grandchildren, they're going to be paying this debt. And, Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that's fair. We should look after our own, what we have here today. We should not be passing this debt on for

generations to come just because the NDP have a spending habit that they cannot control.

They are spending money without proper guidance as to how they're spending. The experts are telling them to really take a look. The PUB—everybody's saying let's take a good look at what we're doing here, but they're not listening. They're just going full bore ahead and spending money as fast as they can to get this project started.

A good example of it is along Highway 12. They did some brush clearing when they first started doing the shoulder widening there and I think it was a mistake the way they did it. They couldn't get anybody to do it, so they just pushed the bush—knocked the bush down and pushed it into the bush. The reason, they told us, for that was they couldn't push bush after a certain date, because birds might be nesting in it. Yet, on Bipole III, they're going ahead full bore and pushing bush whenever they feel like it.

Like, where is the justice in this? The government are—is doing things that are not in the best interest of Manitobans, and I have a problem with that, Sir, because we're here to do the job that's best for Manitobans. This government is doing things that is hurting Manitobans more than it's helping.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): You know, I don't know where to begin here, Mr. Speaker, other than to say that it's rich that the opposition is talking about hydro rates when we have among the lowest hydro rates in North America. And it's unbelievable to me that, when we talk about investments in hydro, in building for the future, you know, it's always great when we can get together in the Chamber, here, and hear an absolute clear divide in the vision for the future of this province, and we have it on full display here.

You know, I think the true colours, here, of the Conservative Party are shining brightly through here, to see that we are on the same road that, right now, they are, I mean, in Ontario. And we're seeing this absolutely clearly with the Liberal Party in Ontario, I would imagine it's the same with our Liberal Party here in Manitoba, that they're on track to privatize Hydro here in this province.

And we know where this leads us. We don't need to guess, Mr. Speaker, we don't need to wonder what this looks—will look like, what this will do to rates. And, in fact, members opposite, if I remember correctly, were advocating very loudly that hydro

rates should return to market rates and we should not be—we should double rates, and, quite loudly, the members opposite were pronouncing this. And I haven't heard any change in this other than to say that, now, our hydro rates are somehow high, even though they continue to be the lowest.

Now, you know, I hear where the members are coming from with regards to investment, because they see the investment, they see what Manitoba Hydro is going to invest, whether it be in local infrastructure, which has to be a focus here in this debate this morning, Mr. Speaker. Manitoba Hydro is doing unbelievable renewal of our infrastructure across the province, whether it be in the city with our updated LED lights—I see these LED street lights in my own community which are more energy efficient, which are brighter, which are better for people walking around and the safety in our communities—whether it be transmission lines within the city.

Aging infrastructure, this is not a Manitoba issue. This is not simply in our jurisdiction that we worry about this. This is happening across North America: aging infrastructure, a need to invest. The difference being that we have a strong Crown corporation that can upgrade this technology, can move us into the future, can update our infrastructure in a responsible way by keeping hydro rates low while investing for the future and upgrading our system.

So this is a great example of where a publicly owned hydro system can benefit Manitobans, can give Manitobans the benefit of a future-looking entity while keeping rates affordable, and they are affordable. You know, when bundled with other pressures—public utilities, whether it be MPI rates or whether it be natural gas, we are among the lowest.

And we're not saying this, just us saying this amongst ourselves. Manitobans certainly know it. But we also went to an outside auditor to show that this is, in fact, happening, that Manitobans are continuing to see an affordable quality of life here in Manitoba. And this is an important plank in where Manitoba Hydro can be successful.

I appreciate that the member opposite mentioned emerging technologies, because we all know this is where we are headed when it comes to electricity generation, you know, whether it be solar—and I think the member mentioned solar, wind—these are great technologies and technologies that Manitoba Hydro has been a leader on. But we can't discount

the fact that we have incredible hydro generation that is unique in North America and to our province.

And this is where the vision for Manitoba Hydro in our province really shines through, because we see this as our legacy, our legacy to the people of Manitoba that we can build for the future, that these generating stations and these transmission lines and these deals that we're making, not just to the south, Mr. Speaker, which we've had a lot of success with, but also now to the west. And, you know, I see this as being a future vision for an east-west transmission line throughout Canada. I think there's a lot of potential there. And I hope the federal government and our new governments in Alberta and Saskatchewan will come on board with this.

We are ready to do business. We're ready to export this power and the benefit comes right back to Manitobans. So we are all benefiting from this investment that pays off into the future. And the fact that the members opposite can't see this, I think, speaks very much to their lack of vision for Manitoba Hydro and for our province.

You know, as I said, we've got fantastic infrastructure that Manitoba Hydro is now rebuilding and reinvesting in. I think we need to continue to do that. I think there's a lot of potential to have our infrastructure, our aging infrastructure be rebuilt by Manitoba Hydro and invested in. I think there's a lot of potential there. But as I said, Mr. Speaker, this is the kind of thing that as a privately owned corporation, which we know the members opposite are working towards, there's absolutely no ability for us to see those investments come back to Manitobans.

So as I said, Mr. Speaker, we see in Ontario, this is an absolute clear example of what it will look like and what it can look like. I know the member of the Liberal Party who sits in this Legislature is right on board with this mantra of towards privatization. And, you know, this is scary. This is scary for Manitobans. They see that if we have a publicly owned asset there's a lot of potential.

Now, the other thing I wanted to mention is, you know, something that I just wanted to put on the record, Mr. Speaker, that I really appreciated the words from the member from Kewatinook. Because the member brought a different perspective to this Chamber, as he often does. And you know, I'm really proud of Manitoba Hydro and how it works with our First Nations people and people of the North. And I think this is something that, again, as a publicly

owned, strong Crown corporation, Manitoba Hydro has the ability to bring to the table.

* (11:40)

We are a world leader in working with First Nations and we're a leader in employing First Nations. You know, this is something that other jurisdictions, you know, would look at and—with envy—that we've built a working partnership with those communities, and we listen to them; we consult with them; we see the value in involving our northern partners, our First Nations, our northern communities in the discussion about future Manitoba Hydro development.

So this is the kind of thing that as a publicly owned corporation, we can imprint our values as Manitobans on the corporation to say this is a priority; this is the future; and, you know, it wasn't always done right in the past. And if we look back 40 years, 50 years, in some of those agreements, in some of the ways that things were done, we can see that it wasn't done correctly. And so, when we can come now with our, you know, with a better understanding, and I'm sure there's a distance we can travel in that regard too, and I look forward to continuing to see Manitoba Hydro strive to be a better partner for northern communities.

But when we have somebody in the Chamber here, Mr. Speaker, who can speak to those values, who can bring that northern perspective to the discussion, I think helps broaden our understanding of the importance of Manitoba Hydro as a company, as a Crown corporation for the people of Manitoba, not just for a certain segment of the population but for everybody.

What they bring to the table, Mr. Speaker, is a vision. It's not a four-year vision; it's not a 10-year vision, a 20-year vision; it's for future generations going forward for Manitoba Hydro to be there, to be the corporation for our children and our children's children and for the future prosperity of the province. I think there's no better path forward than keeping Manitoba Hydro a publicly owned Crown corporation, something that we can all work together with and invest for the future.

I'm proud to stand this morning and speak to this resolution, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): I'm very pleased to rise today to speak to this resolution from the member for—sponsored by the member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler), and I couldn't help but listen to his

comments and think that this is really the argument that the Conservatives will be using to set up the public to prepare them for privatization of Manitoba Hydro.

You know, just four years ago, we had their leader Hugh McFadyen, and past, as well, past iterations of the Conservative Party advocating for market rates of hydro. So that would take—you know, lead to astronomical increases, and we were going to have to look up those previous quotes by the Conservatives and positions they've taken that Manitoba Hydro rates should be brought to market levels and do a calculation as to how big an increase that that would need. And this critic is arguing that somehow the increases that we brought in incrementally are somehow going to devastate the province and seriously harm the homeowners of this province when his own party advocates for increases well in excess of that.

So I think the Conservatives should do some research before they come up with these proposals because I mean this is not something that they've been historically in favour of.

Now, also, you know, I want to deal with what's happening, you know, in our neighbouring province of Ontario because it's something that's, you know, impossible to ignore. The Liberal Party there is planning to privatize 60 per cent of Hydro One, and what that's going to do is it's going to raise \$9 billion for the Liberal government of Ontario, which they are going to—and they say they're going to put \$5 billion against the debt and another \$4 billion into infrastructure, particularly transit.

But, nevertheless, the fact of the matter is the government's going to receive \$9 billion for its 60 per cent sale of Hydro One, but in the process it's going to lose \$500 million every year in lost revenue. So all you have to do is do the math here to see how many years it will take in lost revenue to make up for that \$9 billion that they're getting short term. So, essentially, you're talking about 18 years here where they—where after which the people of Ontario aren't going to own their hydro system and aren't going to have any of the money that selling it off produced.

And, you know, look at what the Conservatives did with the telephone system. You had a telephone system that was started, I believe, in 1908. I believe by a Conservative, if not mistaken. And it flourished for many, many years, and then an ideologically driven government, pushed by their business friends, decided they wanted to privatize it. And what do

they do? They undervalued it. They sold a company that's worth around \$38 to \$43—I don't own any shares, but I believe that's what they're trading for even today, and they've always been in that area. The geniuses, these titans of industry, I think the Finance Minister calls them, these financial geniuses took a \$38- to \$40-value-per-share company and they priced it at 13 bucks. And then on top of that, they lent people half the money to buy the shares.

Well, now, Mr. Speaker, guess who bought the shares? I don't think there was too many residents of Elmwood who bought shares. I don't think there was too many residents of Transcona who bought shares. But I can tell you there was just a beehive of activity going on in River Heights and Tuxedo during that period. And I know some of the scandals that were going on with investment dealers trying to get around the rules. Because there was a rule on how many shares you could buy. You could only buy allotments of—I forget how many now. But what they were doing is they worked around. They did a workaround so that people could load up on these shares. And I know personally of people who bought these shares at 13—paid \$6s for shares at \$13 and were unloading these things, you know, months later, at about 40 bucks.

Now, what did the people of Manitoba get out of all of this? They got a company that's worth 42 bucks a share sold for 13, half of that financed. The money they got back in, what did this government, the Conservatives do? They put that money into the Fiscal Stabilization Fund and they went and spent it. That's what they did, and now we've got nothing to show for it. We don't even have the proceeds of this undervalued company to show for it. It didn't even go to pay down the debt that they talk about constantly: how terrible this debt is, how we've got to pay it down. They had an opportunity. They sold the phone company and they didn't pay down the debt. They took it and they used the money. Actually, they used the money to unsuccessfully buy the—their way into the next election is what they did.

So, you know, we have a—several articles here from The Globe and Mail and others, actually, numerous articles the members, you know, the members should pull them up and read them. But, basically, we've got a Globe and Mail, October 29th, just a few days ago, a—the headline is, Budget watchdog warns Hydro One sale will deepen Ontario's debt. You know, this is—you know, the business community people are pointing out how big

a folly this move is by the Ontario Liberal government.

Now, what is the—you know, what are the Liberals doing here in Manitoba? You know, they're as bad as the Conservatives. They—the argument will be, by the member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler), that, you know, the rates are going up and we've got to privatize the company because the taxpayers will get lower hydro rates if we do that. That's their argument. We have to privatize the liquor commission, says the Liberal leader, because the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) says the wine prices are too high. He can't afford to go to liquor store anymore, so he wants to privatize the liquor business.

* (11:50)

Well, that, Mr. Speaker, is the same argument that all of these privatizers use whether we're privatizing the telephone system, the liquor commission, hydro. It doesn't matter what it is, they—what they do is they try to create and precipitate a crisis, they try to make an issue about rates are going up too high, we can do better,

Autopac will be another issue. You know, your Autopac rate goes up 3 or 4 per cent and, oh my God, it's Chicken Little, the sky is falling; we can get you better rates in the private sector. Let's privatize the company. Let's give up a company that has, I'm not sure what its retained earnings are right are, but it was certainly in the probably billion dollar range.

You know, creating investment here in Manitoba, they want to send that all off to Toronto. They want to privatize it and have people buy their auto insurance at higher rates in the private sector and send the head office and the jobs off to Toronto and set the investment off to Toronto.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that's what these financial geniuses are proposing here in their whole—you know, I could understand making the argument that if you were an Ontario member of the Legislature, right, you're an MPP in Ontario, you know, you know that Toronto is a financial sector of the country. And you could make the argument for a privatization knowing it was going to increase activity in your home province, but who's, you know, who's advising these people, that's what I would like to know, because Manitoba is not the centre of the country. We are not the investment capital of Canada. And what they are basically doing is looking in a very, very short-term basis to, you know, reward

their friends and their ideological people in their party and the voters out there that—

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

Mr. Jim Rondeau (Assiniboia): I'm pleased to put a few words on the honourable member's discussion on Manitoba Hydro rates harming Manitoba's families. And I think that this resolution is rather amusing. And why it's amusing is the following: the former leader of the Conservative Party actually said that they would go to market rates.

Now, people have often not understood what market rates are. In Manitoba we pay about 7 cents a kilowatt hour for electricity. There's no premiums for time of day, et cetera. In some jurisdictions, i.e. Ontario, BC, Saskatchewan, et cetera, the price of electricity goes from 12 to 16 cents. In case—in some places it goes as high as 28 to 32 cents per kilowatt hour. So for the Conservatives who are challenged mathematically, that is 400 per cent higher than what Manitobans currently pay.

Now, so if you talk about the other things, right now I do admit that we're putting a 3.9 per cent increase. Now I'd like to tell the Conservative opposition and the Liberals what some of that money is going to. Two point eight billion dollars are going to replace wires that were put 60 years ago, transformers that are 50-60 years old, they're doing convertors that are 40 years old. That's \$2.9 billion of maintenance. That's building the system, replacing the system before there's a failure.

So here's what happens. When you own an asset, when the Manitobans own an asset, you put money in to make sure that the asset is maintained, so that power goes to houses. Now I know the Conservatives haven't maintained or built things but I, as a business person, know that if you're going to have a successful business you take a regular investment and you make it to the company so your business can continue. So as a New Democrat I am very happy that they're taking lights that were put up 40 years ago and replacing them by LED lights.

The further point is that the people who are replacing the LED lights and putting them together are Manitobans. The people who are doing the wire replacements, the pole replacements, the transformer replacements are Manitobans. So you're looking at creation of jobs.

Then we talk about the actual investments. The Conservative Party called Limestone lemonstone.

They made funny of it. They said they it—they would never make money.

Well, I hate to challenge their math, but \$5.2 billion in profit later, it's a good investment. And unlike the Tories, I think it's a wonderful investment when I can take \$9 billion of sales from third parties and pay for an asset that I will own. So I know that I've bought houses in the past and businesses in the past, I collect revenue, and in 10 or 20 years I own it and a third party's paid for it.

So I am shocked that the member opposite does not believe that the billions of dollars from Saskatchewan, the billions of dollars from our neighbours is a good investment.

To me, when I know that a third party's paying higher prices for the dependable electricity and is giving us \$9 billion, giving us a dam and a transmission line, that's a good thing.

Now, I know the members opposite might be a little bit directionally challenged. But here's the interesting part: we have a multi-megawatt sale worth billion dollars—over a billion dollars to Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan is to the west of us. Thus, when you have a power line, you want to put it on the west side so therefore, when we sell the billions of dollars of electricity to Saskatchewan, that's good.

So we started with a small sale of 25 million watts. We expanded that to 100 million watts of power a year and we have 500 million watts in discussion. That, Mr. Speaker, I am proud of, because as we make the sale and someone else buys our electricity for the next 10 years before we need it, admittedly, they will pay a higher price than Manitobans, and pay for an asset that we will own and then we can sell dependable, cheap electricity from Manitoba forever.

So let's be very, very specific on what the Tory plan is. They want to take the 7 cents per hour—kilowatt hour, and move it—double it—in a period of instantly. So they want to move it from 7 to 12 or 14 cents instantly.

We want to take the same asset and over a period of 20, 25 years do actually equal what Ontario and Saskatchewan is paying today. So I repeat: in 20, 25 years, we will pay the same electricity rate as most Canadians are currently paying.

Number 2: We have taken Manitoba Hydro—and under the Conservatives it was the worst demand-side management in Canada. It was an embarrassment. In fact, they didn't even score properly on the charts. We now have said it where we've worked with Hydro to invest in things like BEEP and BUILD projects; we've invested in geothermal; we've invested in wind farms, et cetera, and guess what, Mr. Speaker? We're now a model for the country. And every single Manitoban knows that if you can save money on electricity it is a long-term, forever prospect. You put the money in your pocket and Manitobans know it. The Conservatives don't know it, but Manitobans know it.

So I am pleased that we have a public company that provides money for insulation, provides money—if you're going to save energy, provides support if you've got a new furnace, provides support if you're putting in a geothermal system. I know my friend here from Dauphin and I put it in before the—

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

When this matter's again before the House, the honourable member for Assiniboia (Mr. Rondeau) will have two minutes remaining.

The hour being 12 noon, this House is recessed and stands recessed until 1:30 p.m. this afternoon.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, November 5, 2015

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