

Fifth Session - Fortieth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
Official Report
(Hansard)

*Published under the
authority of
The Honourable Daryl Reid
Speaker*

Vol. LXVIII No. 26 - 1:30 p.m., Wednesday, March 9, 2016

ISSN 0542-5492

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, March 9, 2016

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 22—The Elections Amendment Act (Signatures Required for Nomination Document)

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Mineral Resources): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), that Bill 22, The Elections Amendment Act (Signatures Required for Nomination Document); Loi modifiant la Loi électorale (nombre de signatures exigées sur les documents de mise en candidature), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Chomiak: I thank members for their co-operation in the House.

The Manitoba Chief Electoral Officer has recommended a reduction in the number of voters required to sign a candidate's nomination document. The bill will reduce the number to 50 for any election held after the bill receives royal assent.

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

Any further introduction of bills?

Seeing none, we'll move on to committee reports.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. James Allum (Minister of Education and Advanced Learning): I am pleased today to table the Manitoba Student Aid Annual Report for

2014-2015 and the Public Schools Finance Board Annual Report for the year ending June 30th, 2015.

Mr. Speaker: Any further tabling of reports?

Seeing none, move on to ministerial statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Remembering Rolland Fox

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Mr. Speaker, it's with sadness I reflect on the passing of one of Canada's most famous fathers, Rolland Fox, father of Canadian hero Terry Fox.

After a lung cancer diagnosis last year, Rolly, as he was known, took up the fight his son Terry had fought so famously. Like father, like son, Rolland faced his diagnosis with courage, grace and humour.

Rolland worked in Winnipeg as a switchman for the Canadian National Railway. He married his wife, Betty, in 1956 and the family moved to British Columbia in 1966. Terry, their oldest son, was diagnosed with bone cancer at 19 and was given an emergency leg amputation. Not long after surgery, Terry approached his parents about his goal to run across the country on one leg. Rolland and Betty were reluctant to allow him to take such a dangerous risk but they quickly realized that Terry's determination could not be swayed.

Terry ran more than 5,000 kilometres across Canada to raise money for cancer research. He trekked through gale-force winds, heavy rain and snowstorms, visited numerous schools and over time persuaded many, from large corporations to ordinary Canadians to schoolchildren, to donate to his cause. After 143 days on the road, Terry was forced to end his marathon early and died shortly after.

Since then, Terry has become a legend in Canadian history as an inspiring example of the triumph of the human spirit over adversity. The annual Terry Fox run has now grown to involve millions of participants in over 60 countries and is now the world's largest one-day fundraiser for cancer research. The Terry Fox Foundation has raised over \$650 million so far.

In the 35 years since his death, Rolland and Betty were fiercely protective of Terry's legacy. They refused to allow for the commercialization of

his name and they dedicated the rest of their lives to promoting and facilitating the Terry Fox Foundation.

Behind every great hero is someone whose strength and pride drives that person to be better. Rolland was a man who selflessly gave up his son as an icon for our nation and who continued to be an ambassador for Terry's legacy.

On behalf of all members, I send condolences to Rolland's family and our thanks for his incredible contributions to Canada.

Lymphedema Awareness Day

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, Lymphedema Awareness Day occurred this past Sunday on March 6th. It is a day that is recognized on both the national and provincial level.

Lymphedema is a condition of chronic swelling due to the accumulation of lymph fluid. It affects approximately 15 per cent of breast-cancer patients but it can affect women, men and children of all ages.

Three years ago, I introduced The Lymphedema Awareness Day Act as a way to promote awareness of this medical condition and the people who live with it every day. I am sure that all members of this Legislative Assembly and Manitobans have been affected by this condition in some way.

This condition's symptoms range from being relatively mild and manageable to severe and 'debilitating,' and all individuals who suffer from it deserve the best quality of care and treatment.

I'd like to wish the Lymphedema Association of Manitoba all the best in their upcoming 4th annual Lymphedema Awareness Day Symposium held this coming Saturday, March 12th.

Congrats and thanks to Kim Avanthay and her board members and the countless families and volunteers.

Interest groups and organizations play a large role in addressing lymphedema. I would like to recognize the Lymphedema Association of Manitoba for the work that it's—that it does each and every day to raise awareness about lymphedema and to help those who suffer from it.

Lymphedema Awareness Day gives all Manitobans and Canadians an opportunity to think about the effects of this disease and help fund research to better understand it.

Thank you.

Talia Gallant

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): I'm pleased to recognize an amazing athlete who grew up in Garden Grove, a Tyndall Park neighbourhood. This past January, Talia Gallant led her team to with the junior gold for Team Canada at the 2016 World Ringette Championship in Helsinki, Finland.

After going undefeated in round-robin play, Canada claimed an overtime victory against the Finnish team, beating them 10-9. Three other incredible players from Manitoba were there to support the U21 Team Canada Captain. They are: Rynne Bannerman, Keyona Tomiuk and Sam Renooy.

In their match against Sweden, Talia was named the player of the game. She scored three goals and five assists in a devastating 31-0 victory.

* (13:40)

That said, Talia is more concerned with teamwork than personal glory. Team Canada's motto in Finland was 22: There are 22 players on the team, and you fight for the girl beside you.

Mr. Speaker, Talia has been playing ringette for 15 years, since she was four, and our government has been fighting for Manitobans for 16 years. During that time, we've been hiring teachers, connecting students to the workforce and supporting our young athletes.

Mr. Speaker, Manitobans know the importance of good athletic programs in their schools, and that's why we are committed to high-quality, accessible opportunities for working and middle-class families.

Congratulations to Talia Gallant, Team Canada and all the amazing sports teams in Tyndall Park.

PST Increase

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, one year ago, this NDP government had a chance for major change. That change did not happen. We did see, however, five senior members opposite stand up for what they thought was right. This did not just happen last year; it started prior to the last election, when every NDP candidate went door to door in every community and told Manitobans, no new taxes, that they had a five-year plan to put Manitoba on the right track.

Manitobans got misled. Within weeks and months, Manitobans received the highest tax increases in the history of this province. When asked about the increasing the PST, the NDP said, nonsense. Whatever happened—what happened next was they raised the PST by 1 per cent, in reality, a 14 per cent increase on the backs of hard-working Manitobans.

It didn't stop there, Mr. Speaker. They told Manitobans they made a deal with the US to sell them hydro, and it would not cost Manitobans one red cent. Great deal? No. Misled again. It's costing Manitobans billions and billions of dollars so that they can provide cheap hydro to our American neighbours, which will in fact either double or triple our hydro rates.

Manitobans have been led down a dark lane with more broken trust and broken government, huge payouts to staff that could not work for this NDP government, higher taxes, higher hydro rates, higher debt, higher interest dollars to pay on the back, and the list goes on and on.

So here we are on the eve of an election. Manitobans will have a clear choice. Will they support a government that misled them for 16 years, or a government that believes that be held accountable, transparent and open, a government that will listen, partner with, dream with and be responsible for good management of their hard-earned money.

Family Violence Prevention through Education

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, October 28th, 2015, the Liberals introduced legislation to reduce and prevent family violence through education. Bill 215 provides measures to ensure that every child, during their school years in Manitoba, would be exposed to learning experiences in their curriculum, which would help them understand family dynamics and how individuals can work together to build families and to resolve disputes and disagreements without resorting to violence.

It is our hope that this learning throughout the K-to-12 system will enable our students to grow up and build strong and cohesive families that can work together and not experience family violence.

Initially, it was immediately met with support by the Minister of Education and Advanced Learning (Mr. Allum), saying, and I quote: We hope to see that it does move forward going forward,

Mr. Speaker, and so I want to commend him for his efforts on behalf of all members of the House to address what's clearly a critical issue in our community. End of quote.

There was similar support from the Conservative Education critic, the MLA for Lac du Bonnet. It appeared that this would be one of those rare occasions where addressing a critical need in our province would override political partisanship. Some concerns came forward, and we consulted with many individuals and groups. We received valuable and detailed input from the Manitoba School Boards Association, the Manitoba Association of Parent Councils and the Manitoba association of school board officials.

To enhance the bill, we responded by preparing changes that we shared with the Minister of Education and the Conservative critic. In spite of these efforts, the Minister of Education and the NDP have made it clear that political posturing comes before improving the lives of Manitobans for them.

Regardless, Mr. Speaker, I hope to return to the Manitoba Legislature after April 19th with many more Liberals, and we will bring forward a bill which will be a successor to Bill 215 so that as a province we can move forward in addressing and reducing family and interpersonal violence through education.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: That concludes members' statements.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: And just prior to oral questions, I have a number of guests to introduce.

Seated in the public gallery today we have with us Mitchell Middle School, we have 76 grade 5 students under the direction of Ms. Heather Loewen, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen).

And also seated in the public gallery this afternoon we have with us from St. Paul's Collegiate, we have 13 Law 40 students under the direction of Carissa Boschmann, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Morris (Mr. Martin).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

NDP Fiscal Management Impact on Manitobans

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the Premier has had his hands in the pockets of Manitobans in—over the last four years, five years, six years, seven and beyond, but, in particular, just in the last few years with the broken-promise taxes, the taxes he promised he wouldn't raise, he's taken over \$5,000 from the average Manitoba family.

Yesterday, he committed to putting a little bit of that money back in the pockets, but it will take Manitobans about 20 years to recover the money that he's taken out in the last four, and that would only work for them if the Premier and his colleagues would rescind all those broken-promise taxes today.

So this makes the issue trust. This is the question: Can you trust this Premier?

We know we can be certain of one thing: This Premier will raise taxes. That's based on his record of raising taxes. We also know he'll break his word. We've seen him do that numerous times.

But I'd like the Premier to explain how any Manitoban could possibly trust him to actually lower taxes when he's never really done that in the last five years.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the seniors tax credit has been rolling out every year. It's now up to \$2,300. We said we'd do it; we delivered it.

The small-business community is seeing the lowest taxes in Canada at zero. We're raising the threshold. We said we'd do it; we delivered on it.

Mr. Speaker, what we have to be afraid of is the risky cuts of the Leader of the Opposition: one half a billion dollars of cuts. What does that mean? Less teachers in the classroom, less nurses at the bedside, less paramedics and firefighters, less social service workers out there looking after people, less doctors, all of those things are at risk with the risky plan of the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Pallister: Well, Mr. Speaker, 773, that would be the amount of this year's deficit that the government is bringing forward, which means future generations will have to pay it back. Future generations, our children and our grandchildren, us when we're older, we'll have to pay all that money back because this

government can't get its spending under control; and because it can't get its overspending under control, it has to overtax Manitobans and it does.

Now, the Premier has said, loves to say: past behaviour, best indicator of future behaviour. He's the one who said ridiculous. He's the one who said nonsense. He's the one who said he'd never raise the PST. He's the one who did.

So Manitobans know they're paying 8 per cent on their home insurance to insure their homes when they were paying zero. When the Premier promised he wouldn't raise taxes he forgot about that and broke his promise.

Same on benefits at work, Mr. Speaker, zero up to eight: fees on cars, cottages, beer and birth certificates, you name it, and then 1,000 other items with the PST hike, \$5,000 just in additional broken-promise taxes.

Now, after five years of this Premier punishing Manitobans with those kinds of tax hikes, why would any Manitoban trust that he suddenly cares about them?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I know the Leader of the Opposition hasn't taken the time to read the fiscal outlook, and I congratulate the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar) for getting it out there yesterday with the able assistance of the House leader. The members opposite wanted to block this report. They wanted to block this report from being tabled.

Mr. Speaker, where is their plan? Tell us—tell us how they will cut a half a billion dollars out of the budget. Show us their plan. That's a million and a half dollars a day—a million and a half dollars a day. That's the equivalent of laying off or firing 22 nurses. That's the equivalent of getting rid of 8 doctors. That's the equivalent of reducing the number of teachers in the classrooms by 27. That's getting rid of 36 social workers, 38 early child-care workers, 21 Crown prosecutors, 28 corrections officers and 42 conservation officers.

Why do the people of Manitoba have to have those services cut because of the risky plan of the Leader of the Opposition?

* (13:50)

Mr. Pallister: Well, his plan will remove doctors from the province of Manitoba yesterday.

The fact is this is the Premier that has afflicted Manitobans with the highest tax hikes in Manitoba

history and the highest of any premier of the province, and his popularity, not just among Canadians, Mr. Speaker, among Manitobans, his popularity with his own caucus has spiralled downward as a direct result of all the broken promises he's made.

Now, he's taken \$5,000 out of the average Manitoba family's pockets, Mr. Speaker, and then he says next year he's going to give 250 back.

Mr. Speaker, if someone broke into your home, took \$5,000 right out of your home away from you and your family, and you found out who it was and you went to them and you confronted them and you said, I'd like my money back, and they said I'll give it back to you over 20 years if you vote for me, I want to know what you'd say and I want to know what the Premier would say to that proposition.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the only person that broke into people's homes is the Leader of the Opposition when he stole their telephone system and sold it off. That's what he did.

Every day when the Leader of the Opposition, if he were so fortunate to become government, he says he will review all the services of Manitoba. Every single day every front-line worker is going to wake up and say, am I going to lose my job today when they make a million-and-a-half-dollar cut? Will a conservation worker lose that job that day? Will a nurse lose their job that day? Will a teacher lose that—their job that day? Will a social worker lose their job that day? Will a Crown prosecutor lose their job that day? Will a paramedic lose their job that day? What about a firefighter, will he get up and tell them how he will implement his half-a-billion-dollar programming cuts?

Come clean to the people of Manitoba, show us your plan.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you.

I just want to remind honourable members that we have a lot of our schoolchildren in the public gallery here today and I'm sure you would all want to leave a good impression upon them. Some of them may be visiting us here for the first time and we want them to have a good impression on how we conduct ourselves in the Legislative Chamber.

So I'm asking for the co-operation of honourable members, please keep the level down a little bit with respect to the volume.

Mr. Pallister: Well, Mr. Speaker, I understand that the Premier's afraid. I get that his colleagues are afraid, and I understand their political strategy is to try to strike fear in the hearts of all Manitobans.

I understand that they want to—I understand also, because I come from a family of civil servants I understand that we don't like saying goodbye to our children in our families whether we're in the civil service or in the private sector. We don't like paying ridiculously high taxes inflicted on us by someone who promised they wouldn't raise them. We don't like waiting longer than every other Canadian for health care and we don't like seeing the worst results in our education programs of any Canadian province. Civil servants don't like that, and they're not afraid of change; they want change.

What they know, Mr. Speaker, is that there's a difference. They know the PST is 60 per cent higher here than in Saskatchewan and North Dakota. They know this government's doubled our debt. They know the average family would actually make \$4,000 more if they lived in Regina than if they lived in Winnipeg; they'd like to stay here in a province that was better governed.

So I'd like the Premier to admit that his failures as a leader and as a premier are the reason that Manitoba's leaking jobs and opportunities, not Manitobans' fault, his fault.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition missed the Conference Board of Canada report yesterday where it said Manitoba had a strong economy last year, will have one of the strongest economies in 2016 and one of the strongest economies in 2017.

What did they attribute that to? The diverse economy, for sure, with the very significant investments we're making in infrastructure, in roads, in sewer and water, in schools, in hospitals, in personal-care homes. They said those stimulus investments will ensure that people get looked after, they—with—that proper schools will be there for children to be educated in, proper roads will be available and safer roads, as we see from the road that goes all the way to Brandon, now much safer road for everybody that travels back and forth to that great community.

Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition has said he will cut 1 per cent of all the services of Manitoba. He has said he will roll back the PST. That means communities will not be protected from

floods; that means nurses will be laid off; that means teachers will be fired; that means doctors will disappear from front-line services in Manitoba.

I don't mind saying that in a calm voice, Mr. Speaker, but I can tell you it's a dangerous and reckless plan, and the Leader of the Opposition needs to come clean with Manitobans and put his plan on the table, show Manitobans how he will accomplish what he said he's going to do, show us how he will meet his promises to cut those services.

Mr. Pallister: Interestingly, Mr. Speaker, when the Premier was seeking popularity in the last election, he ran on the same promise we're making now, which was to keep the PST at its same level. We promise to bring it back to the promised level. Last time it wasn't his plan. He didn't say it was reckless. He didn't say it was dangerous. He didn't say it was going to strike fear in the hearts of civil servants. He ran on the same promise we're running on now. It's petty politics. It's driven by his own fear, and it won't work.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is, there's an old saying, fool me once. And he did that in the last election. He fooled Manitobans when he said it was ridiculous and nonsense that he would ever raise the PST. Fool me twice was when he actually raised it and took away Manitobans' right to vote. So fool me once, fool me twice; there won't be a third time.

Would the Premier like to admit that he's making other plans? Because he should.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, it's not a surprise that the Leader of the Opposition wants to roll back the clock five years and return to policies before we had two of the most significant floods in the history of Manitoba, before we saw that the economic recovery is slower than has been predicted. It's not a surprise to me that the ideological fervour of the Leader of the Opposition would roll back the clock to a time that denies all the reality going around the world.

Mr. Speaker, everybody who's an economic forecaster suggests that we need stimulus; we need to keep the economy going with good investments in infrastructure, making sure that young people get education in schools, a college, a university education or a trade, exactly what we're doing, starting in high school. And his program of risky cuts, rolling back the clock to 2011, completely ignores the last five years of experience, not only in Manitoba, not only in Canada, but around the world.

I know he operates with blinders. We take a look at the conditions in front of us and say, what is the best future for Manitoba? We rolled that out in our Throne Speech, a five-year plan. We put a down payment on that yesterday, 2,000 more daycare spots, more jobs for young people working on infrastructure, more innovation and better education. He wants to put that all at risk by rolling back the clock to 2011.

I have news for him. The clock only goes forward. It doesn't go back, except in his mind.

Mr. Pallister: Well, let's examine the facts rather than the fantasy here.

So the Premier ran on a promise, and he made that solemn vow to Manitobans, and it was after the flood. It was after the flood, so what's he talking about now? Then he broadened the PST before the next one, okay? So his case, as far as raising taxes on Manitobans, is totally falsified under even the most adolescent and cursory examination, okay?

He has a spending problem, and he refuses to admit it even now, a spending addiction which causes our debt, under his mismanagement, to double. And the price for servicing that debt has now made it the most fastest growing department in our government and in our province. And the Manitobans of the future will have to pay the price for that mismanagement. Manitobans are ready to accept that challenge. Manitobans are ready to face the storm that's coming. But they know there has to be change in order for them to have a chance to create a better province for the future.

Does the Premier, as I know the Premier does, really believe that Manitobans will forget all this in this election? Does he think that Manitobans will totally lose the memory of him standing before them and solemnly promising not to raise these taxes? Manitobans, every day, when they go to the store, hear the till ring out and they are reminded of the broken promises of this Premier. They will not forget. We will not forget. Only the Premier will forget, and he will be forgotten as a result.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I give full credit to Manitobans for having a good memory. They remember when the Leader of the Opposition was in government and he privatized the telephone system. And every time a young person or anybody picks up their cellphone now and they see the highest—among the highest costs of the country, they know that was imposed upon them by the Leader of the Opposition.

They remember in the '90s when 1,000 nurses were fired. I was on the board of a hospital in the 1990s, the St. Boniface hospital. They completely wiped out every licensed practitioner nurse in the province.

I went into the schools, and I saw less teachers in the schools, Mr. Speaker, and I saw 30 per cent of children that weren't graduating because they had a three-strikes-policy-and-you're-out approach. Young people were being kicked out of school on the three-strikes-and-you're-out policy. They'll remember that.

* (14:00)

What we're offering Manitobans is a road map to the future: better jobs through infrastructure and innovation; better education, starting in high school; more nurses and doctors. We will deliver that. The Leader of the Opposition needs to show us his plan with a half a billion dollars of cuts. Back to the future for the Leader of the Opposition.

NDP Fiscal Management Impact on Employment

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Speaking of jobs, Mr. Speaker, let's talk about the facts. Since the PST hike, Manitoba has lost 9,300 private sector and self-employed jobs, the second last in Canada.

Will the minister just admit that the Selinger government's high-tax-and-spend policies are having a negative impact on jobs right here in Manitoba?

Hon. Kevin Chief (Minister of Jobs and the Economy): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for the question. Our government is proud to stand with our business owners, our labour leaders, our training institutions and young people. In fact, Manitoba did the best of any province recruiting jobs last year. It's because of them.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, the Conference Board of Canada—and let me tell the members opposite who the Conference Board is. These are a group of experts. They know about the economy. They've been providing information on economic performance for our country for the past 70 years, and what do they say about Manitoba's economy? Manitoba to become one of the top performing provinces over the next two years.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, let's see what Statistics Canada says about Manitoba. Last year alone, Manitoba realized a net loss of 6,600 jobs and

a loss of 5,300 jobs in the last month alone, again, second last in the whole country.

Will the minister just admit that the Selinger government's high-tax-and-spend policies are having a negative impact on jobs right here in Manitoba?

Mr. Chief: Well, the Leader of the Opposition had a plan, Mr. Speaker, and it had nothing to do with jobs, I can tell you that. In fact, his plan was to sell off MTS, made all his friends richer while the rest of Manitobans paid more. And I travelled to all the ridings of members opposite; I talked to young people. They represent these young people from small towns, and they have told me they're devastated because they've lost connectivity.

I ask the members that represent those young people in small towns, Mr. Speaker: Are they going to stand up for those young people and ask their leader to stand up and apologize for selling MTS? The Leader of the Opposition doesn't have a cellphone, but I can tell you all those young people I saw certainly want to have one.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, speaking of young people and jobs in Manitoba, is the minister aware of the fact that the 500 jobs that the Premier (Mr. Selinger) announced in December will be created in Manitoba by SkipTheDishes have, in fact, been lost to Saskatchewan?

Mr. Speaker, yesterday SkipTheDishes made an announcement that they will be expanding in Saskatchewan, not right here in Manitoba.

Will the Premier and the minister apologize to Manitobans and will they just admit that their high-tax-and-spend policies are having a negative impact on jobs in Manitoba?

Mr. Chief: Mr. Speaker, once again, the Leader of the Opposition had a plan that had nothing to do with jobs and—hey, these are his words from today: past behaviour, best indicator for future behaviour.

What's his past behaviour, Mr. Speaker? He invested in a snitch line. He cut 56 organizations; he wiped out friendship centres—not only invested in a snitch line, he campaigned on it. I asked the member from Portage la Prairie, I asked the member from Tuxedo, from Steinbach: Have they asked their leader, will they be investing in a snitch line again, an attempt to embarrass and shame and stigmatize low income?

Mr. Speaker, I ask those members: Will they stand up and ask their leader to apologize for his

disingenuous, mean-spirited country-club approach to social services?

Suicide Rates for Children in Care Funding for Prevention Programs

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, according to Manitoba's children advocate, in the last three years, 33 Manitoba children have died by suicide. In the last year alone, eight children have taken their own lives. In Manitoba's case, many of these are young girls, often children in the care of Child and Family Services.

I would ask this minister what she has done to help prevent this alarming rate of suicide in young people in care.

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): Suicide is devastating for families and for communities. The thought of a young child thinking that their only recourse is death is just disheartening that that is happening in this province.

We are working with all of our partners, working with the Child and Family Services agencies; we're working with health agencies, not-for-profit organizations. We have a robust strategy around reducing suicide across this province. It starts with providing opportunities—opportunities of hope and optimism for youth. It makes—it's ensuring that we have recreational programs. One of the initiatives that we've been able to implement across the North in some communities has been WASAC North. What that provides for youth is training, leadership, employment. That makes a difference.

We have a lot more work to do, and we're going to work alongside our families and our communities to address this tragic issue.

Mr. Wishart: Mr. Speaker, Cross Lake First Nation has a crisis of four teenagers who have committed suicide in the last three months and two more attempted suicides. Several of these children were in the care of child welfare. Children's Special Allowance funding has been clawed back by this government from this very agency along with many others, leaving these agencies serving our most vulnerable children without the resources that they need to deliver all of their services.

How is taking money away from agencies that can be used for prevention programs helping?

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs): Well Mr. Speaker, this is really a serious issue that we're dealing with here and let me

respond this way. I had a telephone meeting this morning with the federal minister of Aboriginal— or indigenous affairs and northern development, Carolyn Bennett, and we talked about this issue and the wide-ranging issue of suicide itself among young people, particularly, not only in Pimicikamak, Cross Lake, but other communities. And as the member knows, the community of Cross Lake Community Council, and the Pimicikamak Cree Nation, have declared a state of emergency for both communities on this very issue.

The member is correct. There's been four suicides—five, in fact, and then 18 attempts in the last few weeks, and this, to us, is a critical crisis. Our government is currently—many departments throughout this government are working with the First Nation and the community council, along with the federal government in addressing this issue.

Mr. Wishart: Mr. Speaker, suicides among young people are a cry for help. Manitoba has a long, heartbreaking history with youth suicides, particularly in remote communities.

How many more children in the care of CFS agencies have to commit suicide before this minister will properly fund prevention programs?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Mr. Speaker, I'm almost speechless with how this member opposite is politicizing the death of children in this province. It is heartbreaking how he is using their lives.

This government is working with individuals, with families across this province to address the issue of suicide prevention. We are doing early intervention. We are involved with the PAX program, the Roots of Empathy. We are working with mental health practitioners across this province that do early intervention to provide opportunities for families.

What we need to keep doing is working to support families to ensure that we're addressing poverty, making sure that young people know that they have opportunities, and that happens by investing in education, in employment, in our post-secondary education to ensure that individuals can see a future for themselves.

Aboriginal Students Graduation Rates

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House know that the success of all students is essential for building a

strong province. The Auditor General reported that only 55 per cent of Aboriginal students graduate from high school. That's a decrease of 2 per cent from 2010, getting worse than better.

Mr. Speaker, Will the minister apologize today for his government's downward slide on Aboriginal students' graduation rates?

Hon. James Allum (Minister of Education and Advanced Learning): Well of course, Mr. Speaker, what we want for all students, we want for indigenous students, is to achieve academic success so that they're well prepared to go on and get a good job and then move into—continue to build this beautiful province.

*(14:10)

Now the Truth and Reconciliation Commission made clear that this was a national issue and that Manitoba was doing considerably better than in Saskatchewan or Alberta, when it comes to indigenous graduation rates. Mr. Speaker, that's why we tabled a First Nation, Metis and Inuit education framework to ensure that we would improve outcomes for indigenous students, to ensure that nonindigenous students would understand the history and culture of indigenous students, so that people would understand, students would understand, the intergenerational impact of residential schools, understand the impact of the '60s scoop.

That bill is currently before the House. I hope the member opposite will join with me to get that bill passed in this session by next week.

Mr. Ewasko: The Auditor General himself says, and I quote, that it is the lack of leadership to guide governmental departments in achieving educational outcomes for K-to-12 Aboriginal students, set out in the Aboriginal Education and Employment Action Plan.

Mr. Speaker, he also says that there's no direction by this government. He also says that roles and responsibilities for achieving results are not well defined by this minister and his government.

I ask the Minister of Education and Advanced Learning today: When the AG mentions that the lack of leadership in his side of the government, is he speaking about the Education Minister, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) or both?

Mr. Allum: Well Mr. Speaker, in our funding of schools announcement we made in January, and then was proposed by the Finance Minister yesterday,

even though the opposition didn't want to hear about it, even though they obstructed, we had very substantial investment in improving outcomes for indigenous students in this province.

We've improved the academic achievement grant by \$500,000 so that it's almost \$10 million this year. We've put in place \$500,000 for transition funds to— for students moving off reserve into the provincial education system. We're working with Paul Martin group to work on the Paul Martin model for indigenous education that's proven very successful in every case.

It's pretty clear by the actions of the opposition yesterday they don't care, they don't want to hear it and they would never do it if they had the chance.

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Speaker, under the Selinger government only 55 per cent of Aboriginal students graduate from high school, a 2 per cent decrease since 2010.

We know that the Auditor General blames the NDP lack of leadership. We know that why—we know now why the Education Minister and his government has been hiding these various stats for years, Mr. Speaker. Hiding and mismanagement is the NDP's model.

Mr. Speaker, how can Manitobans possibly trust this broken-trust and high-tax government? Under this NDP government, we know that everybody pays too much.

Mr. Allum: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm frankly mystified by the member opposite's line of questioning because his leader has already put on the table that they're going to cut a half a billion dollars from the budget.

That means there'll be no investment for indigenous students. That means there'll be no investment for transitions. That means there'll be no work with Paul Martin's model school. That means that the supports that families needs won't be there. That means there'll be no child-care supports for families when they need them.

In every respect, the member opposite asked questions of this side of the House, but because his leader is proposing a half-a-billion-dollar cut to the budget, I would suggest to him that he has more questions for the Leader of the Opposition and his non-plan for Manitobans than he'll ever have for me or this side of the House.

NDP Fiscal Management Provincial Deficit Projections

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): Mr. Speaker, what the NDP offered yesterday was not a budget. It was a phony financial report. It does not follow the reporting rules that a budget would follow. It hides key information that a real budget would disclose.

But as much as this government would hide from Manitobans, even they could not hide the fact that the deficit was initially calculated at \$422 million, and that projection is now revealed to be \$773 million. Mr. Speaker, this is a surprise to all Manitobans. I imagine that that is even a surprise to the members of this government over there.

Mr. Speaker, when the minister said that the deficit was stubborn and going in the wrong direction, it was the understatement of the century. It is massive, it is breathtaking, it is historic, but it is a betrayal. It is a betrayal to all Manitobans.

Will the Finance Minister apologize to Manitobans for jeopardizing this province with his mismanagement of the finances and betraying all Manitobans?

Hon. Greg Dewar (Minister of Finance): We had the opportunity yesterday to table in this House our fiscal outlook, Mr. Speaker, which, as the members know, lays the path forward for the province of Manitoba.

We have before us today the second lowest unemployment rate in Canada. The Conference Board of Canada has indicated that Manitoba will be one of the leading economies in Canada in the next couple of years.

You know, the member opposite, when he was on the radio just a few months ago, he said budgets are tough to balance, and now he's apparently flip-flopped on that. Now he's saying that budgets are easy to balance.

He also said when a reporter asked him repeatedly, he asked him point-blank, he said if he would promise not to cut spending to health care and education if they became government. He could not, Mr. Speaker.

So we know their agenda, Mr. Speaker. Their agenda is to slash health care; their agenda is to cut education; their agenda is to cut our plan that creates jobs.

Mr. Speaker, we have the opportunity this afternoon to deal with the Opposition Day motion. I would ask the member to put his plan forward this afternoon.

Mr. Friesen: It should be appalling to taxpayers and Manitobans that the Finance Minister can offer no explanation for missing his deficit target by \$350 million.

Mr. Speaker, this government tries to hide, but this phony financial report cannot conceal that they have gotten it wrong every time.

Mr. Speaker, there is no flood that the NDP can blame. There is no declining federal transfer payment that they can blame. There is no sudden decline in interest or a hike in the interest rates. There is no sudden loss of tax revenues. The only disaster to explain this situation is the NDP government itself which ignored the experts and worked hard to hide the extent of their failure to all Manitobans.

Will the Finance Minister admit that this financial mismanagement is a disaster for all Manitobans now, and a disaster for all Manitobans to come who will be stuck with the bill?

Mr. Dewar: As I said, I don't know what the economy is like in Costa Rica, Mr. Speaker, where the Leader of the Opposition spends most of his winter.

But I'll let the member know, one of the legacies of the Harper government was weak and tepid growth in the economy. Members speak—every member opposite stood up and they supported the Harper government. That is one of their legacies they left this country.

I'll let the member know there is slowing growth in the global economy. The Canadian economy is growing at a slower rate, and that has the impact upon our economy here in Manitoba as well. Our revenues are down \$150 million because of a glow—a growing—this can be because of a slowing economy.

As I mentioned, last year we had to fight 454 forest fires, and that is why we had to put additional revenues into that. Is the member saying we shouldn't have done that?

Mr. Friesen: Well, the Finance Minister's are—excuses are as disastrous as this phony budget update he's offered.

Mr. Speaker, they're misleading Manitobans. They changed the date three times about when they would balance the budget. Now they've set a new date again.

But in this phony document there is no chart, there is no schedule, there is no indication at all as to how the government would achieve anything. It would be comical were the stakes not so high. But it is Manitobans who will pay the price with less money for front-line services, less money in their pockets, more debt for our children and our grandchildren.

Will the Finance Minister just sit in his place and admit it is a failed government with a failed plan? Manitobans do not believe their phony budget update. They do not believe anything they say.

Mr. Dewar: Well, Mr. Speaker, I reject what the member just put forward.

We have one of the strongest economies in Canada because we're invested in our economy. We have one of the lowest unemployment rates in the nation because we're investing in the economy. We're taking action to keep our economy growing just like the federal government's doing. They're running prudent deficits in the short term to stimulate and grow the economy, just like we're doing here in Manitoba. Last year we created 10,000 jobs, the highest rate of any province in Canada.

So what we want to know, what members want to know, Mr. Speaker, because the public is asking me, what is the plan? What is the plan of the Leader of the Opposition? What is the plan for the member from Morden-Winkler?

You know, I said we have the Opposition Day motion today. I'll sit in this House all afternoon long, Mr. Speaker, and I'll promise them I'll sit here so I can listen to their plan if they present it.

* (14:20)

Fiscal Update Projections Department Spending

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we saw an extraordinary, jaw-dropping increase in the provincial deficit to \$646 million in the core fiscal update and \$773 million in the summary fiscal update. This NDP government has no inclination whatsoever to balance their spending with their revenue. Moreover, the fiscal statement has so little detail in it that we have no specific

expenditure projections for many departments, let alone major categories within departments.

I ask the Premier: Why is he hiding spending projections in arts, in culture, in the environment, agriculture, science and innovation? Will the Premier today table the needed budget to give these details for Manitobans?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): We were happy to put the fiscal outlook on the table yesterday in spite of the obstructionist plan of the members of the opposition who didn't want to deal with it. We put out a good, strong vision following up on the Throne Speech, keeping the Manitoba economy among the strongest in the country; an emphasis on infrastructure to create good jobs at a time when the Canadian and global economy is slowing down; adding the first major instalment on daycare spaces of 2,000; providing record funding to our public schools, including small class sizes, more teachers in classrooms in K to 3; including more opportunities for people in high school for trades, college and university education.

We've asked the opposition to put their plan for a half a billion dollars of cuts forward.

I ask the member from River Heights: How will he support health and education when he's planning to reduce the health and education levy by \$471 million? That's \$2 billion over the next four years. How will he support health and education with a major reduction in the health and education levy of \$471 million?

Provincial Debt Increase

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, the fiscal update revealed an unbelievable increase of \$2.34 billion in new debt. Aside from the \$700-million deficit revealed in this non-budget, there is still \$1.6 billion in debt which is unaccounted for. The fiscal update gives no clue as to the reason for this \$1.6-billion additional increase in debt.

Will the Premier today table information about his fiscal scheme to run a very large deficit and also borrow an additional \$1.6 billion? Where has this \$1.6 billion gone?

Mr. Selinger: In the fiscal outlook is the five-year plan on infrastructure, \$1.1 billion. In this fiscal update there's more money for hospitals and health-care facilities. There's more money for social housing. There's more money for public schools and colleges and universities. It's all laid out in there.

We have not seen how the leader or how the member from River Heights will support any of those initiatives when he's planning to wipe out—and this is the promise they've made: They will eliminate the health and education levy. That will be a tax reduction for the big banks and the major corporations. They're going to hand away \$2 billion to do that in corporate giveaways, and then they say they're going to support essential public services in Manitoba. It doesn't make sense. It doesn't add up. It's foolishness.

Labour Agreement Costs

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, the NDP's exercise in covering up has no limits. Today there are so many outstanding labour contracts which remain unsigned because this government has failed to deal in a timely and fair manner with workers in our province.

If the costs of these yet-to-be-completed contracts, some dating back over two years, have not been included in the fiscal update, then we're looking at tens or a hundred millions of dollars more in costs to come.

Will the Premier table the expected costs of concluding these outstanding labour agreements and tell us whether these costs are included or are not included in the fiscal update projections which were provided yesterday?

Mr. Selinger: Unlike the opposition Conservative Party that would slash and burn public sector jobs with their half a billion dollars in proposed cuts, unlike the Liberals who plan to get rid of \$471 million to support health and education which means jobs will be eliminated in Manitoba, we have negotiated collective agreements. We've negotiated moderate prices on that, usually 2 per cent or less a year.

Mr. Speaker, we provided some job security. We've got agreements with just about all the organizations we work with, our partners in delivering public services, partners whom we value and believe provide good quality services to Manitoba. And we will work with them to find further ways to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of our public services so our collective bargaining is done in the spirit of how can we all work together to serve the people of Manitoba.

And I can tell you, unlike the opposition who doesn't—don't like public servants, nurses, doctors and teachers, and the Liberals who seem to have turned on them with their \$471 million in cuts, we

believe in partnering with our public services to provide stable, high-quality public services at a reasonable price, and that's what we're doing.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Mr. Speaker: It is now time for petitions.

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

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Every day, hundreds of Manitoba children walk to school in Oakbank and must cross PTH 206 at the intersection with Cedar Avenue.

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge that the provincial government improve the safety at the pedestrian corridor at the intersection of PTH 206 and Cedar Avenue in Oakbank by considering such steps as highlighting pavement markings to better indicate the location of the shoulders and crosswalk, as well as installing a lighted crosswalk structure.

This is signed by A. Sward, K. Kosheluk, B. Graham and many other fine Manitobans.

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

Minnesota-Manitoba Transmission Line Route—Information Request

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

The Minnesota-Manitoba transmission line is a 500-kilovolt alternating-current transmission line set

to be located in southeastern Manitoba that will cross into the US border south of Piney, Manitoba.

The line has an in-service date of 2020 and will run approximately 150 kilometres with tower heights expected to reach between 40 to 60 metres and be located every four to five hundred metres.

The preferred route designated for the line will see hydro towers coming in close proximity to the community of La Broquerie and many other communities in Manitoba's southeast rather than an alternate route that was also considered.

The alternate route would have seen the line run further east, avoid densely populated areas and eventually terminate at the same spot at the US border.

The Progressive Conservative caucus has repeatedly asked for information about the routing of the line and its proximity to densely populated areas and has yet to receive any response.

Landowners all across Manitoba are concerned about the impact hydro line routing could have on land values.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro to immediately provide a written explanation to all members of the Legislative Assembly regarding what criteria were used and the reasons for selecting the preferred routing for the Manitoba-Minnesota transmission line, including whether or not this routing represented the least intrusive option to residents of Taché, Springfield, Ste. Anne, Stuartburn, Piney and La Broquerie.

*(14:30)

And this petition is signed by D. Anderson, J. Wiebe, R. Brink and many more fine Manitobans.

Applied Behavioural Analysis Services

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

(3) The preschool waiting list for ABA services has reached its highest level ever with at least 68 children waiting for services. That number is expected to exceed 148 children by September 2016 despite commitments to reduce the waiting list and provide timely access to services.

(4) The current provincial government policy now imposed on the ABA service provider will decrease the scientifically proven, empirically based and locally proven program and force children to go to school at age five before they are ready, thus not allowing them full access to ABA services promised them as they wait on their wait-list.

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the ministers of Family Services, Education and Advanced Learning, and Health consider making funding available to address the current waiting list for ABA services.

This petition is signed by F. Kenbrut, E. Jones, D. Paterson and many more fine Manitobans.

Minnesota-Manitoba Transmission Line Route—Information Request

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The Minnesota-Manitoba transmission line is a 500-kilovolt alternating-current transmission line set to be located in southeastern Manitoba that will cross into the US border south of Piney, Manitoba.

(2) The line has an in-service date of 2020 and will run approximately 150 kilometres with tower heights expected to reach between 40 and 60 metres and be located every four to five hundred metres.

(3) The preferred route designated for the line will see hydro towers come in close proximity to the community of La Broquerie and many other

communities in Manitoba's southeast rather than an alternate route that was also considered.

(4) The alternate route would have seen the line run further east, avoid densely populated areas and eventually terminate at the same spot at the US border.

(5) The Progressive Conservative caucus has repeatedly asked for information about the routing of the line and its proximity to densely populated areas and has yet to receive any response.

(6) Landowners all across Manitoba are concerned about the impact hydro line routing could have on land values.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro to immediately provide a written explanation to all members of the Legislative Assembly regarding what criteria were used and the reasons for selecting the preferred routing for the Minnesota-Manitoba transmission line, including whether or not this routing represented the least intrusive option to residents of Taché, Springfield, Ste. Anne, Stuartburn, Piney and La Broquerie.

This petition is signed by R Hayward, T. McFaren, C. Kohl and many more fine Manitobans.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

The Minnesota-Manitoba transmission line is a 500-kilovolt alternating-current transmission line set to be located in southeastern Manitoba that will cross into the US border south of Piney, Manitoba.

The line has an in-service date of 2020 and will run approximately 150 kilometres with tower heights expected to reach between 40 to 60 metres and be located every 400 to 500 metres.

The preferred route designated for the line will see hydro towers come in close proximity to the community of La Broquerie and many other communities in Manitoba's southeast rather than an alternate route that was also considered.

The alternate route would have seen the line run further east, avoid densely populated areas and

eventually terminate at the same spot at the US border.

The Progressive Conservative caucus has repeatedly asked for information about the routing of the line and its proximity to densely populated areas and has yet to receive any response.

Landowners all across Manitoba are concerned about the impact hydro line routing could have on land values.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro to immediately provide a written explanation to all members of the Legislative Assembly regarding what criteria were used and the reasons for selecting the preferred routing for the Minnesota-Manitoba transmission line, including whether or not this routing represented the least intrusive option to residents of Taché, Springfield, Ste. Anne, Stuartburn, Piney and La Broquerie.

And this is signed by J. Korman, S. Korman, D. Serceau and many others, Mr. Speaker.

Brain Injury Services in Manitoba

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

And the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Brain Injury Canada, cited at <http://braininjurycanada.ca/acquired-brain-injury/>, estimates that 50,000 Canadians sustain brain injuries each year, over one million Canadians live with the effects of an acquired brain injury, 30 per cent of all traumatic brain injuries are sustained by children and youth, and approximately 50 per cent of brain injuries come from falls and motor vehicle accidents—or motor vehicle collisions, I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker.

(2) Studies conducted by Manitoba Health in 2003 and 2006 and the Brandon Regional Health Authority in 2008 identified the need for community-based brain injury services.

(3) These studies recommended that Manitoba adopt the Saskatchewan model of brain injury services.

(4) The treatment and coverage of—for Manitobans who suffer brain injuries varies greatly,

resulting in huge inadequacies depending upon whether a person suffers the injury at work, in a motor vehicle accident, through assault or from medical issues such as a stroke, aneurysm or anoxia due to cardiac arrest or other medical reasons.

(5) Although in-patient services, including acute care, short- and longer term rehabilitation, are available throughout the province, brain injury patients who are discharged from hospital often experience discontinuation or great reduction of services which results in significant financial and emotional burdens being placed on family and friends.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to develop and evolve community-based brain injury services that include, but are not limited to, case management services, known also as service navigation, safe and accessible housing in the community, proctor or coach-type assistance for community re-integration programs, improved access to community-based rehabilitation services, and improved transportation, especially for people living in rural Manitoba.

And (2) to urge the provincial government to encompass financial and emotional supports for families and other caregivers in the model that is developed.

And this petition is signed by L. Vickery, S. Semenko, M. Bender and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: Any further petitions?

Seeing none, we'll move onto grievances.

* (14:40)

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Mr. Speaker: Seeing no grievances, we'll move on to orders of the day, government business.

The honourable Minister of Education, on-acting Government House Leader.

Hon. James Allum (Acting Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, standing in the name of the member for Steinbach—the Opposition Day motion for the member for Steinbach.

OPPOSITION DAY MOTION

Mr. Speaker: We'll now call for the Opposition Day motion, standing in the name of the honourable member for Steinbach.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson), that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the federal government to conduct a national referendum prior to changing from a first-past-the-post voting system for federal elections to another system to determine the will of Manitobans and all Canadians regarding their preferred system of voting.

Motion presented.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, we believe this is a timely issue to debate. Of course, we are on the eve of a provincial election, but we also know that federally, the new Prime Minister has discussed and talked about changing the voting system from what Canadians know as the first-past-the-post voting system to something else, something that is undefined by the Prime Minister. We have heard, federally, that the government is not intending to consult with Canadians prior to determining what the new voting system might be.

Now, I recognize that the new federal government did run on a mandate to change the voting system, but they never spoke during that election about what a new voting system might actually look like, Mr. Speaker. So we believe that they obviously have the right to consult with Canadians on this issue, but they should consult with Canadians on this issue.

How Manitobans and Canadians throughout Canada elect their government is important to them. The system by which the rules are governed in terms of how a government gets elected is critical and fundamental to our democracy, Mr. Speaker.

To not allow input from Canadians by way of a referendum would certainly leave some to wonder and be concerned whether or not rules are being changed to benefit one particular political party or another, Mr. Speaker. And we certainly believe that that is not in the interests of democracy. That is not in the interests of fairness. And it's not in the interests of Manitobans or all Canadians.

We hope that other parties will look at this as a non-partisan Opposition Day motion and will look at

it as something that we can talk about in a bipartisan way, Mr. Speaker.

Now, I recognize that the NDP in not too recent days have spoken poorly about referendums, Mr. Speaker. We know, of course, and I don't need to go and I don't have the time to go through the history of what happened when the NDP government refused and took away the referendum right for Manitobans on the PST. We know what resulted in that. Not only did it result in hundreds of people coming to committee here at the Legislature, not only did it result in hundreds of people attending several rallies outside of the front steps of this Legislature, but it resulted in the NDP caucus 'icself' imploding, Mr. Speaker, over the last couple of years and completely breaking apart into several factions. I hope that the NDP would learn from that mistake by not supporting a referendum under the PST, that they would see the importance of having a referendum from this.

I understand that the Premier (Mr. Selinger) has talked about learning from his mistakes, believing that he has made several mistakes. And we know that there are more than I have time to go through on an itemized basis, but certainly one of them was taking away that referendum right for Manitobans on the PST. But this is an 'offortunity,' obviously, to support a referendum on something that is critical to our democracy.

My hope is that my friend from River Heights supporting the Liberal Party position will also see the importance of standing up for Manitobans. He will have an opportunity today to show that he and his party and, by extension, his leaders, is, in fact, standing up for Manitobans and believes that his first priority, and that the primary priority of a Manitoba MLA is to stand up for the interests of Manitobans, Mr. Speaker. And so I certainly hope that we're going to have the support of my friend from River Heights.

This is something that I believe that all legislators in this House can believe and can speak on a bipartisan basis. We all, as individuals who are out in an election fairly soon, those who are running for re-election, we all need to know that our democratic system is not only fair but it is seen to be fair by those who we are going to and asking for their support and asking for their vote. By not allowing and to having a system change of elections federally, Mr. Speaker, that would go away from a system that Canadians understand without having a

referendum and input from Canadians is a very, very dangerous precedent.

Now I'm not going to suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the first-past-the-post voting system is a perfect system. I'm not even certain if it's a preferred system from Canadians, but that is the question, the question that has to go to Canadians. This is not about defending the current system of electing governments nationally. That is not the point of this particular Opposition Day motion. It is about going to Canadians and talking to them and asking them about what they think would be the best system for them which they would believe in. It's about giving validity and credibility to any change that might come. It's about giving it an assurance that any change isn't there to support one particular political party or another.

And I would hope that my friends in the NDP, having learned the lesson of what it is when you take away—when you take away somebody's right to have their voice heard on a critical issue, I would hope that they would've learned that lesson. When they look at the rubble of their own caucus, Mr. Speaker, I would hope that they would know that this is partly the result of them not giving Manitobans the voice that they were entitled to. I would hope that they would see what damage it caused their own party and that they might look and now realize that they made a mistake by taking away that democratic voice, and that they would want to stand up here to allow Manitobans and, by extension, send a clear message that this Legislature stands as one in ensuring that there is, and asking for a referendum nationally, prior to there being any changes to the electoral system.

I would appeal to members, not as members of individual parties who have—may have taken past positions, although I know the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) has spoke very clearly about the need for people to have input on important issues. He spoke very strongly about Manitobans having the right to a referendum on the PST. I could provide you the quotes, Mr. Speaker, where the member for River Heights was very adamant that it was important that peoples would have their voices heard on such a critical issue. And I would say that I'm sure that my friend from River Heights would feel that a issue of how governments are elected is as important as how taxation works in the province of Manitoba, that one is not more important necessarily than the other, that they both have that equal right, both through the referendum law that we have in

Manitoba, but now asking for this referendum nationally on the federal level before this change.

So I would ask members to not look at this as a partisan debate, to put aside their own individual political perspectives and to look at this as a democratic issue, a democratic debate, Mr. Speaker, where we are looking to protect the democratic right of not just Manitobans but also Canadians, that we will stand with other Canadians by sending the signal from the Manitoba Legislature that it is important that there be a referendum prior to changing the federal voting system.

Now we can discuss and we can have debates about what a new federal voting system may or may not look like. That would be getting ahead of the fact because I think we want to hear from Manitobans and want to hear from Canadians on a—through a referendum, Mr. Speaker. And so it's not about prejudging what the outcome is; in fact, it's the opposite. It's about ensuring that we hear that input first, hear from Manitobans, hear from Canadians and then we can have that democratic discussion.

Now I know that there are some members who will probably stand up and say, well, why are we debating this in Manitoba? Why is this being debated in the Legislature? Well, I think that Manitobans have a very, very important role in sending a signal to Ottawa. I know there are many things that Manitobans in this Legislature have in the past sent a signal to Ottawa on, Mr. Speaker. I know that, in fact, the New Democrats, the NDP, have brought in resolutions that had an impact on the national stage and they were asking certain things to be done nationally.

* (14:50)

And so it's certainly not out of scope and it's not unusual to have this debate in the Manitoba Legislature. What may be unusual is whether or not we can put aside some other partisan interests, whether the Liberal member or the New Democratic members are willing to come together and stand as one to send that signal that here in Manitoba we believe not only in our democracy and our democratic system, but when there are changes to that system, when there are modifications or alterations to our democracy that are significant and that are substantial and that might actually affect the way governments are elected—governments that govern all of us, not just as Manitobans, but as Canadians—that we'd want to have that put to the people first.

And, if that resolution comes out of Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, I think that that'll be a positive thing and we can certainly speak to other jurisdictions and other provinces and other legislators and other governments about joining us in that signal.

So my hope is that this Legislature will be able to set aside some of the difficulties that we sometimes have as different political parties and the differences that emerge from them, Mr. Speaker, and we can speak as a unified voice not because we are Conservatives, not because we are New Democrats, not because we are Liberals or other members of different political parties, but because we are all legislators; we were all elected under a democratic system, and if we don't defend that democratic system, who will? Who will we leave it to to defend the democratic system if it is not us as legislators?

And I hope that, at least, if the member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell) cannot put aside his partisanship for one afternoon, I hope that there are other members who could do it, who could show themselves as better legislators who could rise above their more basic instincts to just deny something because it didn't come from them. That's my hope.

Mr. Speaker, let's stand up for democracy here in Manitoba this afternoon.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): It's an interesting resolution that's now been brought by the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) dealing with federal issue. It's interesting timing. I suppose the key issue of the day for the Progressive Conservatives is whatever they determine to be the issue.

Yesterday, I thought it was the economy and jobs and I think we're prepared to talk about it. But, if this is what the member for Steinbach would like to use the Opposition Day motion—I'm happy to discuss it with him and, frankly, I think it is an interesting thing for us to debate today.

Ms. Jennifer Howard, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

I think we can all agree that the current system of voting and electing representatives across Canada could use a good look and an open discussion across this country. There are interesting points to be made on every side of the debate. There are those who say that the first-past-the-post voting effectively disenfranchises or disenfranchises some people because they feel their votes are wasted. We've seen that the number of people voting—the percentage of people voting in Canada has actually declined until, perhaps, maybe just the very last election. There are people

who have some strong thoughts on that, and I think it's fair to hear what they have to say and to have that debate.

There are others who propose different forms of electing representatives. There's a BC approach that was tried unsuccessfully in a referendum of a single transferable vote, so at least you have the appearance at the end of the day of whoever wins a district having at least 50 per cent of the support, even if it's on the second or the third or the fourth or the fifth choice as their representative.

Other people have been speaking in favour of proportional representation, which has some interesting advantages to ensure that every party that receives a minimum threshold of support winds up having representation in the House of Commons. There are concerns with that; although many people speak about the advantages of a proportional representation, they don't really speak about what that would mean for the effective end of local representation. And in just a few days those of us running again will be going back into our own communities and we'll be knocking on doors in our own area and seeking the support of voters. That changes a lot if there is a system of proportional representation where there isn't the same connection from a Member of Parliament to their own area or a member of the Legislature to their own area, and that would be a major change.

And, of course, one of the concerns, if it was truly proportional representation, is that it may in fact give more power to the leader of a party and to the executive of a party as they create the list of who would then be the top individuals to be put based on the percentage of votes. And the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen)—and I may actually agree on this point—that perhaps he and I wouldn't want that power to be centred in someone other than the people that we now represent in the Legislature.

So there are interesting issues. This resolution comes before we even know what it is that the federal government intends to do, whether they intend to have an all-party committee.

I expect that whatever they do will be—there will be widespread consultation from Canadians. I think it's fair to say that there should be a method of getting the views of Canadians from coast to coast on this very important issue, and it may well be in future that this is something that there could be a provincial position taken on.

What is interesting right now is that there has been a task force dealing with Manitoba that has been struck that will be doing its work after the election to hear what Manitobans have to say. And I think it would be useful, even though it's for the purposes of provincial elections; it'll be interesting to hear what Manitobans have to say before we race ahead and to, today, try to tie the hands of any future Legislature on what should happen.

It is interesting, of course, that the member for Steinbach, of course, paints himself today as the non-partisan paragon of democracy. And, of course, this member and every member of this Chamber had a chance just a couple of years ago to stand up on a resolution that I brought when I was the Attorney General and minister for constitutional affairs, on calling on the federal government to abolish the Senate. And each member of the Progressive Conservative Party in this Legislature stood in their place, as did the Liberal, and they voted against that resolution which would have called in the feds to abolish the Senate. That institution, which is unelected, unaccountable and, frankly, Mr.—Madam Deputy Speaker, dates from a time when women, indigenous people, the poor and other minorities could not even vote.

And we know the Opposition Leader's support for the Senate is long-standing. We know, perhaps, the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) is just hopefully waiting that one day that call to go and join that august institution comes. I'm not planning on getting appointed to the Senate any time soon and, in fact, no New Democrat has ever looked like being appointed to the Senate.

And, indeed, I'll quote from the Regina Manifesto, which is the founding document of the CCF, which then became the New Democratic Party. And back in 1933, the CCF members gathered and they came up with this statement, which is remarkably accurate even some 93 years later: "The Canadian Senate, which was originally created to protect provincial rights, but has failed even in this function, has developed into a bulwark of capitalist interests, as is illustrated by the large number of company directorships held by its aged members. In its peculiar composition of a fixed number of members appointed for life, it is one of the most reactionary assemblies in the civilized world. It is a standing obstacle to all progressive legislation and the only permanently satisfactory method of dealing with the constitutional difficulties it creates is to abolish it."

Well, you know, I take my political DNA from people like Tommy Douglas and Stanley Knowles and others who were there. I know the members opposite—well, their political DNA is a lot closer to Patrick Brazeau and Pamela Wallin and Mike Duffy and, of course, good old Senator Plett, one the two Manitoba senators still remaining.

And why wouldn't the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) have stood up at that time and said, yes, I'm a great New Democrat—not New Democrat, I'm a great democrat? I agree we should do away or, at the very least, try to improve this outdated, reactionary, non-democratic institution, and why not? Well, maybe Senator Plett listens carefully to what's said in this place, and I'm sure with Senator Plett it wouldn't be a text or an email; it wouldn't even be a voice message. I'm sure if they had done otherwise they would have had a pink phone message from Senator Plett—you know, very busy, because sometimes he's running Manitoba PC election campaigns while he's supposed to be doing his work as a senator. Or maybe sometimes he's in the House, thwarting the democratic voice as when he was the leader in having the Senate delay and ultimately destroy human rights for transgender persons. I'm sure Senator Plett would not have been very happy with that. And I'm sure they're almost as scared of Senator Plett as they are of their own leader and his endless trove of wooden buffaloes.

So, you know I—again, I fear maybe being a New Democrat and being opposed to the Senate and calling for its abolition, maybe the member opposite will see that as being a partisan thing. I think there are some good points to a debate. Again, I'm not sure why it would be this day. I'm not sure why the member would seek to do this before we even know what it is the federal government has in mind. I'm not sure why he'd do that before he even finds out what the federal government has in terms of involving other parties represented in the House of Commons, what plans they have to hear from Canadians but it is a decent point. We're always prepared to talk about democracy in this place. I know the member missed it last time he had a chance, so certainly I'll be interested to hear what the Liberal member has to say and what other members of this House have to say on this resolution.

Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

* (15:00)

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and take this

opportunity to put a few words on the record in respect of this motion that we are allowed to consider this day, urging the federal government to conduct a national referendum prior to any change from a first-past-the-post system for federal elections to another system.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is an important motion and it comes at an important time in our nation's history. The context of today's discussions, I mean, they're far broader and far deeper than just a single statement, but I think what has raised the issue anew for a lot of Canadians is a commitment made by the now-new Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, when he said during the 2015 federal campaign—he pledged to Canadians that the 2015 federal election would be the last federal election under which a first-past-the-post system would be in place. So that's quite a statement to get people going and to get a debate going, and oftentimes a debate gets renewed energy on both sides when a statement like that is made. So at the very least, that statement and the pledge made by that party has served the purpose of igniting, again, this debate in the consciousness of Canadians.

And I support the statements made by the member of Steinbach earlier that it is a meritorious debate for us to have, a discussion of value and importance and timeliness for us to have this day. I believe that we can, as legislators in this place. We all have relationships with members of Parliament both in this province and from other provinces. We have the ability to have ongoing dialogue with our federal partners and we take an interest in these federal matters. But, Madam Acting Speaker, of course, we also understand that this is a discussion that is fundamental to the way we do democracy in this country. We need to get this right.

I was—I will admit that I was alarmed to hear the statements of the then-candidate, now Prime Minister, not because I am entrenched in my views and unwilling to examine any other form of electoral process. We have to always understand that in the conventions we observe, in the conventions in this House, where I see the mace at the table; I see the clerks at the table, and you in your place. These conventions did actually have a starting point. They come from somewhere. The Westminster system was born at one time, and something else preceded it and this was better. But we always have to understand when we have conventions and traditions, it came from somewhere. There was a rationalization and it was the work of serious people to deliberate and to

bring forward something and hold it up to scrutiny and for it to proceed, and then, perhaps as well, along the way for changes to be made.

That is the very reason why even now we have adopted changes to this place and even now in this context, now in this spring session, in the fall session, going forward there are changes that will affect the way we conduct ourselves. I have to say, Madam Acting Speaker, I've been encouraged by some of the small changes. I understand right now there's a proposed—well, perhaps I shouldn't allude to proposed changes that have not been ratified—but we can say this in respect of changes already made. I know that now we have included in our deliberations here the opportunity when a bill is introduced before debate at second reading, for the minister to have a chance to unpack that bill and to have opposition members question the minister.

Now, Madam Acting Speaker, you and I can both say we've seen that already in the short time. We've seen that process go south, but we've also seen it observed well by both sides. And I would take into account comments that you as well put on the record the other day in a speech you gave about our—the necessity for ourselves to conduct ourselves in a certain way in this place. We rely on all of us on both sides of this Chamber, and we see that when this new convention is received well and that critics and ministers proceed with good intentions, it strengthens the process.

As a new member—I'll still refer to myself as a new member of this Legislative Assembly. Soon I won't be able to remark in that fashion; if I'm elected again, I will return as an incumbent, and we all take the chance that that will not be the case. We put these things in the hands of voters, and that's exactly as it should be.

But in any case, even in the short time I've been here, I have seen how this process strengthens our deliberations because it does allow for a less partisan way to get at questions, questions that perhaps before had to wait to the committee stage to get discussed. Now it operates almost like a bill briefing. We can do a bill briefing, but then after that fact we can ask questions on the record to say, who did you consult, where did the idea come from? We can ponder other aspects. We can ask ministers, have you considered this? Should fortune shine on us and our party go to the other side, if that is the will of voters in Manitoba, then we're going to see that process from the other side. I would submit that this process

works. It works now for opposition as well as government.

I take that long foray in order to come back and say it is not for members here in this Assembly today to pretend that our systems cannot be strengthened. It is not the how, the nuts and bolts, that we want to discuss this afternoon. It is the actual foundational commitment to putting power in the hands of people. There are some decisions that must be directly influenced by voters.

Now, I heard the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) in his comments just earlier talk about his concern that voting numbers have declined. And I would submit in this place, Madam Acting Speaker, that, yes, I would agree that even around different areas of the province we have seen plurality—or I shouldn't say plurality, we have seen voter turnout decline. Now, I would suggest there are many—a variety, a myriad of reasons for that, and that democracy is not well served when governments do not keep their word. There is already, in the minds of hearts of people, too much suspicion cast on the motivations of politicians. You say that word politician, and people in certain circles will chuckle.

One friend of mine, when I indicated my desire to pursue politics and let my name stand for nomination, he made some kind of a funny comment and said, what kind of a bet did you lose that you had to put your name on the nomination. He had a very poor estimation of people in our profession, and we know that it is not, in most cases, well deserved. We know that the vast majority of the people in this place serve long hours away from their families. They make a lot of sacrifices to do this work. The hours are bad. But it is work we take on humbly and we take it on with gratitude for the opportunity because it is work that needs doing.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would suggest that in this case, the idea of a referendum is work that needs doing. We need to entrust Canadians to have this say. I think about the way, as Finance critic, I must put on the record and say that this very NDP government took away the right to vote of Manitobans when they passed Bill 20 to bring in a tax change that would raise the provincial sales tax to 8 per cent. Now, I've read the bill and I believe that was just prior to your time as serving as Finance minister. We had some good exchanges in Estimates. I realized the government kind of went around the rules by saying it's a temporary tax increase. A permanent tax increase would result in a different process. This was

a temporary tax increase that they defined as a nine-year, 11-month, 364-day tax increase, and because of that they wouldn't need to observe all the rules. I think that's cynical. I do not believe that lends to the idea of the public getting a better estimation of the work we do here or the kind of people that we are.

It is important that we get these rules right. It is like that same referendum condition that the government went around. We need to send a signal, as a group of legislators, that Canadians deserve a say. The federal government House leader in Ottawa had said—has said already that a referendum is not in the cards. He said he's going to strike a committee. I do not believe that meets the threshold. I do not believe that it meets the test of what we should allow.

We're talking about changes that will massively alter how we do elections. PEI, Ontario and BC have held referendums. They have rejected in strong terms any very large change from the status quo. We need to do this right. It is complicated. But just because it's complicated does not preclude it from going to referendum. I'm happy for the discussion today and eager to hear what others have to say on this matter.

* (15:10)

Mr. Dave Gaudreau (St. Norbert): The member's actually brought up a really important federal issue. One of the things that I would like to point out to the member, though, is that they stood in their places when we talked about the Senate. We had a motion in the House to talk about abolishing the Senate, an unelected, unaccountable, you know, a body of government that was from the olden days that we said that we should abolish, and they stood up in their places and they said no.

So the Leader of the Opposition said that he supports the Senate. So, once again, you know, we see the flip-flopping of the opposition. They—you know, they want to talk about the federal government issues, but when we bring up important issues in how to save taxpayers millions and millions of dollars by abolishing the Senate, they don't want to talk about it.

This is kind of a theme with them when we talk about actually saving taxpayers money. They don't want to talk about it unless it's something that they're looking at doing, much like the sick notes. They said, on record, that the most important people were companies and corporations. Well I disagree; I think

the most important people are the people. That's what we're here to represent on our side of the House, anyway. On the other side of the House we see where they—where they're so concerned about. They said that it's—the most important people were corporations and companies.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we've already asked the federal government to move towards electoral reform. And we said we'd like to strike an all-party task force to see how this issue best addressed Manitoba's needs, including, actually, a referendum. So it's already being addressed. We've already been in contact with the federal government about it, saying that we're interested in working with them, and we certainly believe that the Manitobans can consulted—should be consulted.

They want to talk about, you know, having a referendum. Well, I mean, where was the referendum on MTS when it was rammed through in the middle of the night and they sold off MTS? Where was the referendum on that? A Crown corporation owned by the people sold off in the middle of the night by the other side of the House, and not once has the Leader of the Opposition stood up in this House and said whether or not he benefited from it. Did he get anything? Did he not get anything? We don't know. I mean, you know, the seven-car garage and the big house, maybe he did. Maybe he did. Maybe he benefited from the sale of MTS.

You know, he's certainly the everyday average Manitoban where he says that, you know, \$5,000 is gone to—out of Manitobans' pockets. I hope he realizes that's a half a—that's about half a billion dollars' worth of spending. Right? Like, I don't know where he gets these numbers from, but the average Manitoban doesn't spend that kind of money. To spend 1 per cent on a PST, they just don't spend that kind of money. I mean, I know, all the 'Lexi' in his garage, maybe it's different, maybe he's bought a bunch of new ones this year and he's hurting from that 1 per cent PST. I know that he doesn't like our plan because it does tax the people who are doing better. With the people who are doing once \$170,000 a year, and \$230,000 a year, we do tax them more. So the Leader of the Opposition's going to pay to more tax, so it's no wonder he's an angry man. It's no wonder, right? He doesn't want to pay more taxes; he's all about cutting taxes.

Well, you know, you look at what we're going to—what's happening in Manitoba and what's happening around Canada and the world, they don't

want to address that. They want to bury their heads in the sand and they don't want to address the fact that, you know, the world economy is slowing down, Canada's growth is cut in half from what it was supposed to be, but we're outperforming that.

And why is—why are we outperforming that? What's the reason? Well the Conference Board of Canada said it's largely due to government spending on infrastructure. Prudent infrastructure that we're going to invest in for years to come, they want to delay that. So they don't want to build a road, and in 10 years from now we'll build that road. Is it going to be cheaper to build in 10 years? Has anything gone down in prices? No, it's going to be more expensive.

This is historic. Interest rates are at a historic low. So doesn't it make sense to take the money and invest it now and build that infrastructure that we're going to need for the future—like the PCH that's happening in St. Norbert. Is that were the members opposite would cut? They're going to cut the PCH that we're going to be building in St. Norbert? How about my new schools? Is that where they're going to cut?

They're saying they want to cut a half a billion dollars from the budget, where are they going to cut? Where's the opposition's plan? They refuse to put a plan on the table. We've got a document; we've got a plan. You know, instead of debating issues that matter right now in this House to Manitobans, they want to talk about this.

Well, let's talk about the, you know, the federal government. Let's talk about what happened just a few short months ago underneath their side of the House, the PC government, the Conservative government. Let's talk about Harper and all the cuts. That's what we would see in Manitoba from the Leader of the Opposition, who Harper even said is too right-wing for his own government.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, what we would see is—we would—instead of growing and becoming a better province, building better infrastructure, we would see it going backwards because we would just be trading out one Harper for another. This one's just a little taller. We, you know—they muzzled scientists. That's their side of the House; they said scientists couldn't speak to the media. In fact, they fired most of them. That's what we can expect from the Opposition if they ever become government.

They want to talk about constitutional things? How about the federal Conservative government and

all the robocalls? How about that when they broke the law and they robocalled everybody?

How about, well, I don't know, election rigging in 1995 when the Leader of the Opposition was around the Cabinet table, and they rigged an election? You want to talk about constitutional issues? I don't think we have to take any lessons from them on the other side of the House. They didn't have a referendum for selling off a Crown corporation like MTS. They certainly didn't consult Manitobans when they tried to rig an election to suit themselves. Did they consult Manitobans about robocalls? I wonder if they've gone door to door and asked about that.

How about the Leader of the Opposition's plan to raise donation limits because, you know, that'll certainly be—how many Manitobans can afford to give \$3,000, as it is, Madam Speaker? That's going to be for them and the 1 per cent that they can raise the donation limit for political donations. That will benefit the opposition.

So let's talk about what's actually going on here in Manitoba. We have one of the best economies in the country. Our plan is working. We're growing the economy. We've actually doubled the economy in the last—in—since our time in office. It's—our economy is doing well. People are working—\$64-billion economy every year.

St. Norbert, very busy with truck traffic. Thank goodness, our government is going to build a bypass because there's so many trucks that travel down that highway because it's the second busiest port at Emerson in the entire country for trade; \$18 billion a year passes right through my neighbourhood, right down through the States, to the States where we're trading with one of our partners. And that is going to be changed because we're investing in a bypass to bring truck traffic out of a neighbourhood. Now, if they get in, obviously, that won't happen, and we'll see a big cut in all of that infrastructure. The bypass will be gone. The interchanges on the south Perimeter, that won't happen. The schools in my area, that won't happen. More child care, well, that won't happen. We've got, you know, PCH; well, that won't happen.

I mean I'd love to see the plan from the opposition, exactly where they're going to draw their little target before they fire. They always say aim higher. Well, what are they aiming at? They're aiming at hospitals? Is that where they're aiming? Are they aiming at personal-care homes? Is that the

aim? Is the aim schools? Is the aim the school in my area? Is the aim the personal-care home in one of their areas? I'd like to see where their aim is at, Madam Speaker, because they talk about aiming higher. I think that the only thing that they have to aim at are the public servants who serve our province very well, and that's where they would be aiming at. They would be aiming at cutting those public servants. They'd be aiming at privatizing child care. They'd be aiming at those teachers again.

The Leader of the Opposition was in the Manitoba Teachers' Society magazine saying he wouldn't cut the teachers, but he would leave it up to the school boards to do so. So you can read the writing on the wall. He would just defund education, just like they did the last time. This isn't—best prediction of future behaviour is past behaviour. Minus two, minus two, zero, minus six, minus two and zero: their record on education. Our record on education? We fund it to the rate of inflation or greater every single year since 1999. More teachers, more schools, more child care in schools, thanks to our government who's made sure that that's happened.

I want to hear from the Leader of the Opposition his plan for Manitobans. It affects every Manitoban when they're going to go out in an election, and they have no idea what the Leader of the Opposition's going to do for cutting a half a billion dollars. Where's he going to cut it? The two biggest cost drivers in government are education and health care. Is he going to cut it from them? Is he going to cut it from the prison system? Is he going to cut it from the CFS system? Where is he going to cut it from? A half a billion dollars is a lot of money to cut from the economy.

Last time they were in government, they raised the gas tax and spent less on roads. Maybe that's where they're going to cut it. They're going to spend \$90 million on roads instead of the \$700 million we spent this year, and it's going to be over \$1 billion next year. In fact, the City of Winnipeg couldn't even spend all the money we gave them, so they're carrying money over this year because they didn't have enough staff or enough construction companies to do the work, Madam Speaker. That's what you get underneath our side: investment and building. We're moving Manitoba forward. We're building child care, affordable child care with workers having pension plans and having decent wages, and we're building schools, and we're building hospitals. We're building across this province, and we're building

more flood protection, which is very important to the neighbourhood of St. Norbert. And every single time all we hear from the opposition is cut, cut, cut, and they vote against the investments we've put in place.

I would like to hear something about how they're going to manage the economy in Manitoba.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. The honourable member's time has expired.

*(15:20)

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): It gives me great pleasure to rise today to speak to this motion brought forward by the member from Steinbach. It is a motion that is important to all people of Manitoba.

Before we make a fundamental change to our electoral system, it is important that the people of Canada have their say. It's in—like in any other major decision, people should be consulted and made aware of all the issues before something is brought forward.

This motion is about allowing Canadians their say and having input into important and critical issues. This is a non-partisan issue. It's an issue of—about us standing together and doing something for the people of Manitoba, to let the federal government know how we feel about this.

It is important that a referendum be brought forward when it comes to our vote. I mean, the right to vote is something that's extremely important. We just celebrated the hundredth anniversary of women being given the right to vote. So this referendum is important in whatever we talk to in regards to our ability to vote.

We all know that everyone in this House believes that any bill brought forward should have the best interests of the citizens involved. If this involves having a referendum, then that is what should be done.

I listened to Madam Speaker's last final speech the other day, and it was quite important because it stressed on what the job—what our job is in this House when it comes to protecting Manitobans and doing things for Manitobans. And I think that this motion that's brought forward by the member to Steinbach addresses that: that we should all get together and make sure that this motion passes to show the federal government that we are quite interested in what is happening in Manitoba.

We all know that this NDP government has always been very, you know, in favour of referendums. It goes back to the early 2000s when the government introduced—the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro introduced in 2001—the First Minister then—The Manitoba Hydro Amendment Act which amended the law to prevent the privatization of Manitoba Hydro without public approval. And, yes, that was a great motion brought forward so that things couldn't be done with—in important decisions without the input of the citizens of Manitoba.

The bill the Premier introduced in 2001 required the propose—that any proposal to amend, repeal or override the new referendum required or the sale restriction be referred to a standing committee of the Assembly where the public would have input and opportunity to be heard. And, yes, that is extremely important.

In June of 2001, the first minister said, in reference to a need for a referendum on the sale of Manitoba Hydro, the referendum provisions are modelled closely on those of the balanced budget act. Again, the balanced budget act was brought forward to protect Manitobans.

So some of the laws that are being brought forward by the federal government need to be spoken to, and I think it's important that we lobby the federal government to do something about this, to make sure that all Canadians have input into what is happening.

And we know that the provincial government has slowly veered away from their thoughts on referendums, because when they got elected in 2011 one of the—in the second term—or in the second year of their mandate, they brought forward an increase to the provincial sales tax. And we know that that increase to the provincial sales tax should have had a referendum brought forward before that increase was done. They promised the referendum. This was important, and they went ahead and did it without consulting the people of Manitoba.

And I think everyone in this House realizes what was the result of that. It's going to be a dismal decision for this NDP government by doing that. And that's how important it is to make sure that people are heard in the referendums, that—how important the referendum is. I mean, the government back in 2011 went door to door, every single opposition member went door to door, knocked on the doors and says, we will not raise taxes—we will not raise taxes, ridiculous, and that is what they told the people of Manitoba. And then they go ahead and

they do these things without consulting the people of Manitoba, raise the PST from 7 to 8 per cent, a 14 per cent increase, Madam Deputy Speaker, a 14 per cent increase onto the hands of the people who have the least ability. The provincial sales tax is caused the greatest hardship on some of our people who earn the—our lowest wage earners that who has—it has the most effect on people like that, and that is not fair to the people of Manitoba.

So this is a time when possibly the House, the members opposite, can support this motion to ask the federal government for a referendum. It's like maybe paying penance that they realize what they did was wrong before now. Maybe they should stand with us and ask the federal government that we, as Manitobans, would like a say in what happens when it comes time for us to vote.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I know that there's other people who have some extreme importance thoughts on this and I would like them to come forward and bring that forward. Thank you very much.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): Madam Deputy Speaker, I'm very pleased to speak today on the Opposition Day motion urging the federal government to conduct a national referendum prior to changing from a first-past-the-post voting system for federal elections to another system to determine the will of Manitobans and all Canadians regarding their preferred system of voting.

Before I deal with the issue at hand here, I wanted to say that, you know, when elections—we never know how they're going to turn out; I guess that's why we have elections in the first place. So, given that I was here once before as a member for a number of years and I left and was not able to say goodbye to the rest of the people at the Legislature here, but I did do that when I was a federal MP. I wanted to say that I want to thank my family, my campaign team, all the voters who've stuck with me over the last—I guess it's eight provincial elections now and two federal elections. And, regardless of the outcome of the upcoming election, I want to—I look forward to getting the member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar)—hopefully, he'll still be the member for Selkirk after the next election, and I'm sure he will, to get my boat in the river and head out to Muddy Waters for some warm afternoon fun.

I want to say also, Mr.—Madam Deputy Speaker, that in dealing with this resolution, I find it particularly interesting that parties tend to be

supportive of first-of-be against first-past-the-post systems until they actually win using that system. I've seen third parties, probably of all stripes, very stridently suggest that somehow, you know, 60 per cent of the people didn't—majority didn't vote for the government and they add, like, their numbers to the other parties and they say, you know, if we'd only put all these parties together, this vote together, we would've won. So we want a system of proportional representation so we get, you know, better representation

And then those same parties will often find themselves victors in elections where they win under the current system—first past the post. And then all of a sudden you don't hear them talk that way anymore. So I find it very interesting that the Liberals now federally are all interested in adopting or changing the system that they actually won under, and I wonder why that is.

Well, it's been suggested that they understand that they are the second choice, there's a second choice of Conservative voters and there are also, on the other side of the spectrum, the second choice of NDP voters. So, on a preferential ballot they will be more often likely to be the second choice of everybody. So—and that I believe is part of the motivation here for them wanting to change the system.

* (15:30)

Now, you know, this has been debated in the federal House, and I have to say that in all likelihood we've seen provincial initiatives in, I believe, BC and two or three provinces over the last few years, and when the ideas actually go through a referendum, they have—never seem to pass. I think I'm correct with that that when you—when people get out there and consult. And so it is concerning that the federal government, at the current time, evidently has no plans to have a referendum, that they plan to use their majority to make these changes that they feel will benefit them and bring the system.

But the point is that this opposition motion comes out of nowhere. I mean, we should wait until the federal government actually does something, assuming they will. And then whatever Legislature exists at the time, then we should, you know, debate this issue more and deal with it when we have something to talk about.

But I think that the members opposite have simply brought this Opposition Day motion up just

for—they—because they want to talk about something else. They just want to talk about—*[interjection]*—they want to—they don't want to talk about the fact that they didn't have a referendum on the sale of Manitoba Telephone System. You know, they don't want to talk about that, but they want to talk about referendums that they agree with.

So—and by the way, you know, dealing with this issue, I mean, there's lots of elements to this issue of the electoral system that we should be looking at. And one of them, I would suggest to you, and I don't know that the all-party committee that we had here dealing with the Senate dealt with this issue, but we should perhaps be looking at mandatory voting. It's been a concept that has worked in Australia over—and now from memory, I know that they've had it for probably close to 100 years. And, interestingly enough, when we look at the Australia situation, you would think that the mandatory voting system would tend to benefit one party over another. Well, we took a look at how many elections there've been under that system, and, believe it or not, the labour and the conservative party have actually split right down the middle. So, whatever numbers there are, if there were 10 elections under a mandatory voting system, it's been like five for the conservatives and five for labour.

Now, what are the advantages of that system? Well, the advantages are pretty obvious when you look at Australia. They have a voter turnout of probably, you know, 80 per cent or more compared to our turnouts of, like, 60 per cent—and if we could even get that far. So—and, of course, the system in Australia does have a penalty if you don't vote, but it's not a really tough penalty. It's a minor fine, and just the suggestion that there is a penalty gets the people participating. And, you know, surprisingly, there are a lot of people in this country that actually support that idea. And I just hope that perhaps if we do get around to debating the change of the—of our system that we will consider that in the process.

Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, we are shortly going to be dealing with the pros and cons of our policies for the coming election. And I want to say that the government—that the NDP has a very compelling case for re-election—not to mention the fact that we are raising taxes on higher income people earning more than \$170,000 a year and we're offering a tax reduction to working people in this province. The fact of the matter is that we are proposing to build much needed infrastructure in this province. And, you know, among the many things

that we've already built, like a new airport, new hospital, new—the expanded Convention Centre, I mean, the list is just endless, the projects that we have built; unlike the previous Conservative government that really had a record of very little of building anything, for that matter.

Now, we are interested in our area, the northeast section of Winnipeg, in the Louise Bridge which is over 100 years old. It's one lane in each direction. Parking—traffic is backed up and we would like the City to basically repriorize that bridge because that bridge was on a priority list before, under the former mayor, and what has happened here is the City has simply taken the money and moved it off to Waverley. And now in the current budget that is before the City as we speak, they are—they, after budgeting \$2 million in the 2015 budget for the purpose of planning, designing and consulting on the new Louise Bridge, a further \$2 million was projected in that budget for 2016. All of a sudden, just in the last couple of days when the new proposed budget has come out, they have turned that—they've reduced it to only \$500,000. So, once again, what is their intention regarding this bridge? Obviously, the mayor does not support replacing the Louise Bridge based on what he's doing in this particular budget.

So, you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, I was just actually getting started on this resolution, and I realize now that I'm out of time, so if the members want to vote to extend my time, I certainly would accept it. Anyway, thank you very much.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Madam Deputy Speaker, I'm glad to have an opportunity to stand and put a few comments on the record about this Opposition Day motion, and I would just note for the record that the motion at hand states that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the federal government to conduct a national referendum prior to changing from a first-past-the-post voting system for federal elections to another.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I have to say that I was quite surprised when I heard that the federal Liberals were even contemplating doing something like this. And, just as a citizen and somebody that has a strong belief and value in democracy, I find that incredibly offensive, that a government would look at bringing in such a massive change to this country and not be prepared to speak to the people of this country to find out if it is something that they would support. They are talking about ramming through a change that would have dramatic effects in Canada. And, in

fact, every time I hear about this or sit and, you know, have my coffee and read the paper and hear about this, I become actually quite alarmed by it.

I am very disturbed that a federal government could be so arrogant in thinking that they can just go ahead and do this. To me, that's not right, and certainly, you know, a really good example of why it's important for people to have a voice was what we heard when people came to committee on the PST hike. And there were people there—and I was there most nights—and people came because they felt that having a voice was really important. And I know we are only one of two provinces in Canada that actually have public hearings like that on legislation, but that was one of the most amazing examples of the value of bringing the public forward, welcoming them here to hear what they have to say.

And the people that came forward were many that had never, ever done something like this before. There were people of all ages, you know. There were poor people; there were people on welfare; there were working poor. There were others worried about their disabled kids. There were others worried about their senior parents. It was such a cross mix of all kinds of people that spoke up.

* (15:40)

And one in particular stood out for me and that was a man—he was a younger man that was actually very, very ill with cancer and he was in bed. He actually somehow said he got out of his cancer bed to come and make a presentation here. He did not look well, and he stood there, though, and he made his speech.

These were not people that were, you know, came with a lot of written notes. They weren't sophisticated presentations, but they came because they believed in something, and they believed in democracy and they believed in the importance of their voice in a debate. And I have to say probably, in my political career, that those committee hearings were probably the most profound that I have every experienced.

And I had the chance the other night to be looking through all of my papers on the bill that raised the PST in Manitoba, and I had a chance to reread some of these comments and, again, I was affected by what people felt and that they felt that they wanted to come forward and have their voice. And to me, that made such a statement about why,

you know, democracy like this is so critical and why it's important that voices be heard.

The fact that the federal government would not want to listen to voices is really quite mind-boggling, and I do believe that Manitoba has an opportunity here before the government—the federal government starts moving in that direction. Here's a chance for all of us in this province to take a stand on standing up for democracy, you know, as Nellie McClung did 100 years ago, where women in Manitoba were the first to be given a vote. It was a hard fight and they fought it in, you know, really quite, you know, quite a lot of circumstances that are not what we're used to today. They didn't have all the amenities and social media and telephones and cars and all of the luxuries that we have today in order to communicate.

We have a chance right now to communicate to a federal government as a province why we think a referendum is important on this issue. This is too important an issue for us to just say, well, let's wait and see what happens. Let's get out there. Let's have the opportunity for a strong vote from people of Manitoba who are willing to stand up and make comments, who are willing to put their voices out there and be heard.

I know this NDP government—I know if we go back to, you know, the early days of the NDP government, they seemed to support referendums. They certainly wanted one with the Manitoba Hydro amendment act, and they seemed to be in favour of having a public voice then. They certainly changed their tune over the number of years after that where, in fact, legislation says that in order to raise taxes you have to have a referendum. Well, they didn't like that, so they found a way around that and wiggled around that.

But here's a chance for them to really stand up, for all of us to stand up and encourage a national referendum on this issue so that Manitobans can have a say in what we think democracy in Canada should look like. We value having, you know, the gift of democracy. We have a lot of refugees coming here now running from countries that don't have the same benefits that we have as a democracy.

So, when we hear that the federal government is going to pull the rug out from under all of us to take away a voice when it comes to the significance of electoral changes, I think we need, as a province, to stand up and have our voice heard as a province and tell people what we think of. I think that's critically important, and I would hope that this government,

the NDP, and I would hope that the provincial Liberals would all think that something like this is important for us to take a stand on and let us encourage the federal government to put forward a referendum on electoral change, because to ram it through the way they seem to be talking about doing I think is offensive not just to me but to many, many others in this country. And it just seems like such a step backwards from a country that has fought so hard for democracy to all of a sudden not have that opportunity to speak up about democracy.

So I would encourage the government to support this Opposition Day motion and let's do something. You know, as we were the first province in Canada to give women the vote, let's stand as a province again and put forward a strong voice from this province and stand proud as a province asking the federal government—demanding that we look at having a national referendum on something as critical as electoral change.

Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Jim Rondeau (Assiniboia): I'm pleased to put a few words on this motion on the record, and the motion says that the Manitoba Legislative Assembly urge the federal government to conduct a national referendum prior to changing the first-past-the-post voting system for federal elections to another system to determine the will of Manitobans and all Canadians regarding their preferred system of voting.

And it's nice to see that the Conservatives have finally decided that they wish to support democracy and inclusion. I find it passing strange that the same need for democracy was not used when either the selling of the Wheat Board when it was supposed to actually be in the legislation when, if the Wheat Board sold, there would be a national referendum, there'd be a discussion. Well, I don't remember an opposition motion on the—urging the federal government to actually have a referendum on selling the Wheat Board.

I sort of remember the fact that it was the NDP government trying to keep those hundreds of jobs and the headquarters in downtown Winnipeg and keep the economics going. I seem to have read something online the other day that said it was billions of dollars that it cost the actual farmers. And so it's cost jobs in downtown Winnipeg; it's cost farmers money. And so I appreciate that the new—the newest motion is talking about democracy. I hope that it consistently is supported.

I also—I'm very, very pleased that they're talking about how important democracy is. I think that in this own House, I think one of the motions that I was really, really pleased on is when we stopped or excluded corporations from spending huge amounts of money into elections. I'm pleased that the unions were also excluded from putting huge amounts of money into elections.

I look at the US government where the US president basically spends a billion dollars—each candidate spends a billion dollars. You have senate races spending \$30 million, \$50 million. You have Congress—congressional races spending millions of dollars, and we—I believe that some of the issues that are in the US system is caused by excessive cash into democracy, where people buy the ears of politicians, people buy the votes of politicians, and I think it's very, very scary.

So I think that I was very proud of our government—the NDP government moving forward on electoral reform to make sure that those with deep pockets could not buy democracy. And I have to say that I was very, very surprised and shocked when the current Leader of the Opposition actually changed that and said that he was going to open up the floodgates that businesses and rich people could buy democracy. I think it's very, very important that the actual average person has the same ability to influence democracy as the rich people, and I think that's a big difference between the NDP and the Conservative parties. And I'm hoping that the Leader of the Opposition has another conversion on the way to Damascus so that he actually supports democracy and the actual equality provisions of democracy.

I also look at some of the debate on what is the best system, and I had the privilege of going to a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association meeting in Britain in 2004, and we talked about the different systems. We talked about the Australian system, which actually has a mandatory voting system.

* (15:50)

We talked about New Zealand, which has a very interesting system where you have some people who are on the list, which are the party list, and some people who are local, and there's about a fifty-fifty group, and what happens is you then have a mixed representation system.

We talked about all the different systems of democracy, and you look at the first-past-the-post system, and now with—if there's four or five parties,

you could actually have a government formed with under 40 per cent of the popular vote.

And so I think it is important to have a discussion. As a person who is leaving politics and getting into the free enterprise system, I have to say that we've been working very, very hard to develop apps and communication tools with multiple groups, and what we're trying to do is allow people to have participation.

And I know it's shocking, but I am agreeing with the member from Charleswood where I say that it is important to have people come and be heard. But the difference I have with her is that I don't think it should be just, come to this building and be heard. I think that they have to have a right to be heard whether they have mobility issues, whether they're in the north or south, whether they are far.

And so, Madam Deputy Speaker, what we need to do is have an engagement process with everyone, and I think that's the whole idea about democracy. And I'm proud of the fact that people thought that in my 16 and a half years of being an MLA, they thought I was everywhere. And the interesting part is that I go to events in the community, and they actually hand me their issues in a piece of paper because they know I'm going to be there; they're going to hand me their piece of paper because they know I'm going to be there. They talk about issues because I'm going to be there.

And I know that's true with the member from St. Norbert and a lot of other people on both sides of the House where they're really active; they're engaged in the community and therefore they're out there. And because they're out there a lot, they hear about the issues. They hear about the concepts that are being discussed. And I think what we need to do is not only just do that on a local area, but I encourage all future governments to get an engagement tool so that whatever the comment is, whatever the ideas are out there, we don't stick to just the Legislative Building for a hearing, but we engage the broader community in consultation, because everyone should have a voice and everyone should have an equal voice. And, whether the person's a academic or a business person or just an average citizen, they must have the same voice. And so, whether they can do a huge academic piece and hand us these half-inch-thick pieces of paper or whether they can have an opinion, they should be able to express it, and I hope that we have a system where we can then move into the 20th century and have

more and more engagement of the public, whatever that means.

I also encourage other people to say: How do we change the rules so that everything is fair? I hope that we put an end to breaking of the election laws. Every single party, I believe, has been called up. I think what we need to do as a society, make sure that no one—I don't care whether it's robocalls or whether it, whatever it is—we have to have a certain standard where no one breaks it, because that breaks the faith in democracy. And so, whether it was the vote-rigging scandal of 1995 or robocalls or even announcements, we must always have a standard that we can't break.

I look at—other thing is that we also have to look back in the past. And whether it was things like the exclusionary act on immigration, whether it was women's right to vote a hundred years ago, all of these things, I believe, if we had open and transparent democracy, an open discussion, then we would not make some of the decisions that happened in the past.

Like, all of us here in this room, many in the province are aware of what happened with Roblin and the people who pushed for women's rights to vote, the mock parliament. And the deal was—is that if they could speak outside the building, they were able to influence in the building. I think what we have to do is hear people both in and out of the building, because I think some of the most atrocious pieces of legislation, whether it was the Chinese exclusion act, the movement of Japanese-Canadians in BC, whether the women or Aboriginals couldn't vote, those were things that I think we should all be ashamed of, that they didn't happen earlier. And I think what we have to do is make sure we have everyone have a right; it's not just certain people.

And, finally, Mr. Speaker, it's been an honour to serve for the last 16 and a half years. It's been great to make a number of speeches. And I'd like to publicly say thank you to all the people on both sides who are retiring. I wish every single individual good luck in the future because I know it's a tough, tough job. And I would also like to wish all of my colleagues well in their future endeavours because, you know what, I wish nothing but good will to people because that's what I've experienced in the last 17 years.

Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, there was a federal election last year. It was a very, very long election campaign. It was made very clear in the election that if there was a Liberal government, the Liberal government would bring in a change away from the first-past-the-post electoral system. Manitobans—indeed, all Canadians—have voted to elect a Liberal government, and they've already voted to do away with the first-past-the-post electoral system and bring in a new system.

The federal Liberal government, under the leadership of Justin Trudeau, will be consulting extensively with Canadians from all across Canada during the months ahead and before any changes are brought in. Indeed, and I quote: Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has promised broad consultation by an all-party committee before legislation is introduced within 18 months to reform the existing system and bring in alternatives such as ranked ballots or proportional representation.

This resolution is therefore not necessary. There's already been a vote by all Canadians, and there will be further extensive consultation before legislative changes are introduced. And, therefore, I will oppose this motion.

Mr. Speaker, Manitobans will have a vote April 19th. One of the options on the ballot is to move away from the first-past-the-post system. It is the system—it is the option to move away from the first-past-the-post system that will be brought in should there be a provincial Liberal government elected.

Let us face it: Proportional representation is in many ways a better and fairer system. It will encourage more people to vote. People can vote freely for their first choice without feeling coerced to vote for one party for strategic reasons rather than because they prefer that party. At a time of falling participation, we need to embrace change.

I find it odd today that the Conservative opposition is focusing now on a federal issue. There is a consultative process. The MLA from Steinbach and other MLAs who are concerned should present to the federal all-party committee instead of using critical, very short time in this House, when there are so many, very many vital issues facing Manitoba today. The MLA for Steinbach should focus on these critical issues and paying attention to them. And it is in that context that I want to use the rest of my time to focus on what I see as so critical today.

We had a fiscal update yesterday. This fiscal 'upshate' showed dismal financial results, a \$646-million core deficit, a \$773-million summary deficit, a debt which is rising by \$2.3 billion, a horrendous and troubling lack of detail in that fiscal statement. What we need is not that sort of approach that we're getting from the NDP. What we need is the Manitoba Liberal plan for much better fiscal management.

A second problem that we're facing today is tremendous problems within child and family services system under the NDP. There are more than 10,000 children in care, far higher than almost any other jurisdiction in the world. What we need instead of the status quo NDP not being effective in producing any change, what we need is the Manitoba Liberal plan to change to a approach with much better supporting families, and so fewer children need to be apprehended and put in care.

Mr.—Madam Speaker, there are huge problems with mental health issues and the way that they are being dealt with in Manitoba at the moment. Instead of the status quo being very problematic in this respect, what we need is the Manitoba Liberal plan to make sure that every child with autism will in fact get the therapy that they need. What we need is the Liberal plan so that we have services provided by psychologists, some critical services, under medicare, like with doctors.

* (16:00)

Madam Speaker, instead of the NDP 17 years of failing to put in a dedicated stroke unit, what we need is the Manitoba Liberal plan to put a priority on doing this as fast as can be possible.

Madam Speaker, we have a diabetes epidemic in this province and that diabetic epidemic has been continuing for all the last 16 and a half years of the NDP government. What we need is a Manitoba Liberal plan to address this, investing in northern housing and in better nutrition, as well as focusing on this issue so that we can get results and we can turn at last the epidemic around.

Madam Speaker, we have a situation where we've had very poor water management over the 16 and a half years, which has resulted in increased flooding, as we saw in 2011 and 2014. What we need is the Manitoba Liberal plan for better water management to reduce the amount of flooding and to take better care of Lake Winnipeg.

Madam Speaker, these are my words on some of the critical issues of today.

Instead of the NDP-Tory same old story of deflecting the federal issues when they are at a loss for something to say, I ask Manitobans to vote for the Manitoba Liberal team, led by Rana Bokhari, on April 19 for a fiscally responsible, positive, progressive change in Manitoba.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, merci, miigwech.

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to put a few comments on the record.

When it comes to our democracy, as resilient as we understand it to be, our democracy is still fragile. We've seen throughout the history of humankind where governments took for granted their systems and found out later on that their system was actually far more fragile than they had initially thought.

We have in Canada a tremendous, stable and great system. Our country is always ranked as one of the best in the world. Our country is always looked upon as one of the best places to go to in the world, whether it's to immigrate, whether it's to travel, whether it's to visit. We've got beautiful sights. We are viewed as being a very good people and we are viewed as friendly. In fact, we used to have a moniker, friendly Manitoba, and that still stands 'til today.

As you travel the province, I find I am the quintessential Canadian; I often bump into somebody and I'm always the first to apologize. And I was visiting in the United States and I bumped into somebody and it—well, they bumped into me and I said, oh, I'm sorry. The person looked at me and said, you must be Canadian.

And that's the kind of people we are.

We have a very good system. Is it perfect? No. But it has brought us many, many years of stability, of a good quality of life. It has allowed us to debate. It has allowed us to disagree. It has allowed us to agree. We have had big majority governments, we've had minority governments, but we've always had good governance.

I am concerned when individuals stand up and indicate that because the country is doing so well, because things are going so well, what we should do is change things because it's as if things are going too good. What we have to do is bring a little bit of uncertainty into it. What we have to do is destabilize it to a degree.

I would caution all Manitobans and I would caution all Canadians, including our current Liberal government and our Prime Minister, be careful what you ask for, be careful the changes you make. Changes in the way we vote in our governments must be very carefully thought through, there should be a very strong vetting process. And, in the end, it is not the politicians' democracy, it is not the politicians' way of voting a government in or out, it is not the politicians' country; it is the people's country, it is their democracy, it is the way they want to choose individuals.

I would, in the most strongest of terms, recommend to our current Prime Minister and our government, let the people decide. The people, in the end, are always right.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we have gone through many elections in here in this province. I haven't agreed with the results; certainly not in the last four or five elections, I have not agreed. I have not agreed with the way the provincial government, the government that was chosen, but I respect the system, and I respect the people had a right to choose and did choose, even if I disagree with it. And I would suggest to our federal counterparts that we always respect the voter. In fact, a lot of people have said to me, you know, people don't really get politics and they, you know, they're not as in tune. Actually, I think we sell the electorate short. I am always, always surprised, I'm always ecstatic when I go out and I talk to people how engaged they are and how much they actually know. And, yes, there are those individuals who aren't as up to speed, but when elections come around, I'm always impressed by how engaged the electorate is. I would never vote the electorate short, and we should always send something as substantial as changing the fundamental way that we elect our governments should go to the people, and we should allow the people to decide. We should always respect the voter. We should always respect the electorate. We should always respect the people. And I would ask this House that we would unanimously send a recommendation to Ottawa that we would encourage them to hold a referendum. Let Canadians, let the people, let the voters have their say on this issue. It is of utmost importance. It is the way they are going to vote for their governments in—for years and generations to come.

Thank you for the opportunity to have the right and the privilege to put those few words on the record, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Chairperson: Are there any more interventions on this motion?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Mineral Resources): I just want to put a few words on the record with respect to this particular motion.

I do find it curious and strange that the opposition should choose a motion on the federal government the day after the opposition has pledged that they're going to do certain things in the House and that there's certain issues that they think are important. I think it does very clearly indicate the priorities of the Leader of the Opposition has refused to provide us with information as to his plan, his plan of cost cutting and how he is going to manage to both roll back taxes and cut half a billion dollars from the budget at the same time and not do or redo what was done in the '90s when he was in Cabinet, which was to lay off thousands of public servants, which includes nurses, doctors, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, medical technicians, lab technicians. In fact, in all those professions, most of the programs were either halted in terms of the training or were, in fact, slowed down. So, as an example, they—the previous government decided to stop training lab technicians. And a generation later, we had trouble getting lab technicians. They cut the medical school enrolment from 90 down to 80, and is it any wonder that it's taken us some time to—although we have a net increase of doctors in this province, it's taken us some time.

Decisions made by the previous Conservative government have affected generations of Manitobans. Decisions that are made today will affect generations of Manitoba. The reckless cuts and the lack of civility with respect to how you approach the people of Manitoba as expressed by the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Speaker, is astounding.

* (16:10)

The fact that Manitobans know that the vast majority, 80 per cent of the money we spend in the health-care system or in the education system, goes to pay the people that hold your mother's hand, that provide the dialysis for your grandmother, that puts the hospital in place, that builds the personal-care home bed. And the reckless cuts of the Leader of the Opposition will—it's not the Manitoba way. The Manitoba way is one of fairness, one of sharing, Mr. Speaker. It's not one of reckless, extreme, one-sided, driven ideals that only deal with, quote, the bottom line. The bottom line is important, but at a time of recession and economic uncertainty, when

many Canadians are worried about the future, it is the time to invest, it is the time to provide a stimulus to the economy. And the Leader of the Opposition says otherwise, and he's afraid to come forward with his actual platform.

He pounded the table yesterday and talked about all of the initiatives he wanted and, quote, a budget, and nowhere was to be seen yesterday, except I think I heard on media, and today we're waiting for the Leader of the Opposition to announce what their program was, and nary a word was heard. Instead, we heard the same old rhetoric and a refusal to deal with the platform, the issues facing Manitoba.

So I'm very fearful for the future of the province should it get in control of the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Speaker, who not only has pledged to cut services, has pledged to privatize daycare, has pledged to cut half a billion dollars from the budget, has pledged to cut the provincial budget by 1 per cent and cut the PST and end the deficit immediately. That's just reckless. That's just not Manitoban. That's just not the way we are. That does not reflect the ideals of this province of sharing and coming together.

So, I find it curious that the day after we provided our economic statement, the very day after, nary a word was heard from the opposition with respect to their plan. In fact, their plan was to talk about the federal government, Mr. Speaker—the federal government. I happen to like, for the most part, the direction of the new federal government with respect to its approach to indigenous people, its approach to the economy, even though I am of a different—it certainly has more compassion compared to previous governments that preceded it.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

I just find it astounding that we'd be sitting in this House debating a federal referendum and a federal issue at a time when we've put forward in this Chamber so much work and so many bills and so much attention towards how we should build hope for Manitobans and build for the generations to come. It's—the words I hear from members opposite deal with a generation of maybe four or five generations ago, Mr. Speaker, which is do it on your own, pull up your socks and if you can't make it, that's too bad.

Mr. Speaker, that's not the Manitoba way. The Manitoba way is to share. The Manitoba way is to admit when you make mistakes—never heard that

from the Leader of the Opposition, never heard today any direction with respect to how they would deal with the situation in the province, other than to attack what we've done and to talk exclusively—exclusively about taxes when, in fact, they know that we've removed the small-business tax; when, in fact, they know that we provided the homeowners seniors tax credit; when, in fact, they know that they promised a rebate on farm tax, on education taxes and now we've raised it to an 80 per cent rebate and nary a word was heard by members opposite.

It's very confusing, Mr. Speaker, and I hope Manitobans—I know Manitobans are wise and I hope they're not fooled by the tactics and the peekaboo tactics of the Leader of the Opposition, who's now adopted a style of staying out of the limelight in the hope of—and not stating his policy in the hope that he doesn't get trapped into a situation of really telling us what he intends to do.

We know what he intends to do from past practice, Mr. Speaker. We know what he's already said he's going to do. We know that, as was said by members opposite today and reminded by one of my colleagues, the best indicator of future behaviour is past behaviour.

I think—you know, I want to close, Mr. Speaker, with just—today I looked at the picture of Tommy Douglas because I'd been inspired by my mom yesterday who talked about what would happen if a Conservative government came into power and what would happen if there wasn't medicare, and I actually stared at the picture of Tommy Douglas and thought about what we stand for and what our principles are and thought, what would Tommy do in this situation?

And Tommy would say, keep fighting the good fight. Keep fighting for all Manitobans. Keep fighting for those seniors who need home care. Keep fighting for those people who need a hospital bed. Keep fighting for those indigenous people who need a way of life. Keep fighting for Manitobans. Keep fighting for the principles that frame what this party stands for, Mr. Speaker.

And I have no hesitation in saying that while we're not a perfect government, Mr. Speaker, we have worked every single day to try to make life better quality and improve the lives of all Manitobans. And that means all Manitobans, not exclusive, but inclusive. And that stands for what this province stands for. We're an inclusive province. We're an inclusive government. We're a province

that respects diversity. We're a government that respects diversity. We're a province that shares. We're a government that shares. We're a province that cares. And we're a government cares.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

The House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Speaker: Question before the House is the Opposition Day motion that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the federal government to conduct a national referendum prior to changing from a first-past-the-post voting system for federal elections to another system to determine the will of Manitobans and all Canadians regarding the preferred system of voting.

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

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 Nays have it.

Recorded Vote

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

Mr. Speaker: A recorded vote having been requested, call in the members.

Order, please.

The question before the House is the Opposition Day motion. Does the House wish to have the motion read?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Speaker: No?

*(17:00)

Division

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

Yeas

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

Nays

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

Mr. Speaker: Is the honourable member for River Heights on his feet? The honourable member for River Heights?

Order, please.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): My mistake, Mr. Speaker. I—if I had voted, I would've voted against this motion.

Clerk Assistant (Mr. Andrea Signorelli): Yeas 19, Nays 33.

Mr. Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I wonder, in light of—I wonder if we might have another vote on this—have leave of the House to have a—to revote on this because one member was unable to occupy his chair at the appropriate time.

Mr. Speaker: Is there will of the House or leave of the House to permit—now, order, please.

Since there seems to be some confusion, and I apologize for that, there has been a request to the House to reconduct the vote on this matter. Is there leave of the House to reconduct the vote?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: Leave has been denied.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, March 9, 2016

CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS			
Introduction of Bills		Aboriginal Students	
		Ewasko; Allum	956
		Fiscal Update Projections	
Bill 22–The Elections Amendment Act (Signatures Required for Nomination Document)		Gerrard; Selinger	959
Chomiak	949	Petitions	
Tabling of Reports		Provincial Trunk Highway 206 and Cedar Avenue in Oakbank–Pedestrian Safety	
Manitoba Student Aid Annual Report, 2014-2015		Schuler	960
Allum	949	Minnesota-Manitoba Transmission Line Route–Information Request	
Public Schools Finance Board Annual Report, for the year ending June 30, 2015		Pedersen	960
Allum	949	Smook	961
		Driedger	962
Members' Statements		Applied Behavioural Analysis Services	
Remembering Rolland Fox		Ewasko	961
Swan	949	Brain Injury Services in Manitoba	
Lymphedema Awareness Day		Mitchelson	962
Ewasko	950		
Talia Gallant		ORDERS OF THE DAY	
T. Marcelino	950	GOVERNMENT BUSINESS	
PST Increase		Opposition Day Motion	
Eichler	950	Goertzen	963
Family Violence Prevention through Education		Swan	965
Gerrard	951	Friesen	967
		Gaudreau	969
Oral Questions		Smook	971
NDP Fiscal Management		Maloway	972
Pallister; Selinger	952	Driedger	974
Stefanson; Chief	955	Rondeau	975
Friesen; Dewar	958	Gerrard	977
Suicide Rates for Children in Care		Schuler	978
Wishart; Irvin-Ross	956	Chomiak	979
Wishart; Robinson	956		

The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba Debates and Proceedings
are also available on the Internet at the following address:

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/legislature/hansard/hansard.html>