

Second Session – Forty-First Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-First Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLUM, James	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
BINDLE, Kelly	Thompson	PC
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy, Hon.	River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
CURRY, Nic	Kildonan	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Charleswood	PC
EICHLER, Ralph, Hon.	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FIELDING, Scott, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	PC
FLETCHER, Steven, Hon.	Assiniboia	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
FRIESEN, Cameron, Hon.	Morden-Winkler	PC
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon.	Steinbach	PC
GRAYDON, Clifford	Emerson	PC
GUILLEMARD, Sarah	Fort Richmond	PC
HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott	St. James	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
KLASSEN, Judy	Kewatinook	Lib.
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan	Selkirk	PC
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Burrows	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom	Flin Flon	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	Morris	PC
MAYER, Colleen	St. Vital	PC
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
MICKLEFIELD, Andrew, Hon.	Rossmere	PC
MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice	Seine River	PC
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
PALLISTER, Brian, Hon.	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine, Hon.	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Arthur-Virden	PC
REYES, Jon	St. Norbert	PC
SARAN, Mohinder	The Maples	Ind.
SCHULER, Ron, Hon.	St. Paul	PC
SELINGER, Greg	St. Boniface	NDP
SMITH, Andrew	Southdale	PC
SMOOK, Dennis	La Verendrye	PC
SQUIRES, Rochelle, Hon.	Riel	PC
STEFANSON, Heather, Hon.	Tuxedo	PC
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	NDP
TEITSMA, James	Radisson	PC
WHARTON, Jeff	Gimli	PC
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WISHART, Ian, Hon.	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
YAKIMOSKI, Blair	Transcona	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	Point Douglas	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, April 19, 2017

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Madam 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.

Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Madam Speaker: Introduction of bills? Committee reports? Tabling of reports? Ministerial statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Lifesaving Society Rescue Award Recipients

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): It is my pleasure to honour in the Legislature today Teena Cole, Eva Wolfe and John Rempel who received the Lifesaving Society Rescue and Commonwealth Award on March 9th from the Manitoba Lieutenant Governor, Her Honour Janice Filmon.

Last April, Teena, Eva and John were driving down Highway 59, near Highway 52, when they saw a cloud of dust rise up and immediately knew that something was wrong. What they saw was a car in the ditch, sinking into a high level of water. The water was fast-moving, and soon the current began to move the car with a young girl trapped inside.

The trio ran down to the water's edge to calm the girl before trying to flag down others on the roadside for help. Quick thinking led to a tow rope being thrown into the water to attach to the sunroof of the car in order for it to be pulled close to the bank; 911 was called and together with other motorists who had help—who had stopped to help, they were able to rescue the girl.

When receiving the Lifesaving Society Rescue and Commonwealth Award for their actions, Teena, Eva and John humbly accepted it on behalf of all the people on the scene that day. They firmly said

that their actions were what anyone else would have done.

On behalf of the Manitoba Legislature, thank you for your heroic action, your kindness and your compassion to those in need. You inspire us and you demonstrate the best of what Steinbach and Manitobans are about.

Colleagues, please join me in recognizing John Rempel, Eva Wolfe and Teena Cole who join us here in the gallery today.

Café D'Amour Closure

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): This month, south Osborne will lose an important member of our business community when Café D'Amour closes its doors.

The brainchild of Althea Howard and Sharla Lehmann, Café D'Amour opened in January 2012 and promptly became my second constituency office.

Althea and Sharla had roots in our neighbourhood, so when they decided to start a coffee shop, they were determined to spread their special kind of love in the Riverview-Lord Roberts area. And for all of us in Riverview and Lord Roberts, Café D'Amour truly did serve love in every cup of delicious coffee and, trust me on this, every savoury sandwich.

My friends and neighbours loved the place right back because of the kind and welcoming atmosphere created by Althea and Sharla. Althea says they aimed to provide a home away from home for their customers and they certainly succeeded; as you entered the shop you were greeted warmly before choosing a comfy place to sit. One side of the room was lined with books and old VHS tapes to borrow, and other 'elective' items for sale. The other side of the room was decorated with local artwork for sale.

It came as no surprise when Café D'Amour was a finalist in a city-wide contest for best coffee shop.

Café D'Amour has been one of the many extraordinary small businesses in Fort Garry-Riverview and Althea and Sharla were also key members of the South Osborne BIZ.

Althea managed the sixth annual South Osborne sidewalk festival, which had the highest business participation of any other BIZ event.

Café D'Amour has been a hub of activity which was much more than the sum of its parts. It will truly be missed, but Althea and Sharla, who's up in the gallery with us today, I know you have a whole creative future ahead of you.

Based on your exemplary start at Café D'Amour, I look forward to seeing what you do next. Bravo. We'll miss you. Congratulations. Go forth, have a great life.

Chrissy Peters

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, today I rise to celebrate the success of Morden's own Chrissy Peters at the 2017 Special Olympics winter games in Austria last month.

Chrissy is a Team Canada veteran who also attended the world games in 2007 and proudly represents our province on the international stage. She competed against athletes from all around the world in snowshoe races, taking home the gold medal in the 100 metre and the bronze medal in the 200 metre. According to Chrissy, the 200-metre race was especially challenging, saying that, one girl fell and I had to go over her and keep running, making her finish in third place and a bronze medal even more impressive.

It was an extraordinary achievement, one that many competitors will never achieve. However, the achievement could not have been done without her family, her friends, her teammates, Coach Sabrina Klassen, the CEO for Special Olympics Manitoba Jennifer Campbell, and all others who supported Chrissy. They all deserve special recognition for a job well done.

I had the distinct honour to meet and congratulate Chrissy recently at a celebratory dance event in Morden, and today Chrissy and her mother and sister are visiting the Legislature for the first time and are seated in the gallery.

On behalf of Morden-Winkler, Chrissy, congratulations. Your dedication, positive attitude and hard work paid off. Our community, the province and all of Canada could not have had a better athlete to represent us all at the winter games.

I now ask all honourable members to join me and congratulate you.

Gimli High School Lakers MHSAA Champions

Mr. Jeff Wharton (Gimli): I rise in the House today to honour Gimli High School varsity girls' basketball team, the Gimli Lakers. The Lakers won the MHSAA Provincial AA Girls Basketball Championship with a 69-60 victory in a gold-medal game against the Souris Sabers.

The Lakers achieved two firsts when they won the championship game on March 18th in Boissevain. They became the first high school team to win any provincial basketball title in 31 years and first-ever Gimli High School girls team to win this tournament.

Not only that, but a couple of players earned special recognition. Kenzy Groot was named provincial MVP, while Carley Matkowski and Jill Henry were named provincial all-stars.

Coached by Madi Biluk and assistant coached by Ashley Warcimaga, all the players were at the top of their games and overcame a 10-point deficit to win by nine. The Lakers have a great record this season, conquering and dominating regular season games. The provincial title was a great way to end the tremendous season of hard work and many victories. I'm sure that these ladies will continue to push the limits and rise to the occasion throughout their adult lives.

(13:40)

We are joined in the gallery today by: Captain Carley Matkowski, MacKenzy Groot, Kristen Peterson, Amy Thorkelson, Jillian Henry, Jayda Campbell, Jay-Lee Stempler [*phonetic*], Brooke Peterson, Mackenzie Zagoleski [*phonetic*], Mia Grey and Samantha Poitrous [*phonetic*], and coaches, Madison Biluk and assistant coach, Ashley Warcimaga, are all in the gallery today.

I'd ask my fellow members to join me in congratulating the Gimli Lakers varsity girls basketball team for taking home gold, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

Anniversary of Provincial Election

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Madam Speaker, for my colleagues and myself, today marks an anniversary of a very special day.

One year ago today, Manitobans rejected the politics of fear and division. They rejected a government that spent more time fighting with

themselves than they did for Manitobans, Madam Speaker. Instead, Manitobans chose our team, a united Progressive Conservative team committed to delivering the transparent, responsible and accountable government that Manitobans deserve.

On April 19th, 2016, our party was honoured to receive a historic mandate from Manitobans when they elected 40 Progressive Conservative MLAs to this Legislature.

Since taking office, our team has reduced the size of Cabinet, saving taxpayers money. Our MLAs have taken a wage freeze to demonstrate our commitment to fiscal sustainability, and we are unleashing the potential of northern Manitoba through our Look North program.

We have cut burdensome, job-killing red tape left behind by the previous NDP government. Madam Speaker, investors are noticing Manitoba is now open for business, as evidenced by the long-term, sustainable investment into the mill in The Pas.

We also saw this renewed confidence in Manitoba when Roquette chose Portage la Prairie as the site for a \$400-million pea processing plant, which will be the largest such facility in the world.

Madam Speaker, not only are we acting on our promises, we are also listening to Manitobans through our most comprehensive budget consultation held in history.

Together, we are making the important decisions necessary to ensure a prosperous future for Manitoba so that we can leave this province in better shape for future generations.

Madam Speaker, the orange glow has faded from the horizon, and with our hard-working, united PC team in the Legislature, it's blue skies ahead in Manitoba.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Prior to oral questions, we have some guests in the gallery. We have seated in the public gallery, from New Era School in Brandon and Cecil Rhodes School in Winnipeg, 32 students participating in Talk With Our Kids About Money Day. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable members for Brandon East (Mr. Isleifson) and Tyndall Park (Mr. Marcelino), and we'd like to welcome you to the Manitoba Legislature today.

Also seated in the public gallery is Bruce Schwanke from Reston, Manitoba, who is the guest of the honourable member for Riding Mountain (Mr. Nesbitt), and on behalf of all honourable members, we welcome you here today as well.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Manitoba's Affordability Government Record

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): For ordinary Manitobans, it has been a difficult and challenging year. Those who voted for change now realize the changes are not the change they expected. They have seen the cost of living increase while the government turns a blind eye, hikes to MPI rates and potential hikes to hydro.

For the first time in over 16 years, the minimum wage was frozen, and it appears it will be frozen again for another year.

The government launched an unprecedented attack on front-line workers, revoking their rights, precipitating a strike at the University of Manitoba through their political interference, while introducing unconstitutional legislation that will hit over 100,000 Manitobans in their pocketbooks.

Why is the Premier committed to making Manitoba a less affordable place to live for families and seniors?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Congratulations to all members of the House. I know this is a day of anniversary for everyone who was elected in the last provincial election and so I offer my genuine congratulations to all who were honoured that way.

In terms of our challenges, Madam Speaker, I'm very excited to be given the opportunity, along with my colleagues, to build a better province, a stronger province. We've inherited some monumental challenges, that's true, but, nonetheless, we are up to the challenges. We'll face them together. As Manitobans do, we'll look right at them and we'll do our best to overcome them.

Madam Speaker, in terms of the positioning that the members opposite have chosen to take, they have decided that they want to be fearful and to support the status quo. We are hopeful and we do not support the status quo, nor do Manitobans, as they reinforced just a year ago. They want to see us on the road to recovery and that's the road we're on.

Madam Speaker: The honourable interim Leader of the Official Opposition, on a supplementary question.

Health and Education Government Record

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): The government's record is a sorry one. It has failed on important files with the federal government. It hasn't signed a national climate change deal and is the only province to not sign a health-care deal with the federal government.

Meanwhile, it has cut deeply in our health-care system: cancelled personal-care-home beds across the province, shut down successful home-care programs and have announced it will shutter emergency rooms across Winnipeg. This attack on our health-care services makes it clear that the Premier has broken his promise to protect the services families rely on. Now he is turning to privatization as the next step in his ideological agenda.

Why has the Premier broken his commitment and undermined the health-care services of seniors and families?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I appreciate the member using the word broken in reference to the health-care system, Madam Speaker, because it was broken under the NDP. Manitobans were waiting longer than every other Canadian for health-care services, diagnostic tests, treatment. Wait times were the longest in Canada.

I have numerous letters and emails from Manitobans who attest to the fact that they themselves and family members they love and care for suffered as a consequence of the inadequate and mismanagement of the previous administration.

So, Madam Speaker, I really would like the member to do a little bit of research—oh, right, Madam Speaker, I'm sorry—they did some research, but refused to act on the research they themselves commissioned. *[interjection]* Right.

So research doesn't work for the members opposite, but, Madam Speaker, we've consulted with the experts. We're listening. We've listened to front-line health-care workers and we're going to build a better health-care system based on what we've heard because ideology may matter to them, but results matter to us.

Madam Speaker: The honourable Official Opposition Leader, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Marcelino: Nowhere in that second question of mine was a reference to a broken health-care system.

Madam Speaker, the record of this government is embarrassing. They promised before the election they would protect our education system, but they eliminated small class sizes for kids and cut the budget for new schools, labs and gyms across the province.

They promised before the election they would not increase costs on students and youth, but that was what they immediately did. They have hiked tuition rates, making university less affordable. They have deregulated fees and they have raised taxes on students and recent grads by thousands of dollars a year.

The damage the Premier is inflicting on students and youth will take many years to undo. Why has the Premier decided to target students, families and youth for his cuts, undermining the future for the next generation of Manitobans?

* (13:50)

Mr. Pallister: Well, Madam Speaker, the comments are, of course, inaccurate and unfair.

As far as compassion for future generations, there was none on evidence when the previous government doubled the provincial debt, when they paid it backward on to children that hadn't even had a chance to get a job yet to pay taxes, when they actually had the largest tax hikes of any Canadian province and took money off the kitchen tables of Manitoba families and spent it on their own friends with untendered contracts.

Madam Speaker, there was no evidence of compassion, no evidence of management skill, no evidence of sympathy at all for young people or seniors waiting for health care. All there was evidence of was an increasingly inward-looking government that refused to listen to Manitobans and, in fact, even refused to listen to itself. And that's why there was an historic rebellion that led up to the last election where that particular party was told by Manitobans it was time for a change.

We've heard that, Madam Speaker, and we're going to work for better change for Manitobans, even while the members opposite defend the past and the status quo. It's not good enough for Manitobans; it's not good enough for this government either.

Health Care Review Release of KPMG Report

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Madam Speaker, yesterday, the Health Minister revealed that he wouldn't keep his word and release KPMG's report into our health-care system. According to him, he can't reveal the results of a study that Manitoba taxpayers paid for because it is property of KPMG, the consultant. Yet, on page 46 of his own RFP for KPMG, it says very clearly, quote: All information produced by the consultant shall be the exclusive property of Manitoba. End quote.

Why is the minister refusing to release a report that is owned by the people of Manitoba?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Madam Speaker, I'm excited to hear the member is now interested in reports. It was the session before Christmas where he stood in this House and he said that KPMG was a terrible company and couldn't understand why we'd actually hire them to do anything, and now he wants to see the report.

We released the Peachey report, which was commissioned by the Selinger government, and the member stood in the House and said he didn't like it. And then he ran into the hall and said he actually endorsed it. He doesn't seem to know what he wants to do with the report. Some days he likes them, some days he doesn't. He should be consistent, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Concordia, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Wiebe: Once again, Madam Speaker, the minister told the press yesterday that the KPMG report was proprietary. I'd like to refer the minister again to his own RFP on page 47 where it says, quote: The consultant shall waive the consultant's rights under the Copyright Act in favour of Manitoba. End quote.

It's very clear from his own RFP that the people of Manitoba are the ones that own this document and they have the right to now see it.

Will the minister stop making excuses and release the report like he said he would?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, the member is actually seeing the report in action. In fact, when you look at the Peachey report, we released it and now we're actually implementing it. Now, I know he doesn't like that, because it was commissioned by the

Selinger government, so it disturbs him that we're actually listening to experts like they didn't.

In terms of the KPMG report, we're also listening to them. We're implementing a number of things that they've put forward. We'll be implementing many more to improve the health-care system.

That's their difference between the former NDP and this government. We take advice and we act on it, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Concordia, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Wiebe: Madam Speaker, it's becoming abundantly clear that, in the first year of this government's mandate, that they have no intention of keeping the promises that they made to Manitobans.

This government talked a lot about transparency, and, in fact, in June, in this very House, this Minister of Health committed to releasing all information in the report that did not involve, quote, proprietary or legal issues. But perhaps those are proprietary issues.

Has the minister changed the terms of the RFP, and if he did, can he then table that information for the House today?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Let's be clear, Madam Speaker. We did more genuine consultation prior to this budget and to this health-care-reform proposal that we have tabled than any government in the history of Manitoba. We've—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —released more information in conjunction with, prior to and following, our budget than any previous government ever has. The previous administration, Madam Speaker—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —is a political organization whose own leadership process is controlled by three public sector union bosses, that is currently under investigation for vote buying, that's covered up stadium costs in the tune of tens of millions of dollars, that has made sweetheart severance deals to its former associates and covered them up, that has issued millions of dollars of untendered contracts—*[interjection]*—without disclosing them—

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —covering them up, and then when we asked for a report on the Tiger Dams, gives us 100 pages of blacked-out documents.

That's their record. Ours is a record of openness, Madam Speaker, that we'll continue.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Hydro and MPI Rates PUB's Mandate

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): In only one year, Manitobans have seen their affordability advantage disappear.

The Crown corporations were given orders to abandon downtown Winnipeg. MPI rates have gone up, and now the minister is trying to lay the groundwork for the PUB, which is the Public Utilities Board, to raise rates on Manitoba Hydro.

Will this minister explain to Manitobans why he is committed to making Manitobans pay more for hydro and auto insurance?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): I thank the member for the question.

Manitobans understand what the legacy of the former NDP government was. It was a pay-more-and-get-less approach to public finances and service delivery, and Manitobans said no to that.

The report to which the member refers is The Affordable Utility Rate Accountability Act. That member talks about a pledge that his government actually never brought because they promised to guarantee the lowest combined utility and automobile insurance costs in Canada, only they never proclaimed those parts of the legislation.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

The honourable member for Tyndall Park, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Marcelino: The government had the opportunity to indicate what its vision for the PUB was in Bill 20, what its mandate should be. It tabled legislation in this House barely a month ago that set out the mandate of the PUB, and it contained no

mention of the criteria outlined in the April 5th order-in-council, which I now table.

Yet, at the eleventh hour the government decides to intervene and change the mandate of the PUB.

Why is the government interfering in the affairs of the PUB?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the member for that question. I thank him for tabling a public document. It's probably unnecessary.

But, Madam Speaker, this government cares about affordability. If that government had cared about an—a real affordability for Manitobans, they wouldn't have promised to create reserve funds in that legislation and guarantee the lowest bills in Manitoba, and then fail to proclaim those parts of the legislation.

We all know where they stand on reserve funds. They raided the rainy day account; it stands at the lowest balance in 25 years.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Tyndall Park, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Marcelino: Madam Speaker, Bill 20, before this House, does not include the criteria that the government passed in their April order-in-council. Instead, the government is interfering with the independent operations of the PUB. It is part of a plan to undermine our most important public utility, Manitoba Hydro. This minister even had to apologize for labelling Hydro bankrupt.

* (14:00)

If the new criteria are so important to the PUB's mandate, why didn't he put them in Bill 20 that's pending before this House?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Friesen: Madam Speaker, this government cares greatly about openness and accountability. We have taken measures in Budget 2017 to be accountable to Manitobans where that government what—where that party, when they were government, failed every time to show accountability to Manitobans.

I wonder why that member did not bother to mention the fact that every year that they claim to

represent openness and accountability they failed to disclose to Manitobans that they spent thousands and thousands of dollars to private sector contractors to produce reports that they never actually bothered to show to Manitobans.

Refugee Claimants Settlement Commitment

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): A year since the election where Manitobans were promised far more than delivered by this new Premier, not the least a commitment to settle 300 government-assisted refugees this year. But, like many of his promises, he's reneged on said, pushing the responsibility onto the federal government. The Premier has essentially abandoned refugees in the midst of a crisis.

Manitobans want to help refugees and settlement organizations across the province have the skills and knowledge to welcome asylum seekers and help them put down roots in Manitoba.

Will the Premier actually keep his word, continuing his commitment to 300 refugees this year?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Madam Speaker, this government has been, without the assistance of the opposition—either opposition party—has been standing up for asylum seekers and refugees since we came into power. We'll continue to do that.

The member could use her voice more effectively to join with us in that advocacy. She could encourage her colleagues, as divided as they apparently are, to adopt a unified, supportive position in respect of assisting those most in need who are looking for hope in this province and in this country, coming here from other countries desperate for a better life.

We will continue to stand with those people and work with the federal government to encourage and facilitate a better life for these people, and we would encourage the members opposite to do the same.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. Johns, on a supplementary question.

Refugee Organizations Funding Commitment Inquiry

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): The Premier hasn't been clear with Manitobans when it comes to funding for refugees.

The extra dollars he says he put into the pot actually isn't additional dollars at all. Additionally,

there is no multi-year investment for refugee support organizations like Welcome Place. Refugee and newcomer organizations need funding to provide the settlement programs and services supporting refugees' access to education and training that they need to be an active part of our province.

Will the Premier commit to multi-year funding for refugees, beyond the current crisis, for their organizations?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Madam Speaker, while others have reacted to the asylum crisis that has affected our province most of all in a negative way, we have acted with open arms and we have done everything we can to assist. We do this in the spirit of Manitoba and Manitobans. We believe that this is the right thing to do.

The federal government has not, as of yet, decided to assist in any way, shape or form in respect of strengthening the resources that the member references.

Again, I would encourage her and her colleagues to join with us so we can co-operatively and collectively demonstrate our solidarity on this issue.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. Johns, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Fontaine: This past year, the Premier has been arguing with the federal government on a health accord while also using funding for refugees as the carrot to dangle. So far, we've seen this Premier do nothing but bicker with the federal government while Manitobans and refugees actually suffer the consequences of his ego.

It's time for the Premier to step up and commit to actually working with the federal government to make the right investments so that Manitoba can bring in its fair share of refugees in the midst of a global refugee crisis.

The question, Madam Speaker, is: Will he do so?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: Every member here, Madam Speaker—and we have a record number of new members in this Legislature who were elected one year ago today—is on a learning curve, and I encourage the member to embark on that learning curve and I encourage her to get a little bit of class. I encourage her to recognize that we are here to

represent the best interests of those people who care about social justice, not advocate for ourselves in a partisan way, not associate ourselves and our personal egos with issues that are way beyond that. I'd encourage her to join with us, as other members of her party have in the past, to work together for the best interests of all of those who are trying to seek a better life here in our province.

Small Class Size Initiative Student-Teacher Class Time

Mr. Wab Kinew (Fort Rouge): Pleased to rise again in the House today.

Ask any parent if they'd like their child to have more one-on-one time with their teacher, and I'm sure that most parents would say, yes, they would. The small class sizes program gives students more direct teacher attention and support to ensure they have a strong foundation as they embark on their learning careers, and yet this government decided to cut the small class sizes initiative.

Will this minister explain why he thinks it's a bad idea for students to have more one-on-one time with their teachers?

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): As usual, the member is not correct in his 'assertations.' We did not cut the one-on-one program—or, sorry, the small class size initiative.

What we did was give the school divisions the discretion and the freedom that they asked for to make their own choices, to do the right things for their students and their own schools in consultations with the teachers and the administrators.

I really don't know what the member has against local decision.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Rouge, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Kinew: The point that I'm making was outlined in a FIPPA request we had answered that I am tabling for the House today. It says the small class size initiative, quote, gives students more direct teacher attention and support to ensure a strong foundation for learning as they begin their school experience. End quote. Sounds good to me.

Why doesn't the minister support giving students more direct teacher attention and support as they start school?

Mr. Wishart: It is really almost beyond comparison and comprehension that the member would bring

forward the issue of performance in the K-to-12 system, especially given a government that, during its period of time in office, saw our K-to-12 system, in terms of a rating for performance, go from No. 5 in Canada to dead last.

We have given the local administrators and the teachers the freedom to make the choice for what is best for the students.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Rouge, on a final supplementary.

K-to-3 Class Size Inquiry

Mr. Kinew: It seems more likely that school divisions will have to use this grant to offset the impact of this government's de facto cuts to education funding.

Now, to date, the small class size initiative has seen that 20 per cent more kindergarten-to-grade-3 classrooms across Manitoba have 20 or fewer students. So, it went from 48.1 per cent to just shy of 70 per cent: progress, performance, measurable results.

We know that most parents want their kids to have more one-on-one time with their teacher, so can the minister commit to—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —some performance today? Can the minister commit that during his mandate—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —the number of kindergarten-to-grade-3 classrooms across Manitoba with 20 or fewer students will increase beyond 70 per cent?

Mr. Wishart: It seems to me that if the member from Fort Rouge cares about kids in Manitoba in the school system, he cares about the results for those kids. And during that—the period of previous government, we went from No. 5 in Canada to dead last. I do not consider that good performance and good results, and neither do Manitobans.

* (14:10)

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

I would ask for co-operation of members to give the person that is asking questions and answering the courtesy of hearing them. I would—I'm going to ask the honourable Minister for Crown Services and the honourable member for Fort Rouge to heed this

warning. And I would ask members to please show courtesy to people that are asking questions and answering them.

Fiscal Performance Audit Release of KPMG Report

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): Yesterday, some red flags were raised following question period. Over the past year, this government has been bragging about the process that they have been undergoing to put Manitoba's finances in order.

But, Madam Speaker—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Ms. Lamoureux:—Madam Speaker, this government should be ashamed. They promised transparency to Manitobans, but yesterday they went back on their word. They broke their commitment of releasing the contents of the report that they had initially said would be made open to the public.

My question to the Minister of Finance is: Would you like the opportunity to do right by Manitobans and release the information that this government said would be available?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): I thank the member for Burrows for that question.

The fiscal responsibility strategy report is on page 23.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Burrows, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, Manitobans are the proprietors of the KPMG report. That is the report that I am referring to. That means it was their \$740,000 that paid for it.

They were promised by this government that 97 per cent of the contents of this report would be released.

What is this government hiding in the report that Manitobans paid for? Are we going to have to wait and find out through another leak?

Mr. Friesen: This government was proud to undertake the most robust, the most comprehensive listening exercise in the history of this province when it came to the lead-up of Budget 2017.

The information contained in Budget 2017 pertaining to our fiscal responsibility and fiscal performance review indicates evidence about that listening exercise, how we listened to Manitobans in

in-person meetings, online, civil servants, people who came out and gave us advice about how to fix the finances in this province.

This information is contained in the budget. We are proud to report to Manitobans. And we know that we'll be held accountable for how we use the advice that we have received to better all Manitobans' lives.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Burrows, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, this Pallister government is setting a very non-transparent, non-accountable trend.

The facts are, this government says they are following the Peachey report, but has decided to pick and choose which recommendations suit them best. In doing so, they skipped a very important step in expanding three chosen ERs. This government has made an error. And, frankly, owning that error is more respectable than covering it.

Would the minister admit that perhaps the proper consultation wasn't conducted, or perhaps they moved a little too quickly on a whim of excitement?

Please explain to this House how the government going back on their word should be interpreted by Manitobans.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Well, Madam Speaker, I think the consultation that needs to happen is in the three-member Liberal caucus, because we first had the interim Leader of the Liberal Party come out and say that the—what the government was doing with the Peachey report was wonderful and we should expand it right across Manitoba. Then we had the former leader, the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), said, well, maybe we should go halfway and sort of do trial closures. And now the member for Burrows continues on her crusade to have nothing change in the health-care system.

Three members, three positions, and they're all wrong, Madam Speaker.

Manitoba's Finances Year in Review

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): Today marks the one-year anniversary where Manitobans spoke loud and clear for change. I'm humbled and honoured that my constituents of Riding Mountain selected me to represent them. In one short year, our

government has worked hard to move us in the right direction and put us on track to become the most improved province in Canada.

Can the Minister of Finance please give us an update of some of the great achievements we have already made?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): Well, I thank the member for Riding Mountain for that question.

Madam Speaker, today is Talk With Our Kids About Money Day, where hundreds of thousands of young Canadians are learning about financial literacy. Today they might be having conversations around compound interest. They might be studying balance sheets. They might be talking about the effect of amortization.

These are all lessons that the NDP could have used 17 years ago. The NDP ran structural deficits year after year. They doubled the debt of Manitoba. If left unaddressed, Manitoba would have a \$1.7-billion deficit by 2019.

Today we know that there is a principle—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Friesen:—that those students can all appreciate, that there is a value to not allowing your expenditures to run over your revenues.

Madam Speaker, we are fixing the finances of the Province of Manitoba.

Green Manitoba Status of Agency

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): This weekend is Earth Day.

I'm wondering if the minister could inform all Manitobans of the status of the agency known as Green Manitoba?

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sustainable Development): I'd like to thank the member opposite for that question, Madam Speaker.

In fact, it gives us the opportunity to tell you that we are taking Green Manitoba and integrating it into the department to allow it to be more transparent and efficient. And this is something—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Cox:—that the organizations have told us it's something that they want, they look forward to.

And we will get it done. We will not remain status quo like the former government was.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Wolseley, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Altemeyer: Well, Madam Speaker, it's only the Pallister government that could shut down an agency called Green Manitoba the week of Earth Day. And the minister should perhaps talk to some of the people who used to work in Green Manitoba, because, according to them, they could not have possibly given her the A-okay to shut down their agency because they didn't know that was coming. The community groups that get funding from Green Manitoba didn't know that was coming.

Will she commit today to all Manitobans that everything Green Manitoba was doing will continue under this government?

Mrs. Cox: Thanks to the member opposite.

Yes.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Wolseley, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Altemeyer: That was very easy for the minister to do. Why on earth she could not have communicated any of her intentions to the people affected directly ahead of time is a question she needs to be accountable for.

I'm hoping she will use her final answer to apologize to the staff who are no longer working there, to apologize to the community groups, to thank everyone for their hard work and to give us a plan—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Altemeyer:—on how her government, with fewer resources and fewer attention, is going to reduce the amount of resources we are currently sending to landfill.

Mrs. Cox: Thanks to the member opposite.

We've actually taken many new initiatives, and as we move forward in this department you'll see major initiatives that we're taking to reduce waste into landfills such we've done with pilot projects recently within major apartment blocks.

We're also going to continue to have more electronic waste removed from landfills and ensuring that that happens. We're also going to ensure that there's transparency. We've heard from those NGOs, and they've told us—for example, CBCRA, they said that we understand and support the move to eliminate Green Manitoba, as it makes it simpler and more streamlined for stewardship organizations like CBCRA and Recycle Everywhere to deal with one entity rather than—

* (14:20)

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Surface Water Management Government Position on Drainage

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): The government has so far refused to take real action on the important issue of farmland drainage. Producers and residents of southwestern Manitoba are suffering from the impacts of another season of flooding. The government voted against our Surface Water Management Act, a bill that would have made important progress in dealing with this issue.

Why has this government refused to actually address the issue of surface water drainage?

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sustainable Development): I'd like to thank the member opposite for that, because we're actually going to have an improved surface water management act. We are currently consulting with Manitobans and we will include ALUS, which is the Alternate Land Use Services plan, within our surface water management act. It'll be based on the watershed and it will ensure that we have more penalties for individuals who don't follow proper drainage. So it will be bigger and better, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Flin Flon, on a supplementary question.

Co-operation with Saskatchewan

Mr. Lindsey: Madam Speaker, the Premier has the most vivid of imaginations. He imagines events that did not really take place. On March 15th, the Premier claimed that the NDP had never raised the issue of surface water drainage with our neighbours.

I would like to table the memorandum of understanding signed by the previous government with Saskatchewan on October 2015 regarding water management. It lays out the framework for

co-operation to deal with flooding, drainage and environmental issues.

Will the Premier retract his comments and see the work our former government started through to completion?

Mrs. Cox: You know, it's interesting that the member opposite talks about drainage. They had 17 years to get it done, Madam Speaker. They failed in every respect with regard to surface water management.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Flin Flon, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Lindsey: If the Premier points the finger, Madam Speaker, I'll take that as a no.

Madam Speaker, hundreds of grain and cattle producers in southwestern Manitoba are experiencing significant flooding for the third time in the last six years. Farmers have made it clear that there are solutions, but it means the Premier needs a strategy to work with farmers and the Saskatchewan government instead of picking political fights.

Will the Premier commit to tabling a strategy this year to address drainage flooding along the Saskatchewan border?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, Madam Speaker, I grew up on a little farm southwest of Portage la Prairie, and we didn't solve our water problems on the backs of our neighbours and Saskatchewan shouldn't be trying to solve its water problems on the backs of Manitoba farm families. But the NDP said nothing about it for years and years and years, so maybe it's a fight that should have been picked a long time ago.

Now, we're approaching our neighbours in a neighbourly way, but we expect them to do their part and we're willing to stand up for Manitoba's interests. I'd encourage the members to begin to do that from opposition, because they sure as heck failed to do it when they were in government, Madam Speaker.

Provincial Deficit Record Government Record

Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson): It was great to see so many students in the gallery today for take our—or, for talk to our kids about money day. Financial literacy is so, so important to our children and, as the members know, to me.

Now, when kids learn about budgeting they learn how important it is to make budgets that are realistic and achievable and how important it is to control our expenses, and our government's proud of the progress that it's made when it comes to bending the cost curve.

We've inherited a fiscal mess. In the NDP's last year in office they promised a \$422-million deficit, but in reality the actual deficit was more than double that amount, reaching \$846 million.

So can the Minister of Finance please explain to the House why it's important to get our deficit and our debt—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): Well, with Budget 2017 we are on the road to recovery. There are no new taxes. We have indexed the basic personal exemption. We have indexed tax brackets. We have reduced our ambulance fees and will continue to do so. We have introduced Look North strategy. We have invested in the Scholarship and Bursary Initiative to the tune of \$20 million.

Madame la Présidente, après des années de dettes, de désintégration et de déclin, nous réparons les finances, nous réparons les services, nous reconstruisons l'économie.

Translation

Madam Speaker, after the years of debt, decay and decline, we are repairing finances, we are repairing services, we are rebuilding the economy.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

St. Boniface QuickCare Clinic

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And the reasons for this petition—the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) QuickCare clinics support the health-care system by offering important front-line health-care services that help seniors and families.

(2) The six QuickCare clinics in Winnipeg are accessible, located within communities and have extended hours so that families and seniors can

access high-quality primary health care quickly and close to home.

(3) QuickCare clinics are staffed by registered nurses and nurse practitioners who are able to diagnose and treat non-urgent-care needs as well as perform procedures and interpret diagnostic tests.

(4) The bilingual St. Boniface QuickCare clinic actively offers an essential health-care service in French to Winnipeg's Franco-Manitoban community.

(5) Having access to bilingual services is essential to ensuring the ongoing vitality of the Franco-Manitoban community.

(6) The provincial government has announced the closing of the St. Boniface QuickCare clinic on January 27, 2017, leaving St. Boniface and St. Vital seniors and families without access to community health care.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to both recognize the importance of bilingual health services in Manitoba and reverse their decision to close the St. Boniface QuickCare clinic.

And this petition is signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: In accordance with our rule 133(6), when petitions are read they are deemed to be received by the House.

I think the honourable member for River Heights.

Kelvin High School Gymnasium

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background for this petition is as follows:

During the past 20 years a colossal community effort has been put into obtaining a new gymnasium for students at Kelvin High School.

The Kelvin High School gym has been on the Winnipeg School Division one's list of projects for approximately 10 years, and it has slowly worked its way up to the No. 1 priority.

Exercise and sport are a vital part of school activities for students, and these play an important role in developing skills, including discipline, teamwork, co-operation and communication.

The current Premier of Manitoba has said that children and grandchildren should not have to pay the price of his austerity budgeting.

The Kelvin High School gym is a desperately needed space for children and youth to get exercise.

The community has raised more than \$1 million to help pay for the gymnasium so it can be used as a community facility as well as a school facility.

Kelvin High School serves students from many areas of Winnipeg, including central Winnipeg.

Children and youth should not have to pay for the financial problems of the Province.

Improving the physical and mental health of children through exercise and sport can keep children healthy and reduce health-care costs in the long term.

Having young people learn good habits like improving their physical and mental health through exercise can save a lot of money in future health expenditures by helping to keep Manitobans healthy.

This facility will enable members of the community to participate in physical exercise and sports activities in the evening, and since community members have raised money for this component, it will help to save health-care dollars.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to reverse its decision and to provide the remainder of the funding needed to build the new Kelvin High School gymnasium as soon as possible.

Signed by Allan Whicker, Winston Smith, Ian Smith and many others.

* (14:30)

Madam Speaker: Order please. Order.

There are a number of conversations going on, and it's very difficult to hear the members reading their petitions, so I would ask honourable members that are having conversations to please go to the loge or lower the decibel, please.

Taxi Industry Regulation

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

(2) The taxi industry is regulated to ensure there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

(3) Regulations have been put in place that has made Winnipeg a leader in protecting the safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

The regulated taxi system also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

(5) The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

(6) There were no consultations with the taxi industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

(7) The introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihood of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings into the industry.

(8) The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues such as what has been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city and significant risks in terms of taxi driver and passenger safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

Signed by many Manitobans.

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

The taxi industry is regulated to ensure that there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

Regulations have been put in place that has made Winnipeg a leader in protecting the safety of

taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

The regulated taxi system also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

There were no consultations with the taxi industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

The introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihood of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings in the industry.

The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues such as been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city and significant risks in terms of taxi driver and passenger safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

And this petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

(2) The taxi industry is regulated to ensure there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

(3) Regulations have been put in place that has made Winnipeg a leader in protecting the safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

(4) The regulated taxi system also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

(5) The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer

jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

(6) There were no consultations with the taxi industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

(7) The introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihood of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings into the industry.

(8) The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues such as what has been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city and significant risks in terms of driver and passenger safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

And this petition is signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Logan. No. The honourable member for Fort Rouge.

Dakota Collegiate Sports Complex

Mr. Wab Kinew (Fort Rouge): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Manitobans recognize how important it is to provide young people with quality learning spaces to succeed in school.

(2) Sport, recreation and the spaces to engage in them are critical to the physical, mental and social welfare of students.

(3) All forms of educational infrastructure, including gymnasiums and recreation centres in general, represent an incredible value-for-money investment, whereby the return is the improved physical and psychological health and well-being of students.

(4) Dakota Collegiate spent several years raising money towards the construction of the Louis Riel School Division sports complex to reduce the poor condition of its playing field.

(5) Dakota's varsity teams have been forced to play elsewhere because of the poor condition of its playing field.

(6) Dakota Collegiate must put the project out to tender and break ground in a matter of months for the field to be completed in time for this coming school year.

(7) The provincial government, in a regressive and short-sighted move, cancelled funding for this project for political reasons despite the extensive community support, fundraising and engagement.

(8) It is short-sighted move on the part of the provincial government to undercut the dedicated efforts of students, staff and the community in general.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to recognize the tireless efforts of Dakota Collegiate, its students, parents, staff and the surrounding community; to recognize the need for excellent recreation facilities in all Manitoba schools; to reverse this regressive cut and to provide the funding necessary to complete the Louis Riel School Division sports complex.

This petition was signed by many Manitobans.

Taxi Industry Regulation

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

(2) The taxi industry is regulated to ensure there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

(3) Regulations have been put in place that has made Winnipeg a leader in protecting the safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

(4) The regulated taxi system also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

(5) The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

* (14:40)

(6) There were no consultations with the taxi industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

(7) The introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihood of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings into the industries.

(8) The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues such as what has been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city and significant risks in terms of drivers—taxi driver and passenger safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

Signed by many Manitobans.

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

The taxi industry is regulated to ensure there are both provision of taxi service and a fair, affordable fare structure.

Regulations have been put in place that has made Winnipeg a leader in protecting the safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

The regulated taxi system also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a complaint system.

The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

There were no consultations with the taxi industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

The introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihood of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings into the industry.

The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues such as what has been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing service to some

areas of the city and significant risk in terms of taxi driver and passenger safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

This petition has been signed by many, many Manitobans. Thank you.

Kelvin High School Gymnasium and Wellness Centre

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Manitobans recognize how important it is to provide young people with quality learning spaces to succeed in school.

(2) Sport, recreation and the spaces to engage in them are critical to the health and welfare of all students.

(3) All forms of educational infrastructure, including gymnasiums and recreation centres in general, represent an incredible value-for-money investment, whereby the return is improved physical and psychological health and wellness.

(4) Kelvin High School is one of the largest high schools in the province, with over 1,200 students.

(5) Kelvin High School spent several years raising almost \$1.2 million towards the construction of a new gymnasium and wellness centre.

(6) Some Kelvin students currently have to pay to use outside facilities to obtain their mandatory physical education credit.

(7) The provincial government, in a regressive and short-sighted move, cancelled funding for the Kelvin gym and wellness centre for political reasons, despite the extensive community support, fund-raising and engagement.

(8) It is wasteful and disrespectful to the dedicated efforts of students, staff and the community in general to simply lay their goals aside without consultation.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to recognize the need for excellent recreation facilities in all Manitoba schools, to reverse this regressive cut and to provide Kelvin High School with the funding necessary to complete a new gymnasium and wellness centre.

Signed by Lisa Nurgitz, Alex DeSimone, Shaye Samec and many, many other Manitobans.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Manitobans recognize how important it is to provide young people with quality learning spaces to succeed in school.

(2) Sport, recreation and the spaces to engage in them are critical to the health and welfare of all students.

(3) All forms of educational infrastructure, including gymnasiums and recreation centres in general, represent an incredible value-for-money investment whereby the return is improved physical and psychological health and wellness.

(4) Kelvin High School is one of the largest high schools in the province, with over 1,200 students.

(5) Kelvin High School spent several years raising almost \$1.2 million towards the construction of a new gymnasium and wellness centre.

(6) Some Kelvin students currently have to pay to use outside facilities to obtain their mandatory physical education credit.

(7) The provincial government, in a regressive and short-sighted move, cancelled funding for the Kelvin gym and wellness centre for political reasons despite the extensive community support, fund-raising and engagement.

(8) It is wasteful and disrespectful to the dedicated efforts of students, staff and the community in general to simply lay their goals aside without consultation.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to recognize the need for excellent recreation facilities in all Manitoba schools, to reverse this regressive cut and to provide Kelvin High School with the funding

necessary to complete a new gymnasium and wellness centre.

This petition is signed by many Manitobans, Madam Speaker.

Taxi Industry Regulation

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

(2) The taxi industry is regulated to ensure there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

(3) Regulations have been put in place that has made Winnipeg a leader in protecting the safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

(4) The regulated taxi system also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

(5) The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

(6) There were no consultations with the taxi industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

(7) The introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihood of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings into the industry.

(8) The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues such as what has been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city and significant risks in terms of taxi driver and passenger safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

Signed by many, many Manitobans.

Mr. Mohinder Saran (The Maples): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

(2) The taxi industry is regulated to ensure there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

* (14:50)

(3) Regulations have been put in place that had made Winnipeg a leader in protecting the safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

(4) The regulated taxi system also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

(5) The provincial government had moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing service like Uber.

(6) There were no consultations with the taxi industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

(7) The introduction of this bill jeopardize safety, taxi service and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihood of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings into the industry.

(8) The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues such as what has been in the other jurisdiction, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city and significant risks in terms of taxi driver and passenger safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

Signed by many Manitobans.

ORDERS OF THE DAY
GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

BUDGET DEBATE
(Fifth Day of Debate)

Madam Speaker: Resuming debate on the budget motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen), and the amendment and the subamendment thereto, standing in the name of the honourable member for Wolseley, who has two minutes remaining.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): I obviously don't have a huge amount of time left. So let me just offer some broad commentary on this government's budget.

It's brutal and it's uncalled for, and it is completely different from what they ran on. The members opposite should take note of their own document and ask themselves what is this going to do to their constituents; what is this going to do to the future of Manitoba. I would expect a good number of Conservative MLAs are going to be hearing from a good number of very disgruntled constituents in the months ahead, and disgruntled is probably putting it very diplomatically.

The number of hardships that they are bringing down upon people who are already vulnerable is unconscionable. This is not the work of a government that is, in all honesty, trying to work to better the province as a whole or governing for all citizens. It is governing for an exceptionally narrow agenda that will benefit an exceptionally narrow number of people.

The collective work that is required in order to address serious economic social and environmental issues, many of which we made very good progress on while in government, is—like, that vision is just completely lacking. It's as if the public good does not exist.

We hear nothing from this government about protecting the environment, in fact, quite the opposite. Only the Pallister government could cancel the existence of an agency called Green Manitoba the week of Earth Day. That is—I mean, that all by itself sums up, I think, quite nicely their environmental vision. They don't have one, and, in fact, many of their actions are exceptionally damaging.

So lots more that could be said. I will yield the floor to others to point out the obvious flaws in this very—

Madam Speaker: The members time has expired.

Mr. Jeff Wharton (Gimli): It's a privilege to stand in the House today to put a few items on the record for Budget 2017.

Madam Speaker, the NDP and—actually, as recently as yesterday, the member from Wolseley had been accusing us for wanting to take this province back to the 1990s. Well, it's fitting for them to be stuck in the past; the '90s were a long time ago.

I want to talk about where this province is today, how we are going to get there and where we need to go. So I ask the House to take a journey with me not to the previous century, Madam Speaker, but to an—earlier in this decade.

Four years ago I was honoured to lead a group of residents from the constituency of Gimli, who made a submission to committee on Budget 2013 under the former government. We created a report card evaluating the NDP—the NDP as government—fiscal performance in three areas: taxes, fees and spending.

Report card No. 1, Madam Speaker, was on taxes. They were very concerned about the tax burden in this province, essentially the PST, which previous NDP government increased while ignoring the requirement for a referendum as set out in legislation. Citizens were concerned about the tax gap between Manitoba and Saskatchewan with a family of four on an income of \$75,000 per year paying \$3,060 more in taxes here than in Saskatchewan. So we gave the government a failing grade on controlling the tax burden.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Report card No. 2, on user fees—the previous NDP government also added a host of new fees and applied the PST to areas it had never been applied to before. The PST now applies to haircuts, cosmetic services, insurance premiums and land transfer tax, just to name a few. I don't recall the NDP ever running on a promise of higher taxes and higher fees, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When my NDP predecessor from Gimli knocked on doors in his constituency, I can guarantee you that that was a promise that he wasn't going to make to the constituents. But they did it anyways. So, on fee increases, the former NDP

government had a report card, again, of a failing grade.

And, finally, on report card No. 3, on the former NDP government's out-of-control spending, my constituents in Gimli pointed out in their submission that with a healthy growth in transfer payments, record low interest rates, increases in taxes, consistent revenue growth, the former NDP government was still unable to balance the books. So, on the question of government spending, they earned—no surprise, Mr. Deputy Speaker—a failing grade from the people of Gimli and all Manitobans.

Clearly, the previous government ignored the advice of the people of Gimli. And so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, welcome to the Chair, in—on April 2016, exactly one year ago from today, Manitobans put an end to a decade of debt, decay and decline.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let's fast-forward to a new PC government dealing with the mess, dealing with the out-of-control spending, massive debts and deficits and decaying public services with which we were left behind. Tenth out of 10 in education, ER wait times and kids in care ballooning out of control; that is what the previous NDP government has for its legacy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our government understands that we have to make priorities and decisions based on long-term sustainability. Budget 2017 sets out a strong plan for the province as we correct the course and move forward with responsible recovery. We believe by exercising restraint over the spending and making smart investments in front-line services, we can improve the quality of life for Manitobans and set a course to balance. So, for the benefit of members opposite, who accuse our government of being nothing more but austerity, let's have a look at some of those responsible investments we are making for the future of our province.

Students will be happy to note on Thursday last our government announced that we are creating a new Manitoba bursary for low-income students; \$10.5 million will be available to students, approximately 5,800 students, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is up-front, non-repayable assistance to students who need it most. It will provide before and during the school year, enabling students to meet their expenses as they arise. That's the kind of support that they are going to help students as they move forward.

On top of that, changes to Manitoba Scholarship and Bursary Initiative will see better leveraging for donor money. A provincial commitment of 6.5–\$6.75 million will result in up to \$20 million, Mr. Deputy Speaker, going directly to students, not invested in endowment funds. That works out to five times the money that was available under the former NDP government.

Gimli is a town that punches above its weight in arts and culture. My constituents will be especially pleased to note that our government is making more than \$63 million in investments in Sport, Culture and Heritage in the Heritage sectors, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We have also directed \$370 million to local and municipal infrastructure, and there is greater flexibility and autonomy in how the money is spent, to ensure that municipalities—like the RMs of Gimli, St. Andrews, Bifrost-Riverton, the Town of Winnipeg Beach, the Village of Dunnottar and many more villages and municipalities throughout our great province—have a fair say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in what goes on in their communities.

* (15:00)

Budget 2017 invests \$747 million for roads, highways, bridges and flood protection. We know that flood protection infrastructure in the province is not adequate, and we are now moving ahead with Lake St. Martin outlet and a host of other projects that will protect Manitobans from another disastrous flood like the one we saw in 2011.

Anybody who drives in Manitoba knows, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that our provincial highways and roads need work after a decade of decay.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, by putting projects out in tender earlier, we will get better value for money on construction projects going forward. These infrastructure investments will support our objective of building a stronger, more prosperous province while ensuring we maximize value for money and achieve a proper return on investment.

Members opposite would have Manitobans believe that infrastructure spending is drying up, that we are going to balance the budget by letting our roads, bridges and water infrastructure fall into even a greater disrepair. This is not the case, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We will rebuild our province, but we'll do it in a careful, measured way to ensure the limited dollars that are available to us are invested where they can be—where they can do the most good.

The days of saying yes to everything without regard for the consequences of the future generations are finally over. Mr. Deputy Speaker, our government is making smart, targeted investments that will deliver return on investment and will set us on a course to rebuilding the province after a decade of debt and decay. While doing this, we reduce the deficit and have laid out a plan to meet our commitments to Manitobans: a balanced budget within our second term.

In closing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the group of citizens in Gimli who have—gave the former NDP government three failing grades on Budget 2013 are relieved to see the direction in which our new government is headed with Budget 2017.

Manitoba, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Wharton: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Manitoba is finally on the road to recovery.

Thank you.

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas): I'm—it's an on here—an honour here to stand here today as MLA for The Pas to support the amendment put forth by my colleagues on this side of the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, today I was reminded that, yes, in fact, we've been here for a year. And, in fact, I had to look back and reflect on this past year, and it's been very challenging for me as a person and also for northern Manitoba. For example: the closure of the Port of Churchill; the stress that was with their families when the paper mill was being threatened to close; loss of jobs; also, too, my own personal health; the mental health of my daughter when we were medevac'ed back and forth from Winnipeg to the—from The Pas; the IGA closure—many jobs were lost there, a store that has been there since I can remember, since I was a kid; the possible closing of our OCN Blizzard team as well, but we're going to be working together as a community effort to keep that one open; and the cancellation of The Pas clinic, a project that I have watched grow and then all of a sudden just chopped, gone; and also, too, the closure of Grace Lake airport. Medevac services and other business entities will be now further away and perhaps the business entities may not exist any longer; and now we have flooding issues to deal with as well.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's been challenging coming here every week, leaving my young family. A lot of you met my young daughters. It's challenging to leave them, be away for four days and face this government with all the challenges that they're putting forth in front of me and my family and the rest of Manitobans.

So, since this new government has been in place, it hasn't been good at all. After learning about the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) and the Cabinet pay raise, 20 per cent, and there will be no increase in the minimum wage, well, that certainly symbolized to me and to many other Manitobans what lies ahead of us.

The government's motto, All Hands on Deck—I keep on hearing that within this House—but, you know, to me, that's all hands on deck to make life difficult for us Manitobans, especially in the North. So let me elaborate on that.

First of all, the government's definition on consultation is a mystery to me. To me, a consultation has a legal standing. For example, the fisheries envoy regarding the closure of FFMC, where was the consultation there? I've spoken to people in my constituency and only a few conversations were had, and more could've had—more should have been done.

Where was the consultation from the government with the business entities and the First Nation businesses about the closure of Grace Lake airport? None.

What about the consultation and the invites for the Look North economic summit that happened? Were the—were First Nations chiefs invited? Were our Aboriginal northern affairs communities invited as well? And, for example, the petition that we shared today regarding the taxi industry, where was that consultation?

So, to me, the lack of consultation really violates the duty to consult. So, to me, when they talk about consultation, it's—with them, a phantom consultation process, if you will. And they say that the economic potential of our vast 'norse' is tied to their commitment to an enhanced duty-to-consult framework as an anchor for respectful and productive collaboration. Well, I'm still waiting for that and still looking for that evidence. So, with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm still trying to 'graps' their definition of consultation.

Now, The Pas health clinic and the Thompson consultation clinic: families in The Pas and Thompson need improvements to primary health care plus greater access to specialists. These new clinics would've gone a long way to meeting our needs. The cancellation of these clinics and a place to house specialists and more doctors, this could have treated—this could have created less stress for our families, including mine.

The cancellation of these clinics, of these needed investments in primary health care, not only hurts our families but it's a short-sighted and a foolish position. These investments will be only—be more expensive to build in the future.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm disappointed that this government is recklessly cancelling projects across the province. It is my plan to work closely with the leadership of the northern regional health authority, our communities and stakeholders for the reinstatement of these clinics. And I wish the member from Thompson will climb aboard as well with this very important task to reinstate his services as well.

Services that Manitobans rely on are health care, education and infrastructure: gone. And they—with The Pas health clinic, it's completely opposite, with the cancellation of that project. When they keep on saying their commitment to invest in services that we depend on—that commitment to invest: nothing.

And also, too, I was curious to read in the budget that an increase of \$1 million to three provincial nursing stations to continue to provide improved care to northern Manitoba, so I started wondering. Is this money going to be used to move these nursing stations near Winnipeg, since their medevac services are going to be further pulled away from us? Something to think about.

And also, too, they say they're spending more 'capita' on health care. However, that does not include northern Manitoba, and, again, I wish the member for Thompson (Mr. Bindle) can join me in the effort to speak up for northern Manitobans because his clinic was cut too.

Now, Grace Lake airport closure. In addition to the cancellation of The Pas clinic, we now, including my family, face even more cuts to access to health care in the North. The closure on the Grace Lake Airport means adding more precious minutes to emergency flights from our region to The Pas-Clearwater airport to access medevac to

Winnipeg. This puts our lives at risk. These decisions are putting our lives at risk. Cancelling The Pas health clinic and moving our medevac further—services away from us are putting our lives at risk.

Now, a letter was sent out, dated April 11th, and, basically, the letter states: Dear stakeholder—because I know you don't have a name—it reads that there were eviction notice of June 15th of these entities to be moved off Grace Lake airport.

I just wanted to share with you the full scale of what this impact is going to have in our region. The Province of Manitoba issued Missinippi Airways and the Mathias Colomb Cree nation a letter stating their intention to permanently close the Grace Lake Airport in The Pas, Manitoba, effective June 15th, 2017. This is the first communication received regarding the Manitoba government's plan.

* (15:10)

This unilateral decision by the government of Manitoba will have devastating effects, not only on Missinippi Airways, but, more importantly, on the First Nations clients that depend on our airline to provide fast, cost-effective air and health services in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Ontario and Nunavut. Missinippi Airways and Mathias Colomb Cree Nation view this as a direct attack on First Nation communities who require the air and health services we provide.

Missinippi Airways is a 100 per cent First-Nations-owned business, providing medevac and air ambulance services as a well as daily scheduled service for the community of Pukatawagan. We have been operating out of the Grace Lake airport for over 30 years and are the second-largest private employer in The Pas, Manitoba, with a regional economic impact of \$35 million.

The Grace Lake airport is used exclusively by at least five medevac-services providers with Missinippi air care being one. Medevac-services providers choose Grace Lake airport because its close distance, six kilometres, to the medical services and the hospital in The Pas. The Clearwater Lake airport is over 35 kilometres outside of town of The Pas.

The Province of Manitoba's decision to permanently close the Grace Lake airport will add a minimum of 30 minutes to each emergency air ambulance's services and will therefore 'significantly'

affect service to critical patients and will result in an increase in mortality rates.

Without previous communication or consultation, the Province of Manitoba has provided users of the Grace Lake airport eight weeks to relocate. For Missinippi Airways alone, this means moving the entire operation at a cost of at least \$4 million. Closing Grace Lake airport is not a cost-saving measure. There has been many reports that determine that Grace Lake airport is greatly beneficial in providing medevac services to First Nation communities. The Province of Manitoba's approach has been careless and lacks the foresight of the effects this closure will have on the surrounding communities and First Nations people. This is a very heavy-handed approach, also shows a complete lack of respect for First Nation communities and northern communities and First-Nation-owned businesses.

First Nations communities, as well as communities surrounding the Grace Lake airport, will suffer economically and socio-economically as a result of this rash decision.

So, once again, this was a very handed decision with no consultation and basically, again, this is putting our lives at risk. I just find that now that we have no clinic and also demanding us to wait an additional 30 minutes to medevac to get life-saving measures. Cuts to—cuts in northern Manitoba is a great concern.

Why does the Premier (Mr. Pallister) want to balance a budget on the backs of northerners and indigenous people? He needs to stop blaming northerners for our health needs and the cost of living in the North.

Now, in regards to daycare, I read in the budget that there's going to be a commitment to add 500 new licensed child-care spaces and 50 new home child-based—home-based child-care spaces this year. I just want to know if those spaces are going to be located in the North as well. I'm pretty sure the members from Flin Flon, Kewatinook and Thompson are interested in that result as well. As a former employment counsellor, that was the No. 1 barrier that I had to fill in, in our education employment plans for our people in northern Manitoba.

So, with that, family budget—it says that the budget will invest a hundred and six eighty thousand—\$186,000 to combat family violence and violence against women and additional support for Nova House's—the shelter in Selkirk. That's a very

important vestment. But again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will we be seeing that money as well for our women and our families in northern Manitoba?

Now, with the Look North summit, I was happy to be there for the second day, April 3rd and 4th. But, however, the website looks great but there really is no commitment. And also I ask why weren't our other northern communities invited to the Look North summit?

Also, too, with UCN, I just thank goodness that the projects for UCN were completed before this government came into place, because the Thompson campus, the Oscar Lathlin Research Library in The Pas campus, UCN daycare, they all would have been cancelled, just like how the Premier has cancelled so many other projects in this province.

And also, too, I know for a fact that the party has always opposed the creation of UCN and still hasn't embraced that concept, and this is proven in their three attempts in figuring out their northern strategies, their Northern Lights, Yes! North and, finally, Look North. In all three strategies UCN is not mentioned when it's the only education facility to fulfill these economic dreams that they have for our North.

And also, too, dental health is no longer a priority in our region.

Missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, no mention of that in the budget. And I find that very disrespectful because I'm actually living it. I have a younger sister who leads a high-risk lifestyle here in the city. Let's just say each time I watch the news, read the newspaper, I hear about some young woman being murdered, I always think, is that my sister? Is that the mother of the three girls that I'm raising? Do I have to tell them that story?

So, again, open up your eyes, be realistic, this is a real problem here in Manitoba, that there is an issue about missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, and that includes my sister, that includes me and my family.

So, with that, TRC, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, when we were here debating about the amendment to the CFS act, in their preamble not once did they even mention the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and yet, you know, and yet I just kept on hearing 17 years, 17 years, NDP. But yet they fail to recognize and honour and acknowledge that this has been a problem. This is way before—this is a problem that should be

addressed. This has to do with colonization, residential schools.

So, with that, I'm just finding that by not mentioning TRC within any of their budgets, it's a sign of disrespect and ignorance on that side of the House of what the real problem is going on within Manitoba.

Also, too, I just want to talk about The Elections Amendment Act. To me we call it the voter suppression act, and when the former MLA for The Pas, Frank Whitehead, was—during his election, I had to go calm down our voters at the Bighetty poll and with—along with the now vice-chief—regional vice-chief for AFN because we had a lot of Tory scrutineers breathing down the necks of our voters and upsetting our people, saying that's not a ID, that's not a ID. In fact, it upset one of our OCN members so much that he became enraged and started yelling and saying, quit denying my right to vote. And with that, a complaint was made to Elections Manitoba because of such incidences that can happen when you're asking our—when you're questioning our people's ideas and whatnot.

Even in Norway House, with addresses, I went to go campaign to a house. There's a house there with 15 people; I thought a family event was going on. But, no, they all live there. I ask, what is the address to this house? They provided a Manitoba Hydro bill with a 10-digit number with only one name. So how are our people supposed to vote with that kind of a situation going on?

And lastly, 1960, indigenous people got the right to vote. We were the last people in Canada to get that right to vote and now we're going to have further suppression on us to exercise our democratic right there.

So, with that, I'm just saying that with all this, what's going on, what I'm witnessing here is that the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) cost-saving agenda of cuts will only drive up other costs in social services, justice and CFS. But that's the point of view from us marginalized people.

So, with that, deputy—Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm that Manitoban, along with many others, who are truly affected by these cuts. I represent single-parent families, foster parents, an indigenous woman who has been marginalized, experienced racism, discrimination, grew up in social housing, struggling with mental health, and my family struggling with mental health, an intergenerational school survivor, a

parent who depends on child care, a northerner who needs greater access to health care.

So, with that—with the budget they say there's a challenging road ahead. Well, I agree with that. There is a challenging road ahead, indeed, for us northern Manitobans. That is why I will stand here today, as the MLA for The Pas, and will continue to work hard to assure that we in the North will be included, accounted for, not looked at as novelty tourist attractions. And we demand and we deserve much more respect from this government. Thank you.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Good afternoon, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the budget this afternoon, a budget which the opposition, I know, is struggling to find things to criticize about.

* (15:20)

I know they came to listen to the budget, and they were—like always, they had their dark shades on. They were expecting gloom and doom. They came in expecting the worst, as they always do, because that's the kind of opposition they are, and then what they saw is what Manitobans saw. They saw a balanced approach. They saw a reasonable approach. They saw a road to recovery. They saw exactly what Manitobans voted for a year ago when they voted on this day a year ago.

And so, the opposition struggles. And I spent a little bit of time in opposition myself, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have a little bit of an understanding, sometimes, of how challenging it can be, but I would say to them—and, you know, Gary Doer used to always say to this—that being in opposition doesn't mean you have to oppose everything. Being in opposition means you should look at things that are—in a reasonable way and in a respectful way, and when things are presented well, then you should say that, and the public will give you credit for that.

And I think Gary Doer, a successful politician, of course, in this Legislature and in Manitoba, went on to do a distinguished career as ambassador in Canada. We could use a strong ambassador like that these days in Washington, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But, you know, I think he was onto something there, that opposition's job isn't just to oppose, although I recognize that there's an important part of that in keeping government accountable, but it is about looking at things in a way that Manitobans would

expect you to, and I don't think this opposition has done that.

And I would say to the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway), a senior member, the member for Louise Bridge, a senior member of this House, he could certainly take a step back and look at what his former government did and the road that it was on in terms of increasing the deficit and the debt. And as a senior member, the member for Elmwood could say that that really wasn't a responsible way to be headed down, that we needed to have change. And I would hope that he would recognize and that he would reflect on this day, of any day, that this would be the day to reflect on why it is that Manitobans voted for change.

An Honourable Member: Patrik Laine's birthday. It's a big day.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, and I'm glad to see the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) is in good spirits today, looking forward to a positive Bomber season, no doubt. But he, too, should reflect upon the—what happened a year ago today and what Manitobans were looking for. They were clearly looking for change.

And why is it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that they voted for change? And if the members opposite—and I don't want to give the members opposite too much help in opposition. I don't want to give them too much advice. I wish them a long and successful stay in opposition, Madam—Mr. Deputy Speaker. But if I was to give advice—

An Honourable Member: It won't be 17 years.

Mr. Goertzen: —it would be—well, the interim leader says it won't be 17 years. Maybe she's suggesting it'll be longer. Maybe she thinks it'll be two decades, three decades. I don't know; I wouldn't want to suggest that. We respect what Manitobans would do in future elections. They're going to decide, ultimately, what it is that they want to do, so they'll decide who's going to be in government in future elections.

But I think it would behoove the members opposite if they would stop and reflect on their loss, think about how they felt a year ago today. And if they would look back and they would think about that, they might want to look at the reasons why they lost in such dramatic fashion. They might want to reflect on why Manitobans, in a historic election, in a record election, in overwhelming ways, that there needed to be change in Manitoba. And if those

members opposite would think about that and think back at how they felt a year ago, it would probably put them on a better path than they are right now.

Now, again, I don't want to give them a lot of advice. I hope they have a long and fruitful stay in opposition, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm sure that someday they'll have a chance to govern again. They just have to be patient. As Gary Doer would say, they need to be very, very, very patient. But in the interim they need to think about why Manitobans wanted change.

Manitobans saw the direction the province was heading in. They saw the financial mess that was—that we were already led into and the direction that it was going under the former premier and his Cabinet and the members of that former government. They knew—they knew—you couldn't continue on that path. They knew if you continue to spend that way and not have a way to pay for the things that you were saying you were going to do, that, ultimately, that would get passed on to the next generation, to our kids and to their kids, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Manitobans understood that and they voted. They voted with their actions. They went to the polls and they said, we need a change—we need a change—and this budget, which the members opposite will have an opportunity to vote on, represents that change. It represents a balanced approach on the road to recovery. It represents a realistic approach in terms of how do we move Manitoba back in the right direction.

It represents an approach that I think if members opposite would speak to Manitobans, if they'd even speak to each other, would have the opportunity to learn that it is the kind of approach that is typically Manitoban. It takes into view a number of different opinions, and there was many opinions sought. It looks at things in a way that are not too drastic in one way or the other and looks at a longer view. It has a plan. It has all the elements of a good, responsible budget moving us into the right direction.

So the members opposite, they'll have an opportunity as an opposition, they can choose whether they want to vote for the budget or against it, whether they want to continue the pattern—*[interjection]* Well, the member for Elmwood says he's already made up his mind. And that, you know, it's disappointing, but not surprising—not, this is—it's not surprising. The member for Elmwood, you know, is holding on to those old, hard ideological ways that doesn't matter what is presented by the government,

we're going to storm against it, we're going to oppose it, we're not even going to speak to our constituents, we're not going to ask Manitobans, we'll just come in here and oppose it because we're the opposition and we are going to oppose anything—anything, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is what the member for Elmwood is essentially saying.

And he needs to step back and to think about what other leaders have done at different times when—sometimes when things were going well, you say they're going well. I think the public actually gives you credit for that. And I think the public would give the opposition, the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) and others, would give them credit if they were able to put aside their partisan blinders and say, you know what, we've made mistakes as a government in the past and this budget actually corrects a lot of those mistakes and moves in the direction of correcting many more. I think the public would give them credit, would give the member for Elmwood, the interim leader, the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger), the member for The Pas (Ms. Lathlin), would give them credit.

Now, I don't want to give them that advice—I don't want to give them that advice—but I think they should think about that. And they've got a couple days to think about it—or a day, Mr. Deputy Speaker—to think about it. They can reflect on how it is that they're going to vote. But we'll hold them to account, as Manitobans will, as Manitobans did a year ago, a year ago when they decided they wanted a different direction, that they wanted a different direction—*[interjection]*

Well, I mean, this is interesting. Now I hear the member for Elmwood—the member for Elmwood yells from his seat about balancing the budgets, you know—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, and I appreciate you calling order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I don't mind if the member for Elmwood wants to talk about balanced budgets and yell from his seat. There is a member for 17 years who sat on the government side, for 17 years, and particularly only in the last seven years—

An Honourable Member: Glorious years—17 glorious years.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, yes, 17 glorious years, he says, Mr. Deputy Speaker—not for Manitobans who will be paying for the debt that was racked up by the former

government, by the member for St. Boniface for far more than 17 years, for generations—for generations—is the result of what the member for Elmwood and others in his caucus did. So he may want to consider them glorious years, but I know that Manitobans will look back on those as lost opportunities, as lost years. What a lost opportunity for Manitoba to go into a different direction.

So he has the opportunity. Now, all of a sudden, he's a great proponent of balanced budgets—never spoke about it once when he was in government, and I heard him speak lots of words here. He spoke a lot when he was in government. He's nodding his head now.

When he was a Member of Parliament for those short few days, when he was a Member of Parliament, he held the record, apparently—he put it in a brochure—that he spoke more than any other Member of Parliament had during that particular session of Parliament. He put it in a brochure. And then the members of his constituency promptly unelected him.

So the more words you speak doesn't necessarily mean it's a good thing. But, when the time that he spoke in this House, when he was in government—never talked about balanced budgets, never talked about responsible finances, never had anything to say about how their government would return to balance. And now that he sees a plan laid out in front of him, the opportunity to look forward and to return to balance in a responsible way, he stomps his hand on his desk and he says, I'm not going to vote for it simply because I'm in opposition and my job is to oppose everything.

Well, I would say to the members opposite, having spent time in opposition, your job isn't to oppose everything; your job is to look at things responsibly, see whether or not they're good for the province of Manitoba and then make that decision. The member for Elmwood will have that opportunity to make the decision. I ask him to put aside his partisan blinders, speak to his colleagues, if any of them are still speaking to each other, and decide to support this responsible budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Any further speakers?

* (15:30)

Mr. Greg Selinger (St. Boniface): I'm only surprised that the member from Steinbach didn't use all of his time. He had so many words of wisdom that he wanted to impart towards us.

But, today, we speak to the budget of 2017-2018, Mr. Speaker, and it is a budget that has many things that need to be commented on in it. And first of all, Manitobans were actually braced for something that could've been potentially worse. And the media portrayed it as a budget that didn't bring as much austerity as might have occurred, and that is certainly true.

Nonetheless, there are certain tendencies in the budget that speak to the challenges ahead, Mr. Speaker. First and foremost, this budget brings forward a new standard in setting double standards in the province. The first thing they did was they cranked up and confirmed in the budget a 20 per cent wage increase for them as Cabinet ministers at the same time as they froze wages for everybody else working in the public sector and also froze, for the second year in a row, the minimum wage. And the collective bargaining has been surpassed by unilateral legislation that breaches the collective bargaining process. I'm sure the prospects of it being challenged all the way to the Supreme Court are quite strong given the lack of consultation that has occurred.

But this double standard, Mr. Speaker, where salaries have gone up \$14,000 for Cabinet ministers, \$22,000 for the Premier (Mr. Pallister), while at the same time everybody else in the public sector, including just the most modest-income workers, home-care workers, et cetera, are getting zeroes, is truly problematic; it does set a double standard.

The other thing we've seen over and over again, and we just heard it from some members in the Legislature, that the budget is one that rewrites history. Some would call it revisionist history. It runs down the past as much as possible so that they can claim they are the most improved in the future. So they try to run everything down that's been done in the past. All the progress that's been made, they denigrate it. They dismiss it. They ignore the facts, and then they want to be able to claim that they're the most improved in the country. Well, that's a strategy that I don't think will be very effective. You don't lift yourself up by running other people down, Mr. Speaker, and that's the plan that they're following today.

The most obvious example that they comment on a lot is they make the point that the former government raised taxes more than any other government in the history of the province, which is just not factually correct, Mr. Speaker. When the

government of the day used to publish the Manitoba Advantage, that showed the cumulative impact of tax reductions in Manitoba, and a family of four—that's two-earner family, of \$76,000, a middle-income family in Manitoba—have realized, up until last year's budget, savings of \$4,596 a year on income taxes, and that included income tax savings, income tax credit tax savings and property tax savings. So there had been a very significant reduction in the taxes that Manitobans paid, in addition to cost-of-living advantages for their utilities, which I'll comment on later. And we used to publish what was called the Manitoba Advantage, something that had been brought in by the former Filmon government and has been abolished by this government. They no longer want to be accountable, showing the affordability of their budgets and the impact it has on families.

And so we see some real problems: a two-earner family at \$60,000 has the second lowest cost of living in the country, with tax savings of \$30,260.

A graduate, before the graduate tuition tax rebate, Mr. Speaker, had the lowest tax burden of any young graduate in the country, and it was not surpassed by any other province. And so there—savings there were \$5,500.

A senior, Mr. Speaker, had among the third lowest living costs in Canada, with tax savings of five hundred and—\$5,353 for a couple of \$60,000.

A single person with a disability had the lowest and the—lowest cost of living in the country and tax savings of \$1,358.

So there are many other examples that were listed in the previous budgets before this new government came in and abolished the Manitoba Advantage and stopped being accountable to Manitobans and stopped being transparent. And those tables illustrated the advantage of families living in Manitoba where the cost of living was among the most reasonable and stable in the country.

Similarly, with the business community, Mr. Speaker, the Manitoba business environment, the tax on \$500,000 of corporate tax was the lowest in the country. The income tax was the lowest burden in the country and that was the case for '16 and for future years that were being projected under our plan to keep small business tax the lowest in the country: zero. When we came into office it was 9 per cent; we took it down to zero and that has demonstrated to be of great value to Manitobans.

So, the net cost of investment from a smaller manufacturing firm in Brandon was the second lowest in the country and in Winnipeg the fourth lowest in the country. The net cost of investment for a larger manufacturing firm was the third lowest in the country for Brandon and the fourth lowest in the country for Winnipeg.

The pre-net tax income for a small manufacturing firm in Brandon was the lowest, and in Winnipeg the third lowest, and for a large manufacturing firm it was similar: The lowest in the country for Brandon and the third lowest for Winnipeg.

The effective tax rates for a small manufacturing firm were the lowest in the country for Brandon and Winnipeg, and for a large manufacturer, the lowest in the country for Brandon and the fourth lowest for Winnipeg.

And very competitive on internal rates of return. For a small manufacturing firm in a city of over 500,000 Winnipeg was the most competitive in the country, and for the internal rate of return for a larger manufacturing firm, Winnipeg was the most competitive in the country, Mr. Speaker.

Those are demonstrable facts that were published in previous budgets. They're no longer made available because this government has a different agenda when it comes to affordability and it belies the rhetoric that we hear so frequently from the members of the opposition. So it is something that we have to be aware of, that they're rewriting history every day to justify what they're doing.

They talk about the deficit and the debt burden, Mr. Speaker. The most salient impact of any borrowing is what does it cost you as a proportion of your expenditure, and when we came into office the cost of servicing the debt in Manitoba was 13.2 cents on the dollar, and even in this last budget, when a lot of debt was put on the books by the current government—they brought it forward instead of amortizing it properly—it's 5.8 cents on the dollar. It's less than half the cost of servicing the debt than it was when we came into office.

And so it shows that Manitoba, during our time in office, had been able to reduce the debt as a proportion of the GDP until the recession came from about 32 per cent down to about 23 per cent. We had put \$800 million aside in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund and then we prudently used that to reduce deficits and to keep the cost of debt down as we

continued to stimulate the economy through the recession.

So those facts are something that the members never mention because it doesn't make their case. It actually contradicts the case that they're trying to make and their revisionist history.

So the reality is that there's been very responsible, prudent fiscal management in the province over the last 17 years, and the new government has inherited that and are making dramatic changes that will make the cost of living much higher for Manitobans and take away their cost of living advantage.

Transparency is another thing they ran on, but what we see instead is a great deal of opaque cloudiness in what they present to Manitobans. They no longer present the cost of living, as I've just illustrated. They've decided to eliminate the affordability utility rate accountability act, which required Manitobans to keep the costs of running an automobile, insurance, the cost of home heating and the cost of electricity, as a bundle of services, the lowest in Canada. They're no longer going to report on that and let people know about that.

They've decided to end the public-private partnership legislation, Mr. Speaker, which required any public-private partnership to be measured against a public sector comparator and show that it was better value for the money and better value for Manitobans if they're going to choose that method of financing. That's been eliminated now, so there will be no accountability when public-private partnerships are brought forward, and they've run into very significant problems in other jurisdictions because of this lack of accountability. And the accountability tool that was in place, the transparency tool, has been eliminated.

They've not released the KPMG report on the financial review when they said they would release 97 per cent of it. Similarly, they have not released the health review that they commissioned, Mr. Speaker, and those are not examples of transparency.

* (15:40)

They've made hypothetical projections of what the future costs would be in Manitoba, but they haven't shown how they've come to those projections.

Another theme that's starting to emerge in this budget is greater inequality—greater inequality because, on the one hand, they're indexing the tax rates and the basic personal exemption, which mostly benefits those of us that have more income and least benefits people with lesser incomes, so the gap between the wealthy and the less wealthy will continue to grow.

It'll be exaggerated even more, Mr. Speaker, by freezing the minimum wage so that folks at the bottom, including students and women who are working part-time in the workforce, or people that are retired and working in the workforce, or people that are working at minimum wage jobs in the service sector don't see any gains in their wages, even though their cost of living is going to go up. So that will create greater inequality.

The cancellation of the graduate tuition tax rebate cranks up the taxes of every young graduate who decides to live and work in Manitoba by \$2,500 a year. That's a very significant hit on somebody trying to put down roots and get started in Manitoba, and there will be less housing under the social housing program Manitoba Housing made available for people and we all know that stable housing is a foundation upon which people build stable lives. And, by providing less housing, you provide less jobs, but you also provide less stability within our communities. And, of course, the higher utility rates which are coming because they've cancelled the utility rate accountability act will also lead to greater inequality.

So these are some of the themes which are starting to emerge in this budget, and it looks like those themes will continue in further years as they roll forward on this agenda of creating greater inequality with less transparency, and following a double standard and rewriting history to justify what they're doing.

Another theme that's come out is deregulation, and we'll discuss this further because that bill has been held over, but there are risks to labour standards. There are risks to safety in the workplace with some of the deregulation measures that they've put in place. There are risks to water and health with some of the deregulation measures they've put in place.

The deregulation of student fees means that students earning minimum wage will now be paying higher fees when they go back to school, not just tuition fees, but lab fees as well, and the lack of

tendering on contracts such as the Boston Consulting Group shows that they have a preferential approach to seeking consultation advice, and advice without looking at comparable firms that might be able to do the job more effectively from within Canada or from any other jurisdiction, for that matter.

And another theme that seems to coming here is in the election they indicated that there would not be any reduction in front-line services, and yet we've seen several examples of front-line services being cut in Manitoba. The home-care program was eliminated just at the end of March. They say they're going to replace it with a new program, but the reality was this home-care program looked at high-needs individuals, people that would otherwise require perhaps personal-care-home beds or would be in beds in hospitals. It allowed them to stay at home and function better. There were nurse practitioners that were working in that program. There were doctors that were working in that program. There was a program that allowed people to stay in their community and function as long as possible.

The QuickCare clinic was eliminated in St. Boniface. We do believe there's an opportunity to find an alternative service for that, but it was shut down first, and now everybody's working together to find an alternative to that, and that means a gap of service in the meantime.

And the proposal to shut three ERs will require people to drive by their local hospital to get an emergency service at an emergency room farther away from home, and there's definitely health risks attached to that, Mr. Speaker.

During the election they talked about building more personal care homes. After the election they put a cap on the amount that they would contribute on a per-bed basis for building a personal care home, which is going to definitely slow down the number of personal care beds that could be built, which was one of the keys to unlocking some of the congestion in emergency rooms in Manitoba.

And the reduction in housing support, Mr. Speaker, is another cut to front-line services and will put the safety and security of many members of our population at risk.

Education, the class size initiative has been eliminated. The minister speaks about giving choice to school divisions. The research was pretty strong—quite strong that in the K-to-3 area the class—smaller class sizes did get positive results for student

learning throughout the entire learning career of a young person until they graduate from high school, and that has now been eliminated.

Will something better be put in place? It's not clear. Some school divisions will do their best to hang on to it; others may not be able to because the funding increase they've received is so modest at 1 per cent that they may have to abandon these kinds of initiatives.

The tuition fees are going to go up, as we've talked about earlier, in education. That will make the cost of post-secondary education less affordable for people and will discourage them for continuing the path of lifelong learning, which is so essential in a rapidly changing global economy which impacts us here in Manitoba as well.

And the cancellation of the graduate tuition tax rebate, about a \$58-million reduction in expenditure, about \$2,500 for each student on an annual basis for up to six years, which could be \$15,000 of benefits to a young Manitoban or any Manitoban graduating from university, will definitely increase the cost of living in Manitoba and make it harder for people to put down roots and build a life for themselves in Manitoba.

On the daycare front, we were committed to at least 900 daycare spots a year. That's been cut in half, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased that they've decided to continue to bring more spaces available in the non-profit sector and not rely exclusively on home daycare, which can be a service that has issues with respect to quality and the ability to continue in service for more than four or five years at a time.

So we need to continue to invest in daycare, but the amount that they're putting in there does not address the gigantic backlog of over 14,000 spaces and the reality that over 70 per cent of families have both parents working, including women in the home, and they need access to daycare. The whole family needs access to daycare in order for them to provide for their families and have a sense of security.

And daycare, more and more, is early childhood learning, Mr. Speaker. It prepares young people for schools through guided and directed play, through opportunities to learn the skills, both behavioural skills and social skills, but also learning skills, that prepare them for success in school.

We've seen a reduction in culture spending, Mr. Speaker, of \$200,000 to the Manitoba Arts Council. I only hope that when they make those

decisions, about how to spend \$200,000 less, that they ensure that the smaller arts and culture groups are not left out, because many of them are very dynamic and innovative and can offer a lot to the quality of life in Manitoba.

In the justice sector, there was an opportunity to provide more restorative justice with respect to the social economy and create jobs and opportunities for people coming out of the corrections system to have the opportunity to learn a trade, to learn the skills that'll allow them to be employed and reduce recidivism, or the return to jail, and re-establish themselves in the communities, and we haven't seen any activity on that front, Mr. Speaker. And that's penny wise and dollar foolish and will only hurt us in the future.

The other thing that we need to do—and we had very good success, and I think members opposite know about this. The early childhood development initiatives were getting excellent results. The research that was being done in Manitoba showed that \$1 invested in early childhood development generated about seven to eight dollars of benefits in avoided social costs going forward and probably higher leverage in Manitoba in high-need communities, and we didn't see any improvements in that area.

So a lack of commitment to prevention only will drive up costs for government in the future and will make the lives of Manitobans, particularly young Manitobans, more difficult going forward. So a fundamental commitment to prevention, particularly in early childhood development, in 'infant'—in infant safety and security, those kinds of measures can make a huge difference, and we didn't see any announcements or discussion of that.

The fiscal arrangements are something that this government has been able—has been struggling with in terms of the relationship with the federal government. And I do want to say that every government should try to get a fair contribution from the federal government for things like health care and education, employment training and labour-market programs as well as immigration programs all across the boards where there's joint jurisdiction, including on the environment, but we haven't seen great results there so far and we haven't seen agreements being signed. And that's unfortunate because these are missed opportunities here in Manitoba that would allow us to have access to more resources. And, yes, we still have to keep pushing

the federal government to do their share, but it doesn't mean we turn down opportunities in the short to medium term to make lives better for Manitobans, and that includes on issues like climate change.

And I also noticed in the budget that there was a very significant commitment to increase the tax credit for wealthy Manitobans to contribute to political parties, and that only tilts the democracy towards those that have the resources and the power and the access and takes it away from those that don't. And you combine that with voter ID requirements, photo ID requirements—we're shrinking the universe of people that are going to be able to vote in the next election, and that is a real setback for Manitobans.

* (15:50)

Some of those measures are going to cost Manitobans money. We're going to be paying for greater privilege in the democratic process and less equality, and I think that's a lamentable outcome, a tragic outcome, and one that set Manitoba back when we were one of the first provinces to offer women the vote, we were one of the first provinces to have an independent boundaries commission, and we need—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time is up.

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): I'm pleased to rise today—[interjection]—thank you—to speak about the Budget 2017. And I listened intently to the MLA for St. Boniface, the former premier. I was optimistic. I like to give people the benefit of the doubt, especially people who have held the office of the Premier of Manitoba, and he started out very well, you know, talking about the budget and how people were speaking about the document around Manitoba, that they were surprised by it, that it could have been worse. And I thought he could have gone on and then said how about how good it is, but then he devolved down into the doom and gloom, the naysayers—

An Honourable Member: The facts.

Mr. Helwer: The—no, not the facts, but, well, what are the facts? Let's see now: No new tax increases—no tax increases—how about that? It has been years—years—in Manitoba when you could say that about a budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, quite shocking how that has been.

And, you know, as a matter of fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as you know, I've managed and operated and owned businesses in Manitoba and in other provinces and—for many years, and, for 17 years in Manitoba, business has been under attack by the former government—relentlessly under attack every single day. They try to brag about taxes while they're clutching and grabbing at every dollar, every dime that a business creates, because businesses create wealth for their owners. Businesses create wealth for the employees; they create jobs; they pay taxes. So the former government was certainly willing to take tax from businesses. They were relentless in their fees and taxes that they imposed on businesses. They drove businesses away day after day.

And I could speak from comparisons, Mr. Speaker. I listened to the former premier talk about numbers for studies that they'd commissioned. Well, I can speak from experience, because we ran businesses in Alberta; we ran businesses in Manitoba. And we know how they compared for tax structure. We know how they compared for employability. We know how they compared for the relentless—relentless—attack on business in Manitoba from the former NDP government. It was disgusting, and it, as I said, it drove businesses away; it drove them to reduce their expansion and it drove them—

An Honourable Member: Name one.

Mr. Helwer: Shur-Gro Farm Services—he says name one. It drove us to expand in other provinces and not [interjection] I hear a member here's laughing at business, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Isn't that horrible that they might laugh at a business? And I know that is how business in Manitoba felt: that they were laughed at by this former government, because they wouldn't meet with them; they wouldn't listen to them. But they would attack them relentlessly.

So now I see a budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that, yes, I did have a hand in. You know, as a member of Treasury Board, we spent a lot of time on this. Thank you to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) and his staff and the many other members of Treasury Board that worked on this. You know, as we went through the budget process, I kind of compare it to you turn over a rock and something ugly crawls up—out, and you have to deal with that thing. These were the things that were left to us by the former NDP government.

You know, the premier talks about poisoned water. Well, we saw that every day in Treasury Board, Mr. Deputy Speaker: things that the

government had done to tie the hands of future governments. They railed against the balanced budget legislation day after day. They changed it; they modified it; they did away with particular areas of it; they changed it so that their ministers wouldn't have to take a pay cut. And then they complained about how it's implemented with the new government, and they put false information on the record time and again.

But they didn't like having their hands tied by their own actions, which is what happened under the balanced budget legislation. So they changed it. But, then, what they went ahead and did is they signed contracts—so many contracts, just before the election when things seemed to be turning against them, that bound the hands and the decision-making of governments for not just one year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but for years to come—five years, 10 years, as much as 20 years that they signed agreements on, that we can't change, Mr. Speaker. These are legal agreements. Unlike the former government, we don't take people to court to change agreements. We don't break agreements and get sued by entities like the Jockey Club. So we're bound by these agreements, and many of them are quite horrible in their intent. But we have to deal with them, and those are the many things that we've had to deal with in this budget.

So could it have been better, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Absolutely, it could've been better, if they had left us a better hand.

I look at what happened in transition in Saskatchewan, from the NDP government there to the Conservative government—well, to the Saskatchewan government. And at least that NDP government was enlightened. They had started to make changes to make Saskatchewan a better place. But we didn't see that from our government. We were handed a very poor hand here.

But we're making the best of it, and Manitobans are with us on this, Mr. Deputy Speaker. After a year that we've spent in government now, it's hard really to put into the words how much optimism there is in the province of Manitoba. Everywhere that I go, everywhere that I listen to people, they are so optimistic about the outlook in Manitoba, and we're not just hearing it from Manitobans. From across the country and around North America and around the world, people are coming here because of things that we put into to place.

Just imagine, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the things that the previous government had done took us from being one of the best places to invest in mining in the world to 19th, behind Burkina Faso. It's a company that—or a country that I studied in graduate school and about the development challenges in that country. So I know it's not maybe the best place there to invest and certainly we were behind it. And in one year, we have gone from being the 19th to the second best, behind Saskatchewan.

Isn't that absolutely amazing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the space of one year the changes that we can implement and that can happen? Because I always say the Canadian Shield didn't move away from Manitoba; it's still here. The minerals are still here. The ores are still there. But the mining companies—what happened? The mining companies were driven out by the former government. So now they're back and they're looking to how they can develop mining again in Manitoba.

Talk about creating wealth for Manitoba and for Manitoba employees and for companies, Mr. Deputy Speaker, talk about the opportunity. There is so much there that we are seeing people move back to Manitoba. You know, for a long time they were driven away by the former government. But now we see them coming back.

I listen to the former premier talk about tuition fees damaging people that are entering university. The most damage that was done, Mr. Deputy Speaker, was two strikes at Brandon University under the former previous government that they ignored. They damaged and they destroyed the education opportunity for those students. That might have been their one shot, and probably was to many students, their one shot of getting a degree. And that government destroyed that dream by not one strike—by two. They failed to act time and again. It's just sad when I talk to the students—the former students and the parents of those students, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what it did to their ability to move forward with their education.

But now we have an opportunity to make Manitoba better. We're on the road to recovery. We're going to fix the finances. It's hard work. It takes a lot of time, it takes a lot of planning and you change things slowly. You enable people. You empower people. You focus the investment and you listen to people. We have had more consultations on this budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, than has happened

in many previous governments, because they didn't listen to people. They drove them away.

And yet again we listen to them trying to defend the wait times in the health-care system because they failed to act. So we're the worst in Canada in education. We're the worst in Canada in wait times. We're the worst in Canada in many things. But think of the opportunity, Mr. Deputy Speaker; there's nowhere to go but up, and we're going to enable Manitoba to do that.

* (16:00)

So, with no new taxes, we'll—we have a moderate budget that will get results for Manitobans, and Manitobans are on side with that. As I said, the optimism in Manitoba is unbelievable, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm thrilled that we're part of that government.

And, when I look around this Chamber that a year ago was all newly elected, 40 MLAs on the Conservative government side—congratulations to every MLA for being elected a year ago. It's a big step, and I'm thrilled to be part of this Chamber with you, part of the government is quite a different step. But to look down, as the Premier (Mr. Pallister) said, to their first caucus room meeting, to look at the 40 MLAs in that room, Mr. Deputy Speaker, was just amazing. You know, when we think of where we came from and where we are today and where we are going, Manitoba has so much opportunity, and we're going to enable that with not only this budget but the budgets going forward that will make Manitoba the most improved province.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Just a reminder before we continue, a reminder that the member from Fort Garry-Riverview has a—has been designated with his leader's unlimited speaking time.

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): Yes, thank you. *[interjection]* That's right. There's a lot of commentary going on as I stand up, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I'm quite happy to get up and put a few hours on the record—I mean, a few miles on the track—no, I mean, a few comments on the record regarding the government's budget that was tabled a week ago. And there's—there is plenty to talk about, and we're going to try and do that in the course of the next little while.

But I have to say, following the member from Brandon West—I guess I'll start there—because here

we have a member of the House get up, talk about his government's budget and is not able to articulate one thing, not able to point to one thing that the government did in Brandon. Now, I'll have to look at the Finance Minister's speech over again to see if Brandon is even mentioned. I have a sense that it wasn't.

An Honourable Member: Where is it?

Mr. Allum: Yes, that's right. It appears to be missing from the map, and that's not the first time under a Conservative government where things have gone missing from the map. We remember when all of northern Manitoba was wiped off a map of Manitoba, which was hard to understand.

But it's hard for me to get up today, I have a lot to talk about, but to follow a member who can't point to one productive thing in the budget that was done for the very community that he represents. And so you have to say to yourself, well, what is he doing in his job in representing his community and advocating for programs and services and capital investment in his city? And he's unable to articulate one thing. *[interjection]*

Bless you. My sister from St. John sneezed, and so I felt—just for memory's sake, for people happen to read this speech years from now, referring to Hansard and all of a sudden in the middle of it I just went, bless you—I wasn't referring to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and not to my friend from Brandon West, who failed miserably in his speech to articulate anything for the people of Brandon, but to my sister from St. Johns, who I know, who, in fact, has been ill this last little while, and yet she comes to work every day to advocate on behalf of the people of St. Johns and the people in the indigenous community and on behalf of women, day in, day out, and it's a pleasure that I have and a great honour for me to be able to sit beside her in this House.

Like every member in this House, if they didn't do this—do it, I'm certainly going to take a—just a second to thank the people of Fort Garry-Riverview for their support and their encouragement in my role as their representative here in the Legislature, and I, like everyone else, I assume, have a few critics out there, and that's as it should be. They hold me to account. But the vast majority of people in my constituency, which is a very progressive riding, very progressive constituency, are always very supportive of me and always very encouraging of the work that our government did in the past and of the work that we continue to do as Her Majesty's loyal opposition

to hold the government to account. That is, after all, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because you'll remember, that's our job on this side of the House, and I'm proud to do it. So often I've heard in the members' speeches is this kind of bragging that goes on about how they won and we lost and—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Allum: It's disappointing to hear my friend from Lac du Bonnet lead the applause on that because he knows—he knows—that we don't come into this House to be a winner or a loser; we come into this House to represent and advocate on behalf of our constituents. That's why we run. That's why we hope to win, but our obligation and our understanding of what we do isn't about the winning and the losing. In fact, I find that unbecoming. I'm sorry, I do. But we come here to represent the people of Manitoba, and I'm proud to do so on our side of the House with my brothers and sisters.

And so, as I say, I want to thank the people of Fort Garry-Riverview for providing me with this extraordinary privilege to have a seat in this House to—in the past, to have served as minister of Education and Advanced Learning—and I'm going to get a chance to talk about education, maybe today, probably tomorrow—and also to serve as—that's what you call a set-up. That's foreshadowing for those of the government caucus who aren't quite clear about what's going to happen in the next little while. But I do want to say that I was proud as well to serve as Attorney General and Justice minister, admittedly, under difficult circumstances for us but, nevertheless, was a personal honour to do so and only reason I say that is to thank the people of Fort Garry-Riverview for 'griving' me the great opportunity to fight for social justice in Manitoba.

I also want to start, if I could, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by saying that while I'm going to speak about the budget, I can hardly do better—hardly do better—than the speeches that preceded me on this side of the House, not including the Conservatives who are on this side of the House, who are as far away from influence as I am, even though they sit and represent the government's side. And I quite enjoy their company. I'm very glad to have them on this side of the House. I hope that I'm able to call each and every one a colleague and a friend. But I have to tell them, you're about as far away from influence as I am, and I regret that very much. I hope you'll—all of you do get a opportunity to maybe sit, at least on that side of the House, if not in the front

benches with the other 12 and a half members of Cabinet and—but I wanted to begin my comments by saying that—and it's funny, you know, I—that I'm proud to say my dad was a Presbyterian minister, and he often did turn to the choir to ask for some support. And I have my own choir right here who are constantly helping me with commentary and other asides I think that we could do without, they won't make it on the public record, but they might if they happen to want to get involved in this particular speech, so I encourage them to help me along if they feel like doing so. I know that some members will have a hard time resisting it as we go forward.

* (16:10)

But I wanted to begin, if I could, just by saying that I could hardly do better than the speeches that have already been given to my extraordinary colleagues here on this side of the House. And I want to begin, of course, with our interim leader, the member for Logan (Ms. Marcelino), who has been a member of this Legislature since—

An Honourable Member: 2007.

Mr. Allum: —2007, that a decade in this Legislature, as I'm sure some of the new folks here will appreciate, is a—has to be a labour of love, if nothing else, as it's a difficult job. But I want to thank her for her leadership. I know her to be a kind and generous and humble individual who represents such a profound contrast with the Premier (Mr. Pallister) of this province, day in and day out, on questions of public policy and on questions of doing right by the people of Manitoba.

She gets up each day; she asks one set of questions, and sometimes two. She puts it to the Premier each day directly about defending the interests of Manitobans, and what she gets back is chock full of misinformation and falsehoods that is not worthy of the Premier's chair in Manitoba. I have encouraged him that he might want to get a fact checker, but he seems not interested in the truth.

But I want to thank the member for Logan for her inspired but quiet leadership during the last year and for the work that she does on behalf of her community and that's, of course, the newcomer community, broadly defined; the Filipino community, of course. She does a wonderful job representing their interests. She did a fantastic job in her time as a minister of the Cabinet. She attended, I think, more events than any human being can

possibly ever attend. And so I want to thank her for her quietly and inspired leadership.

I also want to thank our House leader, the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway), the dean of MLAs in the House. I think I can say that, with some certainty, I don't think anyone has served longer. I know he had some other political opportunities in Ottawa, and he did a great job here. But I want to thank him for taking on the job of House leader as well as Infrastructure critic, and we're going to get a chance to talk about infrastructure or investment or lack thereof in the next few hours. But I want to thank him for the work that he does and for holding the government to account on their failure to invest in infrastructure in Manitoba.

He has a—had the unenviable task of trying to find the Infrastructure Minister, who, we know, was characterized as missing in action, by his own constituents, just a short time ago. He seems to have disappeared not only off the grounds of the Legislature, and I say that in a metaphorical sense not in any other sense—I say that in a metaphorical sense. We can't find him; nobody can find him. I know he's sitting in here, but we can't find him. We're not even certain what he's up to. It's certainly not investing in infrastructure.

But I wanted to take a moment just to thank our House leader for the work that he does in negotiating with the Government House Leader (Mr. Micklefield). We know that the Government House Leader has a very difficult job trying to juggle the government's agenda. We know that he's a new elected member, and so I don't envy him—his particular role. I know that I was acting temporary, sometimes occasional House leader when we were in government, and I know it's a complicated thing, and so I say to the member for Rossmere (Mr. Micklefield) that I don't envy his position. I don't envy having to go in and talk to the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Pallister), the Premier, every day and having to explain why the legislative agenda seems to be just sort of rolling along slowly without any energy and or—any excitement.

I know the House leader could probably look at his Cabinet colleagues to—and blame them. I know he wouldn't throw them under the bus and would probably take responsibility, but I don't envy him for his position. But I would say that our own House leader and the House leader from Rossmere have tried hard to keep the activities of this Legislature rolling along.

I was disappointed that the House leader of the government waited 'til the very last day to introduce legislation, and he held on to the most critical eight bills. And so, when he wonders why there isn't sufficient time, why there hasn't been sufficient debate, he has only to look in the mirror.

But I know that, really, if he looks closely in the mirror, he'd look behind him to see the other political operatives in the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) office who have planned this strategy and otherwise held the people of Manitoba hostage over legislation, all of which, especially those last eight bills, that require significant debate in this House, and yet we know that it will be all cut short, sadly.

And I don't blame the House leader for the government's side, the member for Rossmere, but I do think that it was a poor political strategy that was not fair to the people of Manitoba, that eight bills, eight critical bills, should be left to the eleventh hour. But I say all that in trying to pay my respect to our House leader and the member for Elmwood, for his work both as House leader and as our Infrastructure critic.

I really want to also pay tribute, if I could—because I can hardly do better than the speech she just gave—to our member from The Pas who has done an extraordinary job representing her constituency and representing indigenous peoples and representing communities all across the North who have, frankly, been abandoned by a government that seems not to care about northern Manitoba, who simply makes—has made something: missing north, going north—

An Honourable Member: They don't know about North.

Mr. Allum: They don't know about North, says my friend from Flin Flon, and I'm not surprised. They have apparently launched a tourism strategy of some kind, but nobody can really get a handle on it. But it hardly surprises us because it's always clear that when they go north, they're just visiting. They don't have any intents of building and growing deep roots in the same way that our party has.

But the member from The Pas, I want to say, has brought a very profound sense of the needs and aspirations of northerners into this House and this Legislature. I don't need to tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that she belongs to political royalty in the North. Her dad, the great Oscar Lathlin, was an iconic figure in this province, someone who I didn't

get to know as well as I would have liked to, although I certainly knew him and knew of him and knew of the contribution that he had made over decades to the well-being of indigenous Manitobans and Manitobans all across the province.

And so she has taken that torch from her dad and she carries it with great pride. She's a wonderful advocate for the North, and she's made absolutely clear the inherent unfairness in the way in which the new government has treated northern Manitoba and their desire not to continue to build an essential part of our province. She has been utterly fantastic in bringing UCN to the government's attention, of their needs, of the important role that UCN fills in the North, in Thompson, in The Pas, in 12 smaller communities all across the North.

* (16:20)

It's worth pointing out that when UCN was created, and the minister at that time was my predecessor, the extraordinary Diane McGifford, and that was such an essential undertaking that was done to transform UCN from a mere and underappreciated community college into the University College of the North. And for those who are new to the House, you'll recall that the Conservatives, back in the day, voted against UCN. They've never really cared about that essential, profoundly important educational institution that has tentacles all out across the North. It's worth saying that we didn't just wait and try to carry on with the facilities that were the former Keewatin Community College, we improved them and built them. And it should be no surprise that one of those capital projects that we undertook is now called the Oscar Lathlin library, and it is an extraordinary—extraordinary—place, not only for learning, but for social engagement.

And I want to say to our member from The Pas that I'm so proud to know her and that she's on my side and that I have had a chance to get to know a little bit about the political royalty from which she comes from.

Madam Speaker in the Chair

I want also, of course, to turn to my friend from Tyndall Park, who has been an extraordinary critic of our Crown Services minister. And I know that we can't take liberties with what the name of Cabinet portfolios are. We have a different way of thinking about the Minister of Crown Services (Mr. Schuler) that I suppose I should just leave alone for now rather than getting into any trouble, although I'm sure

some of his friends might be called Bozo or otherwise, but, nevertheless, I wanted to pay tribute to my friend from Tyndall Park, who was elected in 2011 at the same time as I was. We have become, I think, pals, here in the Legislature. We share common portfolios as critics. We work with each other. His life story is as interesting and as sometimes scary as something that I would never have encountered in my own personal life, so I have a lot of time for him, both as a friend, as a colleague, as someone who has shown incredible backbone and incredible ability to take the hardest points in life and make something of them. And he's taking all that personal life experience and brought it into this 'leger' to advocate on behalf of his own community, of his own constituency. And I think the world of him, and I thank him for the work that he does, day in and day out, to hold the government to account.

Equally, I want to say to my friend from Minto, former Justice minister, who represents, quite likely, maybe the constituency with the most difficult socio-economic circumstances in the province. It may not—it may be one of a number, but it's certainly a very diverse constituency with people from all over the globe who've come to make Winnipeg and Manitoba our home. And I know that he's out advocating on their behalf each and every day. And he, as a long-standing Justice minister, did an—has done an extraordinary job of holding our new Attorney General (Mrs. Stefanson) and Justice Minister to account. And I'll get into some of those things, but, just on a personal note, I want to thank him for the work that he does as our Justice critic and fighting for a constituency who needs more friends in the Legislature rather than those who are opposed to their well-being.

That, of course, brings me to my friend from Concordia, our Health critic, who has the very difficult job of dealing with a Health Minister who is an able politician—I would give that to the member from Steinbach. He has a way with words—many words, endless words. And my friend from Concordia matches him, day in and day out, and though the Health Minister often talks about everything else that my friend from Concordia asks him about, nevertheless, word is getting out about the Conservatives' ongoing damage to our health-care system. And I attribute that word getting out to my friend from Concordia, who, by the way, Madam Speaker, wasn't feeling very well yesterday when he had to give his speech on the budget, and yet it was one of the best speeches I've heard in my

time as an MLA on—I don't want the MLA for Concordia ever to be sick, but if that's what brings out the best out in him, then I hope he feels under the weather just a little bit more often, in order to hold the government to account.

He did a brilliant job of asking government members representing constituencies all across the province, where are they when the government is doing this considerable damage to Manitoba's economy and the future of Manitoba, and he was able to articulate that they've been sitting on their hands, not doing their job as MLAs, and I'm going to return to that theme in a while as well. But I want to thank him for the work that he does. He's a—I've known him for quite a while now, and does a extraordinary job in this Legislature, in this community. He's a good guy and also a great dad with a fine family. I got to travel a little bit with his wife when she was a public servant and learned a lot about him and still found he was to be a great guy, all the same.

I did say a few words about my sister from St. Johns a few minutes ago, and I'm inclined to say a few more about her because she has come to this Legislature just, well, a year ago, as we heard over and over and over again in question period. And she's done an extraordinary job of holding the Families Minister to account and at the same time representing so many different kinds of people in our province. And I said a few minutes ago, it's my great honour and privilege to sit beside her and to get to know her, and we swapped stories and become friends and share a few laughs. Most of those laughs are at my expense, Ms.—Madam Deputy Speaker, but that's because I'm always doing something that, really, no normal person does and—

An Honourable Member: It's amusing.

Mr. Allum: She says it's amusing, and I appreciate her good humour for that.

But she brings a very special kind of critique to this Legislature as a woman, as an indigenous woman, as a person herself who has come from extraordinarily difficult circumstances that I, as a man in my 50s, can't possibly begin to comprehend. But yet here she is advocating so hard for social justice in our province.

And she had a great speech talking about local issues, but also issues that affect women, affect indigenous persons, infect—she has our immigrant—immigration critic, immigration issues,

refugee issues in the way that she did in question period today. These are all fundamental parts of the budget that I'm getting to, but I want to thank her for her continued inspiration and friendship.

As I look behind me, of course, I have my good friend from Fort Rouge who, it's no secret now, has thrown his hat into the ring to be leader of our party, and I want to thank him for doing that it. I think that's tremendously courageous, a selfless thing to do; it's easier not to run. I think that that's—but I know that when he made that decision, he made it in careful consideration with the wonderful family. And I know that if he's successful, he will be a fantastic leader of this party and will do everything he can not only to hold the government to account but, more than that, to identify a vision for all Manitobans into the 21st century, and that's desperately what we need. We saw in the budget—

An Honourable Member: Are you going to endorse? Is that what you're building to, you're going to endorse?

Mr. Allum: My friend from Fort Rouge is asking some additional information that he requires, and he'll, as he knows, needs to wait for that wonderful information.

But I would say that I'm—I know that he will present, in the leadership campaign, a vision for this province that will take us into the 21st century, take us forward, Madam Speaker, instead of back. The government has made it their business to take us back, not forward. It's—and that's unfortunate.

* (16:30)

But I also want to compliment the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew) for his work as our Education critic. He—obviously a well-educated individual himself, but he has been an incredible advocate for students and for families and for an education system that I think I can say, as former minister of Education and Advanced Learning, that makes me very proud. It—nothing disappoints me, day in and day out, to hear the Education Minister of this province get up in this House and run our education system into the ground. I can't understand how any minister of the Crown can be given the privilege to be an Education Minister, or Health Minister, or any of the other ministers on this side—on that side of the House, and yet run down the very portfolios they're supposed to be advocating for.

So I want to thank the member for Fort Rouge for his finely tuned critique of the government's

educational agenda, which, as I say, is threatening to take Manitoba's education system not merely back into the 20th century, but it has the potential to go back to the 19th century as well. So I thank him for the work that he's done.

I want to also acknowledge our—my new friend, turning—quickly turning into an old friend in short time, but the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Lindsey), who has been an incredible addition to our caucus, has done an extraordinary job in holding the government to account on its war on labour, which is otherwise inexplicable, that they didn't campaign on, that was not part of any agenda that we're familiar with, and yet the first thing that they do is declare a war on labour. And the member from Flin Flon, a stiff backbone that he has, has got up and gone toe-to-toe with the labour minister and the Premier (Mr. Pallister) day in and day out not simply to defend labour, as important as that is, but to defend working men and women in this province and their families. And so I'm honoured that he should join our caucus, to become our caucus chair.

You know, you—one thing you can say about the NDP, you can get advancement pretty quick. We don't wait to move people up the—

An Honourable Member: We recognize talent.

Mr. Allum: Yes, when we see talent, we take advantage of it. And certainly the member from Flin Flon, we're taking advantage of his many wonderful talents—

An Honourable Member: He's a good arts critic, too.

Mr. Allum: And he has been an extraordinary arts critic as well. And I'm going to talk a little bit about that today—or in the next little while as well.

Of course, I want to compliment the member for Wolseley (Mr. Altemeyer) as well. We are long-time friends. I have the honour of representing his family, his mother and father, who live in Riverview, who are great, great people. His mom is an über-volunteer. If there's something that needs to be done, something good to be done, call Jean Altemeyer, because she'll be there and she'll be doing it. And, as the expression grows, apple never falls too far from the tree. And her son, the member for Wolseley, has taken on that mantle and has done an extraordinary job as our environment critic, especially in light of a government who appears not to care about the environment, about the sustainability of the globe for generations to come

or about having a clean and healthy environment which everyone can enjoy. And so the member for Wolseley has done an extraordinary job in holding the government to account, as has my other colleagues. But more than that, Madam Speaker, he brings a vision of the sustainable future to this House, which we welcome and embrace. I'm only sorry that the government seems to be going backward on the environment, and we're going to talk about that as well.

I also, finally, if I could, in paying tribute to the work of all of my colleagues, want to pay tribute to the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger), as well. He has been an incredible public servant in this province for well over two decades. I didn't live here in Manitoba when he was a city councillor, but I know that he did an extraordinary job because I'm a former city employee, and so you see the work the councillors do. And I saw the legacy that he left as a city councillor. It's unfortunate that he didn't get the opportunity, he ran a great race, but didn't become the mayor of Winnipeg. I want to say categorically how different this city would have been had the member for St. Boniface been elected mayor of the city all those years ago, in 1998, I think it was, rather than the mayor that we did get, which started the slow decline of the city that was, for a very short period, improved by the presence of Glen Murray, and I can say that because I was there. But, then, it fell into freefall in all the subsequent elections after—thereafter. When Mayor Murray left, you tried to run for the Liberals—federal government. He didn't succeed in that, but sadly he didn't ask for my political advice. I would've told him not to run as a Liberal, in St. James, at that point in history. But, nevertheless, I would say that had the member for St. Boniface become Mayor of Winnipeg, he would've done a great job.

And then he went on to become elected here, and I suppose it was our good fortune that that happened, because he went on to become Finance minister, with a record 10 balanced budgets in a row. And it strikes me as quite remarkable that last week when we made that point in debate, suddenly, that apparently wasn't true. But that's the kind of misinformation we get from the government side.

In fact, it was true: there were 10 balanced budgets in a row under the member for St. Boniface's leadership as Finance minister and then came—went on to become our premier. I'm proud to know him. I'm proud to be his colleague, proud to call him my

friend, and so glad that he stays in this House as a member to represent St. Boniface.

I know he's doing remarkable work in his constituency, as all of us have an obligation to do, and I have enormous respect for him being able to do that when others would not have the considerable backbone that he has to do it.

So, Madam Speaker, in saying all that, paying tribute to each and every one of my colleagues, I do that because I can hardly do better than they did in their budget speeches in critiquing the government with respect to their individual critic responsibilities. But I—so I'm only trying to add, if I could, to the critique that was—that each has made, and also to let them know how deeply I care about them and how much I like them, and how proud I am to be their colleague.

I want to begin—maybe—

An Honourable Member: Is this the introduction now?

Mr. Allum: That might be the right word. I want to begin—there's so much to talk about in the budget, but I want to begin by talking about the peculiar theatre of the budget that happened in here on budget day, because it was theatre, and I said this to my friends on the government side who sit on this side that it is political theatre that we often practise in here. And, if we all understand that, then we're okay when we go out into the hallway and be colleagues and friends. But, in here, we have a job to do and it's often theatrical in the way in which we do it. But I don't think anything can quite top the theatre that happened here with last week's budget. And I'm thinking of a particular way of delivering the budget that the Finance Minister had that I found quite remarkable, and maybe it was only me, but I want to spend just a second talking about it, because I found it so very, very odd.

During the course of his budget, the Finance Minister would speak of a particular government department, and, when he was done, he would turn approvingly to that particular Cabinet minister and kind of nod to them. And I found it hard to understand what that nod conveyed. He seemed to be saying, as he turned to a given minister, that: see; we're on the same side, and I've done good work for you. What I found hard to understand is that, in each particular circumstance, the Cabinet minister clapped even though the Finance Minister had just delivered

a cut to their department. I found it really remarkable.

* (16:40)

I can remember distinctly, the Finance Minister in delivering his budget, and, of course, he has the big podium up in front of him and he's got his papers up in front of him, and he turns over his left shoulder to look at the minister of Culture, Heritage, tourism and Sport, whose budget he had slashed quite remarkably, and she gave him a huge round of applause and thanked him for doing so.

He turned over his right shoulder and looked at the Minister of Education, whose budget has been slashed dramatically both in terms of operating and in terms of capital, and the Minister of Education clapped.

He turned to the Minister of Infrastructure (Mr. Pedersen) over his right shoulder, and he has cut funding for roads, funding for highways, funding for infrastructure investment all across the province. The Minister of Infrastructure smiled and he clapped.

So I found that little piece of political theatre to be quite strange, to be honest with you, and more than a little weird, to be quite frank, because I don't know what Cabinet ministers think their job is, but their job is to advocate for their various portfolios to ensure that there's a continued and sustained investment in the programs and services that each of those departments provide. And yet they applauded the very cuts that those programs and services rely on—cuts to the funding that those programs and services rely on.

And I think that speaks volumes, Madam Speaker, if I may say, about the culture of the government and about the future direction of the government. They're clearly looking to turtle under the—in the face of enormous pressure from the Finance Minister and the Premier (Mr. Pallister) to undertake an agenda that only hurts Manitobans.

And so I don't know how they went back to their offices that day and held their head high. I don't think they did. I don't think they went back to their constituencies later that night and held their head high. I don't think they were able to do that. I think they would have had to acknowledge that, in relation to their specific portfolios, their specific departments, the Finance Minister had pulled the rug out right from under them.

And sadly, while the 12 and a half members of that Cabinet will continue to get huge pay increases, the people who they represent will suffer and suffer significant damages. I see my friend, the House leader. I owe him better than that. He can be the thirteenth floor on my elevator anytime. I think, if you notice, that on an elevator, the thirteenth floor is often missing, but there you go. But, if I've hurt his feelings in any way, of course, he's a member of Cabinet and should be respected for that. We'll find another half member doing their job in due course.

So the theatre of the budget I found troubling, strange, more than a little weird. And, as I said, it goes to the culture and direction of the government where not only Cabinet ministers but individual MLAs, now proudly representing 40 constituencies across the province, are finding out that they need to knuckle under an austerity agenda being put forward aggressively by the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and the Finance Minister, and nobody ought to say a word. Nobody ought to advocate for their constituency; nobody ought to stand up for the people of Manitoba. So I guess on this side of the House, we'll take on that mantle. We'll do that job. We'll do the job not only of the constituencies that we represent, but the 40 others across the way because their MLAs are clearly asleep at the switch.

Now, this budget was primarily and only about one thing, and that appears to be about the deficit. And we know that the government has made a crisis out of the deficit for no particular reason other than political gain. They've gone out to their constituencies and across Manitoba and frightened Manitobans about where the deficit is in relation to other economic factors in Manitoba. And, when they do that, they do a tremendous disservice to the financial health and well-being of this province. They constantly rewrite history, and I suppose that's—it's often said in history that winners write the past, and I suppose that's what's happening now. I've read a lot of history in my life. I've studied it extensively. I've never heard revisionist history like I've heard from the government side. That's a tremendous disappointment to me, especially in relation to the deficit.

And I would want to say that that's not to say that you don't need to manage the deficit. We would always concede how important it is to ensure that the deficit doesn't get out of control, doesn't become a weight on the shoulders of Manitobans. But that's not the case here in Manitoba, Madam Deputy Speaker. In fact, nothing—nothing—could be further from the

truth. So to have an austerity agenda built on that most simple mischaracterization of the state of our deficit or the state of the Manitoba economy is a profound disservice to the people of Manitoba. And it disappoints me greatly that members opposite continually refer to their lines written by—speaking points written by political operatives, rather than having a fair and honest debate about what the state of the deficit is.

And so I thought it would be useful for members opposite if I read into the record a nice piece that was done by Professor David Camfield, who is a labour studies professor at the University of Manitoba. He is, by the way, the author of a chapter on Manitoba in a forthcoming book on fiscal policy and public services in Canada's provinces. So, if David's listening, I just gave him a plug there. But I think members of our caucus all had a chance to read David Camfield's piece, so I was just saying that I thought it would be valuable to read it into the record so that we can put—

An Honourable Member: Highlighted excerpts with context.

Mr. Allum: Highlighted excerpts with context, my friend from Fort Rouge is suggesting. I didn't have such grandiose ideas about adding additional context, I thought it would just be useful to read it into the record, so—and then maybe we could talk a little bit about it.

But this is—this piece is entitled Slay the deficit myth in Manitoba, professor urges on budget day. And I'll just repeat that, in case members opposite weren't listening. The piece is called, so that you can go look it up, because I think it is important for you to have a read of it, it's called: Slay the deficit myth in Manitoba, professor urges on budget day. And it was published on—posted on May 31st and—well, 2016, but it nevertheless still remains relevant in 2017.

And so I want to do that, and I'm going to read it into the record now, if you'll allow me to, in order that we can have a fair and balanced discussion of what the circumstance facing the deficit actually is. I think it's an important piece of information. *[interjection]* We hear the opposition House—or Government House Leader (Mr. Micklefield) is saying to me, well, he doesn't think that this is a useful use of our time. But we hear so much mythology about the deficit in the House, and because the budget is built on a pretense of a budget crisis, I think it is useful—and, in addition, the House

leader for the government sits beside the Health Minister, a few chairs down from the Premier (Mr. Pallister), they've talked about the importance of listening to experts, day in and day out. At first they were going to be listening to front-line workers, and that quickly went out the door, and they're going to listen to experts. But—so I want him to pay particular attention, I know he'll want to share this across his constituency so that there's some appropriate context to where we sit, where we stand and where the deficit is.

And so Professor Canfield starts this way, and when there's a quote, I'll say so, but I'm reading the entire piece into the record. It's not long at all, but it makes a number of salient points.

It says: "The new Progressive Conservative government wants Manitobans to believe the province's deficit is a problem. The claim that the deficit . . . topped the easy-to-remember \$1-billion mark is suspiciously convenient. As a Winnipeg Free Press editorial noted, quote: 'There is lots of room in the provincial ledgers to move numbers around.' Unquote.

"The Canadian Taxpayers Federation, eager to spur the government toward cutbacks, insists the debt is, quote, 'a heavy burden,' unquote, and, quote, 'bad programs, and even some good programs,' end quote, will have to be eliminated.

"But the claim that the deficit is a significant problem for the Manitoba government is a misleading and dangerous fabrication."

And I think I'll highlight that particular phrasing again. This is, again, Professor Canfield saying: "A significant problem for the Manitoba government is a misleading and dangerous fabrication.

"The real issue for any government"—and I want friends on the other side of the House to listen to what Professor Canfield's saying: "The real issue for any government is not the size of its deficit but how much it costs to service its accumulated debt. When governments spend more than they take in in revenue, they sell bonds to raise funds. A government's credit rating affects the rate of interest it has to offer in order to attract buyers for its bonds.

"Manitoba's debt servicing costs are eminently manageable." I'll say that again: "Manitoba's debt servicing costs are eminently manageable." *[interjection]*

Well, David Canfield. I'm reading this into the record.

"Interest rates are low and all three of the main credit rating agencies that assess provincial governments give Manitoba a good score. Only a minority of provinces are ranked better.

"Even so"—and I'm continuing on reading Professor Canfield's piece into the record—"Even so, it's important to point out that credit rating agencies are not the neutral technical information-providing services they claim to be. They are private firms that belong to broader corporate networks. The people who run them and issue ratings for governments are committed to a particular ideology: neoliberalism. Their evaluations of governments reflect this. For example, in 2013 Standard and Poors downgraded France's credit rating in spite of the French government's fiscal restraint. U.S. economist Paul Krugman pointed out that this move was driven by S&P's opposition to the French government's decision to raise taxes instead of 'dismantling the welfare state.'

"What we are given by those who argue"—and I'm continuing on with Professor Canfield. "What we are given by those who argue for deficit slashing is, as British political economist Hugo Radice puts it, quote, 'an entirely circular argument. We are told by supposed economic experts that deficit cuts are necessary because international bond markets require them. So why do the investors in international bond markets require cuts? Because the economic experts say they are necessary.' Unquote.

"If Manitoba's debt is objectively manageable, why is there such a hue and cry over the deficit?" Such fearmongering is used for—useful for politicians—and I'll interject just briefly to say, useful for the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) and government MLAs—and lobbyists who want to justify cuts to public services.

"Those who insist that the deficit is a problem also preach that the solution is austerity." This means cutting public spending—check, privatizing public services—check, and reorganizing what's left of the public sector along corporate lines: corporatization—check. "This is part of the neoliberal project of dismantling anything that could be a barrier to corporate profits, including workers' rights, environmental protection regulations and corporate taxes."

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Allum: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I can understand why the truth gets—

Madam Speaker: Now, I would ask all members to—please, to show some courtesy to the member that is in debate right now, and I'm sure everybody would expect the same when they're debating the budget as well.

So I would ask if everybody could please bring the decibel down a bit. We've only got five more minutes to go.

The honourable member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum).

Mr. Allum: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate that intervention and also appreciate the acknowledgement that there's only five minutes to go.

So I will wait, maybe, to read the remainder of Professor Camfield's important—important—piece into the record. But I—

An Honourable Member: Where's he a professor at?

An Honourable Member: University of Manitoba.

Mr. Allum: Yes, University of Manitoba.

But, as my friend from Wolseley often says to the—not environment minister—

Some Honourable Members: Sustainable Development.

Mr. Allum: —Sustainable Development Minister, what does she know, or what does the government know, that Professor David Camfield doesn't?

And I think when you have an expert in this regard, a labour studies professor at the University of Manitoba, someone who studies these issues academically—that means dispassionately—and gives Manitoba some very helpful advice, it's hard to understand why the government prefers to fixate on an issue, which is not nearly at—of crisis proportions in the way that the Finance Minister and the Premier (Mr. Pallister) make out day in and 'daya.' And yet so much of the phrasing that he uses is familiar to us on this side of the House.

An Honourable Member: I think I quoted him.

Mr. Allum: My friend from Fort Rouge says he's also referred to this; it's such a good piece.

We know, because he's well read; others of us know that, in fact, Professor Canfield's hardly alone in this view of thinking. In fact, it was just a few short years ago when the International Monetary Fund, hardly that friend of working men and women across the globe, said essentially the very same thing.

So all across the political spectrum, people are saying that the foundation upon which this government had built this budget is sinking sand. It's not—

An Honourable Member: Quicksand.

Mr. Allum: It's quicksand, says my friend from Tyndall Park. And that alone suggests to me that the government is doing a tremendous disservice to the people of Manitoba, and, goodness knows, people of Manitoba deserve better than what we have heard from the Premier and from the Finance Minister in his budget last week.

I do know, Madam Speaker, that during our time in government, and the members across the way always say, oh, it's 17 years—but remember, that wasn't some, like, uninterrupted 17 years. Our government was elected once, twice, three times, four times. Yes, it came to an end a year ago; I understand that. I accept the outcome. I—as I said earlier, this isn't about winners and losers.

But that whole notion of 17 years is an insult to the people of Manitoba who elected an NDP government once, twice, three times, 14 times. And I would ask them, as a simple courtesy to the people of Manitoba, stop rewriting history like that. Stop taking us down that particular path and respect the fact that the people of Manitoba voted an NDP government in on four successive occasions.

An Honourable Member: I think they want to be reminded about Doer's record on deficits.

Mr. Allum: Well, I've already—was speaking about both the Doer and the former Finance minister's uninterrupted run of 10 years of balanced budgets. You know, I want to talk more about that a little bit later.

But I will say, Madam Speaker, that if we're to have an honest and informed and engaged debate in this House on issues respecting last week's budget, then let's start from a place of rational debate where we put the issues in their proper and appropriate

context, and let's not create crises where they do not exist.

We expect more from the Finance Minister; we expect more from the Premier (Mr. Pallister); we expect more from the new government of Manitoba. But, more than that, we expect more from the 40 MLAs—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have unlimited time remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, April 19, 2017

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