

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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The Honourable Daryl Reid
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 14, 2013

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Mr. Speaker: Introduction of bills. No introduction of bills?

PETITIONS

Municipal Amalgamations—Reversal

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

And these are the reasons for this petition. The background to this petition is as follows:

The provincial government recently announced plans to amalgamate any municipality with fewer than 1,000 constituents.

The provincial government did not consult with or notify the affected municipalities of this decision prior to the Throne Speech announcement on November 19th, 2012, and has further imposed unrealistic deadlines.

If the provincial government imposes amalgamations, local democratic representation will be drastically limited while not providing any real improvements in cost savings.

Local governments are further concerned that amalgamation will fail to address the serious issues currently facing municipalities, including an absence of reliable infrastructure funding and timely flood compensation.

Municipalities deserve to be treated with respect. Any amalgamations should be voluntary in nature and led by the municipalities themselves.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Local Government afford local governments the respect they deserve and reverse his decision to force municipalities with fewer than 1,000 constituents to amalgamate.

This petition is signed by B. Morris, J. Piwniuk and D. Piwniuk and many, many more Manitobans. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Further petitions?

Provincial Sales Tax Increase—Referendum

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for the petition:

(1) The provincial government promised not to raise taxes in the last election.

(2) Through Bill 20, the provincial government wants to increase the retail sales tax, known as the PST, by one point without the legally required referendum.

(3) An increase to the PST is excessive taxation that will harm Manitoba families.

(4) Bill 20 strips Manitobans of their democratic right to determine when major tax increases are necessary.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to not raise the PST without holding a provincial referendum.

Signed by M. Kaatz, J. Boychuk, L. Schewe and other—

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Steinbach.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Yes, good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present the following petition.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

The provincial government promised not to raise taxes in the last election.

Through Bill 20, the provincial government wants to increase the retail sales tax, known as the PST, by one point without the legally required referendum.

An increase to the PST is excessive taxation that will harm Manitoba families.

Bill 20 strips Manitobans of their democratic right to determine when major tax increases are necessary.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to not raise the PST without holding a provincial referendum.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by S. Manchulenko, L. Zurba, B. Zurba and many other—

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Portage la Prairie.

St. Ambroise Beach Provincial Park

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And these are the reasons for the petition:

The St. Ambroise provincial park was hard hit by the 2011 flood, resulting in the park's ongoing closure and loss of local access to Lake Manitoba, as well as untold harm to the ecosystem and wildlife in the region.

The park's closure is having a negative impact in many areas, including disruptions to local tourism, hunting and fishing operations, diminished economic and employment opportunities and the potential loss of the local store and a decrease in property values.

Local residents and visitors alike want St. Ambroise provincial park to be reopened as soon as possible.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the appropriate ministers of the provincial government consider repairing St. Ambroise provincial park and its access points to their pre-flood conditions so the park can be reopened for the 2013 season or earlier if possible.

This petition's signed by R. Courcelles, T. Lambert and P. Hunrick—

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Lac du Bonnet.

Provincial Sales Tax Increase—Referendum

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

The provincial government promised not to raise taxes in the last election.

Through Bill 20, the provincial government wants to increase the retail sales tax, known as the PST, by one point without the legally required referendum.

An increase to the PST is excessive taxation that will harm Manitoba families.

Bill 20 strips Manitobans of their democratic right to determine when major tax increases are necessary.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to not raise the PST without holding a provincial referendum.

This petition is signed by C. Wojcik, A. Wojcik and S. Balcsok—

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Midland.

Municipal Amalgamations—Reversal

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

The provincial government recently announced plans to amalgamate any municipalities with fewer than 1,000 constituents.

The provincial government did not consult with or notify the affected municipalities of this decision prior to the Throne Speech announcement on November 19th, 2012, and has further imposed unrealistic deadlines.

If the provincial government imposes amalgamations, local democratic representation will be drastically limited while not providing any real improvements in cost savings.

Local governments are further concerned that amalgamation will fail to address the serious issues currently facing municipalities, including an absence of reliable infrastructure funding and timely flood compensation.

Municipalities deserve to be treated with respect. Any amalgamations should be voluntary in nature and led by the municipalities themselves.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Local Government afford local governments the respect they deserve and reverse his decision to force municipalities with fewer than 1,000 constituents to amalgamate.

And this petition is signed by A. McKenzie, L. Reid, B. Bohm—

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Emerson.

Provincial Sales Tax Increase—Referendum

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

The provincial government promised not to raise taxes in the last election.

(2) Through Bill 20, the provincial government wants to increase the retail sales tax, known as the PST, by one point without legally required referendum.

An increase to the PST is excessive taxation that will harm Manitoba families.

(4) Bill 20 strips Manitobans of their democratic right to determine when major tax increases are necessary.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government not to raise the PST without holding a provincial referendum.

And this petition is signed by S. Boyle, C. Ursell and F. Foy—

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Agassiz.

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

The provincial government promised not to raise taxes in the last election.

Through Bill 20, the provincial government wants to increase retail sales tax, known as the PST,

by one point without the legally required referendum.

An increase in the PST is excessive taxation that will harm Manitoba families.

Bill 20 strips Manitobans of their democratic right to determine when a major tax increase—major tax increases are necessary.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to not raise the PST without holding a provincial referendum.

This petition's signed by W. Tully, C. Small, D. Kennedy—

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for River East.

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

The provincial government promised not to raise taxes in the last election.

* (13:40)

Through Bill 20, the provincial government wants to increase the retail sales tax, known as the PST, by one point without the legally required referendum.

An increase in the PST is excessive taxation that will harm Manitoba families.

Bill 20 strips Manitobans of their democratic right to determine when major tax increases are necessary.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to not raise the PST without holding a provincial referendum.

And this petition is signed by A. Bruinooge, K. Bruinooge, D. Daudrich—

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for La Verendrye.

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

The provincial government promised not to raise taxes in the last election.

Through Bill 20, the provincial government wants to increase the retail sales tax, known as the PST, by one point without the legally required referendum.

An increase to the PST is excessive taxation that will harm Manitoba families.

Bill 20 strips Manitobans of their democratic right to determine when major tax increases are necessary.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government not to raise the PST without holding a provincial referendum.

This petition is signed by C. Thiessen, P. Penner, W. Doomernik—

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Spruce Woods.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition:

The provincial government promised not to raise taxes in the last election.

Through Bill 20, the provincial government wants to increase the retail sales tax, known as the PST, by one point without the legally required referendum.

An increase to the PST is excessive taxation that will harm Manitoba families.

Bill 20 strips Manitobans of their democratic right to determine when major tax increases are necessary.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to not raise the PST without holding a provincial referendum.

This petition is signed by G. Jefferies, T. Jonsson, H. Russell—

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Lakeside.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

The provincial government promised not to raise taxes in the last election.

Through Bill 20, the provincial government wants to increase retail sales tax, known as the PST, by one point without the legally required referendum.

An increase of the PST is excessive taxation that will harm Manitoba families.

Bill 20 strips Manitobans of their democratic right to determine when major tax increases are necessary.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government not to raise the PST without holding a provincial referendum.

Submitted on behalf of G.J. Purdy, V. Hotel, R. Sarahs—

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Morden-Winkler.

Municipal Amalgamations—Reversal

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

The provincial government recently announced plans to amalgamate any municipalities with fewer than 1,000 constituents.

The provincial government did not consult with or notify the affected municipalities of this decision prior to the Throne Speech announcement on November 19th, 2012, and has further imposed unrealistic deadlines.

If the provincial government imposes amalgamations, local democratic representation will be drastically limited while not providing any real improvements in cost savings.

Local governments are further concerned that amalgamation will fail to address the serious issues currently facing municipalities, including an absence of reliable infrastructure funding and timely flood compensation.

Municipalities deserve to be treated with respect. Any amalgamations should be voluntary in nature and led by the municipalities themselves.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Local Government afford local governments the respect they deserve and reverse his decision to force municipalities with fewer than 1,000 constituents to amalgamate.

And this petition is signed by B. Burkitt, N. Turnbull and T. Bisschop and many—

Mr. Speaker: No further petitions?

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have from River West Park School 14 grade 9 students under the direction of Mr. Todd Johnson. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger).

And also seated in the public gallery, from Kildonan-East Collegiate we have 31 grade 9 students under the direction of David Ramsay, Nelia Resendes-Marques, Carol Ripley and Darlene Sopher. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe).

And also in the public gallery, we have with us today Kelly Legaspi, RN, BSN, vice-president of the Philippine Nurses Association of Manitoba Inc., who are the guests of the honourable member for Tyndall Park (Mr. Marcelino).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Tax Increase Impact on Families

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, governing is about making choices, and the Premier has decided that he can't reduce his spending by 1 per cent.

He would prefer to reduce the income of the average Manitoba family by 3 per cent instead, but that amounts to broken-promise taxation. Taxes on gasoline, life insurance, group benefits, haircut styles, home insurance and the PST add up, and that's \$1,600 per year for the average Manitoba family. That's a 3 per cent reduction for a family with a net income of \$50,000.

So the question of how Manitobans will cope, I guess, the government hasn't considered, but they will cope if they have to. Manitoba seniors will take fewer trips to see their grandkids, and Manitoba couples will make fewer payments on a mortgage. Manitoba families who struggle already will struggle that much more, but the fact of the matter is that the government doesn't seem to get that.

I want to ask the Premier: How is it that he feels he has the right and his government has the right to cut Manitobans by 3 per cent when they won't cut their own spending by 1 per cent?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the member of—the Leader of the Opposition obviously missed it. We did actually cut expenditure 1 per cent last year across a variety of different fields in government. We focused it on services that created more efficiencies. We continued to support education and health care.

Mr. Speaker, we do an affordability advantage every year on the same methodology that the members opposite did when they were in office, and a two-earner family of five earning \$75,000 is now No. 1 in Canada for affordability; a two-earner family of four earning \$60,000, in the top three for Canada on affordability; a lone parent earning \$30,000, in the top three for affordability; and a single person earning \$30,000, in the top three for affordability. That's the results of our budgeting every year.

Mr. Pallister: Yes, Mr. Speaker, and it's so easy for the Premier—so easy to take 3 per cent more from Manitoba families, but so hard for him to reduce his spending by 1 per cent—a third as much—and he has no credibility on this issue whatsoever. And he should remember that the very people, on a daily basis in this Chamber—the very people he tries to frighten with his bogeyman approaches are people whose household incomes are being eroded by his broken promises and by his tax hikes.

Now, he claims that he's reduced spending last year by 1 per cent. We have yet to see any proof or verification of that fact, but if that is the case, then, if reducing spending by 1 per cent was such a brilliant idea last year, then why isn't it a good idea in 2013?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, our per capita expenditure increases over the last five years are the second lowest in Canada, and our per—and our expenditure increases over the last two years are the lowest—second lowest in Canada.

The indiscriminate approach put on the table by the Leader of the Opposition would have laid off—let me see now—700 nurses, Mr. Speaker, 700 nurses in health care alone, 60 correction officers, 200 teachers and 135 social workers. The approach the member takes is one that doesn't take into account a careful analysis of the priorities of Manitobans.

We have decided that Manitobans want quality health care, which is why we have investments in health care, including free cancer-care drugs, including CancerCare treatment centres throughout rural Manitoba.

We have decided that we need to invest in education so that young people have a future in Manitoba, and that's exactly what we're doing, Mr. Speaker.

* (13:50)

Mr. Pallister: He needs the 192 spinners to work on some new talking points for him, Mr. Speaker.

Here's a quote from last year's budget document, page 3: ". . . we will achieve \$128 million of savings in-year—the equivalent of an additional one per cent reduction in program spending." Exactly the wording that was in our recommendations for this year. So the consequences he talks about are bogeyman consequences; he trots out the bogeyman.

But his high-tax policies are hurting Manitobans, and he should be ashamed of himself that he's trying to frighten Manitobans with his Chicken Little, sky-is-falling approach. Manitoba's civil servants are feeling the pain in their homes of spendDP tax hikes. The broken promises are affecting them too. Manitoba's nurses and teachers and social workers work and live in the real world, not a fantasy world. They work with real patients, real students, real clients, and they deserve political leadership that they're not getting that can address their real priorities in a real way.

Will the Premier admit that his frightening fantasies are just a sad attempt to cover up his spending problem?

Mr. Selinger: There are some people putting a lot of fantasies on the record this afternoon. Leader of the Opposition is foremost among them.

Mr. Speaker, ask ourselves, who was the one in this House that said he wanted to put a chill on public spending? Leader of the Opposition. Who was the one that said he wanted to practise tough love on public services? The Leader of the Opposition.

What did that mean the last time he was in office? It meant 1,000 less nurses; they were fired in Manitoba. It meant 700 less teachers; they were let go in Manitoba. It meant no infrastructure spending in Manitoba. Infrastructure spending was at the lowest it had ever been in Manitoba when he was in office, and that does not even get to the point where he laid off every child welfare worker every Friday and put children and families at risk.

That was his approach. It is not our approach.

Tax Increase Impact on Families

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Well, Mr. Speaker, who was the leader in the last election who said they wouldn't raise taxes? The Leader of the NDP.

Now, this is a Premier who leads a government who has a spending problem. Now, and instead of trying to find 1 per cent savings in their government, they're going to all Manitobans in Brandon, in Winnipeg, in rural Manitoba, in the north and saying, we want you to find 3 per cent savings in your budget.

Now, for the average family, that can be very significant. That means maybe they won't be able to have music lessons for their kids. Maybe that means they won't be able to have their kids in a sporting program. Maybe that means they won't be able to take that family vacation that they're hoping to take this summer.

I want to ask the Minister of Finance why these good, hard-working Manitoba families should have to pay for his spending addiction.

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Well, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition has done it again. He gets up and makes up numbers as if they're anywhere related to reality. He just pulls them out of mid-air from someplace again.

Mr. Speaker, these hard-working Manitobans that the member for Steinbach talks about, for example, a two-income family of four at \$60,000 is paying \$2,410 less today than when members opposite were in government in 1999. A two-income family of four at \$80,000 is paying \$3,372 less today than they did when those guys were in office.

We don't need to take any lessons from people across the way when it comes to supporting Manitoba families, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Goertzen: And I'm not going to take lessons from a Minister of Finance who promised Manitobans that he wouldn't increase taxes and then increased them the highest rate in 25 years, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this is a Premier (Mr. Selinger) and a Minister of Finance who's trying to convince Manitobans that they can't find 1 per cent savings across government so they're going to Manitobans and they're saying, we expect you as individual families to sit around the kitchen table and come up with 3 per cent savings. That might mean that they won't be able to go to a summer fair this summer. Maybe that means they won't be able to visit friends and families. Maybe they'll have to cancel that camping trip.

So maybe the Minister of Finance may give them some advice. What advice would he give to these Manitoba families? Should they cancel vacation? Should they cancel going to a Manitoba fair?

What advice would he give to these Manitoba families for his spending addiction?

Mr. Struthers: First thing I'd advise Manitoba families to do is take a good hard look at what members opposite are saying when they put numbers out there that make no sense, Mr. Speaker.

Last year, as part of our government's budget exercise, we took on a number of initiatives to reduce expenditures in government. We didn't take the approach of laying off 700 nurses like members opposite have said they'd do. Instead, we reduced regional health authorities from 11 down to five. Mr. Speaker, that saved millions of dollars to the Manitoba families. That's money that we've redirected into the front lines of health care rather than cutting the front lines of health care like members opposite would do.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Steinbach, for the final supplementary.

Mr. Goertzen: The Minister of Finance is saying that we shouldn't believe the numbers that are in his own budget. Maybe we shouldn't, because we can't believe anything else that he said, Mr. Speaker.

Ultimately, the government had choices. They had the choice not to take a million dollars in the vote tax, but the Minister of Finance decided that that was a priority. They had the choice not to hire former NDP MLAs into positions that were before

held by current NDP MLAs, but they decided they wanted to pay off their friends, Mr. Speaker.

Those are the choices that he decided to make, but now he's saying to Manitoba families, you also have to make a choice. Maybe you have to not put your kid into a sports program. Maybe we're going to have to delay that family vacation.

So if he's so full of advice, I want to know what advice he's going to give to those hard-working Manitoba families who are going to be sitting around the kitchen table making those decisions. Does he advise they not they put their kids in sports programs, music programs, or does he advise they cancel—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The member's time has expired.

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Speaker, our choice was to fund, at 2.3 per cent increase, public schools in this province so that we can support Manitoba students, we can support Manitoba families, and—very key—we can support the future of our economy in this province.

Our government chose to increase spending to health care this year, Mr. Speaker, not zap it by 1 per cent like people across the way would do, not reduce it by millions of dollars and show no support for the front lines. That's not the approach that we're taking.

We are—we said we would reduce our spending to make sure that we take that money and put it in the front lines. We said we would do that, and we did it.

PST Increase Impact on Low-Income Earners

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): The proposed increase of one point of the PST will have dramatic impacts at all levels, especially for those Manitobans who are struggling to get out of poverty. Essentials for life for those in poverty have growing costs. An increase in the PST will apply to many incidentals there, as well, limiting the budget for food. The poor or those with disabilities or fixed income are already taxed to the max.

Mr. Speaker, how will this budget help those in poverty? Is it really not taking money out of their pockets?

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade): Well, Mr. Speaker, one

of the things that we've consistently said is that education is a great equalizer, and we've been investing in education. We've been investing in training—meaningful training. Not just any job for the sake of having a job, but we're taking a new approach where we'll be providing wraparound services for people on employment income assistance and talk to them about meaningful training opportunities for long-term sustainable employment. That's the equalizer.

Members opposite have already said what they would cut—or said that they would cut a certain amount, but they're not telling us what they would cut. And we know from past experience that they would be cutting education, Mr. Speaker. Not this government.

Mr. Wishart: Mr. Speaker, in today's paper Harry Wolbert, a long-time advocate for the poor and disabled, is quoted as: Another tax increase will only hurt those who can least afford it. A hike in the PST will hurt Manitobans struggling to get out of poverty.

Mr. Speaker, why should this government expect Manitoba's most vulnerable citizens to pay for their spending addiction?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I think past behaviour is the best indicator for future behaviour, and we know that there is a record on the floor across the way.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable Minister of Entrepreneurship. Order, please. The honourable Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade.

* (14:00)

Mr. Bjornson: And we know that the Filmon government essentially declared war on EIA recipients, Mr. Speaker. We know—we know—that they cut nearly \$150 per month from the benefits of people that need the help the most. We know that a single person was—non-disabled was reduced by \$40 in '93, reduced again by \$14 in 1994 and reduced yet again by \$95.60 in 1996.

We know that it wasn't enough then, that they decided to claw back the National Child Benefit, and we ended the PC clawback to the child benefit.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The minister's time has expired.

Mr. Wishart: Mr. Speaker, by the government's own numbers, an increase in EIA or RentAid would likely be eaten up by the increase of the PST, which Harry Wolbert has described as a regressive tax which hits our poorest and most vulnerable citizens hardest.

Mr. Speaker, why is this government targeting Manitoba's poor to pay for their—pay for their spending habits?

Mr. Bjornson: Mr. Speaker, every family should have a roof over their head, should have food on the table, and that's what we're doing by focusing on what matters most in this budget: investing in education, investing in supports for families.

And again, in my last answer I didn't quite get it on the record, but I'll remind members opposite that when they clawed back the child tax benefit, it was a \$48-million loss to families in Manitoba, \$48 million for the most vulnerable people. And we ended that clawback and made sure that that universal child tax benefit stayed with the parents, Mr. Speaker. These benefits put \$533 per month into the hands of a single parent with two small children—\$533 per month. They clawed it back.

Mr. Speaker, we're on the side of education and supports and trainings—training for meaningful employment for families. That's our—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The minister's time has expired.

VLTs Additional Terminals

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): Mr. Speaker, it's very clear this NDP government is hooked on the revenue generated by VLTs. Despite a so-called moratorium, the NDP have increased the number of VLTs in Manitoba almost every year since 1999. With the announcement of 500 more machines yesterday, this brings the total increase in VLTs to 1,850. This represents a 42 per cent increase in VLTs since 1999.

Clearly, the NDP need to feed their spending habit. Unfortunately, they are doing this on the backs of some of Manitoba's most vulnerable.

I ask the minister how much money the additional 500 VLTs will generate for this NDP government.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Lotteries Corporation Act): Mr. Speaker, it's a bit rich coming from members opposite, and they do know about rich—talk about VLTs—because they brought VLTs into the province.

They also commissioned the Bostrom report, which recommended up to five First Nations casinos. And, indeed, we have been implementing that in partnership with First Nations. That's something we're proud of because it's providing significant economic development opportunities. There'll be that for Spirit Sands in southwest Manitoba coming up.

So what we're doing, Mr. Speaker, unlike members opposite, is we're also bringing social responsibility. I want to remind members opposite they brought in VLTs and they cut funding for AFM. That's the Tory approach to VLTs.

Mr. Cullen: Well, the minister said yesterday it was going to generate \$18 million for the NDP government, Mr. Speaker.

Now, clearly, Manitobans are already the—among the highest taxed Canadians. Now the NDP are after as much of our after-tax dollars as they can get their hands on. They plan to take another \$18 million out of our pockets, this on the backs of Manitoba's most vulnerable. This will have a direct impact on Manitoba families.

Mr. Speaker, I ask this government: Why has the NDP allowed themselves to become so financially dependent on gaming revenues to fund their out-of-control spending?

Mr. Ashton: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to remind members opposite that it wasn't members on this side, it was the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson), who was minister at the time, said, ultimately people choose whether or not they are going to spend their disposable income on gambling or smoking or drinking or attending a movie or going to see Phantom or going to the ballet, going to a sporting activity. People do ultimately make those decisions.

I want to point out we've not added a single new site through an announcement that was made over the last couple of days. What we're doing is raising the cap from 35 to 40 machines in sites where the public is deciding to game, Mr. Speaker, and on top of that we're putting, for the first time, 2 per cent of funding into social responsibility. That's more than double what they put in place in the 1990s, and

again, they brought in VLTs and they cut funding for AFM.

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Speaker, clearly the NDP have their hands in our pockets at any turn. We have one minister who plans to roll out 500 more VLTs to take another \$18 million out of our pockets. We have another minister who wants to take at least \$5 million out of Assiniboia Downs to fund his spending habits. This will put a \$50-million industry and 500 jobs at risk, an industry which has positive economic spinoff for the province.

Mr. Speaker, is this NDP government in such desperate need of money it will continue to tax Manitoba's most vulnerable and at the same time put a \$50-million industry at risk here in Manitoba?

Mr. Ashton: Well, Mr. Speaker, the inherent contradiction is within that question, its preamble one.

We starts—the member opposite starts by talking about the change in terms that VLTs generate, but then he's got problems with the fact that we're actually reallocating not all but part of the proceeds from VLTs that currently go to Assiniboia Downs to support schools and hospitals and other needed public services in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you one thing, and Manitobans will remember this: We take no lectures from members opposite when it comes to VLTs. They brought in VLTs. They cut funding for social responsibility. That's how much they care about finding a balance in this province.

VLTs

Social and Economic Impact

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): Mr. Speaker, what we see is a government that is addicted to the spending and is continually increasing the number of VLTs in this province.

According to surveys conducted by the Canadian Gambling Digest in 2001, Manitoba had the highest prevalence of problem gambling of any province at 6.1 per cent. Rather than addressing this serious issue, we see this NDP government promoting VLTs to the point of ridiculous, having increased the number of terminals by a staggering 42 per cent since 1999.

In a recent article I read, a woman talks about how she planned to end her life, not as would be expected as the VLT addict himself. She said, and I quote: I was so lost in his lies, his deceit and mental

abuse that I actually set myself up. Got my papers in order to take my—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The member's time has expired.

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs): I think it's important to put some facts on the record.

Since 1999, we have increased funding by about 115 per cent and that's gone from \$14.4 million to \$34.8 million. It's also interesting to note that the former government moved funding from \$10.4 million to \$9.6 million, and that happened between 1997 and 1998.

I'm pleased to be a part of a government that continues to support addictions and support individuals who need those services, and I'm pleased to be a minister that's moved so that we have multiple agencies creating wonderful supports and wonderful services throughout the province. And I'm also pleased that we have gambling supports—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The minister's time has expired.

Mrs. Rowat: What I hear from this member is he's proud that he is a part of a government that has the highest prevalence of problem gambling in our province at 6.1 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, a study published in the Canadian Journal of Psychiatry noted that VLTs in communities and casinos are the No. 1 and 2 modes of gambling associated with problem gambling among Canadian women aged 50 and under. The provincial government has—the Provincial Council of Women in 2009 had requested that the government create an independent working group to examine the social and economic costs of gambling.

Mr. Speaker, I ask this government: We all know of the social and economic damages caused to families when a family member becomes an addict to VLTs, so why are they ignoring the victims of the VLTs, the spouses and the families?

Mr. Rondeau: In addition to moving the funding from \$9.63 million to about \$20 million just in AFM and having support systems for gambling throughout the entire system—I believe it's 37 sites where you can get support—I think it's also interesting to note that we now have a program, the resource centre—Resource Assistance for Youth program that wasn't around before that focuses on youth that need support. I'm pleased that we have contracted

Macdonald Youth Services; they have, again, a number of support services that were not around before. And, again, Two Ten Recovery is a good example at transition housing.

I'm pleased that we continue to expand the supports that are available, not just the—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The minister's time has expired.

Mrs. Rowat: And this is a government that actually closes AFM services through the Christmas season, Mr. Speaker.

In a conversation with a family battling VLT addiction, the spouse said, and I quote: It angers me that the government can only see fit to trickle some money down to them of the billions they are making. Gambling can cause acute depression and impoverishment.

* (14:10)

As the former member of Burrows stated of VLTs in 1998, use of gambling as a revenue-raising device means that these least able to pay often pay.

And I guess—I ask the minister again: Is it this government—is this government so greedy that it won't sacrifice VLT revenues until Manitoba's families lose everything, everything that is important to them?

Mr. Rondeau: I'm pleased that when the members opposite brought in VLTs they actually cut the funding to addictions.

I'd like to let people know that we have prevention, early intervention services that have—very extensive. In fact, there's about 39,000 people who get those services, and they didn't exist when you were in government. Pretreatment: we have good detox systems, and there's about 1,800 people who avail themselves of that. And also, Mr. Speaker, we continue to expand and enhance the service. So it's not just the breadth, but it's the depth of the services, and I'm pleased that not only do we have services here in Winnipeg but all over.

And, Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, they closed AFM services in the summer, and I'm pleased to be the minister that opened them up.

Tax Increase Impact on Manitobans

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, quite a spectacle, Mr. Speaker,

trying to wrap the blanket of a hero around themselves for treating a problem they're making worse. Whatever happened to the promise not to increase the number of VLTs? Another broken promise. But this tells us the difference. It frankly tells us the difference yet again between this party and our own.

The reality is that the NDP thinks—they really believe that Manitoba will become stronger if they take more money away from the people of the province, whether it's through gambling revenues, taxation penalties of various kinds. They believe this province will be made stronger if Manitobans are made weaker.

And that's why they bring in record tax increases over the last year. That's why they've taken \$1,600 more just in the last 12 months away from Manitoba households. That's why they want to raise the PST from 7 to 8. That's why they want to eliminate the right of Manitobans to vote on tax increases. And, frankly, they should be ashamed of themselves.

We believe Manitobans deserve hope. This government is—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The leader's time has expired.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): We believe Manitobans deserve jobs and an affordable cost of living. That's what'll make a difference in our province.

That's why, Mr. Speaker, while the Leader of the Opposition was away from the House, a few things changed. A two-income family of \$60,000 pays \$2,400 less when the last time the member was here, a two-income family of \$80,000 pays \$300–\$3,372 less than when the member was here last time, and a two-income family of four at \$100,000 pays \$3,800 less than when the last time the member was here.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, things have changed for the better. People pay less, and more people are working than ever in the history of the province.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

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

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition has the floor.

Provincial Comparisons

Mr. Pallister: Yes, thanks for the history lesson. Mr. Speaker, the Premier's competing against a team that competed in a league 20 years ago, and he's losing against the teams that he's competing against today.

We have the least competitive tax environment in western Canada. Other provinces move ahead; this province falls behind because of the consequences of a have-not government. So reality is that taxes have gone up. We are less competitive than Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario in most categories, west of Québec the highest level of basic personal deduction. We start taxing people earlier here than any province west of New Brunswick. We punish low-income people in this family because the government insists on taking money out of their hands and pretending to help them with ribbon cuttings funded by the children of the people they are ripping off with their tax hikes.

Let me ask this Premier why he insists on fighting the battles of yesterday instead of turning to the future and competing with the people in other provinces who have a better vision of where they want to take their people in their jurisdiction than he has ever demonstrated in his time in office.

Mr. Selinger: People are paying less taxes than when he was last here, and more people are working than ever in the history of the province. That's the reality.

And in today's cost of living and taxes, Mr. Speaker, our Manitoba advantage, a two-earner family of five earning \$75,000 has moved into first place in Canada for cost of living, and all families in Manitoba are in the top three for cost of living, as they have jobs, as they have a future.

And that's why we did the skills agenda, Mr. Speaker, 75,000 more skilled workers over the next eight years. We're investing in real hope, which means jobs, education and training.

The Leader of the Opposition says he would cancel—cancel—all hydro projects for export. We're going to build it and we're going to create jobs for Manitobans, Mr. Speaker.

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Reduction Strategies

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) boasted about the government's Healthy Child Committee, which is a mini-Cabinet of 10 ministers

presided over the Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities. This mega-committee is not effective. There has been no improvement. The extent of alcohol consumption during pregnancy and the number of children diagnosed with FASD are not going down. I table figure 8 from the government's own report.

I ask the Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities: What specific measures is he taking to reduce the high level of alcohol consumption during pregnancy in Manitoba?

Hon. Kevin Chief (Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for the question.

First off, I'd like to talk about the report where he got his information, the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet, the first of its kind in the country. Of course, we're committed to research and data and evaluation, and that's why he's—be—able to reference the material. Also, we're committed to making that report public, Mr. Speaker, so our community organizations and people in our community can actually get that information.

Some highlights from that—I know the member said that there wasn't improvements at the prenatal stage. There's been improved access to care before six months. New mothers, we've seen increased high school graduation. There's been, you know, with our Prenatal Benefit, there's support for mothers from low income, healthy baby weight, our Families First home visiting program.

So I'm glad that the member was able to use—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The minister's time has expired.

Alcohol Consumption Infant Mortality Rate

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Minister—Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for the report, which was well done, but the fact of the matter is that the report shows that there's not been the progress we should have.

Indeed, high rates of alcohol use during pregnancy contribute not only to FASD but also to Manitoba's high infant mortality rates. As this table—this piece that I reference—I table shows, the evidence is clear; the government's mega-committee is not effective, you know. In contrast, smoking during pregnancy started going down only after there was

an All-Party Task Force on Environmental Tobacco Smoke, which recommended effective changes.

I ask the Premier: Will he consider calling an—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The member's time has expired. Order, please. The member's time has expired.

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

The all-party task force on tobacco consumption was a useful exercise, as was the all-party task force on healthy kids. We have seen a decline in smoking in Manitoba. There is a correlation between the cost of cigarettes and the consumption of cigarettes, and we have seen a dramatic decline in the consumption of tobacco in Manitoba.

If the member has any good ideas, we're very open to listening to them and finding ways to work with him as we move forward to make sure the health outcomes for all young mothers and all young families improve in this province and, indeed, across the country by the interventions we take.

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Reduction Strategies

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, the fact is the mega-committee is not working despite many, many questions from the Liberal Party over the last decade. With regard to FASD, the number of children identified with FASD is not decreasing.

The cost, Mr. Speaker, of each child with FASD is estimated at a lifetime cost of \$1 million per child, and I table this. With an average of a hundred new children being diagnosed with FASD each year, and that's not a complete number, the cost of FASD to Manitobans from this government's inaction is now more than \$1.3 billion.

I ask the Premier: Will he call today an all-party task force into reducing alcohol—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Member's time has expired.

* (14:20)

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, FASD is a scourge for any family that experiences it and any young child. There's no question about it, which is why we did put an FASD strategy in place and which is why Manitoba is the site of global research on AF—FASD.

One of the things that's being done under the Canada-Israel Committee for health is to take a look at how we can do path-breaking work on FASD, and the Prenatal Benefit is a solid foundation for that, with the home visiting program that's done by nurses through the Families First program. We are finding that with proper nutrition we can reduce the incidence of S-FASD in families, which is why the visiting program and the prenatal program have been and made a great difference and are looked at around the world as very good interventions.

If the member of the—Leader of the Liberal Party has any other suggestions, we'd be happy to work with him on other ways we can improve outcomes for these young families, because there's no doubt we can make improvements in Manitoba and will make improvements in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker.

International Students New Legislation

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): One of the fundamental and important ingredients to build any society is to support education. Personally I have done that and—at my family level, and I have been very proud to share with the young residents of my constituency and others in the province.

International students coming to our province enrich the educational, social, cultural and economic fabric of our society.

Can I ask the Minister of Advanced Education to share with the House on her new legislation to attract more students to our province? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy): I thank the member for the question.

Mr. Speaker, nearly 7,000 international students choose Manitoba as the place to study each year. Those students bring more than \$150 million annually into our economy, but more importantly, they enrich our classrooms and our society.

We know people from around the world are choosing Manitoba for the quality of our education, and, Mr. Speaker, this bill, the first of its kind in Canada, will ensure that international students are treated fairly, are working with reputable providers and have supports in place to help them succeed.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba is indeed a friendly province to come and learn in. Thank you.

Jan Roux Rural Residency Appointment

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, the Virden and area recruitment and retention committee supported a local doctor—a local student, Dr. Jan Roux, to get his doctorate of medicine internationally. They invested \$70,000 with full knowledge of this NDP government for a return of service agreement. The minister's own department put in another \$30,000 for \$100,000 in total. It's obvious that six years ago the minister knew a residency would be needed for Dr. Roux, who wants to practise family rural medicine in Virden with his father.

Mr. Speaker, why, after six years of her knowledge of this issue, Jan—has Jan Roux not—still not been able to get a residency match in Manitoba?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I've spoken on a number of occasions with the member opposite on this issue. I believe I made it clear to the member then, but I will endeavour to do so again.

The faculty of medicine, of course, is charged with the allotting of residencies. They go through a very rigorous process, academic as well as a variety of competencies. This particular individual was not selected for that residency.

We are asking the faculty of medicine, at the member's request, to take a second look, but I'm quite sure that the member opposite isn't suggesting that politicians should decide who get residencies rather than medical professionals.

Mr. Maguire: Mr. Speaker, the minister is the one that indicated that Dr. Roux would get to practise with his father in his own home community.

The minister bragged about expanding the number of rural and northern residencies for doctors by seven just yesterday, Mr. Speaker, in this House. Yet Dr. Roux—who's here with us in the gallery today—and in spite of the minister's own department investing her \$30,000 in his training and knowing of his return of service agreement for years, still he and other Manitoba-based doctors aren't able to receive residency positions in this province.

Can the minister explain how putting more of her own department's money into residency positions will meet the needs of rural and northern citizens' medical needs when she's turning away young rural Manitoba doctors that fit her own criteria perfectly, Mr. Speaker?

Ms. Oswald: I would say to the member that we absolutely want to recruit more doctors, which is why during challenging times we increased the spaces in medical school. We don't cut them like the members opposite.

Further, Mr. Speaker, we also, as the member announced, provided 15 additional residencies we announced just last week.

And I would say to the member, I would say to the individual in the gallery today, that the faculty of medicine makes this decision based on academics, based on performance. This individual wasn't chosen; I'm sorry for that, but, indeed, that is the faculty of medicine's decision.

Mr. Maguire: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've said, a hundred thousand dollars been invested by their local retention committee and her department.

So, Mr. Speaker, now Dr. Roux's been told that, quote, pursuing your residency out of the country may be the best option at this point, end quote, in spite of the minister announcing seven new rural and northern residents' positions in the House, as I've said, yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, why is the minister not concerned about spending about a hundred—spending a hundred thousand dollars of local and RHA funds being invested and yet is not accepting rural Manitoba based doctors in residency?

Ms. Oswald: I'm deeply concerned about increasing our spaces in medical school and not cutting them. I'm deeply concerned about getting more doctors to Manitoba, not sending them away year after year after year like they did under the members opposite. I'm deeply concerned—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

The honourable Minister of Health, to complete her answer.

Ms. Oswald: Thank you very much. I'm deeply concerned about all Manitobans having the highest quality care.

And if this is an indication of how the Progressive Conservatives would run medical school, that is to say, they would appoint their friends regardless of qualifications, then we all have problems.

Mr. Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

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

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to members' statements, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the Speaker's Gallery where we have with us today Shellie Power and the Hope Centre Ministries team who are the guests of the honourable member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler). On behalf of all honourable members, we welcome you here this afternoon.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Hope Centre Ministries

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): On April 27th, I had the privilege of attending a fundraising event for organization that exhibits and celebrates a gift and uniqueness of individuals who live with disabilities, an organization that supports specially gifted people in their walk with God in their faith communities.

This unique and outstanding organization, Hope Centre Ministries, hosted a weekend conference at McIvor Avenue Mennonite Brethren Church for churches and other Christian organizations and ministries who want to grow in their understanding of inclusion.

Organizer and Director of Spiritual Care Shellie Power and her volunteers provide a professional learning opportunity for anyone who was interested in supporting meaningful inclusion for people with disabilities in a church setting including pastors, volunteers, children and minister 'treasures', teachers, group leaders and family members.

Participants discovered that through this organization they'd access tools for their Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, access information on pacific disabilities and seek consultation to address barriers to inclusion.

Saturday night, covenant reform church on Knowles Avenue provided the venue for spectacular concert featuring international-acclaimed singer-songwriter, visionary and Pastor, Brian Doerksen.

Though he currently hails from Abbotsford, British Columbia, Brian has strong Manitoba ties, and together with his band he led hundreds of people and including those the disabilities in their celebration of community through worship and song.

It was a beautiful picture of what a community everywhere can—should be. One hundred per cent of all funds raised 'goward'—goes towards providing spiritual care for individuals with disabilities.

Thanks to this initiative which will become an annual event, people now have a greater understanding of how they can partner with Hope Ministries in providing valuable services to people with disabilities here in this city and province; services such as camp retreats, fellowship and friendship art groups that address isolation that often exists with people on margins of society, and opportunities for community service and worship.

People can become involved in fostering inclusion beyond physical needs and vulnerable people by supporting become involved in this compassionate non-profit organization.

Mr. Speaker, it is my hope that all members of the House will avail themselves to the knowledge that Hope Centre Ministries has to offer regarding universal access to ensure all Manitobans, regardless of perceived ability, have the opportunity to partake in everything is great this province has to offer.

We all have gifts—they differ. I ask all members of this House to join me in welcoming Shellie Power and the fine folks from Hope Ministries

* (14:30)

WestJet Air Service (Brandon)

Mr. Drew Caldwell (Brandon East): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate an exciting development in my home community of Brandon. Yesterday WestJet announced that it is coming to the Wheat City of Canada. Starting this fall western Manitobans will have access to daily non-stop flights to and from Calgary through WestJet's regional service known as Encore.

I would like to begin my remarks by thanking WestJet, the City of Brandon, the Brandon Chamber of Commerce, Tourism Brandon and the great many Brandon citizens who lobbied long and hard to make the business case for bringing national air service back to Brandon. Brandon is the economic hub of western Manitoba, and this will give the city even more connectivity with the wider world: to tourism and business opportunities, to conferences and conventions and to national and global markets.

Mr. Speaker, our government knows something about working to build the conditions necessary for stimulating economic development. Against the

opposition of the PC Party, we worked together with others to build the MTS Centre and return the National Hockey League to Manitoba.

In Brandon, we built the Keystone Agriculture Centre of Excellence, which our opponents ridiculed as Cadillac barns, and in hosting the Memorial Cup we transformed the Keystone Centre into a national venue for sports, entertainment and business.

At Brandon Municipal Airport, McGill Field, we worked with the City and federal government to install a \$1.5-million instrument landing system. This renewal of airport infrastructure to the standards required for modern air service enabled Brandon to accommodate aircraft landing in a wide range of conditions and was a fundamental piece of airport infrastructure required to secure regularly scheduled air service. The arrival of WestJet is yet another acknowledgement of Brandon's key role as an urban hub in western Canada.

Our government looks forward to working further with our partners in Brandon to ensure that the city continues to take off into the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Robert Ferguson

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me today to pay tribute to Robert Flemming Scott Ferguson, a proud Manitoban. Bob is a retired school teacher and has resided in Neepawa since 1975. He has spent many years serving his community and volunteering his time with numerous clubs and organizations. His true passion, however, lies in promoting the Legion and conserving Canada's military history.

Bob lost two uncles in World War II, one on Juno Beach on D-Day and one at Antwerp. Bob has dedicated much of his life to Canadian servicemen and women, raising awareness of their service to our town and country.

When Bob first arrived in Neepawa he focused his attention into promotion of the Legion and the air cadet squadron. His air cadet service is impressive. He enrolled as an officer in 1976 and completed courses at CFB Winnipeg. He was promoted to squadron commander in '77 in charge of 75 air cadets. He remains as a squadron training officer today.

Bob became an executive member of the Royal Canadian Legion in '76 and remains part of this organization still. He served as president for three

terms, has chaired numerous committees within the Legion, including chair of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations in '76, the Year of the Veteran in 2005 and the Veterans Gala in 2006. He was also the school liaison for the Legion Poem and Poster Essay contests and wrote Volume 3, History of Manitoba and Northwest Ontario Command, '57 to '87. He has been the Remembrance Day co-organizer in Neepawa for many years along with being involved in the Poppy Day blitz for Neepawa and area. November 11th is such an important day to Bob. He helps to host services in Neepawa that see more than 500 people in attendance and those numbers are growing.

In '91 Bob was chosen to represent Manitoba and the Northwest Ontario Command of the Royal Canadian Legion on the Pilgrimage of Remembrance with nine other command representatives and members of veterans—and a number of veterans. They were given a tour of the battlefields in Europe where our Canadian soldiers, sailors and airmen fought for our freedom. More recently, in 2009 Bob helped the Neepawa Legion branch organize a send off for 400 troops from CFB Shilo who were being 'deployed' to Afghanistan.

Bob has been involved in volunteer programs that visit care homes, the royal Canadian veterans survey program. Since 2006, he has visited approximately 350 war veterans. In 2012, Bob was nominated and received the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal for community service.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to applaud Robert Ferguson for all his community involvement and particularly for his dedication to honouring those that sacrificed their lives so that we can live in peace and freedom.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Fifth Anniversary of the Filipino Nurses Recruitment Mission

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): Mr. Speaker, 2013 marks an anniversary that is special to the Filipino and health-care communities.

Five years ago, nurses were recruited from the Philippines to work in Manitoba. More nurses were needed across the province, especially in rural areas. A strong partnership between the Province, the College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba, the Manitoba Nurses Union and the Philippine Nurses Association of Manitoba made this mission a success.

More than 120 nurses arrived, exceeding the provincial target of 100 new nurses. The recruitment mission, as well as support for the nurses after arriving, was very well organized and streamlined. A community settlement and integration plan was critical in supporting the nurses to settle in their new communities and has been key to longer term retention.

These nurses have made a real difference to patients and families in over 20 communities across our province. In this situation, we all win. These well-educated and highly skilled nurses helped prevent hospital closures. Also, they have boosted morale among employees by increasing the staffing levels and strengthening support systems. These health-care professionals have been wonderful additions to the nursing and Filipino-Manitoba communities and have paved the way for many more Filipino nurses to come to Manitoba. These nurses have strengthened our health-care system and expanded the Manitoba multicultural mosaic.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

WestJet Air Service (Brandon)

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate WestJet Encore, the City and residents of Brandon and western Manitoba on the announcement yesterday of air services between Brandon and Calgary starting September 3rd, 2013. Indeed, I was pleased to be there for a—that announcement; it was very important for Brandon.

There has been a great deal of work done by many, many people in Brandon area and, of course, by WestJet to make this dream a reality. The mayor, Shari Decter Hirst, and city council; Scott Thompson, city manager; Sandy Trudel, economic development officer; and Nate Andrews, president of the chamber of commerce, are just a few of the people whose efforts should be noted. Brandon-Souris Member of Parliament Merv Tweed was also instrumental in bringing WestJet Encore to Brandon.

Mr. Speaker, early flights are already getting booked up, giving an early indication that WestJet has a good business plan. WestJet has said time and time again that if the numbers worked, if the business plan looked viable, they would fly into Brandon.

Mr. Speaker, I know with two of our own children in Calgary attending university, our family will make frequent use of WestJet, and I'm sure

many others in Brandon and western Manitoba as well.

It was indeed a thrill to see Brandon on WestJet's site on the drop-down menu as a destination.

So, Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased to be there yesterday with many, many other people from Brandon and western Manitoba, and I'm sure all members of Manitoba's Legislative Assembly would join me in welcoming WestJet Encore to Brandon.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Grievances. Any grievances? Seeing none—

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Government House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker, on government business. For the information of the House, tomorrow we'll be considering the Opposition Day motion, and we're ready to proceed with debate on Bill 20.

Mr. Speaker: For the information of the House, it has been announced that tomorrow the House will be considering the Opposition Day motion sponsored by the honourable member for Midland (Mr. Pedersen).

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Bill 20—The Manitoba Building and Renewal Funding and Fiscal Management Act (Various Acts Amended)

Mr. Speaker: And now we'll be considering Bill 20 on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers), Bill 20, The Manitoba Building and Renewal Funding and Fiscal Management Act (Various Acts Amended), and the amendment thereto, standing in the name of the honourable member for Emerson, who has seven minutes remaining.

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Well, Mr. Speaker, and it gives me great pleasure to finish my talk and my advice to the members across the way.

* (14:40)

And, Mr. Speaker, you know, it would be quite simple that we would be able to move forward in this province if the NDP government would unbreak the promises that they have done in the last two years. If they would just say, we are going to obey the law;

we are going to call a referendum on the PST. If they would say that today and get 'er done, we would be able to do a lot more in this House.

But it would appear, Mr. Speaker, it would appear that the mission statement of the NDP government goes something like this: they're the ones who feel a great deal of debt to their fellow man, which debt they propose to pay off with their fellow man's money. And as we've heard today, that's exactly what they're doing. They couldn't cut the budget by 1 per cent. No, they had to raise that 1 per cent, but that's 3 per cent of the average Manitoban's income. So they want to lay that hurt on everyone in the province to the tune of \$1,600 to a family of four; that's unconscionable.

There's a number of broken promises and a number of other issues that are affecting Manitobans and one of them is a vote tax. The vote tax that this NDP government has taken to fill their own pockets, every member on that side of the House will benefit by \$7,000 from the vote tax—\$7,000 for each member sitting there who sat in their chair and would not get up and answer questions, who would not get up and walk out and face Manitobans on the front step, who instead scurried out the back door just last week.

See, Mr. Speaker, Mark Twain had a quote not so long ago. It was a few years, but not that long ago: If you don't read the newspapers you're uninformed, but if you do read them—in Manitoba—you're misinformed. You're misinformed because of their ads in the paper, constantly in the paper professing all of the good things about the budget and leaving out the fallacies, leaving out the truths of the budget that they are not prepared to cut their budget by 1 per cent, but they will cut every Manitoban's budget by 3 per cent. And they are spending thousands and thousands and thousands upon thousands of dollars to do that.

And there was another great man, J.P.—or P.J. O'Rourke, who said: For those who think that health care is expensive, now wait until you see what it costs when it's free. And our members across the way would say that health care is free. Tell that to the people that are having babies on the side of the road. Tell that to the hospitals that have closed ERs; 40 per cent of Manitoba's budget goes into health care and we have a minister that can't keep doctors here, that will not hire doctors after expending \$100,000 on this particular doctor, and won't see that he has a job in the province. He will have a job in Saskatchewan, and without a doubt his father will

step across that imaginary line that separates a have-not province—or a have-not government in a have province to a province that has a have government and a have province.

Mr. Speaker, I guess I will quote Mark Twain one more time, and this was a quote in 19—in 1866, which 147 years later holds true—says: No man's life's, liberty or prosperity is safe while this Legislature is sitting. And that's a fact. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) has made it clear to all Manitobans, it doesn't matter what you have I'm going to get it. I'm going to get it and I'm going to waste it. I'm not going to invest it.

So, in closure, Mr. Speaker, Winston Churchill said it best: This inherent advice of capitalism is on equal sharing of the blessings. The inherent blessings of socialism is the equal sharing of misery.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I was looking forward to having some members of government speak to this important motion on Bill 20. I know the Minister of Finance—clearly, it's his legislation that he's trying to change, and I thought he might take the opportunity to speak to this motion that was brought forward by the member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger).

And I think, Mr. Speaker, it's important to—maybe just to remind the government what that motion is on the books so that we could have a good discussion about it.

An Honourable Member: We can read it on the Order Paper.

Mr. Cullen: And I will, Mr. Speaker, and maybe the members don't take time to read the Order Paper. So I'm going to take this opportunity to remind them what this motion is about.

And, basically, what we're saying is is the House has not received satisfactory evidence or assurances that an increase in the retail sales tax was either considered or recommended at the government's prebudget consultation meetings, Mr. Speaker. And that's pretty clear, and we've asked, over the course of the last few question periods since the budget was introduced, who actually asked for the increase in the provincial sales tax here in Manitoba.

Now, we know the government, in last year's budget, they certainly broadened the provincial sales

tax that impacted pretty well every Manitoban across this province, Mr. Speaker. And I guess, really, that was just the precursor for an increase in the percentage in sales tax this year because this increase will certainly impact every Manitoban and will, actually, will impact a lot more goods and services across our great province.

So clearly, after multiple questions, we didn't get any answers from the government, in terms of who was actually asking for the increase in the provincial sales tax. And we've gone out, and we've talked to Manitobans across the country and across Manitoba, and no one that we can find has asked for an increase in the provincial sales tax, Mr. Speaker. In fact, you know, we've got the Manitoba and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation certainly opposed to it. We've got the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, who are actually doing surveys of their membership, and certainly a substantial number of Manitobans, I believe the figure was 72 per cent of Manitobans, were in—opposed to that increase.

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Clearly, in the business community, a lot of the business community—almost—I think it was over 90 per cent of the business community, were opposed to an increase in the provincial sales tax, because clearly that will have an impact on business operations and, in fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, an impact on all Manitobans and the economy of the province.

And then we get a company like the Bank of Montreal who haven't—take a good look in terms of what the repercussions will be of a 1 per cent, or an increase of one point in the provincial sales tax. And clearly, the alarm bells should have rang over in the NDP benches when we get numbers coming in from the Bank of Montreal, in terms of what the economic impact will be as a result of this increase in the provincial sales tax, Mr. Speaker.

So, clearly, I think this is an important motion. We hope that the government would have stood up and addressed where they felt there was a need to increase the PST here in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, and maybe I should just talk about some of the numbers, some of the financial numbers that the NDP have got themselves in. You know, we had the Premier (Mr. Selinger), he was the Minister of Finance for a number of years prior to being Premier. He certainly should know where the financial situation is developing in terms of the provincial finances. And, clearly, the Minister of Finance has inherited the

policies and the deficit budgeting and the inherent debt in that with—over the past few years.

In fact, this particular budget proposes a \$500-million deficit. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is even given the increase and the broadening of the PST last year, covering a lot of extra goods and services that Manitobans use. And it also includes the enhanced revenue, about \$200 million from the increase, and that turns out to be a 14 per cent increase in the provincial sales tax this year. Even given those hundreds of extra—hundreds of millions of dollars of extra revenue that have come into the NDP coffers, the budget this year still predicts a \$500-million deficit.

* (14:50)

So, clearly, the government is looking for ways to generate revenue. The NDP are clearly not looking at ways to cut their expenses. They haven't signalled any time to look in the mirror and reflect back and say, maybe we should curtail some of our spending in some areas. They're still continued on the idea that they can spend more money and that will solve all of our problems. Unfortunately, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we see a government that is bent on spending more, but, unfortunately, Manitobans see we are getting less out—at the end of the day.

The only thing that really has increased though, at the hands of the NDP government, is the provincial debt. The provincial debt is going to be, according to this year's budget, over \$30 billion at the end of this fiscal year, Mr. Speaker. And that's a substantial amount of money and clearly that's the money that will have to be paid back by our children and our grandchildren down the road.

And I want to just make a point of reminding members what a \$30-billion debt means to us and what it means on an ongoing basis on an annual budget, Mr. Speaker. And what it means to the province of Manitoba is that we are losing \$850 million in our provincial budget each and every year. That's \$850 million out of a \$12-billion budget that has to be paid for interest to service that debt that we have. So that's \$850 million that cannot be used for health care, cannot be used for education, cannot be used for infrastructure, cannot be used for social services.

Now, the government, a few years ago, had a bit of a plan in their budget where they were going to try to turn that around. We were going to get back to a balanced budget, but in this year's budget there's no

sign of a plan to go forward and how we are going to curtail their spending and move towards a balanced budget, Mr. Speaker. So, instead, they're looking for any kinds of revenue that they can get their hands on.

You know, when I talk about debt-servicing charges, I'm not even talking about Crown corporations and the debt that Crown corporations carry. I know Manitoba Hydro has about a \$9-billion debt they're carrying right now, and in terms of debt financing, it's a pretty substantial amount of money. It's over \$400 million a year that Manitoba Hydro has to pay to service their debt they have, and that's \$400 million that we, as Manitoba Hydro ratepayers, are forced to pay out of our pockets. And that's why we see our hydro rates going up 8 per cent over the past year, and that's why we see the NDP and Manitoba Hydro looking at a 4 and a half per cent increase in our hydro rates for the next 20 years. And, clearly, that's going to be fairly substantial and that's going to impact Manitobans for many years to come.

So, if you combine the \$850 million that comes out of our provincial debt budget each year—pardon me—provincial budget each year, combine that with the \$400 million that Manitoba Hydro has for debt-servicing costs, Mr. Deputy Speaker—that is over \$1.2 billion that we, as Manitoba taxpayers and ratepayers, are paying on interest. Those are strictly interest costs that we have to pay on the current provincial debt. And I say current, because the budget appears that we are going to continue to grow the debt in the foreseeable future because there's no plan to turn that around.

And, Mr. Speaker, the other, I think, would be a scary predicament for most Manitobans, the NDP are looking at spending another \$21 billion on hydro capital investment, and, clearly, that money will have to be borrowed as well. So, clearly, we're going to be facing even larger debts into the future of Manitoba, and, clearly, those debts have to be paid and those debt-servicing costs will have an impact on Manitoba ratepayers and Manitoba taxpayers quite clearly. So those are some of the issues that we are in terms of where we're at now, and, unfortunately, there's no plan to turn that around.

The unfortunate part of this is it really comes down to management, and we've seen a lack of planning and foresight here in Manitoba. And I know there's been comparisons made of premiers around Canada in terms of their ability to be fiscal managers. And, unfortunately, on the rating system,

our Premier (Mr. Selinger) has come out 10th out of 10 of the premiers that were evaluated in this most recent study, Mr. Speaker. And it's certainly a little alarming in terms of where we're headed in terms of our gross domestic product relative to net debt. And we're clearly headed the wrong direction, and this is what the study has pointed out. It's certainly on the wrong way. We're going to be from almost 23 per cent in 2009-10 and headed to—it was 26 per cent in '11 and '12, and the numbers are even worse after we look at this particular budget. And this is in clear contradiction to some of the good work and some of the good management that's undertaken in other provinces.

And, clearly, these policies have a direct impact on taxpayers in Manitoba. Manitoba taxpayers are already one of the highest taxed provinces and as ratepayers across Canada, Mr. Speaker. And it's incumbent upon us to have a look at why we're in that situation, and, hopefully, I've been able to spell out to you the deficit position we're in and the fact that we do have to raise taxes on the backs of Manitobans to try to balance those books.

And I know we've had pretty stark comparisons to a taxpayer in Manitoba versus taxpayers in Saskatchewan, and, clearly, just the other day, we had a conversation with a chartered accountant who compared—and he has the ability to compare what he would pay in Manitoba versus Saskatchewan, and he found out that if he was a resident of Saskatchewan, he would pay \$2,500 less in taxes, Mr. Speaker. Now I know the government goes on and on about the cost of living here in Manitoba, but, boy, it takes a lot of money in terms of cost of living to make up for \$2,500 in the course of the year just on that one tax alone.

Now we've seen a move from the government to generate income in other ways. We've had an announcement just yesterday that the NDP will be introducing another 500 VLTs here in Manitoba. Clearly, in our mind, that's a tax grab on the backs of low-income Manitobans. And contrary to what the government tells us in terms of a moratorium on the expansion of VLTs, the numbers prove otherwise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In fact, we've seen an increase of 1,850 VLTs when we take into account the announcement yesterday of an additional 500. And this means the VLTs in Manitoba have increased 42 per cent since the NDP came into office in 1999.

Now, clearly, the government is looking to generate as much revenue as they can from VLTs

because they need that money to offset their spending addiction. They have—so, no shy—no cause that they are going to turn around and stop their spending. Clearly, it's a spending addiction, Mr. Speaker, and as a result they're also addicted to the income generated from the gaming here in the province of Manitoba, and as a result of that addiction, they're looking to find as many ways to generate as much money as they possibly can.

And, clearly, when generating money from VLTs, as I said, it's really on the backs of some of the most vulnerable Manitobans that we have. And clearly, those Manitobans will be facing challenges. Those Manitoba families will be facing challenges as they go forward because they will be covering different issues relative to the gaming problems, and it certainly is serious for Manitoba, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, you know we see the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) who's clearly—the Minister of Finance has had a bad month since he introduced his budget. He's had very little—very few people, very few companies, industry, any stakeholders that are supporting his budget, so he's had a bit of a tough sell with his budget. And, in fact, probably even worse for him last night; his Maple Leafs took it on the chin with the Boston Bruins, and I know that was probably the last thing that the Minister of Finance wanted to hear, especially given the fact that the Maple Leafs were up 4-1 at one time and then lost in overtime. So, just to cap off a bad month for the Minister of Finance, his Leafs are now out of the playoffs and he's going to have to look for somebody else to cheer for.

But the Minister of Finance is also—seems to be headed down a path where he wants to kill another industry in Manitoba, and that's the horse racing industry here in Manitoba. And he's clearly driven by money, by greed; he wants to get his hands on as much money as he possibly can to finance his own spending habits, Mr. Acting Speaker. And what he's proposing is to take \$5 million out of revenue that's generated at Assiniboia Downs and use it for his own spending addiction.

* (15:00)

And he's also threatened to change The Pari-Mutuel Levy Act, which says that money generated by the industry is to go back to enhance and promote the industry in Manitoba, and I would think it would be fairly bold of the Minister of Finance to change that legislation to take that money out of the industry and use for his own good. But we are looking

forward to the minister introducing that legislation to see what it says so we can have an honest debate about the idea of moving money that's generated by the industry and moving it into—potentially, into government coffers. So we look forward to that.

The point of this motion is to go back and have a real hard look at the existing balanced budget, debt repayment and taxpayer protection act, and it's pretty clear what the act spells out. And it says the government shall not present to the Legislative Assembly a bill to increase the rate of any tax imposed by an act or part of an act listed below unless the government first puts the question of advisability of proceeding with such a bill to the voters of Manitoba in a referendum and a majority of the persons who vote in the referendum authorize the government to proceed with the changes. That's the point of the matter and that's what we're here about and that's why we're opposed to Bill 20. And I thank the member from Charleswood to bring in this motion in relation to Bill 20, which, I think, is a very positive motion that should be discussed by the NDP as well.

With that, I thank you for this opportunity to speak on this particular motion, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): It's a pleasure to rise and put a few words on record in support of our member from Charleswood's recent amendment, and it gives us an opportunity to have another look at the implications of Bill 20. And, of course, we're all very concerned that it does away with the balanced budget legislation and in the process, of course, takes away Manitobans' rights to have a voice in any major tax changes. And certainly that is something that most Manitobans did not expect from this government, and, in fact, I'm pretty sure in the budget consultation process that no one suggested not only increasing the PST, but then striking down the balanced budget legislation. So they're moving very quickly to take away all of their obstacles to balancing the budget any time in the future or in fact stopping them from doing anything in terms of changing taxes in this province.

And I think it's a sign that Manitobans should be very concerned, because it would make it—it makes it very easy to do further increases, and, certainly, we've seen all signs that that could easily happen again—as has been pointed out by previous speakers that they still haven't dealt with their annual deficit. They're still going to have a deficit of over

\$500 million, and that certainly doesn't bode well for where they're going to go into the future. It shows really a lack of respect for Manitobans that they do nothing really to move to consult with them on this issue. It really comes down to: We know better; we're going to spend your money for you; and it really doesn't matter whether you like what we're going—what our priorities are or not. It certainly wasn't something that they went through the election to get a mandate to do. I suspect that there's a lot of ND me—NDP members across the way that are very, very uncomfortable with where things are going here and with the comments that they frequently get, I'm sure, from members of their constituencies. We're certainly hearing from a lot of people about the problem, as they see it, with spending, and I'm sure that the members across the floor are no different—that they're getting comments as well too. And I hope that they're standing their ground and trying to defend what has been done, because it will make for some interesting discussions out in the community. It would hardly be fair to have run an election on not increasing taxes and having a balanced budget and then hiding from the constituents because you actually went against your word.

Now, certainly we've seen very little support for the increase in the PST. We see a lot of major groups like AMM and the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce and the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce and the Manitoba Business Council as well as the Heavy Construction Association who did talk before the election about needing the revenue that 1 per cent on the PST would generate to help to deal with the infrastructure debt—deficit that's in this province, but that is not what we've accomplished with this increase in the PST. Really, only a very small amount has actually gone towards increasing infrastructure. In fact, the myth that was a—perpetuated the day that we saw Bill 20 come forward, was that this was for—to deal with flooding issues. Well, we know that that's two years in the past, and certainly, if we will look at how that money is being spent, we would find a big portion of that is actually money that they will, in fact, get back from the federal government over time. But—and I—also, that \$1.2-billion number that they like to use so often is really, actually, a bit of a myth, because not only will they get a big chunk of that for—money back from the federal government—and some of it, in fact, they already have gotten back.

But they counted everything they could possibly in that total, which included crop insurance

payments, which was—a significant portion thereof was actually producers' own money. So it seems hardly fair to tell Manitobans that this is federal expenditures—or provincial expenditures, rather, when it's, in fact, producers' own money that they're getting back through the insurance pool. It's certainly an abuse of spin doctoring, if you want to put it that way.

Now, in 2011, every member across the floor here ran in that election on a promise not to raise taxes and they received a very clear mandate on that, one that they're quite proud to brag about, but, really, that did not include any increase in the taxes. And they campaigned door to door, and I would wonder how many of the members opposite will be very leery about going back to those doors the next time around, to see what people have to say when they—1 per cent increase appears on the PST bills, and whether everybody will be happy to see them or whether or not they will find quite a different reception than they found last time.

Now, Mr. Speaker, besides breaking their election promise, they made a big tax grab in many other ways. First they broadened what was covered by the PST, and then, of course, they raised it. Now, you have to wonder, broadening it would be the obvious first step. Did they actually have that planned two years ago, when they broadened the base of the PST, that this was where they were going this year? And where does that leave us for next year? Will things be even worse for us all next year, because, as I pointed out earlier and has been pointed out by many, that they really haven't balanced their budget yet this year at all? In fact, made very little progress on that direction despite the biggest tax increase in modern history.

In fact, you have to go all the way back to the Howard Pawley days to get even closer to that. But I know that the memory for history across the floor appears to be very good, so I'm sure that they're very well versed on some of the great expenditures that were done in the Howard Pawley days. Not only is they—increase in PST and where some of the money went, but good investments like MTX, where we transferred unknown amounts of dollars from Manitobans to Saudi Arabia so that they could benefit from their largesse.

Overall, Manitobans are going to play 300—or pay, \$383 million more in PST alone due to the NDP's decision to expand and increase this tax over two years. That alone equates to \$1,200 per year for

a family of four in PST taxes. That's money for—that families have to come up with and have to dig deep for. And it's particularly hard—and I mentioned it briefly in my—in questions in question period—particularly hard for the poor, those who are on social assistance or the working poor who are struggling to make ends meet. Because even though there are some exemptions for PST for things like food and children's clothing, many of the basic necessities of life, in fact, are covered by PST, and people have to find that money from somewhere.

And very often it comes out of the food budget and we see more and more people going to food banks. And certainly we've been seeing a fairly dramatic increase in the use of the food banks here in Manitoba. That is not a healthy sign and certainly we're very concerned about where they're going with that.

Actually, if you include all taxes and fees—and they were certainly quick to raise a lot of the fees as well—the actual cost for a family of four increased by another \$400 a year to \$1,600 for a family. And that's certainly a heavy burden to be placed on a family and puts us in the highest income-tax bracket outside of Québec, and it certainly puts us in an uncompetitive position in terms of PST in western Canada. Across western Canada, we are clearly the worse for PST in the West. Right now we are 60 per cent higher than Saskatchewan, and, of course, Alberta, with no PST, makes it—quite a significant difference to those that are there.

Those that live in border towns have already complained about the non-competitive aspect that existed before, and this will certainly only push in that direction. A—actually, a family that lives in a border town in Melita, Manitoba—and they've certainly noticed that it's been very hard on the business community there, a lot of the business leaving to go to Saskatchewan. And that was before the 1 per cent increase, so it certainly won't improve things.

*(15:10)

Now, this increase the NDP tried to sell, is dealing with the problems of Mother Nature, the flooding, and, particularly, I find that annoying, because we look at where they have spent their money in flood preparations and find that very little of it went to anything long term. They did do a little lakeshore revitalization, and certainly the river has seen its attention, but as we know they were looking

for projects where they could find cost sharing with the federal government, and they have found it.

They didn't get cost sharing on all of the programs because, frankly, they didn't seem to understand the nature of the programs. The member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) the other day talked about the fact that many of the announcements that occurred during the flood were—very clearly didn't qualify for some of the programs that they had referenced they would link to, and with my past history with Keystone Ag Producers, I knew some of those programs reasonably well from the ag side, and we did notice during the periods of announcement, that a lot of the announcements just couldn't happen within the parameters of those programs.

We weren't surprised when they had a little difficulty to get some of them qualified under the federal initiatives. I'm really quite surprised that ministers with this much experience would have had—would not have seen this coming, that they would have a problem doing some of these things [*inaudible*] under there.

But I'm really beginning to think now that the flood of 2011 isn't really so much about the—solving the problems, it's about an excuse, moving into the future, Mr. Speaker. They reference it quite frequently as to why everything costs more, why they have to have more tax revenue, and in realities, I think, the—they certainly haven't paid out anywhere near what they have implied. In fact, in my constituency we have a vast number of claimants of many different types, actually five of the six programs that were run through Manitoba Agriculture functioned inside my constituency. And, really, very few of them worked well.

I saw literally hundreds of claims from different people. Some we were able to resolve reasonably well. Many got 50 per cent or less of what were they probably were owed. And also a great number were actually rejected outright through the process, some through technicalities, some through bad advice that they got. I can't begin to count how many constituents came to me and said, well, I was turned down; why was I turned down?

And we look at their situation, go back through the process, get a hold of a different adjustor and get them back into the program, and, yes, they do get paid eventually. But they were turned down the first time. How many people had the patience to go back around the second time and—or to bring it to someone like myself who had—was working with the programs

and actually could realize that the parameters and where they should fit in the program? And I suspect there are a lot of frustrated people out there who went through the first time and were told no, and didn't make the effort.

And I'm—I can't help but reference one particularly touching case. A very young family that had just bought—moved back into a community and bought a business in a small community very close to the lake, that made a fair portion of its living simply from the summer tourist trade. And, of course, that was just before the 2011 flood, and it was actually devastating for their business, devastating for the community. The tourist trade has yet to return, though we certainly hope that we'll get it rebuilt. But that family was turned down for business interruption under the program. They were turned down for damage to their houses. And they could have fought all of this; we were quite prepared to work with them and go through appeals process, which, by the way, would not yet have been heard. But they simply couldn't survive that long without any source of income.

So they have packed up and left the community. They do hope someday to come back when things return to some semblance of normalcy in that community. But it is simply a very sad case and very hurtful to see programs functioning that poorly this government is actually touting as being very rich programs and talking about the amount that was paid out. That number is nothing more than misleading.

Now, when you look at the amount of money that actually has been paid for capital spending for infrastructure to deal with flooding is actually down in the 2012 budget by \$11 million. And we certainly hope that they will have a good look at the task force reports and 'priorize' them, but there is really nothing in the task force reports that have come out that is actually a shovel-ready project.

So, given the usual time, not only to do the proper engineering, but to do environmental studies and impact statements, we're probably two or three years away before any major construction is done. Those projects that were actually ready to go, like expansion of the gates on Shellmouth, are now no longer considered feasible because damage to the Shellmouth Dam from 2011 was certainly greater than anticipated. So now that project can't be completed.

We also know the PST is not going towards transportation infrastructure. The budget shows

highways capital spending is only going up by \$28 million. It's only 14 per cent of this year's PST increase—really not much more than maybe one small project.

I think the mayors had it right when they got together very quickly after the spin was put onto infrastructure and stated very clearly that that money wasn't going to them, that the cities were not getting their share and that they were very clear on that and, I think, put an end to that spin, because it's very obvious that that money is not going where it's needed.

But they were really quick to take \$1 billion for road taxes for their political operations. A political party shouldn't be raise—run on taxpayers' money. In fact, I'm very surprised that they—we haven't heard more on that from across the floor. I'm pretty sure that most people, when they go into politics, understand that fundraising is one of the things that is involved in politics. It may not be the nicest part of the job—certainly, ribbon cutting is probably the nicest part of the job, and we see an awful lot of that going on.

But, if you went into politics and did not expect to have to do fundraising, you were really deluding yourself, Mr. Speaker, and I'm wondering how many people across the floor are—frankly, are just too lazy to do the fundraising. It is not something that many of us really enjoy, but it is something that goes with the job and you don't see anybody on this side of the House stepping back from it. In fact, our fundraising appears to be well ahead of other years, so clearly we're being fairly successful.

They did well—very well in terms of spending money on more communicators, and we see that every day in the House when we see a new spin on whatever we have had to say the day or the previous days. And clearly they have more than enough staff to deal with those spins, but I'm wondering how the public is seeing this. Public gets very tired of that kind of spin doctoring that goes on as well.

Now, I can go on here, there are a number of other comments I'd like to make, but one of the very important ones is the issue of balancing the books. We were told at election time that they were on time and on line to balance the books by 2014, and clearly that wasn't happening. And we—and we have not seen any movement in that direction and they're telling us now 2016, but that obviously is not going to happen as well.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'd like—thank you for the time and the chance to make a few comments on this reasoned amendment.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): A pleasure to speak this afternoon on the reasoned amendment brought forward by the member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger). In fact, it's not a usual chance for us to speak to a reasoned amendment. I understand that it's something that's only happened maybe three or four times in the history of this Legislature, Mr. Speaker, so it's historic in some ways.

I would hope that the members opposite would want to take advantage of this historic opportunity and speak to this reasoned amendment to be part of history. I know the Government House Leader (Ms. Howard) would, no doubt, want to have her name in the logs of those who spoke to this—

An Honourable Member: I'm waiting for the reasonable amendment.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, she's waiting for a reasonable amendment. We have lots of time, Mr. Speaker, in the summer for many other amendments as she might agree with and we'll have lots of things she might find that she wants to speak to and that she's going to enjoy.

I want to say, on this particular amendment—because it deals with the issue of there not being consultation around the PST increase and the government not listening to people at the prebudget consultation meetings. Now, it's been a frustration of mine over the years that this government refuses to come to the great constituency of Steinbach to have prebudget consultation meetings—the city of Steinbach, which is known as being one of the most successful communities—and the region—in terms of economic growth and business, and yet there is no way we can get this government to have a prebudget consultation meeting.

I hear the Minister responsible for Entrepreneurship, Mr. Speaker, saying that he doesn't want to come to the community, that he doesn't want to listen to the good people of Steinbach. And it's clear, I think, in the—it's clear in their actions, because we know that they've only come once out of 11 years or 12 years to have a consultation in the community. And, you know, people in the community, they wonder why it is that the government wouldn't want to take advice from such a successful area, but, ultimately, I think, we've come to the conclusion that the government's not listening

anyway; that when they have these little dog-and-pony shows, that they go and they present what they think is the most favourable position for themselves on the economic front. But, ultimately, they're not listening to what Manitobans want because we know that not one Manitoban at these prebudget consultation meetings asked for an increase in the PST. And the reason we know that is because we've asked the government many times to stand up and identify anybody who was asking for a PST increase, and they can't do it.

*(15:20)

And, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that after these many days and weeks, had there been somebody who was advocating hard or an organization who was pushing hard for this PST increase the way they've implemented it and to do away with the referendum, that they would have identified that group or those individuals. But they don't exist because ultimately people understand that what the government has done is an undemocratic act. They've taken away an opportunity for them to have a say on this tax increase and they, certainly, Manitobans wouldn't advocate for that sort of thing at a prebudget consultation meeting.

And so the amendment really is about asking the government to not pass this bill because they haven't brought forward satisfactory information that, in fact, there was Manitobans who were asking for this.

And I want to say, I've been pleasantly surprised, Mr. Speaker, by the number of Manitobans not only who have emailed—and then—that number's in the thousands, the number of Manitobans who've emailed and written and expressed concern about the PST increase. But I've been very impressed by the number of Manitobans who not only say that we don't think we should have pay more for the PST because we—are—other ways that the government could find the savings internally. But they've really latched on to the fact that this is undemocratic in terms of how it's been done. They've really—make a point in almost every email that I get about the PST, about the government doing away with the referendum because, ultimately, Manitobans see this as an issue of fairness and that there's a lack of fairness that the government has decided to not only increase the PST, but change the rules by which this is done.

And I would caution the government, of course, Mr. Speaker, because they're racing towards a deadline of increasing the PST without actually

having the legislation passed by July 1st. And we know that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) had his day in court a couple of weeks ago, or maybe a week ago, and that day in court didn't go very well for him. He was figuratively put over the knee of the justice and given a bit of a lesson in terms of how government should operate and not operate. And I think that justice clearly indicated that government doesn't have carte blanche to do anything that it wants, that it has to follow the law—the very laws that it creates.

And so you would have thought that that warning would have been enough for the government when it comes to the PST legislation, that they wouldn't want to have to go through that again, that they wouldn't want to have to get called back into the proverbial principles office, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and have that lesson applied to them again that you can't simply implement something before the laws change. And that's really what the government is suggesting it's going to do. It's suggesting that it's going to increase the PST on July 1st whether or not the law has been changed or not. So the existing law would still say you need to have a referendum. The existing law would still say that you shouldn't—that you can't bring in legislation to increase the PST without that referendum. That is what the law says in Manitoba now, and that is what it will say, likely, on July 1st.

And so the government has an option. The government can decide whether or not they want to go ahead and risk breaking the law again, Mr. Speaker. And there's two sort of elements of concern that they should have regarding that. One is certainly the judicial opinion; one is certainly a legal opinion about whether or not they are following the law as it will likely exist on July 1st.

And certainly they have to be concerned and they should be concerned about another situation where the government is found not to have followed the law as it was the case with the Minister of Finance and the Assiniboine downs, Mr. Speaker. The other situation, of course, the public perception, there is the legal perception and the legal reality, but there's also the public perception. And we know that the public is very concerned about the fact that the government doesn't feel it has to follow its own laws. There's an issue of fairness there that people within the public wonder, well, why is it that I have to follow the law, whether it's a speeding limit or whether it's fines they get administered for other reasons. People within Manitoba understand that if

they don't follow the law there is a penalty to be paid. They simply can't change the law, and that's what this government is suggesting.

But they're actually going one step further, Mr. Speaker, because they're saying even if we can't change the law in time we're still going to do the very thing that the law says we can't do, and therein lies the concern and therein lies the dilemma for the government ultimately.

Now I suppose that had they brought in stand-alone legislation on the referendum and were able to get that passed, you know, we be—might be looking at a different scenario, but that's not what they did. They decided to put these two pieces of legislation together and then put in a proposal at the back end of the legislation to try to have the bill time-travel when it is passed. But the reality is if we still have the existing legislation on July 1st with the requirement for a referendum before a PST increase and the PST increase is still applied, this is a government, in my opinion, that's broken the law. And it risks having that same opinion brought forward to it within the courts, and more importantly—or as importantly, I would say, also risk having lost a great deal of public faith within the public who rightfully believe that we need to follow the laws, that there is an issue of fairness and that the government shouldn't be able to do something that ordinary and average Manitobans aren't able to do. So that's my caution, certainly, for the government, as they move towards this July 1st date without having been able to get this particular bill passed.

Now, I know, Mr. Speaker, that there are, I think, 175—or maybe it's more already—people who are registered to present at the committee on Bill 20. These are Manitobans who have decided on their own to do something very unusual for them, I'm sure, because it's not often that people come and make presentations at a government committee here in the Legislature. For many people that'll be an intimidating thing to do. They are not used to, as we are, to—speaking to issues and speaking in public, and yet they've decided they are so concerned about not only the fact that the government is increasing the PST, but how they're increasing the PST, that they want to come and have their voice heard at a committee in the Legislature of Manitoba.

So, 175 people or more than that now, have signed up and said, we want to have our voice heard. Now, that's important, Mr. Speaker, and I'm glad that Manitobans are going to come to that committee. I'm

hopeful that the government is going to be respectful in terms of how they operate that committee, that they're not going to ram people through the night and have committee presentations at 2 or 3 in the morning. After all, it was the Premier (Mr. Selinger) himself who asked Manitobans to sign up, to come to committee. It was the Premier who said, we're taking away your referendum right, but there's another option—although not a very good alternative, not a very good substitution—but he said, we want people to sign up and come to committee here at the Legislature.

So I'd be surprised and very disappointed, Mr. Speaker, if after the Premier himself asked Manitobans to come to the Legislature, to come to committee, that he would give instructions through the Government House Leader (Ms. Howard) to have those committees at 2, 3, 4 in the morning. And, certainly, we would as an opposition do everything that we could to avoid that from happening, to be respectful to Manitobans, to ensure that they could present at a reasonable hour to their elected officials, and we do commit to that; we do commit to doing what we can to ensure that these committees are held in a reasonable way, in a reasonable fashion and a way that Manitobans will have the opportunity to speak to the government and to try to change their minds on this decision.

And, ultimately, Mr. Speaker, that is a large part about what this process is about. The reason we've been spending hours and hours debating Bill 20 is we want the government to have the opportunity to change its mind. And we want Manitobans to be able to also have the opportunity to engage with the government to get them to change their minds on this PST tax increase. Ultimately, we know that this bill can't be held forever, that at the end of the day the government has the numbers, that they can ram this bill through eventually, but our opportunity—or our job is to ensure that Manitobans have the opportunity to change the mind of the government and to adhere—get them to adhere to the promise they made in 2011 during the election to not raise taxes.

So we are still committed to do that. We are going to do our best to ensure that committees on this bill are held in a respectable and respectful way for all those Manitobans who come to this Legislature to make presentations, Mr. Speaker. We're going to continue to ensure that the government has lots of time to reconsider this decision, and I hope some of them will get up and speak to this amendment and other motions that

might come forward so that they can have their opinion put on the record. In the years that come, we might have Manitobans who are studying this debate and they might wonder why the government sat silent; why they wouldn't stand up and try to defend the PST increase; why it is that they wouldn't speak to something that they, in other forums, are saying is so important.

*(15:30)

So they'll have that opportunity to speak in the days, weeks and, perhaps, months ahead, Mr. Speaker, on this bill, to ensure that they have the opportunity to change your minds. And that is certainly something that we are committed to do, because ultimately Manitobans are looking for a few things. They're looking for the government to adhere to the promise that they made, to follow the promise and uphold the promise that they made in the 2011 election not to raise taxes. They broke that last year, of course, Mr. Speaker, but this is a monumental reversal from that particular promise of not raising taxes by increasing the PST. So that's the first thing we're hoping that the government would do and adhere to its promise and that Manitobans are looking for.

We want to, of course, ensure that they respect the law, and respect the law in terms of the referendum to ensure that Manitobans—if they're committed to going ahead with this PST increase—will, in fact, hold that referendum as the law says today that they should and as the law, I believe, will say on July 1st, Mr. Speaker, that they follow that particular law because that is what Manitobans are expecting them to do as well. And we are hopeful that this doesn't become a legal issue, of course, but it certainly has already become a political and a public issue, and there is a public confidence issue about whether or not the public will continue to hold confidence in a government that won't follow the same rules that they very—that they expect Manitobans to follow.

Even on this particular docket, Mr. Speaker, of legislation that we have, we have the Attorney General (Mr. Swan) doing things to change fines and to change different pieces of legislation. So he is expecting Manitobans, as the Attorney General, to expect a—to respect a variety of different laws that we have in the province of Manitoba. He implements fines; he increases fines. So all Manitobans are asking him to do and ask his government to do is to follow the very same principles that they're expecting

Manitobans to follow. There is a law in place. Follow that law and let the chips fall where they may. If the government is so convinced that they would win a referendum, they have the opportunity to hold that referendum and then we'll all find out. But I think, ultimately, the reason they refuse to call the referendum has nothing to do with time. We're going to have as much time to debate this bill in the Legislature as it would take to call a referendum. But they know what the result would be. They know that Manitobans don't support a PST increase because Manitobans don't believe that this government has done all that it can in terms of finding savings internally.

So we hope that we're doing our best to give the government enough time to change its mind and we're giving Manitobans enough time to change the mind of the government.

Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I'm pleased to rise today and speak in support of this reasoned amendment brought forward by the member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger), as I understand this is a rare amendment that is brought forward in this House, and so I want to thank her for bringing forward the opportunity to encourage innovative debate. It's an innovative way to encourage debate in this House and I want to thank her for working with her House leader on that, and I think that that's what we need to do here.

This is supposed to be a democratic society in our province. This is a democracy where we should have the opportunity to debate amendments in this House and to debate legislation that is going to affect Manitobans, and I think it's unfortunate that so far members opposite have neglected to be a part of this debate.

And I just wonder, considering this is a reasoned debate, Mr. Speaker, why they are refusing to participate in this debate. And I think it's because they are afraid of some of their speakers getting up and some of their MLAs getting up and maybe putting some words on the record that they may regret, that may be sent back out into their constituents, because I believe their constituents believe in a free and democratic society. That's why their constituents went out and voted in the last election. They didn't all vote for members opposite, but many of them did and they wanted—they elected members opposite to come forward into this

Manitoba Legislature to participate in debate. That's what they expect in this Legislature.

And so I hope that what has happened so far in this Legislature is not indicative of what we're going to see over the course of the next months and years ahead, that members opposite are going to refuse to debate legislation. Of course, democracy is the corner of who we are as a society. It's a very important part of who we are and what we represent, and it's what we are teaching our children. We see many children in the gallery on a regular basis, Mr. Deputy Speaker, who come down to the Manitoba Legislature because they're being taught in our schools about democracy, and they come down to the Legislature to see what's going on in the Manitoba Legislature. And, if they come up and sit in the afternoon, all they'll see is members of the opposition talking on a bill, and they're not really seeing what members on the government's side have to say with respect to this reasoned amendment.

So I'm hoping it's not indicative of what we'll see over the course of the next weeks and months ahead. And I would encourage members opposite to also participate in this debate because this debate, again, is about democracy, but it's also about this government's want to take away a democratic right of the people of Manitoba. And that's what this amendment is all about.

Mr. Speaker, in the 2011 election, each and every NDP MLA in this House promised their constituents that they would not raise taxes. In fact, they received a mandate by their constituents to balance the books in 2014 and not raise taxes. Well, we know that they've already raised taxes some \$1,600 a household since they came into office in the 2011 election, since they were re-elected then, after running on not raising taxes, and we know that they have extended that balanced budget to 2016-2017.

Well, they've extended that balancing the budget for years now. This five-year plan that they had 10 years ago or eight years ago, or whatever it was, has changed about 10 times in the last five or eight years. So Manitobans know that they're not going to be looking at an NDP government that will balance the books by 2015. They know that that won't be the case because we know that they're already breaking their promise with respect to taxation.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) went as far as to say in the last election that raising the PST was, and I quote, ridiculous ideas that we're going to raise the sales tax. That's total nonsense.

He said, everybody knows that.

And that was the Premier of our province running in the last election during the election campaign.

And then the NDP lied. They brought in the biggest tax increase in 25 years in the—in 2012. They jacked up the fees and they expanded taxes on everything they could think of. And to name those expansions, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the PST alone, they expanded it to include insurance products for the home. They expanded it to include property insurance. They expanded it to include group life insurance. They expanded it to include the hydro increases, to include manicures, pedicures and hair styling. The list goes on and if we look at the fees that they jacked up and they raised as well, fees like birth certificates, campground rentals, death certificates, veterinary diagnostic services, abuse registry checks, company registrations, fishing licences, environmental permits, vehicle registration fees.

Mr. Speaker, those fee increases and the PST expansion from last year was the largest fee and tax increases that this province and the people of Manitoba have seen for more than 25 years, since the last NDP government of Howard Pawley.

And that is extremely unfortunate when, in the last election, the Premier of this province ran on not raising those taxes. So if that wasn't bad enough, that in last year's budget they expanded the PST and jacked up the fees in this province, Mr. Speaker, one of the largest ones we've seen in the history, if that's not bad enough, they've now, this year, increased—they're proposing an increase to the PST itself, from 7 per cent to 8 per cent.

And, if you add all that up, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is equivalent to about \$1,600 a household in Manitoba, which is equivalent to a 3 per cent pay decrease to each and every Manitoba family. And I think that that is one of the most unfortunate things about all of this because if we look at those Manitoba families, we know that they are being charged more by this NDP government in order to pay for their spending addiction.

The NDP government is asking Manitoba families to take a 3 per cent pay decrease in order to pay for their spending addiction, and we're just asking why couldn't they find a 1 per cent—why couldn't they find 1 per cent savings across the board in government? They did it in last year's budget. It

didn't seem to be a problem then, so why couldn't they have done it this year? That's all we're asking them. Why are they taking it from the pockets of hard-working Manitobans instead of trying to find savings themselves, Mr. Speaker?

*(15:40)

And, you know, as Manitoba families sit around the tables, the dining room table, the kitchen table, and they start to—and they bring out their own household budgets, they're going to start to have to make very difficult decisions as families—\$1,600 is a lot of money out of a person's household income. And what they're going to have to do is they're going to have to start to make decisions. Is my daughter going to be able to continue to take her dance lessons? Is my son going to continue to be able to play hockey or my daughter continue? Is she going to be able to continue to play hockey or soccer? Are they going to be able to continue their piano lessons? What are the decisions that these families are going to have to make? Are we going to be able to go on a family vacation? Are we going to be able to do the things—or to go to a campground this summer?

These are the types of decisions that families in Manitoba are being faced with as a result of this NDP government's PST hike. And I think it's unfortunate that what this government is doing is taking away their right to have a say in the way of a referendum, which is what Bill 20 is taking away their rights, and I think it's unfortunate. And so, again, I want to thank the member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) for bringing forward this reasoned amendment.

Mr. Speaker, again, this is the biggest tax increase that we have seen since the NDP government of 1987 under Howard Pawley. And I just want to talk about The Balanced Budget, Debt Repayment and Taxpayer Protection Act, which we need to remind members opposite why it was put in place. It was put in place to protect Manitoba families from governments like this NDP government. It was enacted to ensure that any government that wanted to significantly increase major taxes in Manitoba has to receive a true mandate from the people by way of a vote; a vote that this NDP government wants to deny them by the introduction of Bill 20.

Mr. Speaker, under this act, Manitobans have the democratic right to a referendum whenever a government wants to raise a major tax in Manitoba. The PST falls into this category and the NDP did not

receive a mandate to raise taxes in any form, let alone in the form of a PST hike. They got a mandate to do the exact opposite in the 2011 election. The problem is that the NDP don't want to abide by this or, it seems, other laws. In fact, they feel they are above the law.

That's why, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they voted against a resolution last session that said Cabinet ministers should face consequences when they break the law. The Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) showed this when she broke the election law and the government publication bans and received no punishment despite being found guilty. We have a Premier (Mr. Selinger) of this Province, the then-minister of Finance, who falsified his election return. And we saw this when the current Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) was found guilty of breaking the law by refusing to transmit funds to the Assiniboia Downs, despite being legally bound to do so.

Mr. Speaker, this government likes to play fast and loose with the law and they use their excuse, they say it's okay to break the law because we're going to change it. Well, other Manitobans don't have the ability to be able to change the law, so they can't go out and say, well, that's okay for us to break the law because we're just going to turn around and change it—it's not an excuse. Every single citizen of this province, regardless of elected or not, has to abide by the existing laws of the province at that time. Unfortunately, members opposite don't believe that.

And that's why they're ripping up the taxpayer protection act. They think they are above the law. With Bill 20 they are removing the democratic principles that protect Manitobans from dictatorial governments such as this current NDP government.

No one agrees with the NDP's approach. If you look at every major interest group in this province, none of them agree with the NDP's decision to remove the referendum requirement before taxes can be increased.

The Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce CEO, Dave Angus, said, and I quote: If the Premier believes that increasing the PST is in the best interest of Manitoba and will create a strong competitive economy, then his government should be prepared, willing and enthusiastic to engage Manitobans and take their proposal to the public. End quote.

Manitoba Heavy Construction Association President Chris Lorenc, what did he say? He said,

and I quote: "When you have been espousing a position 180 degrees to the opposite, there is something that is owed to the public if you're changing direction." And he was referring to a referendum.

Mr. Speaker, the Manitoba Business Council CEO, Jim Carr, said, and I quote: "A referendum should be held to settle the matter." End quote.

The Manitoba Chambers of Commerce CEO, Chuck Davidson, said, and I quote: "Chambers across the province are clearly concerned with not only the government's decision to increase the PST but also the manner in which they are trying to accomplish it." End quote.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business Director, Janine Carmichael, said, and I quote: Unbelievable. It's so disrespectful to taxpayers. That legislation existed for a reason and to just negate that and go ahead is so disrespectful to taxpayers.

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation, Colin Craig, said, and I quote: It's cowardly. I think the NDP know that Manitobans would turn down their plan.

How many people—and I want to just go to the prebudget consultation meetings themselves, Mr. Speaker, and ask how many people asked for this in the prebudget consultation meetings. The fact of the matter is that nobody asked for it in these prebudget meetings. In fact, it wasn't even mentioned at the prebudget brief—it wasn't even mentioned in the briefing distributions, and it wasn't presented to the people there by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers), and so nobody asked for this. So the fact that nobody has asked for this and the NDP government just sees fit to bring this forward and to take away the democratic right of Manitobans by way of bringing forward this piece of legislation, Bill 20, is unfortunate, and that's why I encourage members opposite to get up and speak in favour of this recent amendment brought forward by the member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger), because this is the right thing to do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's a pleasure to put a few words on the record with regard to the friendly amendment put forward by the member for Charleswood, The Manitoba Building and Renewal Funding and Fiscal Management Act, and this bill—this amendment that

is presented by the member for Charleswood, I think, speaks to what Manitobans are asking for is the government that should be accountable to the dollars they spend and true to their word with—regarding a democratic vote should they feel that this is something that they need to do, and they are denying that of Manitobans.

Under the balanced budget, debt repayment and taxpayer protection act, Manitobans have the democratic right to a referendum whenever a government wants to raise a major tax, and I would believe that the PST would fall into this category, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So I believe that what I'm hearing from a lot of groups out in Manitoba, and a lot of individuals and families, is that they were never asked the question—the question with regard to a PST increase. Individuals who attended the budget consultations, who were there to lobby on behalf of their requests from this government to be included in the budget in the upcoming year were not asked if they would support a PST increase of 1 per cent.

Even in the city of Brandon, I understand, that when the minister was there, the Minister of Finance doing his consultations, they were discussing a number of things in the community that were important initiatives and the minister actually had a good dialogue with them and just indicated that he understood those challenges and understood the need for those types of initiatives. There was an excellent opportunity for him during that conversation to indicate, oh, by the way we're going to increase the PST by 1 per cent. What do you think? That never happened, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I think it's—it just shows the true character of this government which doesn't have a lot to be proud of.

*(15:50)

Because of the NDP government's serious financial situation, there seems to have been no respect or regard for the impact that taxes have on Manitoba's ability to thrive and survive. You know, I was listening to the radio the other day, and one commentary indicated that this government, this NDP government, has dug a hole, a huge hole, and with a \$30-billion debt. And instead of, you know, looking at it and paying it down and, you know, in a sense, stop digging, they've done the exact opposite. They continue to dig and are going to be putting Manitobans into a very serious financial situation, a situation that I'm not only going to have to worry about, but my children are going to have to worry

about and my grandchildren as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

To service that debt that has been increased by this government, it's going to take about \$1.2 billion a year to service, Mr. Deputy Speaker; \$1.2 billion would be a significant asset to any organization who is looking at this government to provide support. I know the critic areas that I am responsible for, and the member for Fort Rouge (Ms. Howard) is also responsible for, and others, you know, we need to ensure that we do our best to provide services and supports for individuals. When we put \$1.2 billion of the financial budget into debt servicing, it definitely takes away from providing services that are needed and required and expected by Manitobans.

With regard to the tax increases, as I said earlier, no one expected them. Nobody asked for them. And every major interest group that I've talked to, and our colleagues within this Chamber have talked to, have indicated that they were not asked for their opinion. There was no talk about raising it and then changing legislation to take away the referendum—you know, the democratic right for individuals to have a say in this process.

And, you know, I've been talking to a lot of individuals who, in the past, have not necessarily been supporters of the Conservative Party, who have—who are outraged by this government's ability to overlook the significance of the democratic process being taken away from them, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and they're disillusioned by this government and its addiction to spending and its inability to respond to, you know, what Manitobans expect: this NDP government to manage their expenses and to ensure that Manitobans are taken care of.

In 2011, each and every NDP member of this House promised in the last election not to raise taxes, and they received a mandate to balance the books by 2014 and not raise taxes. And, you know, as an elected official and running my campaign, I really pay attention to what I'm promising my constituents, because I have to go back to those individuals and be accountable to the things that I've said during the campaign. And I'm just wondering how these members on the government side of the House are actually dealing with, you know, their electorate. How are they responding to the concerns that I know that they're raising with us on this side of the House and saying—you know, how are they responding to this outright lie, this outright lie to the people of Manitoba who—they knew that they were going to

raise taxes and they knew that they were going to have to do that without having a referendum, and I think that Manitobans deserve better.

How will this impact Manitoba families? Well, when the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) stood up in the House and said there's 16,000 less Manitobans living in poverty, you know, I had a conversation with David—*[interjection]*—Northcott, thank you—David Northcott from Winnipeg Harvest, and he indicated to me, I don't know where they got that number from, because that's not a number that he's familiar with or would be dealing with. And I understand that he's going to be asking the Minister of Finance very shortly, you know, where did you get that number from. And, you know, and the Minister of Finance stands in this House and says, I don't know where they get their numbers from—you know, questions the credibility of members opposite.

And you know what? I have a serious issue with what this member from Dauphin puts on the record because I believe that he, you know, he spins it two ways, Mr. Speaker, speaks from both sides of his mouth, as others have said. And I do know that this is a very serious concern Manitobans have with regard to how this Finance Minister is actually presenting this very serious financial situation to Manitobans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the NDP broke that promise in 2012, and—with regard to the—expanding the PST. And this PST increase has not been made since Howard Pawley's time in government. And, you know, people remember that. People do remember that the PST was increased by an NDP government. And that was a big part of, I believe, you know, the former premier's statement, that I will not raise taxes, and I think people, you know, over the period of time that he was the premier, Mr. Doer, or Premier Doer, he actually, you know, followed through on his commitment. But, as soon as he was gone, you know, this government took a different slant and a different angle, and they just went ahead and broke all those promises and did so even during an election campaign.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Manitobans will be paying over \$383 million more in PST because of this NDP's decision to expand and increase the tax over a two-year period. And this comes out of Manitoba's pockets, Manitoba's—our hard-working Manitobans. And you know, and I sit here, and listen to debate, and listen to the comments coming from the government side, and they speak to, you know, tough

love, and that type of thing. You know, they have to make decisions in the best interests of Manitobans. And what we're seeing is, it's easier for them to raise the taxes to pay for their promises, or sometimes lies, I guess, and go—then, instead of taking care of what is important, which is Manitobans, and Manitobans who value a budget and stick within a budget.

You know, my kids have asked me. My son, Cameron, is 19, and he follows, you know, politics a little bit more than probably some of his friends do, but he has an interest in this, and he's very concerned where, you know, a leader of a party can go out in a campaign and say one thing, and then in less than two years, turn around and do something totally different. You know, and if you're talking about disenfranchising the younger generation with, you know, misleading politics, I think this is a very good example of how—you know, my son has said, well, you know, like, you watch what you say out there, Mom. Like, you're being careful about what you're saying to ensure that, you know, your credibility is intact. And then we have a Premier (Mr. Selinger), a leader of our Province, who has said one thing in saying, you know, it's ridiculous, it's nonsense, and then does, you know, the total opposite.

So, you know, I think that, you know, the damage that he's doing is not only in with regard to the debt and the expenses that are going to be put on our children, but it also is going to take an effect on the democratic process by not allowing the referendum—that's one piece—and taking away the democratic right for Manitobans to make a decision on the PST. But it also takes away from the credibility of this government, this Premier, and probably politicians around the board, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because when you see a leader of a province say one thing and within a year and a half do something totally different, why should people be engaged, as my son has said, and my daughter. You know, why be engaged, why bother? You know, because, well, they can say one thing and totally do another, so, you know, what's the point? You know, what's the point? And I totally agree with them.

And, you know, I'd love the Premier to have a chat with my son because I think he would find it rather interesting to hear what the Premier's excuse would be with regard to the decisions that he makes.

And when we ask for, you know, he's—the Premier has indicated we need this money to help with the flood, to help Manitoba families. And then we go off and talk about schools and hospitals and

that type of thing. And then, you know, we're talking about ensuring that, you know, that front-line workers are taken care of. Well, front-line workers have been challenged for a number of years, especially in the area of health care and Family Services.

* (16:00)

You can throw all the money you want at situations, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but, if you don't have an accountability attached to how you're putting those dollars forward, at some point it's going to come back and bite you.

And that's exactly where this government is at. They are in a situation where they have an extremely high debt, an extremely high deficit, and they're not looking at it. It's like—it's the elephant in the room, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's the elephant in the room because this government knows that at some time someone's going to have to be accountable for the decisions made by this government, and it appears that this government is going to put their head in the sand and walk away from it.

So I guess, you know, it speaks to the arrogance of this government. The government has had a chance to change the law, you know, and ensure that, you know, the referendum happens—maintain the law, I'm sorry, and make sure that the referendum happens. But they're not doing that, Mr. Deputy Speaker; they're not doing that. And it's not in the best interest of Manitoba families

We see—I was told by a number of interest groups that the best way to determine how your province is doing in—with regard to low-income families or families that are in poverty, is by identifying the number of people or recognizing that number of people who are actually accessing food banks.

And you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have the highest number—highest incidence of children utilizing food banks. In Brandon, at Samaritan House, the highest number of individuals or families that are using the food bank are low-income earners.

So, when this government talks about the wonderful things that they're doing with regard to families in need and Manitoba's most vulnerable, then why do we have the highest numbers of individuals accessing food banks, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

If this government believes that they have the best interests of Manitobans at heart with regard to

an increase in PST without allowing them to have a referendum, then why are we seeing more and more Manitobans leaving our province, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Why are we seeing more and more families losing their jobs, or being removed from their positions and leaving the province?

We see more and more young children—young women—babies having babies. We don't see a government that seems to have a strategy in place to deal with these issues, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Addictions, you know, this government talked about, you know, increasing their budgets to address these needs. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have, in addictions for gambling alone, the highest percentage across the country, 6.1 per cent. That's outrageous.

And then we see a government that is now going to increase, or has over the last 10 or 12 years, increased the amount of VLTs in this province by 42 per cent. You know, if you see the studies that are out there, even within our own province, University of Manitoba has done a study, and others, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Provincial Council of Women, these individuals and these organizations have indicated that they're—that VLTs are the crack cocaine of gambling. They are the worst things to be playing when you're in—your free time because they are so addictive.

And I don't think that this government realizes—they indicate that we brought in the VLTs; well, yes, we did, but we didn't have the data and we didn't have the reports available that are now so obviously in front of this government's face. What do they do? They increase the VLTs by 42 per cent.

I can tell you that that would not be where I would be going as a government, Mr. Speaker, when you are being told over and over again through different studies, through different organizations that deal with addictions. You listen to them and then you go off and continue to increase that percentage.

So I am very ashamed and very disappointed in this government, and I believe that the amendment presented by the member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) is an excellent piece of legislation and amendment.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

And I believe that we should support it as a House and provide Manitobans with the best interests possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): I am pleased to rise to speak to this amendment, and much has been said already by many of my colleagues. You know, we talk about the spending of this government, the tax increases—it's all quite disappointing. And, you know, I know there's been some work done recently by average Manitobans, Mr. Speaker. When you did your taxes, if you bought a computerized tax return program, you could go in and you could select which province that you chose to pay your tax in, as if we have a choice, and you could find out what the differences are. And, if you look at that, the average Manitoban would find that there are higher taxed provinces in Canada, but not very many. There's very few, as a matter of fact. Prince Edward Island would be one; Nova Scotia would be another one; and Québec would be yet another one. So those three provinces might have higher taxes, depending on your income and how you lay it out. But the others are all lower-taxed environments than Manitoba at this point, and that's quite disappointing to find that out. We knew and we suspected it, and then we see this is even before a PST increase, of course, on the impact it's going to have on Manitobans.

When we look at the types of things that are done with government spending, we do find in economic research that, as a fiscal policy in the form of fiscal stimulus, there is an impact, but recent research has shown that there's a new Keynesian-type approach that they're looking at versus the old Keynesian, and the government spending multipliers are, in fact, not what economists once thought. When we look at what a multiplier would be here in Manitoba and elsewhere, for every dollar spent, that the government spends, for every dollar the government spends, the actual impact, the multiplier is 0.63 cents, which is pretty dismal, Mr. Speaker, to expect that you're going to stimulate the economy with government spending. In fact, you're providing a drag on the economy and having a poorer effect so that we also see that, you know, the effect on GDP would diminish as non-government components, that would be the private sector and individuals, their spending is crowded out by government spending. You are competing as a government with your own citizens in this, and you're crowding out their spending. They don't tend to do it, and you take it away in increased taxes.

So, in fact, tax increases are even a worse type of environment for the government to go into in an increased spending mode and increased taxes. The drag on the economy is quite substantial, and the

effect on GDP can be negative and, indeed, has been shown to be negative. So, in that type of environment, this is certainly not something that Manitobans expect nor desire. They did expect that they were protected from government increases of this nature, increases on provincial sales tax by the balanced budget legislation. There was a belief amongst Manitobans that they were protected by increases such as this to PST. And then to have the government come in and say, well, we're not only going to increase PST, but we're going to repeal portions of that act so you no longer have a vote. You are irrelevant as Manitobans. This NDP government knows the best in their minds. They don't believe that Manitobans have a role, and, indeed, we see in academic research that the impact of government spending will reduce the economy.

So those are things with lessons that this government may need to learn, but it's difficult for government to learn, even though we talk about this being a New Democratic Party—maybe that's the new democracy, that you don't have any democracy anymore, because that certainly seems—seems to be what we have in Manitoba—a lack of democracy and the intent in this regard. Manitobans want a vote on this and the government should allow them to do so. And, if the government, as I said before, if the government really, actually believed that they deserved this PST increase, that it was necessary for Manitobans, if you believe that, you should have an ability to convince other people in that belief as well. You should be able to go and sell that. You should be able to convince Manitobans that it would be necessary, and then if it were, indeed, that convincing, was that convincing if you're able to convince Manitobans if you allowed them to vote they would vote in your favour. But this government won't even allow that, so, obviously, they don't believe that this is a necessary increase. They're just forcing it on Manitobans, and it's going to drive our economy even deeper than it is now. It's going to cause a drag on the economy. It's going to cause us to be uncompetitive with other provinces.

*(16:10)

As I've indicated, we are a very high tax environment in Manitoba. We are a high sales tax environment, higher than North Dakota, higher than Saskatchewan, and those are our immediate neighbours that people do compare to when they are looking at shopping for large and small items. You have a sales tax savings going to Saskatchewan that's going to be even more dramatic. You have a sales tax

savings going to North Dakota that, again, is going to be even more dramatic for Manitobans. And, when you look at which Manitobans are going to be drawn to these areas, I mean, you could expect that south of Brandon, south of Winnipeg, would probably tend to go to North Dakota; west of Brandon, you'd probably tend to go to Saskatchewan; and in the Interlake, well, I'm not sure what they would do there.

An Honourable Member: They'll pay the sales tax.

Mr. Helwer: They're going to pay the sales tax, and that's the unfortunate part.

But, you know, we do, as Manitobans, want to support our economy, but not when we see the effects of this government's spending, because the government brags about all the spending it's done. But what Manitoba road can you drive down and see the effects of this government's failing infrastructure? Virtually all of them. You drive down all of the roads and you see them deteriorating, and if they have indeed been spending money on infrastructure, it's not visible to Manitobans. What they see is the roads falling apart.

Indeed, I drove down No. 10 Highway from Brandon, not that long ago, crossed over the border, found the nice roads in North Dakota. But, in the interim, while I was driving down No. 10 Highway, which is in deplorable condition—lots of crumbling asphalt, lots of holes, lots of warning signs, the big orange ones that say, you know, there's a bump ahead, there's a hole ahead or however, fair warning—but I did have to go off of No. 10 Highway onto a gravel road, and all of a sudden it was nice and smooth. The gravel is well maintained by those municipalities out there that know how to balance their books, not like this government.

You know, you could go down a gravel 'road'—road and you wouldn't have damage to your vehicle, like we see in the newspapers where people are damaging them in potholes, because those gravel roads are well maintained by municipalities that know how to operate efficiently and they know how to balance their books and they do it for their ratepayers. So, when you travel down those roads, it's nice and smooth. It's nice and quiet. Then you go back down No. 10 Highway, again, and you have to go back there because you can't travel on a gravel road all the way to the border, and, again, you're dealing with potholes, you're dealing with big cracks and crevices in the road, you're dealing with the sides of the pavement falling off and big holes there. And it's quite disappointing that this is a government that

tries to sell on Manitobans that they've been making all this investment in infrastructure, and Manitobans are saying: Where? We don't believe you because we see it falling apart in front of our very eyes.

You try to convince Manitobans that they go into an emergency room that things are going to get better. What? We don't see that. People wait for hours on end for serious conditions. We've heard that in the House. We've had people come here to be in the gallery, and these individuals have been in serious condition in an emergency room and have waited for hours and hours and hours on end. Their health is decaying. The health-care system, this is what they're seeing. We're being told it's better, but this is what Manitobans are experiencing in their infrastructure, in their health care, and now they're seeing that this government wants to take more of their money from them and try to pretend that the government knows how to spend better, which, indeed, we know they don't. We know from first-hand experience that that doesn't happen.

And then—you know, again, we go back to what happens with this multiplier effect, and a government stimulus that they hope to be, quickly produces a contraction in the private sector, in investment and consumption, because you're competing with the private sector, and the more government money is spent, the more that that contraction grows. And so you see the private sector eventually disappearing as the government takes over the economy, and that is not a healthy economy. It shows, usually, a decline in GDP, and that's not a healthy economy. That's not how we want to grow Manitoba.

And, indeed, the more often you do this, there's greater changes in the second year and the third year, so that households and firms anticipate the second-year changes and they spend even less because they know you're going to suck more tax dollars out of their disposable income. They know that any government expenditures are going to be—what?—financed by higher taxes. And it happens again and again and again and we've seen the history of this NDP government.

They, you know, the government just lied to Manitobans that they weren't going to increase taxes, and they did. They lied to Manitobans that they weren't going to broaden the tax base the previous year, and they did. And they're going to tell Manitobans, you know, we only need to do this just one more time. Well, how can we possibly believe that, because the government has lied in the past and

proven that they're willing to do things that they said they wouldn't do? So you can fully expect it, in the future, they're going to do something similar. What would they do next year? Are they going to run out of this PST increase, because it's already spent several years out into the future? So how are they going to balance the books next year? And what's the next step? You raise the PST again? Is that possible? Can you really raise a PST two years in a row?

Government transfer payments are consistent, is what we've been told by the deputy minister. They are going up 6 per cent over several years. That's an increase in most books. That's stable, consistent funding. But, you know, this government knows what's coming in, but they still need more money. They still need to draw more and more money in, in their minds, in order to spend—and they're not, you know, they're not even close to balancing the books.

So you—what do you do? You borrow more money? Well, you can do that. And this government has been very good at borrowing more money. The billions of dollars that they've added to the debt over the years is quite startling in what we've seen, and we—eventually, we have to pay that back. And, of course, you spread that interest-rate risk over several years. And we are at a very low interest rate regime right now in North America. Every central banker that you listen to says interest rates are going to go up. That's a pretty safe prediction. Nobody can say when. They know it's going to happen sometime. Is it going to be rapid? Is it going to be slow? Those are the things that we can't predict.

So, eventually, we know that we are going to spend more interest on servicing our debt because those rates are going to go up, and that is money that's taken directly out of Manitobans' pockets, and it's taken directly out of the government's pockets, in order to pay for the interest on that debt. That doesn't go to services; that doesn't go to pave roads; that doesn't go to reduce health-care waits; that doesn't go to get rid of hallway medicine, or highway medicine, as we've now come to learn. No, it just—it goes to pay interest. And the amount of debt that we have out there, it's going to be a substantial amount of interest because we have a considerable amount of debt that this government has added. So what you're kind of stuck now. What are you going to do? You raise more taxes? Raise more debt?

You want—apparently, this government wants to spend more money, because that's what they say, and we don't see the effects of it out in Manitoba there.

Roads deteriorating. We promised dikes in Brandon that were going to be improved. The flood—last flood was two years ago. Those dikes are still sitting untouched. You know, there's lots of other things that have been promised and announced several times that are not done. Are they funded? Are they not funded? They're announced. We'll announce them again. We'll change the budget. We'll change the amount were going to spend on it.

So it's really quite disappointing, Mr. Speaker, on what the outlook is for Manitoba because I really believe that Manitoba has some of the greatest opportunities in Canada. We have a tremendous province, but it is being ignored by this NDP government. We have mining reserves that are going untouched. Companies are going and doing business elsewhere because things change in Manitoba and the ground is shifting all the time. A company wants stability. Citizens want stability. They want to know that there is stability in the government. They want to know there is stability in the rates. They want to know there's stability in taxes. And that's where companies look to invest. That's where individuals look to invest. That's where individuals look to move to.

And, if this government's not able to offer that stability, indeed, those companies and those citizens and those workers will go look elsewhere. And, as we've said, it can be attractive elsewhere. Manitoba is a fabulous province, but we are losing some of the people from Manitoba. And we are losing the opportunity in Manitoba; it's passing us by.

You know, it was—we were fortunate to have a WestJet announcer coming into Brandon. One of the driving forces is the oil reserves in the Bakken reservoir, and we know that there are people coming from Alberta to work in Manitoba. We know that there are oil companies that are coming to invest in the Bakken reservoir in Manitoba, because they've done it in Saskatchewan, they've done it in North Dakota, and they're looking to expand those reserves.

* (16:20)

So we know that there will be a lot people flying on WestJet from that type of environment, looking to work here but not living here, and where are they going to pay taxes? Well, somewhere else because it's a much lower cost environment than we currently have in Manitoba, and that's very disappointing to see, Mr. Speaker.

So I do hope that the government will take a sober second look at this, and say: You know what? Manitobans deserve to have the right to vote on this, as was promised in the legislation, as was promised to them. They have the right. They legally have the right to vote on this PST increase. So let's let them do that.

And I hope that the government will look at that and, indeed, allow Manitobans to vote on a PST increase.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Any further debate on the amendment?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Mr. Speaker: Question having been called, the question before the House is the amendment proposed by the honourable member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger).

This House declines to give second reading to Bill 20—[*interjection*]—oh, yes, pardon me—on the amendment by the honourable member for Charleswood

THAT the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "THAT" and substituting the following:

This House declines to give second reading to Bill 20, The Manitoba Building and Renewal Funding and Fiscal Management Act (Various Acts Amended), because this House has not received satisfactory evidence or assurance that an increase in the retail sales tax was either considered or recommended at the government's prebudget consultation.

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

Some Honourable Members: Agreed

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

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

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

Mr. Speaker: All those opposed, signify it by saying nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

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

Recorded Vote

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

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

Order. Order, please.

I will now put the question on the amendment proposed by the honourable member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger).

Does the House wish to have the amendment reread?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: I heard a yes.

THAT the motion—the main motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word yet and substituting the following:

This House declines to give second reading to Bill 20, The Manitoba Building and Renewal Funding and Fiscal Management Act (Various Acts Amended), because this House has not received satisfactory evidence or assurances that an increase in the retail sales tax was either considered or recommended at the government's prebudget consultations meetings.

Division

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

Yeas

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

Nays

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

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

Mr. Speaker: I declare the amendment lost.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The hour being past 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and—oh, pardon me.

Debate on the main motion of Bill 20 will remain open.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 14, 2013

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