

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

Monday, August 19, 2013

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Mr. Speaker: Introduction of bills. We'll move on to—

PETITIONS

Applied Behaviour Analysis Services

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

And these are the reasons for the petition:

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

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

School learning services has its first ever waiting list which started with two children. The waiting list is projected to grow—or to keep growing and to be in excess of 20 children by September 2013. Therefore, these children will go through the biggest transition of their lives without receiving ABA services that has helped other children achieve huge gains.

The provincial government has adopted a policy to eliminate ABA services in schools by grade 5 despite the fact that these children have been diagnosed with autism which still requires therapy. These children are being denied necessary ABA

services that will allow them access to the same educational opportunities as any other Manitoban.

Waiting lists and denials of treatment are not—acceptable. No child should be denied access or—to or eliminated from eligibility for ABA services if they still—if the need still exists.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Education consider making funding available to eliminate the current waiting list for ABA school-age services and to fund ABA services for individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

This petition is signed by S. Nguyen, K. Armstrong, P. Walker and many, many more Manitobans.

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

Further petitions?

St. Ambroise Beach Provincial Park

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

The St. Ambroise provincial park was hard hit by the 2011 flood, resulting in the park's ongoing closure and the 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 the local tourism, hunting and fishing operations, diminished economic and employment opportunities and the potential loss of the local store and the 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. Warburton, D. Nott, R. Potter and many, many more fine Manitobans.

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 D. Watson, V. Watson, G. Fraser and many more fine Manitobans.

Applied Behaviour Analysis Services

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

School learning services has its first ever waiting list which started with two children. The waiting list is projected to keep growing and to be in excess of 20 children by September 2013. Therefore, these children will go through the biggest transition of their lives without receiving ABA services that has helped other children achieve huge gains.

The provincial government has adopted a policy to eliminate ABA services in schools by grade 5 despite the fact that these children have been diagnosed with autism which still requires therapy. These children are being denied necessary ABA services that will allow them access to the same educational opportunities as any other Manitoban.

Waiting lists and denials of treatment are unacceptable. No child should be denied access to or eliminated from eligibility for ABA services if their need still exists.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Education consider making funding available to eliminate the current waiting list for ABA school-age services and fund ABA services for individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

And this is signed by R. Jaquet, B. Anderson, J. Jaquet and many others.

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

* (13:40)

The provincial government did not follow its own policy statement on autism services which notes

the importance of early intervention for children with autism.

School learning services has its first ever waiting list which started with two children. The waiting list is projected to keep growing and to be in excess of 20 children by September 2013. Therefore, these children will go through the biggest transition of their lives without receiving ABA services that has helped other children achieve huge gains.

The provincial government has adopted a policy to eliminate ABA services in schools by grade 5 despite the fact that these children have been diagnosed with autism which still requires therapy. These children are being denied necessary ABA services that will allow them access to the same educational opportunities as any other Manitoban.

Waiting lists and denials of treatment are unacceptable. No child should be denied access to or eliminated from eligibility for ABA services if their need still exists.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Education consider making funding available to eliminate the current waiting list for ABA school-age services and fund ABA services for individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

This petition is signed by S. Houle, S.C. Houle, A. Paul and many other fine Manitobans.

Provincial Sales Tax Increase—Referendum

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

These are the reasons for this 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.

This petition is submitted on behalf of C. Eisenmenger, L. Glowacki, K. Lavallee and many other fine Manitobans.

Applied Behaviour Analysis Services

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And the background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

(3) School learning services has its first ever waiting list which started with two children. The waiting list is projected to keep growing and to be in excess of 20 children by September 2013. Therefore, these children will go through the biggest transition of their lives without receiving ABA services that has helped other children achieve huge gains.

(4) The provincial government has adopted a policy to eliminate ABA services in schools by grade 5 despite the fact that these children have been diagnosed with autism which still requires therapy. These children are being denied necessary ABA services that will allow them access to the same educational opportunities as any other Manitoban.

(5) Waiting lists and denials of treatment are unacceptable. No child should be denied access to or eliminated from eligibility for ABA services if their need still exists.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Education consider making funding available to eliminate the current waiting list for ABA school-age services and

fund ABA services for individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by S. Pimentel, I. Feistt, G. Sinclair and many, many other Manitobans.

Reopen Beausejour's Employment Manitoba Office

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

(1) The RM of Brokenhead and the town of Beausejour are growing centres with a combined population of over 8,000.

(2) Employment Manitoba offices provide crucial career counselling, job search and training opportunities for local residents looking to advance their education.

(3) The recent closure of the Employment Manitoba's Beausejour office will have negative consequences for the area's population who want to upgrade their skills and employment opportunities.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to reopen Beausejour's Employment Manitoba office.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by S. Kelly, T. Mukherjee, A. Lasko and many, many others.

Applied Behaviour Analysis Services

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

The background for this petition is as follows:

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

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

The preschool waiting list for ABA services has reached its highest level ever with at least 56 children waiting for services. That number is

expected to exceed 70 children by September 2013 despite commitments to reduce the waiting list and provide timely access to services.

The provincial government policy of eliminating ABA services in school by grade 5 has caused many children in Manitoba to age out of the window for this very effective ABA treatment because of a lack of access. Many more children are expected to age out because of a lack of available treatment spaces.

Waiting lists and denial of treatment are unacceptable. No child should be denied access to or age out of eligibility for ABA services.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Family Services and Labour consider making funding available to address the current waiting list for ABA services.

This petition is signed by S. Borowski, P. Lahti, D. Hulsemann and many, many other fine Manitobans.

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The provincial government has made a commitment to support families of children with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder, including timely diagnosis and access to treatment including applied behavioural analysis, or ABA services.

(2) The provincial government's own policy statement on autism services notes the importance of early intervention for children with autism.

(3) Currently, the wait-list for ABA services is at its highest level ever with 56 children waiting for services. That number is expected to exceed 70 by September. This despite commitments to timely access and a no wait-list policy.

(4) There are many children in Manitoba who have aged out of the window for very effective ABA treatment because of a lack of access, and many more are expected to age out because of a lack of available treatment spaces.

(5) Wait-lists and denials of treatment are unacceptable. No child should be denied access to or age out of eligibility for ABA therapy.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Family Services and Labour make funding available to eliminate the current wait-list for ABA services and fund treatment programming for individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder such that there is no wait-list for services.

And this petition is signed by P. Michalski, N. Griffith, I. Rasic and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Reopen Beausejour's Employment Manitoba Office

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

(1) The RM of Brokenhead and the town of Beausejour are growing centres with a combined population of over 8,000.

(2) Employment Manitoba offices provide crucial career counselling, job search and training opportunities for local residents looking to advance their education.

(3) The recent closure of Employment Manitoba's Beausejour office will have negative consequences for the area's population who want to upgrade their skills and employment opportunities.

* (13:50)

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to reopen Beausejour's Employment Manitoba offices.

Signed by C. Schmidt, R. LaCroix, V. Paquette and many other fine Manitobans.

Applied Behaviour Analysis Services

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

(2) The provincial government did not follow its own policy statement on autism services which notes

the importance of early intervention for children with autism.

(3) School learning services has its first ever waiting list which started with two children. The waiting list is projected to keep growing and to be in excess of 20 children by September 2013. Therefore, these children will go through the biggest transition of their lives without receiving ABA services that has helped other children achieve huge gains.

(4) The provincial government has adapted a policy to eliminate ABA services in schools by grade 5 despite the fact that these children have been diagnosed with autism which still requires therapy. These children are being denied necessary ABA services that will allow them access to the same educational opportunities as any other Manitoban.

(5) Waiting lists and denials of treatment are unacceptable. No child should be denied access to or eliminated from eligibility for ABA services if their need still exists.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Education consider making funding available to eliminate the current waiting list for ABA school-age services and fund ABA services for individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

This is signed by G. Neustaeter, D. Free, D. Friesen and many, many other Manitobans.

Provincial Sales Tax Increase—Referendum

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

(1) 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 not to raise the PST without holding a provincial referendum.

This petition is signed by D. Penner, H. Sveinson, D. Ross and many more fine Manitobans.

Applied Behaviour Analysis Services

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

And the background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

(3) The preschool waiting list for ABA services has reached its highest level ever with at least 56 children waiting for services. That number is expected to exceed 70 children by September 2013 despite commitments to reduce the waiting list and provide timely access to services.

(4) The provincial government policy of eliminating ABA services in schools by grade 5 has caused many children in Manitoba to age out of the window for this very effective ABA treatment because of a lack of access. Many more children are expected to age out because of a lack of available treatment spaces.

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Family Services and Labour consider making funding available to address the current waiting list for ABA services.

And this petition is signed by R. Rempel, E. Koe, Y. Malcohm and many, many others.

Provincial Sales Tax Increase— Cross-Border Shopping

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

(1) Manitoba has a thriving and competitive retail environment in communities near its borders, including Bowsman, Swan River, Minitonas, Benito, Roblin, Russell, Binscarth, St-Lazare, Birtle, Elkhorn, Virden, Melita, Waskada, Boissevain, Deloraine, Cartwright, Pilot Mound, Crystal City, Manitou, Morden, Winkler, Plum Coulee, Altona, Gretna, Emerson, Morris, Killarney, Sprague, Vita, Reston, Pierson, Miniota, McAuley, St. Malo, Tilston, Foxwarren and many others.

(2) Both the Saskatchewan PST rate and the North Dakota retail sales tax rate are 5 per cent, and the Minnesota retail sales tax rate is 6 per cent.

(3) The retail sales tax rate is 40 per cent cheaper in North Dakota and Saskatchewan and 25 per cent cheaper in Minnesota as compared to Manitoba.

(4) The differential in tax rates creates a disincentive for Manitoba consumers to shop locally to purchase their goods and services.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To acknowledge that the increase in the PST will significantly encourage cross-border shopping and put additional strain on retail sectors, especially those businesses located close to the Manitoba provincial borders.

And (2), to urge the provincial government to reverse its PST increase to ensure Manitoba consumers can shop affordably in Manitoba and support local businesses.

And this petition is signed by L. Doell, D. Hildebrand and H. Wiebe and many, many more fine Manitobans.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Canada Summer Games

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister responsible for Sport): Yes, I have a statement for the House. *[interjection]* I've kept a copy.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba has always supported and believes in our young athletes. We have a proud history in sport and our history is equally as bright.

From August 2nd to 17th, Team Manitoba athletes competed in a variety of sports at the Canada Summer Games in Sherbrooke, Québec. Since their inception in 1967, the Canada Games have become the largest multi-sport event in our country, alternating between winter and summer games. The competition is held every two years and is a pinnacle of national sport development for young athletes.

Team Manitoba consisted of outstanding young athletes from across this province. Our Manitoba athletes brought home 35 medals: three gold medals, 11 silver and 21 bronze, breaking our 1989 record of 29 medals won during the competition. Our athletes also brought home this year's Centennial Cup which is awarded to the most improved province or territory.

*(14:00)

Paddler Hannah Guttormson had the honour of being Manitoba's flag bearer at the closing ceremonies on Saturday night, and all our athletes have made our province very proud. Their drive, dedication and discipline are preparing them to become our country's next great national, international and Olympic athletes.

Mr. Speaker, three years ago, our government committed \$1 million to a high-performance athlete development initiative to support our Team Manitoba athletes to achieve their goals and objectives. The original intent was to build towards a best-ever showing at the 2017 Canada Summer Games that we will be hosting here in Winnipeg. We are delighted to see, through Sport Manitoba's dedicated efforts, these best results ever. We've set the bar high for 2017, but it is a challenge that everyone is eager to build upon.

The 2017 games are also a significant milestone because they mark the 50th anniversary of the Canada Games and Canada's 150th birthday. We look forward to welcoming athletes from across Canada to our province, showing them all the wonderful things that Manitoba has to offer.

On behalf of the province of Manitoba, I congratulate all the athletes who represented Manitoba at the Canada Summer Games. Your passion is an inspiration to people across our province and we wish you every success in your future endeavours.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I want to thank the minister for his statement today.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank the Leader of the Opposition who had the opportunity to attend some of the events in the Canada Summer Games in Sherbrooke, Québec, last week. And I understand that he—his family had some exciting news, as well, where his daughter brought home the—and her team brought home a bronze medal. So we want to just congratulate their team and, indeed, to congratulate all athletes who participated in the Canada Summer Games.

Mr. Speaker, the last couple of weeks, from August 2nd to 17th, 4,200 young and up-and-coming athletes gathered and participated at the Canada Summer Games in Sherbrooke, Québec, the nation's largest sporting event. Team Manitoba was represented by 353 athletes, 80 coaches and managers, and 21 mission staff and competed in a total of 17 different sports ranging from basketball and baseball to swimming and fencing, including competition in Paralympic and Special Olympics events. We want to congratulate all of those athletes who worked—who participated in the events.

Hard work and perseverance paid off and Team Manitoba received a total of 35 medals representing an all-time high for the team. In fact, Team Manitoba was also the recipient of the Centennial Cup, awarded to the team showing the most improvement. So congratulations to the Manitoba team.

On behalf of our PC caucus, we overwhelmingly extend our congratulations to the dedication and perseverance of all the 353 Manitoban athletes. We would also like to recognize the efforts of all of the families, the coaches, the staff and volunteers which ensured that the 2013 Canada Games was such a tremendous success.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Mr. Gerrard: I want to join others in the Chamber in congratulating all our athletes. I think it's just fantastic how well the Manitoba team did bringing home medals, but also a lot of pride to Manitoba. And I think it's important to make sure that we recognize those who didn't necessarily get medals,

but went there and did well and competed and were part of the overall Manitoba effort.

I want to extend a special congratulations to the daughter of the Leader of the Opposition and her achievements and the bronze medal. I think that that's a—particularly, a noteworthy event.

I also want to comment that, you know, there were others who contributed from Manitoba, and I give you one example. At the—last Friday it was unveiled—a huge mural, and that mural was done by many, many artists across all of Canada. I think there were something like 250 individual plaques. And I understand there were five artists from Manitoba, one of whom was my wife, Naomi. So she has been following the games and with particular attention.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Any further ministerial statements? Seeing none, we'll move on with guests prior to oral questions.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: And I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today Michele Kisil, the daughter, and Lauren and Serah Kisil, who are the granddaughters, of the honourable member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Bipole III—West-Side Route Approval Pre-Construction Rate Increases

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): We're pretty fortunate here to have the fine work of these fine young people who serve as pages. I understand that it's Lauren Hadaller's last day today and she's heading down to Ottawa to further her education. I know we'd like to show our thanks to Lauren for her great work this summer.

The government's plan to Americanize Manitoba Hydro, Mr. Speaker, shows a disrespect, I think, for the democratic rights of Manitobans. It's a continuation of their previous undemocratic actions in eliminating the right of Manitobans to vote in a referendum on the PST hike and their millions of dollars of new fees and taxes that they promised they wouldn't impose on Manitobans.

But when they force Manitoba Hydro to go down the long and winding road on the west side to the tune of a billion dollars of additional cost, that's pretty bad. But when the arrogance continues and they embark on line construction prior to the approval of the dams which make the line necessary, that goes too far. Now, the NDP has no right to build without public approval. This is a public utility, after all, and this disrespects Manitobans.

I'd like the Premier to outline in total how much the government has imposed in costs on hydro ratepayers prior to the approval of the bipole west line.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, first of all, the bipole is needed for domestic security of supply over and above any additional generating capacity that may be built for export purposes. As the member will recall, in 1997, about 19 towers were taken out of service, and all the power that comes through Manitoba, 70 per cent of which comes down through the Interlake, was put at risk, which puts the Manitoba economy at risk at—and a one-week shutdown in the Manitoba economy is worth more than a billion dollars.

So the bipole decision is for security of domestic supply. That licence has been issued. Preparatory work was done to find a solution that would allow the Manitoba economy to resist the kinds of things that happened in 1997. And the government of the day, when the member of the—opposite was in that government, did nothing about that. We are securing the energy future of Manitoba.

Bipole III—West-Side Route Public Input

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): We don't get security with insecurity, Mr. Speaker. Why would they put the line down tornado and ice storm alley if security was the issue?

I remind the Premier that Manitoba Hydro is a public utility and therefore is owned by the public. And the public deserves more than hucksterism from ministers on the other side. We know the Conservation Minister has already said he's not interested in looking at alternatives. The Premier, eight years ago, directed Manitoba Hydro to use the west route and the Hydro Minister himself has accused Manitobans of—who are opposed to this concept that the government's advancing, of sabotaging our children's future. And he's including in that criticism, of course, former NDP ministers

like Tim Sale, Len Evans, former premier like Ed Schreyer. That's not listening. That's hucksterism. That's dictating, just like the PST hike is dictating.

This Premier has not listened to a single person who's testified at committee on the PST hike. Will he admit that he's not listening to Manitobans on the bipole west route either?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition unfortunately makes a very poor choice of language. He will know that when we discussed this in Estimates, that Hydro itself commissioned its own report on line alternatives for the additional bipole. And that additional report said that there's a matter of public policy that needs to be addressed by the government.

The broader matter of public policy was not only the location of the line but the implications for the reputation of Manitoba Hydro of where the line was sited and what the impact might be on the ability of Manitoba Hydro to conclude profitable export sales.

After due regard and feedback from the government, Hydro board made its decision to proceed down the west side in order to secure supply of hydro for the domestic economy, prepare Manitoba Hydro for a future of exports of up to \$29 billion over the next 30 years, and to ensure the reputation of Manitoba Hydro remains intact after it had been severely threatened by the flooding that had occurred in the 1970s.

* (14:10)

Mr. Pallister: He's trying to dress up a pig, Mr. Speaker. The dictating to Manitoba Hydro is hardly feedback. He dictated to Manitoba Hydro when he was the Hydro minister. He's dictating to Manitoba Hydro right now, and the only thing worse than a Premier that won't listen is a Premier who pretends to be listening but still is not listening. And the Public Utilities Board report that is supposed to be—we're awaiting it—is useless if it's not going to get listened to. The needs-for-and-alternatives-to analysis is useless if, in fact, it's not looking at alternatives. And the Premier's refusal to allow consideration of other routes besides his preferred first-and-only option means that this is a long, winding waste of a billion dollars, and the government is set in its ways.

But this is no longer the era of the divine right of kings. The Premier has no right to dictate the bipole route, no right to subvert the process of consultation and no right to proceed with bipole or any other

project, including the PST, unless he stops dictating and starts to listen.

Will he commit today to start to listen to Manitobans on these important issues?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the very discussion we're having in the Legislature was also a discussion in 2007 election. It was an additional discussion in the 2011 election. Manitobans gave the government a mandate to proceed in a responsible way, to support the decision of Manitoba Hydro to build the bipole down the west side. The need-for-alternatives study with—is with respect to the future generation capacity of the province.

But the member is right. This is no longer the divine-right-of-kings era. That was the era when the members opposite, without any study, without any foresight, was promising to do the opposite: privatize the Manitoba Telephone System. That was the era when they didn't do any studies, when they went ahead and privatized things, put money in the pockets of their friends and made Manitobans worse off with among the highest rates in North America.

Now, Mr. Speaker, that era is over. We are proceeding with a government Crown-owned utility to serve the people of Manitoba to ensure it has a good reputation and to keep the hydro rates the lowest in North America.

Manitoba Hydro—Bipole III NFAT Review Request

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): Well, Mr. Speaker, Manitobans did not give the NDP a mandate to raise the PST. And on top of many other Manitobans—Ed Schreyer, Tim Sale, Len Evans, Hydro officials past and present, environmental groups—on top of all of them, today we have Will Braun of the interchurch council, and he says, and I quote: The review will not include Bipole III even though the new dams would be useless without it.

I would like to ask this government: Why will they not include the Bipole III line in the NFAT study?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): I'm not sure if members opposite totally understand the issue, but Bipole III is there as a result of security needs, Mr. Speaker. The two lines that run to the Interlake, as the Premier indicated earlier in his response, are subject—and, in fact, there was a serious problem that occurred in 1997 and 19 of the lines

were knocked out. That cut off 90 per cent of the power—pardon me, 70 per cent of the power that goes to Manitobans.

We cannot afford that risk, and one of the ways to prevent that risk is to have a separate and divided line that goes down that provides alternatives to power. That is something that's a necessity. It's not something that's subject to, rather, it's something that Hydro must have and must have as soon as possible to protect the lives of Manitobans, to protect our economy and protect the hydro system.

Mr. Schuler: And, Mr. Speaker, why is the root of that line also not part of the NFAT study? Because right now, where the government is planning to put the line actually puts Manitobans at jeopardy. It should be going down the east side. Why is that not something that the NFAT study can look at? In fact, Will Braun, interchurch council, amongst many other Manitobans, says: The government is not obligated to heed PUB recommendations. It can issue licences regardless of the outcome of hearings. At least with the NFAT, there would be some place where Manitobans could go and debate this issue.

Why won't they do the right thing and put it with the NFAT?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, everyone's entitled to their opinion. The member for St. Paul has said that he—that it's right to go down the east side. That's the same member that didn't want a line through his own constituency. It is very true. No one really wants a transmission line in their backyard. It's not like an oil pipeline. It's not like a road, but no one wants it in their backyard. After meeting with 88 communities, after reviewing it with communities on the east side, after looking at all of the options, a decision was made to go down the west side. There was an election held in 2007 where it was probably the No. 1 issue on the doorstep and it was endorsed. It was a major issue on the doorstep of 2011; it was endorsed. And now—now that we're building it, now that it has a licence, the members want to go back to the past again and stop hydro.

Mr. Speaker: I want to caution all honourable members about a respectful workplace again.

During answers to questions that are posed by the honourable member for St. Paul, I'm hearing members of the Assembly heckling across the floor. I'm going to draw a tighter line on this, and I'm indicating this to the House. I want to be able to hear the questions posed by the members of the

Assembly, and I want to hear the answers. And if I have—see or observe or hear members, in any way, adding comments that make it difficult for me, I'm going to interject at that point, and I'm going to point out the error of the ways of the individual that's involved.

So I'm asking for the co-operation of all members of the House. Please give me the courtesy of hearing both the questions and the answers.

Mr. Schuler: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and the minister is right; a decision was made to go down the west side, but it was made by the NDP Cabinet.

And what Manitobans are calling on, including Ed Schreyer, Tim Sale, Len Evans, Hydro officials past and present, environmental groups and even the interchurch council, what they're asking for is that the Bipole III decision be put to the NFAT. The concern they have is, and I quote: And the public review process is only kicking in once the hydro plan has been allowed to gain virtual unstoppable momentum.

I ask the minister: Will he please put the Bipole III in with the NFAT and let it proceed there?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, in a democracy, the ultimate expression—the ultimate expression—of consent or non-consent is an election campaign. We've had two election campaigns where the location of bipole should be was front and centre, both those campaigns. And both times, the public said, overwhelmingly, they agreed with the bipole on the west side.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, environmental groups, First Nations in that area, people who are customers—people, people across the country, know that the best route and the best way to get it built, to build security for Manitobans, is to have a line go down the already quite developed west side, as opposed to the east side. It has got the only contiguous boreal forest and can be conceived as part of the lungs of these—of this planet.

Cattle Enhancement Council Levy Update

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, the creation of the Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council levy was announced on March 28th, 2006. Since it began collecting the levy, MCEC has collected \$8 million from cattle producers. That's not counting the Province's matching dollars. In the last

2012 MCEC report, it showed just over \$535,000 in net assets, compared to \$7.6 million in 2011.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Agriculture: Where did all the money go? Clearly, they have mismanaged millions of cattle producers' dollars.

Hon. Stan Struthers (Acting Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Well, Mr. Speaker, this government has worked very hard with the Cattle Enhancement Council, with ranchers in the province, with businesses who are interested in improving the slaughter capacity for the Manitoba rancher. And I think we all understand what a benefit that would be for the cattle rancher in Manitoba.

Rather than spending money to ship cattle outside of our province, we should be doing what we can to increase that slaughter capacity here in Manitoba. We have been working towards that. We've had some successes in terms of that, and we've been looking for co-operation with partners, such as the federal government, to make sure that that is accomplished.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, further, there's an empty parking lot sitting in St. Boniface where there was supposed to be a packing plant, a plant promised over and over again. MCEC admits their 2012 report, which came out in April, that the provincial government recently indicated they will not provide a loan guarantee.

Mr. Speaker, this move is from the same government that chastised the federal government in 2009 when MCEC business plan went on to go to promote HyLife if—instead of the poorly conceived MCEC report.

So I ask the Minister of Agriculture once again: What has happened to the money? We have nothing to show for our producers' millions and millions of dollars.

* (14:20)

Mr. Struthers: Well, Mr. Speaker, this side of the House has been onside, whether it's slaughtering on the pig side or slaughtering on the cattle side. We think that that's an important activity here in Manitoba. It provides jobs; it provides opportunities closer to market for our producers, whether they be—whatever they happen to grow: pigs, cattle, otherwise.

It is a fact that the federal government did back off of its \$10-million commitment towards a

slaughter facility here in our province. That was very disappointing. We need and we want to continue to work towards a federally inspected plant. It was too bad that the member's cousins in Ottawa didn't share that goal.

Mr. Eichler: What's disappointing is the government has nothing to show for the \$8 million taken from these producers. Shame on this government.

Whether the MCEC is not being able to come up with a viable business plan—unfortunately, numerous slaughter plants attempted since the BSE hit in 2003 have failed. This NDP government has spent millions of dollars, producer dollars, nothing to show for it. This government since BSE is not a success—succeeded at anything to increase slaughter capacity, except to spend producer dollars.

How long is this government, Mr. Speaker, going to allow MCEC to collect a levy without being able to generate a viable business plan for those producers to increase slaughter capacity in the province of Manitoba? When's he going to table it?

Mr. Struthers: Well, Mr. Speaker, I was Agriculture Minister when the federal government backed off of its commitment of \$10 million. I remember conversations that I had with Gerry Ritz, the federal Ag Minister.

One thing that I did note that was missing was a little support from members opposite. Instead of standing up for the Manitoba rancher, they decided to protect their cousins in Ottawa, and now they get up and complain about it today in the House.

This side of the government is going to continue to work with any and all who are interested in building a federally inspected plant and improving slaughter capacity in our province on behalf of our producers. We're going to continue to do that despite the lack of enthusiasm from members opposite.

CentrePort Canada Expropriation Timeline

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): It was the minister—the current Minister of Agriculture that said that the MCEC's business plan was not viable, and that was just recently.

Manitoba's economy is suffering under this tax-and-spend NDP. New business for this province, like Facebook, have tried to set up shop at CentrePort, only to find their government's mismanagement and red tape at every turn. Even worse, they drive businesses away with their illegal PST hike.

Basic infrastructure projects like water, sewer and road access are not being completed. Rather than negotiate, this government is bullying landowners into—in expropriating land.

Mr. Speaker, can this spenDP government provide a 'timelan'—timeline as to when expropriations will be complete, and when will CentrePort be up and running?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to point out that in the month of June, 7,300 jobs in Manitoba were added; that made us the second lowest unemployment in the country. That brought our unemployment rate down to 5 per cent, as I said, second lowest in the country. So I'm not sure where the member for Emerson gets off being all doom and gloom about the economy in Manitoba.

That's exactly why we invest in things like roads and bridges and schools and hospitals. That's why we invest in the highways network that provides for tourism that gets farmers' stuff to market—products to market. We're investing in flood protection that helps Manitoba families. That's all positive for our economy, and yet every step of the way members opposite complain about it.

Mr. Graydon: Well, Mr. Speaker, second in June, third in July; it's going the wrong way.

Only two settlements have been made to acquire the land needed to grow CentrePort and there are 29 that have yet to reach a fair settlement. This government is withholding rightful compensation from affected landowners in its attempt to extend the process and force them to accept less than a fair deal.

While this spenDP worries about their own political future with a \$200,000 vote tax, landowners are victims of the government bullying, mismanagement and incompetence.

Mr. Speaker, when will this government stop bullying landowners, offer them a fair deal and start managing CentrePort in a way that supports the growth of Manitoba's economy?

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Local Government): One of Manitoba's most proudest moments is when you had the Business Council of Manitoba, you had chambers of commerce in Manitoba, you had the Manitoba Federation of Labour, you had many, many business community leaders coming behind CentrePort, Mr. Speaker, and, grudgingly, members opposite, you know, kept

complaining about CentrePort and all the value of CentrePort, and then dragging, kicking and screaming, we finally brought them into the new century to support CentrePort.

And having discussions across the country the value of CentrePort, including Prime Minister Harper, should be congratulated, and the federal government for supporting CentrePort and taking a look at the future of Manitoba and, indeed, the bright future of where CentrePort is going.

Mr. Speaker, the RM of Rosser, the City of Winnipeg, the Province of Manitoba and the federal government are all working co-operatively to make sure CentrePort is—

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

Mr. Graydon: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've no doubt that there are people working co-operatively. It's just the Manitoba government that's not. This government has mismanaged CentrePort from day one. Only two of the 31 landowners have settled with the government. The NDP's track record when it comes to business is clear, and financial mismanagement is one of the NDP's staples.

Of the \$7.1 million budgeted, only \$1.7 million is left in their expropriation budget. This will not cover the purchase of the 29 parcels of land left.

Mr. Speaker, where has the money gone?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, Mr. Speaker, we made a tremendous investment in CentrePort, the federal government included with the Province and also the City of Winnipeg as well as the RM of Rosser, working co-operatively together to ensure that, indeed, this inland port becomes a shining star, a jewel in the centre of Canada and will be able to provide many, many, many jobs going forward. Indeed, working with many communities, we're looking at water sources for CentrePort, an alternative water source, and we continue to work closely with those municipalities affected, indeed, with those particular issues.

But, Mr. Speaker, when I refer to people working co-operatively in the past, we indeed anticipate a lot of co-operation moving forward, whether it's working with the railways, the airport, trucking—

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

Student Financial Aid Information System Project Costs

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Advanced Education (Ms. Selby) was so thrilled and excited to get questions the other day that she neglected to give any answers, so I'm going to give her another chance.

The Student Financial Aid Information System was originally tendered to be in place by June 2011 at an estimated cost of \$14.5 million. Phase II, the largest part of the system, is still not in place.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: When will phase II be completed and at what cost?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Acting Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy): Perhaps just the member would like to share the inside story about what—how difficult it was this morning when he practised that in front of the mirror, given that Conservatives, in fact, that killed bursaries, they had no need for an information system. I don't know why they have an interest.

Mr. Briese: Mr. Speaker, in 2012 Estimates the minister admitted the new cost would be \$15.3 million, an increase of \$800,000, and still no phase II. The minister stated, we do have an online system in place. But she didn't admit it is the old system used before she spent the \$15.3 million.

My question is simple: Where did the \$15.3 million go?

Mr. Mackintosh: And I think Manitoba students want to know what happened to their bursaries. Where did they go in the 1990s, Mr. Speaker?

But the phase I was indeed completed. It was completed on time and within budget, and it's my understanding that the proper due diligence is taking place to ensure that phase II is done in the public interest.

Mr. Briese: Phase I was a minimal part of it, a very small part of the whole overall budget. It was less than, I was told, \$300,000 out of the 15.3 that's supposedly been spent. Mr. Speaker, the minister also said she had been doing a review of the system to see what parts are functional. So she spent \$15.3 million or more to come up with a system that has to be reviewed for functionality before incorporation. Wouldn't functionality be part of the terms of reference?

I ask the minister again: Why are you using the old system four years later and where did the \$15.3 million go?

* (14:30)

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, the member wants to know what happened, Mr. Speaker, to investments in post-secondary education. I understand that, and I trust my note is right, but it says that we've invested \$220 million more in grants and scholarships to students.

And I do understand from the note, and I'm sure it's right, that the opposition, in fact, got rid of the bursaries. But here's something—it must be wrong—it must be wrong—it says here that the Conservatives actually cut and froze funding to universities for five straight years. I don't know. I got to get this straightened out. I can't—it just can't be right.

Horse Racing Industry Government Intention

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): Mr. Speaker, the NDP have completely mismanaged the horse-racing file. The NDP seem like they want to destroy the industry here in Manitoba. There was no commitment to the standardbred industry this year until the very last minute. Only through hard work and determination was the industry themselves able to save the circuit and, indeed, the season.

Mr. Speaker, I ask: Why has this NDP government failed to provide a long-term plan for the standardbred industry here in Manitoba?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, in amongst all the misinformation the members opposite put on the record, they forget to mention that the change we made to The Pari-Mutuel Levy Act actually dedicates 15 per cent to the very horse-racing, rural harness-racing circuit that the member across the way feigns interest in.

We're very committed to making sure that the harness-racing industry remains strong in some of the very communities that that member represents, despite his best efforts to make sure that that horse-racing industry does not exist. The commitment on this side of the House to harness racing is clear. The commitment of this side of the House to move \$5 million from horse racing generally into hospitals remains just as consistent.

Great Western Harness Circuit Payment Timeline

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): Well, Mr. Speaker, actions really speak louder than words. This government withheld funding for the Manitoba Great Western Harness Racing Circuit until almost halfway into the season. Only after questioning in the House on July 29th were funds sent to the Manitoba Horse Racing Commission. Now it appears the NDP are telling the Manitoba Horse Racing Commission to withhold payments to the Manitoba great western circuit. As a result of this direction, people operating the circuit, the horsemen, the horse owners, the horse trainers and drivers, are not getting paid in a timely fashion.

I'm going to ask the minister: Why is the NDP allowing this to happen?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Well, Mr. Speaker, he can get up and in a phony way pat himself on the back for those things if he likes, but the fact of the matter is that this side of the government made a decision to hive off 15 per cent from The Pari-Mutuel Levy Act, totally within our rights, to dedicate towards the harness-racing circuit in rural Manitoba.

We've been very clear, right from the beginning, right from January, backed up in our budget, exactly what it is that we had planned in terms of horse racing in Manitoba. We're very, very glad that the Assiniboia Downs is working with a partner so that they can ensure their viability, and we think in the long run that will make the horse-racing industry viable in our province.

Horse Racing Industry Government Intention

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): Mr. Speaker, if the minister reads his own legislation, it says that 15 per cent goes back into general revenue. We know the NDP are really keen on cutting their cheques to their own political party. They've completely mismanaged the horse-racing file in Manitoba. They have not developed a long term for the industry, and they have effectively driven people out of the industry and out of the province. It now appears they are gerrymandering the financial process to make it even more difficult for people in the industry.

I think the fact of the matter is: Why do the NDP hate horse racing in Manitoba?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Why do Conservatives in this House hate health care, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker, governing is about setting priorities. We believe that we need to redirect money that was going into horse-racing purses, from that into health care, which is what we are moving forward with. We're doing that because we 'prioritize' health care. We have priorities on this side of the House that don't include putting money into horse-racing purses. Having said that, we still have support there for Assiniboia Downs as part of our overall package of support. It has been reduced. That is clear, and we think that it makes better sense to put that money into hospitals and schools in this province.

Food Safety—Meat Inspections Provincial Responsibility

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, in 2011, the federal government announced that it would transfer the responsibility of food inspections at provincial meat-packing plants to the provincial government so that the Province would be fully responsible for meat inspections as of January the 1st, 2014. It's been five years since the listeriosis crisis, which resulted in shaking consumer confidence in food inspections. Now, Manitobans, at this point, are very concerned that food safety and meat inspections should never be compromised.

I ask the governments: What measures is being taken to ensure that meat inspection is done properly and that our food is safe after this transition?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the federal government has decided to vacate this field; the Province will be moving in to provide this service. Up to 16 inspectors will be made available through the provincial government to do this service, to ensure the food supply is secure with respect to these types of inspections.

Provincial Food Inspectors Training

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I understand that the provincial government has recently hired inspectors. Now, this is almost two years after the initial announcement by the federal government and just four and a half months left before the Canadian Food Inspection Agency walks away from the 33 provincially registered meat-packing plants.

I would ask: What assurances does the Premier have that the inspectors who've just been hired will be adequately trained to ensure that the food safety and the health of Manitoba consumers are satisfactorily looked after as of January the 1st and that the proper processes are in place to ensure safe food inspections?

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

There has been a transition process in place since last June between the federal and the provincial government. They've been working diligently to ensure a smooth transition. New inspectors have been hired, two new supervisors have been hired. They expect to go live in January of the next coming year and the smooth transition should allow a continuous protection of the public interest with respect to safe meats in Manitoba.

Mr. Gerrard: The federal government meat inspectors undergo on-the-job training, I understand, for three years. This is to meet the responsibility of ensuring that the meat-processing facilities operate to the highest standards. Now, the federal government, of course, already reduced that timeline by providing the provincial government only two years' notice of the transition. And now, with only four and a half months left, I understand that the newly hired inspectors have had less than two weeks of on-the-job training so far.

With the training time for new provincial inspectors falling so far short of the federal standard, I ask: What is the Premier's plan to ensure the meat-slaughter plants have the support infrastructure necessary to ensure to Manitoba consumers that our meat will be safe?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the new inspectors will be shadowing the existing inspectors. They'll be learning from them the procedures that they undertake to ensure safety. It goes without saying that the first responsibility for safety of the meat supply is for the plants and the producers that use those plants themselves and then, of course, the inspectors ensure that the regulations and the laws are properly enforced. They will be learning from the existing inspectors. They will be ready to go because they've had the opportunity to go through a smooth transition with them and we fully expect that the meat system will be safe because we believe the people that are in these plants want to provide a safe product to the public and the inspections will ensure that that happens.

Manito Ahbee Festival Government Support

Ms. Melanie Wight (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, as we all know, the festival season is in full swing all across Manitoba and we're all enjoying the wonderful opportunities that brings for us to celebrate and enjoy the dancing and the music and the eating. And one new addition to the summer schedule is moving from its usual dates in the fall; it's the Manito Ahbee Festival which celebrates Aboriginal music and art and culture.

And I would like to ask the Minister for Culture, Heritage and Tourism to give us an update on that festival.

Hon. Flor Marcelino (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism): Mr. Speaker, and I thank my colleague for the question, Manitoba is proud to support the Manito Ahbee Festival and is committed to supporting our diverse Aboriginal arts community. This festival is an opportunity to bring Manitobans together to learn, share and enjoy our rich indigenous cultures, heritage and traditions.

* (14:40)

Mr. Speaker, last night, the Aboriginal People's Choice Music Awards, APCMA, was held. It is the only awards program of its type in Canada that recognizes top First Nations, Metis and Inuit artists. I would like to thank both the Premier and the Deputy Premier and Minister for Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Robinson) for joining me at the APCMA and presenting awards.

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

QuickCare Clinic (Selkirk) Nurse Practitioner Care

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): Well, Mr. Speaker, there's a sign on the door today at the QuickCare Clinic in Selkirk. The sign indicates that there will be no nurse practitioner at the clinic today, or tomorrow, or the next day. And when this QuickCare clinic opened, the minister said its purpose was to provide an alternative to the ER for people with less serious illnesses. The minister promised the community that the Selkirk QuickCare Clinic would be staffed by nurse practitioners. Well, it's not happening.

Mr. Speaker, there are no nurse practitioners today at the Selkirk QuickCare Clinic. Where are

these people supposed to go to get the medical help they need?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question and, indeed, there are some personal circumstances that are not permitting a nurse practitioner to be available at that QuickCare clinic. Consequently, those doors are closed.

I can tell the member, however, that since that clinic opened, it has been functioning at its fullest capacity over 90 per cent of the time, contrary to the information brought to the House. Of course, we want that to be a hundred per cent of the time, in addition to the fact that we want all Manitobans to have access to a family doctor. In addition, Mr. Speaker, we want Manitobans to have access to a range of primary care options, which is why we opened them in the first place.

Mr. Friesen: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister says she wants access. The only problem is it's not happening.

Mr. Speaker, today I want to table a photo taken that shows that the Selkirk QuickCare Clinic is operating without practitioners. In fact, the photo shows that regular hours of operation aren't even posted in the window of the clinic because those hours are so erratic.

Mr. Speaker, in July this minister launched a flashy \$150,000 campaign, saying Manitobans should go to QuickCare clinics to get appropriate care. There's administrative staff there, but there is no care being provided. In fact, one constituent from Selkirk contacted us and said why is the NDP wasting our health-care dollars like this.

Mr. Speaker, my question for the minister: Why isn't she ensuring that the clinic isn't a waste?

Ms. Oswald: I'm not sure I heard the member opposite clearly, but it sounded a little to me like once again the Conservatives in Manitoba are saying investing in nurses is a waste of time.

I want to make clear to members opposite that we created the option of the QuickCare clinic who, by the way, are exceptionally well run by nurse practitioners and registered nurses, Mr. Speaker, to provide excellent care for those individuals that want to get care immediately, but they know full well that an emergency room is not an appropriate place for them. We are going to be opening more QuickCare clinics. We're going to be building our human

infrastructure of nurse practitioners and nurses. We're going to continue to provide these options, as we have in Selkirk over 90 per cent of the time since that clinic has been opened.

I just don't know why the members are always so negative about such things.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Morden-Winkler, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if I heard the minister correctly, but she referred to personal circumstances at Selkirk. Then could she explain why, just down the road, it turns out that the Steinbach QuickCare Clinic is also experiencing shortages and closures due to lack of staff? Today at Steinbach there's only a nurse practitioner available after 5 p.m.

So the minister's message to Manitobans is clear: go to the ER before 5 p.m., even though it's not the most appropriate place to get care, because there's no other option. No wonder the Conference Board of Canada rates us dead last when it comes to ER use for conditions that you could seek care for elsewhere.

Why has the minister so badly bungled this situation when it comes to ensuring that QuickCare clinics are operating for the purpose they were intended, so Manitobans could get appropriate care?

Ms. Oswald: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think what I heard the member opposite say is in Steinbach, if your child gets ill after your regular doctor's office closes, presumably around 5 p.m., you're going to be able to go to the QuickCare Clinic in Steinbach, which you were never able to do before.

I find this curious strange, really, Mr. Speaker, coming from the people that thought excellent health care access here in the city of Winnipeg, for example, was to close emergency rooms in all of our community hospitals overnight, to close Misericordia's ER altogether and develop a sinister plan to close Seven Oaks ER, which, of course, never happened thanks to the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak), might I add.

The members opposite do not have the first clue about providing greater access. They are about cuts.

Applied Behaviour Analysis Treatment Access to Services

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): Mr. Speaker, prior to the 2011 election, the NDP had committed to eliminate wait-lists for children with

autism trying to access ABA services. Deflecting from this broken promise, the minister has spoken to increases in outreach services and also to supporting restructuring. None of those—neither of those things were being implemented by this minister.

Will the minister stop deflecting her responsibility and start respecting autism children and their families by actually committing to address the ABA services wait-list today, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Family Services and Labour): Well, the autism outreach services that we speak of, which are very important to many families, are supported by this government. They are in this budget, a budget which members opposite voted against. We will continue to work with the clinicians and the families on how we can better provide for families who have a diagnosis of autism.

But I want to tell the members again that what they might want to consider doing is have a discussion in their caucus about how their plan to cut half a billion dollars from services like ABA would help those families. They should take some time and have that discussion in their caucus.

We'll continue to work with those families to invest in those services that kids depend on.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired. Time for—

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Folklorama Wrap-Up

Ms. Melanie Wight (Burrows): I rise to recognize the end of another successful chapter in Manitoba's summer festival season.

This Saturday, Folklorama wrapped up two wonderful weeks of showcasing Manitoba's diversity for yet another year. This year's Folklorama was incredible. Over the course of two weeks I visited 44 pavilions, and I'm sad to say the festival's over.

From India to Portugal, to Ethiopia, to the Philippines, I have had a chance to explore a myriad of cultures representing five continents, Mr. Speaker. Only at the largest and longest running multicultural festival in the world can you travel in Chile, Romania and Israel all in one night.

Whether you go for the delicious cuisine, lively dancing or beautiful melodies, Folklorama really does have something for everyone. Visitors leave

every pavilion with a better understanding of a different culture and a lasting excitement to learn more. Folklorama showcases so much of what makes Manitoba an outstanding place to live and visit: appreciation of diversity, celebration of cultures, strong community, active volunteerism and collective understanding.

I had an opportunity to connect with many people at the festival, both from within my constituency and beyond. These ties that Folklorama helps forge within and between communities are part of what will continue to strengthen our province.

Over 20,000 volunteers and festival organizers make this top-notch event the success that it is today, and I cannot commend them enough. Mr. Speaker, I invite all members to join me in congratulating all those who participated in making this year's Folklorama an experience to remember. I look forward to seeing many of you again at the pavilions next year.

Thank you.

Canada Summer Games

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the last couple of weeks from August 2nd to 17th we saw 4,200 young athletes, up-and-coming athletes, gathering and participating at the Canada Summer Games in Sherbrooke. It's the nation's largest sports event and it has a long history in our country.

The first competition was held in our centennial year in Québec City under the motto Unity through Sport. And the way has been paved for what is now Canada's largest multi-sport competition for young athletes. Rotating between summer and winter games each two years, it's an important way to foster the development of our future athletes to the highest of their abilities.

These games are excellent for increasing the economic benefits to the regions that host them. The games in Sherbrooke generated millions of dollars, created many jobs locally and built local infrastructure that will have a lasting advantage for young athletes in the future. And they also leave a lasting impact on all those who are involved, creating incredible memories that'll stay with them for a lifetime.

We should be very proud and also very anxious to repeat or better our performance in these past games when we host the games in 2017. Our team

was represented by 353 athletes, 80 coaches and managers, 21 mission staff, and we competed in 17 different sports ranging from my beloved basketball and baseball to swimming, fencing. And there was competition also in Paralympic and Special Olympic events.

And we all want to, I'm sure, congratulate all those involved. Our hard work and perseverance paid off, as the minister noted earlier, in a record medal haul and also in us being awarded, as a province, the Centennial Cup, which is awarded to the team—provincial team—that shows the greatest improvement.

* (14:50)

I also want to acknowledge the important work of Ted Bigelow, the chef de mission for Manitoba, and his many support-team participants in the games, as well as the families, the coaches, the volunteers, the officials, who all were a part of this incredible event. And I also, of course, want to congratulate the athletes for Team Manitoba and all athletes in the games for their dedication and participation in these games.

Through these games, wonderful opportunities for personal growth and an unforgettable experience for all will result, Mr. Speaker. Congratulations to Team Manitoba and to the organizer of this year's Canada Summer Games.

India Day Celebrations

Ms. Erna Braun (Rossmere): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I and my colleagues joined members of the Indo-Canadian community at the Legislature to 'celebrate'—celebrate and pay tribute to the 67th anniversary of India's independence. Since gaining independence, India has become the world's largest democracies—democracy with one of the fastest growing economies. With over 1.2 billion people, India is home to many different religions, languages and diverse a—cultures.

Canada and India share a commitment to democracy and to increasing the quality of life for our citizens. Through our partnerships we can continue to work together to encourage philosophies of non-violence and social justice globally. These philosophies were embodied by Mahatma Gandhi, who spent decades leading the non-violent Indian independence movement. Last week at The Forks, a street near the Canadian Museum for Human Rights was named Mahatma Gandhi Way in honour of this dedicated and inspirational leader.

Manitoba is a culturally diverse and prosperous province because of many of the contributions that people of Indian descent have made to our social fabric. In sharing their cultural heritage and traditions with us, this community works to promote a shared understanding and appreciation of Manitoba's cultural diversity.

Yesterday's India Day was filled with joy and excitement. We celebrated by singing both the Indian and Canadian national anthems, which was followed by greetings from Manitoba's Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism (Ms. Melnick), MP Kevin Lamoureux and City Councillor Brian Mayes. The program's master of ceremonies was Shipra Verma, and Hardev Sandhu, president of India Association of Manitoba, brought a welcome greeting.

Special presentations included recognizing Suvira Parashar with the Unsung Hero Award, and Divya Modha sang a very moving rendition of a patriotic song. This was followed by a number of wonderful dances and cultural performances representing the different regions in India.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all members of the Legislative Assembly to join me in thanking the India Association of Manitoba and Aman Rai, chair of the celebrations committee, for organizing and contributing their time and efforts to making India Day possible, and offering congratulations on the 67th anniversary—

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

Hanover Agricultural Fair

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): I rise today to congratulate the organizers, volunteers and sponsors of this year's Hanover Agricultural Fair, which wrapped up yesterday. The festival ran from August 15th to the 18th, and I'm happy to report that it was a great success.

The Hanover Ag Fair, which was first held in 1945—since then, visitors to the ag fair have enjoyed the festival's cheerful hospitality, great food, wholesome entertainment and relaxing atmosphere. This year's fair was no exception, included some new events for visitors to enjoy like the Redneck Night at the Fair, where visitors were encouraged to dress up in their favourite redneck apparel. The demolition derby returned for Thursday night and boasted some exciting new talents. Another old favourite, Bullarama, also returned but was moved to Friday

and, as a result, improved the quality of its entries and attracted strong competition with 20 new riders ready to tackle the challenging event.

The fair also featured some of the best musical entertainment in Manitoba. Canadian Country Music Awards' new artist of the year, Kira Isabella, graced the Fairway Ford Mainstage Saturday night, along with some of Manitoba's favourite local country artists: Kim Erickson, Jason Petric, Frannie Klein and Jason Kirkness.

From the bucking bulls to the crashing cars, from the musical mainstage to the petting zoo—another children's event—each day at the festival had something for everyone in the family to enjoy. One of the most popular events, the parade, was greater than ever. Both the MLA for Steinbach and myself had the great privilege of being part of that parade.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the volunteers, sponsors and organizers who were on hand to provide a great Hanover Agricultural Fair experience. Their months of hard work paid off in an exceptional fashion, and I look forward to seeing what next year's organizing committee and festival have in store for us. Thank you.

Opaskwayak Indian Days

Mr. Frank Whitehead (The Pas): Well, Mr. Speaker, today I rise to commend my community of Opaskwayak Cree Nation for organizing and hosting the 48th annual Opaskwayak Indian Days. This year's Indian Days was a huge success designed for the whole family in mind. Events ranged from traditional to contemporary throughout the week. Our community participated in many events, including the world-famous canoe classic, foot races that brought in athletes from across northern Manitoba. There was also a youth and adult outdoors survival skills competition, soccer tournaments, a horseshoe tournament, as well as amateur and professional singing, and a golf tournament.

Reggie Leach and Dave Schultz were special guests at this particular event. Reggie Leach can handle a golf club with great proficiency, as he did with a hockey stick. And Dave Schultz—well, he was a gentleman throughout the tournament. We enjoyed their company. The participating athletes from Opaskwayak and from surrounding communities were celebrities this past week. They won prizes and displayed that, with hard work, anything is possible for them. The community honoured and applauded the winners for the great events. There were even a

few special guests from England in attendance this week. They have ties to the community of OCN. One of the guests is a great—is a granddaughter of a World War II veteran from OCN.

To end the week of excitement, there was a well-attended social, which included a concert headlined by the Canadian country music artist Crystal Shawanda. Mr. Speaker, it was incredible to see so many community members come together in celebration this week. Together they were able to share our histories and build our collective future.

Mr. Speaker, this annual summer celebration is made possible by many sponsors. Various organizations, agencies and local businesses gave generously to this major event. The passion and excitement I saw in this community was truly inspiring. I thank everybody for participating.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: Seeing no grievances—

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, would you proceed with report stage on Bill 20, please.

REPORT STAGE AMENDMENTS

Mr. Speaker: We will now proceed with the report stage of Bill 20, The Manitoba Building and Renewal Funding and Fiscal Management Act (Various Acts Amended).

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

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire),

THAT Bill 20 be amended by adding the following after Clause 2(2):

2(2.1) The following is added after section 1.2 and before the centred heading that follows it:

Study of impact of increased sales tax on inflation
1.3(1) Within one year after this section is enacted, the minister must cause an independent study to be conducted for the purpose of determining the impact of the increase in the general sales tax rate on the rate of inflation in the province.

Tabling study in Assembly

1.3(2) The minister must table a copy of the study in the Assembly within 15 days after receiving it if the Assembly is sitting or, if it is not, within 15 days after the next sitting begins.

Publishing study on government website

1.3(3) The minister must publish the study on a government website.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable member for Brandon West, seconded by the honourable member for Arthur-Virden,

THAT Bill 20 be amended by adding the following after Clause 2(2):

2(2.1) The following is added after section—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense? Dispense. The amendment is in order.

* (15:00)

Mr. Helwer: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this—rise to speak to this amendment.

And, again, when we look at the types of things that will come out of this sales tax increase, it's very important that we see the impact that that will have on the Manitoba economy. And I would encourage the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) to look at this amendment because it is very important to see what is going to happen when, in fact, this PST increase as it—has already been charged, but when the legality of it comes forward, because we do want to see and reflect on what the impact has been on the economy. And I think it should be very important for the government to see that.

We know that we look back on what has happened in the economy, and Manitoba has often had the highest inflation rate in Canada and the biggest month-to-month price increases along that route. In fact, we look back to March and it was by far the highest annual rate in the country, more than double the Canadian rate. So what we see causing some of those things are higher taxes at the gas pump, and, indeed, increases to the sales tax, will, of course, have an impact on that.

But I think it's important that the government step back and reflect and see what it is having an impact on here in terms of raising the PST by 14.3 per cent. We know that it's not just gasoline that it's going to have an impact on, Mr. Speaker, but many things that Manitobans pay for every day and,

indeed, many things that people that cannot afford to pay for will have an impact on that. We—the people that have the least money to spend in Manitoba are the ones that are going to have the biggest effect on their budget. So, when you take that 14 per cent increase impacting on those vulnerable Manitobans, they will have to make some serious decisions as we heard in committee. The individuals that came to speak at committee were very clear that they have a fixed amount of money and this government is taking more of it away. So, when they go and they make some difficult decisions—the individuals are going to have to make the difficult decisions. The government's taken some of their money away for gasoline or for other areas—insurance.

So they have less money to spend when they go to the grocery store. So, when they go to the grocery store with that less money, they have to make some very, very difficult decisions. Are they going to buy less of the more nutritious, more expensive food, or are they going to have to make the decision to buy some bulk and less expensive food that may not be as good for themselves or for their children? So what this government is doing is forcing the individuals to make tough decisions. Those tough decisions, we heard at committee, will make life very difficult for many, many Manitobans.

The government doesn't make tough decisions; they just force Manitobans to pay more and then they threaten them. They said if you don't do this, you're going to see your health care falter, you're going to see your roads crumble. Well, Mr. Speaker, which Manitoban that has been in an emergency room waiting for hours on end can honestly say that their experience now, with all these tax increases, is better than it was a dozen years ago? I don't think you'll find too many. They were going to do away with hallway medicine with a very small investment—hasn't happened. It's gone to highway medicine. Now you're waiting in the waiting rooms and if the doctor's not there, well, then the nurse is going to help you dial 911. But what do we do when we go into a nurse—a quick 'clare'-care clinic, and there are no practitioners there? I guess you got to dial 1-911 by yourself if, indeed, it is that—it is, indeed, that severe. So this is what the government's doing;; they're downloading things onto Manitobans.

And then we get into infrastructure in the roads, Mr. Speaker. You know, I've spoken in this House before about my—some of my past careers, and one of them I hauled a lot of fertilizer up and down No. 10 Highway. And I've watched as it's

deteriorated, and as it's deteriorated we just see the impact that the lack of investment from this government has had on that highway. And that's just a microcosm of Manitoba because there are many other highways in Manitoba that are having the same problems and we see the deterioration because this government does not put the money into repair and maintenance of those roads. And they say, well, it's because of the winter.

Okay, so let's look next door in Saskatchewan. They have more roads, more miles of highway than we have. They're able to maintain them. Let's look in North Dakota; again, similar climate, doesn't just change at the border. They're able to maintain their highways. So there's something different in the mix here, and I would posit that it is the NDP government that is different in the mix here and that has caused the damage to the infrastructure in our province. So I would encourage the government to look at this.

I think it's very important to look at what the impact of this sales tax increase is on the Manitoba economy. We see other people that will do some analysis of the economy, and if the government doesn't like that analysis, well, then they're just going to—they say that it's not relevant, as in what they say in their terms. But we look back to things of a multiplier effect, and when we look at the effect of government expenditures on a GDP, in fact, it's not very good. When we look at expenditures of government money on GDP, studies time and again have shown that for every dollar that the government spends they only get a 63-cent return in the GDP. So that's poorer than most—all industries. It's much better to leave the money in the pockets of the private sector. It's much better to leave the pockets in the pockets of Manitoba individuals for them to spend the money, because the multiplier effect is much higher. So is that a good thing, Mr. Speaker, to have a higher multiplier effect?

Well, yes, economists would say so, because there's more money in the economy, there's more money going around, there's more investment. As we heard just recently again, the oil sector in southwestern Manitoba, the vibrancy of that sector, it's hard to keep up with everything there. It's hard to keep up with staff; it's hard to keep up with the trucks on the road; it's hard to find people to do the work. And that's all private sector. But what is hampering it is the investment, and, in this 'regar'-case, it is public-sector investment with Hydro. Hydro needs to put some money in there to make sure that electricity runs to the bump checks. But,

you know, they're behind, and, indeed, they're very far behind, so much so that it causes a detrimental drag on the economy there.

So we see these things that are happening in Manitoba, sometimes in spite of the government. The government didn't will the oil to be there. I know that one of the government ministers talked about oil mines, but I've never seen an oil mine. I never heard of an oil mine until just the last month or so in this House, Mr. Speaker, and I don't think that they really exist, but perhaps the government minister can show us one. But the impact on the southwest sector in the oil sector on Manitoba can be quite large if the government paid some attention to it, because we know that the roads are deteriorating there. I've talked and—about No. 10 Highway, and that is a critical north-south road in that area. That's—the oil sector, though, is all to the west of No. 10 Highway, and we see the impact of all the trucks on the roads; we see the impact of the people that are working on the roads. And this government's failure to protect that infrastructure and invest in it has been a detrimental effect not just on that sector of the province but on all of Manitoba.

So I would encourage the government to conduct a study of this nature and, of course, to release it, because we do often see government studies that are conducted and then, when the government doesn't like parts of it, well, they'll just release little pieces. And then you have to go through, you know, FIPPA to try to get some more information, and you'll get, as I understand, some information that's redacted, perhaps something that might be a totally blank page. We have seen some government studies have been released with several blank pages, and obviously the government is trying to protect something there. It may be detrimental to them, it may be related to human resources, but if we don't see any information then we really don't know.

And these are studies that the government has paid for, the public expects to see, and certainly in that—in this case, it is a study that we are—encourage the government to look at, encourage the government to conduct to see what the impact is going to be of their policies, and, indeed, this increase in the sales tax, what impact that is going to have on Manitoba, and then to bring it to the House so that they can show Manitobans. And if it is a good thing, then I'm sure the government will talk about it. If it's not so good, hmm, we might not hear about it. Wouldn't that be a surprise, Mr. Speaker?

So I encourage the minister to review this amendment and to give it some serious consideration. Thank you.

*(15:10)

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): I'm pleased to stand and put a few words on the record in—about the amendment brought forward by the member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer). I do—I just want to quickly, maybe with his permission, fix up a couple of things that he put on the record.

First of all, I think he knows the PST does not apply to gasoline. So, when the member's worried about the inflationary impact of the PST on gas, Mr. Speaker, I want him to know that it does not apply to gas.

In defence of the member for Brandon West, he may have been thinking of his colleague for the Midland who came to Public Accounts and asked the Deputy Minister of Finance how a harmonized sales tax—the HST, the federal HST—would play out. And that, of course, would apply to gasoline. That, of course, would be an increase to the pump price that you see as you drive up to put gas into your vehicle. They—Conservatives across the way were asking how that would be implemented and that, in fact, would have—every year as the gas price went up would have an inflationary creep in terms of the gas tax. But I want him to know that the PST itself is not applied to the—to gasoline, as he asserted just earlier. I'm sure the member opposite would—next time he has the chance will correct the record on that.

The other thing that I want him to think about, he mentioned in his speech that he spent a lot of years hauling fertilizer over the Manitoba highway network. I applaud him for doing that work, Mr. Speaker. But I think he knows that since 1999 we have quadrupled the budget that is dedicated towards investments in those very highways that he was hauling the fertilizer over. So there's no doubting the kind of commitment this government has to improving infrastructure. As a matter of fact, the one-cent-on-the-dollar increase that we're proposing to the PST—every dollar of that increase will go towards Manitoba infrastructure, will go towards building those highways that the member for Brandon West hauled fertilizer over and they'll go towards the bridges that connect the highways that he hauled the fertilizer over. They'll go towards hospitals and schools and those things that Manitoba families depend on us to deliver upon.

The other thing that I noted in his speech was that he talked a lot about the private sector and how much better the private sector is at producing that multiplier effect. I think the fact or the assertion that the member for Brandon West put on the table here today was that when we in the public sector spend a dollar we get a multiplier effect of 63 cents, and his claim is that the private sector can do better than that. Well, maybe that explains why it is that they would privatize health care in Manitoba then.

That's not the position that we take on this side of the House. I don't know if his numbers are correct in terms of how the private sector would increase the multiplier effect in health care when they move to that two-tier, private, for-profit system of health care that the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Pallister) has expounded in this House. But that could explain why this multiplier effect—this could explain why they would take that position.

Mr. Speaker, to put some facts on the table in terms of the PST and inflation, well, first of all, Manitoba is one the most affordable provinces in which to live, in which to raise a family, in which to start and grow a business out—in the whole country. The—we live in a province that has one of the lowest unemployment rates, the third lowest unemployment rate in the whole nation and we have a situation where our average wages are growing faster than the rate of inflation. So the wages, the take-home wages of the people that we represent is outpacing the growth of inflation already. So I just want members opposite to think about that.

In Manitoba we have average weekly earnings that grow an average of 1 per cent faster than inflation, and that's not just recent. That's over the last five years. We're outpacing inflation with our average weekly earnings by 1 per cent, and that means that real income growth in Manitoba is higher than in the rest of the country. That's a good thing. That's something we should be striving for in this province and that's something that this government is committed to maintaining.

We can introduce somebody new. Well, I've already spoke about Paul Ferley with the Royal Bank of Canada and some of the things that he has said. When it came to inflation, Mr. Ferley said that they're not flagging any major problem in Manitoba, and the reason he's not flagging a problem in Manitoba is that our growth in Manitoba continues to be above average.

So, when you look at inflation, you need to look at the amount of growth. We know that this side of the House, since 1999, has almost doubled the size of our economy. We've gone from a \$32-billion GDP to a \$62-billion GDP. That is a good thing again, Mr. Speaker. That's growth, that's confidence, that's the private and public sectors doing their parts to grow our Manitoba economy.

But more than anything, Mr. Speaker, we need to consider the affordability of this province and measures that we take as government to make sure that we maintain that affordability advantage over every other province in the country. I think that's very important—so important that we've introduced legislation that guarantees that Manitoba enjoy the lowest Autopac rates—the bundle of Autopac rates, hydro rates and home heating costs. We bundle that together, we put it out there for the rest of the world to see so that we can compare with other provinces. Deloitte & Touche say that we—that, in fact, last year we did have the lowest bundle of any other province, and not by—it wasn't a photo finish at the finish line between us and British Columbia. British Columbia did finish second in that, but we far outstripped BC and every other province when it came to that bundle of things that are so important to Manitoba families and to Manitoba businesses.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would encourage members opposite not to look at these issues very narrowly. I would encourage them to look at the big picture. I would encourage them to look at all of the facts, not cherry-pick the ones that they want; not to make assertions that can't be backed up in—by fact. I would encourage them to look at the whole picture, and I think they would see that overall, especially when you consider the fact that a one-cent-on-the-dollar increase that we're doing, invested through law to build roads and bridges and schools and hospitals, will create a stimulus in our economy. It'll create a hundred thousand jobs over the 10 years, which is the life span of the one-cent-on-the-dollar increase. That, too, will have positive impacts on our economy. It'll keep our unemployment rates low, our employment rates solid. It'll provide more household incomes to be spent in the businesses and in our communities when—in every region of our province.

So, Mr. Speaker, it goes without saying that we won't be supporting this amendment that's been brought forward. We need to get on with the work of building our province and building our economy.

So thank you very much for those few minutes.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to have an opportunity to put some comments on the record about this amendment, and I am disappointed to hear that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) doesn't think this amendment is worth looking at, but that's a problem with this government is they often don't want to take advice. We've heard that many times from them and from many third parties out there, where this government really turns a deaf ear to some good advice that comes their way.

But it is interesting what's already happening with inflation in Manitoba since the NDP increased the PST, and according to Stats Canada—and this was as of July—Manitoba had the highest inflation rate in all of Canada. And, Mr. Speaker, we know that when we see a statistic like that, we know that Manitobans are being forced to pay more and more for a number of things because of increased fees and taxes, and we know exactly why that's happening. It's happening because of what the government did last year by expanding the PST into a number of different areas, and we know that there is a significant impact that it is having on people now because of the PST hike that they brought in this year.

* (15:20)

And it's interesting to note, too, that when I asked a question of the minister in July, and my minister—or my question to the minister was, why is he forcing Manitobans to pay for his broken promises and for his poor fiscal management. He actually said, Mr. Speaker, and I quote: Today we learned that Manitoba has some of the strongest retail sales taxes in the whole country. End quote. Well, of course they do. It's because they brought in the PST. That is why they have such high retail sales taxes in Canada.

And I'm thinking that was probably a Freudian slip from the minister, but it actually does point out what Stats Canada was trying to say, and that is Manitobans are being very, very affected by the PST hike and the inflation rate is increasing all the time. It's now become a trend. It's risen twice as quickly in Manitoba as compared to the rest of Canada. So the reason behind that is because of increasing taxes and fees. That's why the inflation rate is going up, and that is not good news for Manitobans. It's the worst in Canada, and right now probably in the vicinity of \$40 million has been taken in by this government since they brought in the illegal PST on July 1st—\$40 million.

Well, of course, the inflation rate is going to go up. We are having to pay more now for just about everything. And, in fact, the—when the Stats Canada report came out in July, the assistant chief economist with RBC in Toronto said, and I quote: "Manitoba inflation really shot up in June and the introduction of the PST increase will probably result in Manitoba continuing to outpace the country."

So, Mr. Speaker, what we're going to see is everything here is going to be costing more. We're going to see a squeeze on Manitobans who have to pay more for taxes and fees, and this does not position Manitoba well at all as a place where the economy is going to be doing well. It's not going to put Manitoba in a position that is going to want to attract people or businesses to want to move here when we see the inflation rate continuing to move up, and it's going to be interesting to see what happens now because it does appear certainly there is a trend in place and that trend, I imagine, is going to go up instead of down.

We know Saskatchewan only has a PST of 5 per cent and we are the highest in western Canada. This will definitely affect a number of people here because what it is showing Manitoba has is a high-tax policy and, Mr. Speaker, Manitobans can't afford a government that makes their lives unaffordable.

You know, certainly, with the PST going up—it's a 14.3 per cent increase in the PST despite the spin from the government and certainly a clear lack of understanding by some members of that side that they don't understand that it actually is a 14.3 per cent. And we heard from many people that came to committee that this is going to hurt the poor. It's going to hurt the working poor. It's going to hurt seniors the most, but this government really seems to not care. They have been deaf to the pleadings of many people that came forward and asked them not to raise the PST because it is going to hurt them.

And I heard in the minister's comments, too, he talked about HST and that's another thing that we have concern about, Mr. Speaker, because this government had said a number of times that they weren't going to bring in the HST and—but we are seeing what they're doing by expanding PST. It's really HST by stealth, but we're concerned when the minister said they weren't going to apply it here in Manitoba, and then after he said that we heard that he was having conversations with the federal government about actually what that might look like

in Manitoba. And so we know what they said about the PST. They promised no PST and then they turned around and they hiked it. Now, you know, we're—we've heard from the Finance Minister a number of times, no HST. Why should we believe him? We know that they were in discussions with the federal government. Is that where they're going next? Is that going to be the next tax hike we see in Manitoba?

And, Mr. Speaker, I'll just conclude my comments and correct something on the record that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) put forward. He talked about the fact that he's so happy that he can be, you know, the Finance Minister within a government that has a publicly funded health-care system—30 per cent of health care in Manitoba is already privately-funded privately, paid for.

And this Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) and this government has—have embraced private clinics. They have multi-million dollar contracts with private clinics. We have the Minister of Health on record saying that they are fully supportive of private clinics delivering care in Manitoba. This government is on record saying that. The Minister of Health has publicly said it. We have it in writing, so I don't know what they're talking about when they fear monger about the Tories going out there and getting into two-tier health care. They're already there, and if it's okay for them, why are they fear mongering when they already have multi-million dollar contracts with private clinics? And it is helping those patients have faster access to care, but the government pays. And, Mr. Speaker, that is all that we have ever, ever promoted, was government payment of care no matter where that care is delivered. And, if it's in a private clinic but it's publicly funded, I don't see how this government thinks that what they're doing is any different than what we have ever talked about.

So they're putting a lot of misinformation on the record, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad we've got the Minister of Health's comments directly on record about this saying that they fully support publicly funded private clinics with their multi-million dollar contracts. So I certainly would urge them to be careful with the words they're choosing.

So I'm disappointed the Minister of Finance didn't support this amendment. I think it would have been a good thing for them to have done that, and I'm just here to say that I think this inflation is going to hit Manitoba harder as we go forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, Mr. Speaker, just to put a few brief comments on the record on this amendment, I think it's well worthwhile for all Manitobans to understand the impact of the sales tax on inflation. The increase in the provincial sales tax from 7 to 8 per cent certainly will have some effect, and it's important for us to know what that overall effect is. This impact is added on to the increase in the provincial sales tax on insurance last year and on a variety of other businesses, and so it is not occurring just in isolation, there is a larger, overall effect of inflation on a number of businesses in particular.

And, as we heard at the presentations at committee stage, the increase in inflation will result not just from the 1 per cent increase from 7 to 8 per cent in the provincial sales tax, but it will also come from the fact that this increase in the provincial sales tax applies to a lot of business inputs. And, when it applies to business inputs and you then have an added 1 per cent sales tax on the product produced by the businesses, that's essentially a tax on tax and that will increase the inflationary impact. So it is something that we should know, and I hope all members will support this amendment. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: House ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House is the amendment to Bill 20.

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 by saying aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

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

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

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

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): On division, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: On division.

Mr. Speaker: We'll now call the next amendment.

Mr. Helwer: I move, seconded by the member for Midland (Mr. Pedersen),

THAT Bill 20 be amended by adding the following after Clause 2:

Reference to the Court of Appeal

*2.1 Immediately after section 2 receives royal assent, the government must refer sections 1 and 2 to The Court of Appeal for an opinion as to whether the sales tax increase enacted by section 2 is valid notwithstanding that no referendum was held under section 10 of **The Balanced Budget, Fiscal Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act.***

* (15:30)

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable member for Brandon West, seconded by the honourable member for Midland (Mr. Pedersen),

THAT Bill 20 be amended by adding the following after Clause 2:

Reference to the Court of Appeal

2.1—dispense?

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

Mr. Helwer: I'm pleased to rise to speak to this amendment which, of course, is—deals with something that Manitobans felt they were protected by. They felt that they were protected by The Balanced Budget, Fiscal Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act. And, indeed, what we have seen over the last several years is the slow degradation of that act by this government. As they found that they weren't being able to follow the guidelines of that act anymore, that it wasn't going to be legal—that their actions were not going to be legal, they would come in and change the act.

Indeed, in this case they are changing the act after the fact, which the government has often said, well, we do this all the time, but it's something that Manitobans, I don't believe, respect. If you have a goal, if you have something that you have in mind that you—you put the process in place before you put your actions, Mr. Speaker, in place. And that's something that Manitobans have come to expect, and it is something that we have not seen reflected in this government because Manitobans really expected and

believed that they were protected from the excesses of government with this act. They believed that Manitobans were protected from a sales tax increase, the lights of which—likes of which this government has brought in this year, a 14.3 per cent increase in provincial sales tax. Manitobans believed that they were protected from that increase because they knew, Manitobans knew that the government had to ask for a vote. The government had to ask for a referendum if they brought in an increase to the PST, as they have proposed here.

So Manitobans felt comfortable. They had this protection in place under this act, and now we see that the government wants to take away that protection after the fact. So it is indeed something that Manitobans are concerned about, and we heard that time and again at committee, Mr. Speaker, not only that Manitobans were upset that the NDP lied to them at the doors, that each and every candidate at the door in the last election lied to Manitobans when they said to Manitobans that the NDP government would not raise the provincial sales tax. That's what everyone that was across the way, there, every NDP candidate went to the door and they told Manitobans that. Now, obviously, we 'seel'—we see that the NDP candidates were lying to Manitobans, and, again, that was part of the problem that Manitobans saw and that people that came and presented at committee. That was one of the things they were concerned about.

Another thing that they were concerned about was the betrayal of the government in this regard in taking away their right to vote. And I think it was significant, Mr. Speaker, when we saw a couple of veterans that came and spoke to committee, veterans that have fought for our right to vote in a democratic nation. And, in fact, I was a little surprised, that I thought that they would be really very upset at just—that they had gone to fight for Canada and that the NDP was taking away some of those rights, and they were, indeed. But, you know, that was, I guess, in their remarks something that they had so believed in what they fought for that they couldn't comprehend that someone might actually want to take away a democratic right to vote. So, yes, they were concerned about that, as were many Manitobans.

And we heard in the previous amendment, Mr. Speaker, the Finance Minister take task with some of my statements about the PST and the impact on gasoline, on inflation. And perhaps the minister doesn't understand the impact of the sales tax on inflation because, even though when we look at what

he's talked about in terms of what is applied in terms of taxes to gasoline, throughout the delivery of that gasoline to stations, throughout everything else and the whole infrastructure of this—the—of delivering gasoline to stations, the pipelines and everything else, provincial sales tax has an impact. Provincial sales tax has an impact on inflation, and all of that factors together in terms of the impact that this will have—the negative impact this will have on the Manitoba economy.

And economy—economists are pretty unified on this, Mr. Speaker, that taxes of this nature are a drag on the economy. We know that there are lots of studies out there on the impact of taxes of this nature on economies not just in Canada but throughout the rest of the world and certainly in Manitoba, and they tend to be negative impacts. Well, not tend to be, they are negative impacts.

And certainly we see those impacts throughout how Manitobans look at this increase when they came and spoke to committee. They're making some tough decisions and they are not happy with this proposal not only that the NDP has to 'increst'—to increase the PST by 14.3 per cent after they have broadened the sales taxes last year to apply to many, many more things that Manitobans never used to pay sales tax on. Not only do they have to pay tax on those items—such as insurance, Mr. Speaker—now they have to pay an increase on that item.

And so they're upset with that and they're upset that they don't get a right to vote on it. Because, as I said, for years they really thought that they were protected, that no government would have the audacity to bring forth a sales tax increase such as this that would be so damaging to the Manitoba economy.

And, you know, we listen to the government talk from day to day, and one day the Manitoba economy is booming, the next day the Manitoba economy is in recession. It must be very interesting to look at their charts. They must go up and down every day, Mr. Speaker. There's no trends, obviously, because they change. Today the economy is in tough shape, they say, so we have to do this, we have to impose a sales tax, we have to increase the sales tax, we have to broaden the sales tax. To pay for what? Well, they say to pay for roads. And again, we don't see the effect of that. The roads are deteriorating. They say, well, to pay for health care. Again, we don't see the effect. You can't access health care in many places in Manitoba. I think the number now is up to

18 emergency rooms that are closed under this NDP government, that were all open when they were elected originally. Very strange. So how is that health care more accessible? I don't understand that.

But those are the things they talk about to try to create fear in Manitobans. There's all kinds of things that they talk about, Mr. Speaker, but Manitobans, they really want to believe that the government is doing the right thing, but, in this case, they don't have that belief.

And if—again, if the government really believed that this tax increase was necessary, if they really believed that they could convince Manitobans that this tax increase was necessary—and convinced them not through fear, Mr. Speaker, but rational discussion, which we don't always see from across the House—if they truly believed that, then they should be able to go out and hold a referendum. They should be able to go out and win that referendum, because if it was in case true—indeed true that the sales tax was necessary as this government proposes, they should be able to convince Manitobans of that. They should be able to go out and ask Manitobans to vote in a referendum. And if that were the case, they would have full confidence that Manitobans would indeed reflect that back to the government and agree with that PST increase. I don't believe Manitobans think that's the case, and indeed we saw in the presentations to Bill 20 it's far from the case.

There were a few people, certainly, that came and spoke to committee that said—that bought the government line that it's necessary for infrastructure. Well, you're running a deficit. We have a lack of investment in infrastructure that hasn't happened under this government, so I don't believe that, Mr. Speaker. I don't believe that they're going to spend the money on infrastructure, and we'll talk about that in another amendment down the road here.

* (15:40)

What they said was going to happen, then, indeed, didn't happen, because they talk about a lot of things, Mr. Speaker, and then we see that it doesn't happen. We see bridges that have not been replaced. We see traffic lights that are on bridges so that only one lane of traffic can proceed at a particular time. It's very antiquated and it's deteriorating and it is causing a drag on the Manitoba economy. So not only will this PST be a drag on the economy, but also the government's lack of investment in the infrastructure has caused a drag on the economy

because we just can't go about and do the things that we need to do to make sure Manitoba is successful.

So I would encourage the government to look at this amendment and make sure that Manitobans have a right to vote. Indeed, I'd like to see that.

Thank you.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, this is one of the amendments that we hoped that the government would pay some significant attention to, because if there was anything out there that has most offended the public, it is the fact that this government is bulldozing through what—with this legislation without actually calling a referendum. And most people out there do not believe that the government has a legal authority to do what it is doing.

So what really the government needs to do and this amendment would allow them to do is to refer sections 1 and 2 to the Court of Appeal for an opinion as to whether the sales tax increase which they are enacting is actually valid.

And there will, Mr. Speaker, have to be some legal opinions obviously looked at with this because when you have current legislation that is still on the books that calls for a referendum and the government overrode that without their legislation—their new legislation—even being passed, it does appear to everybody that this is not a legal process that the government has moved on. And so, certainly, you know, there will be, I'm sure, a lot of legal minds weighing in on this once this bill does actually get passed, and then the legal community will certainly have a chance to have a say in whether or not this is actually legal.

It is very, very surprising at how the NDP chose to handle this because they certainly could have finished gutting the balanced budget law. I mean, they are a majority government, they have been doing that for years. They have been gutting the balanced budget legislation. They have been taking away taxpayer protection all these years. The only thing that they have taken care of and not done anything about is to protect ministerial salaries, and we've seen that.

But, certainly, they have not kept to what Gary Doer had said election after election and that he would balance the budget, and they are on record many times saying that. But what we see now is they've been gutting the balanced budget legislation. They are now putting the final stake in that

legislation and a stake through the heart of taxpayer protection with this legislation.

And we believe that what they have done is not legal. It will be important to see what the courts will say after the fact, because what has happened now is taxpayers feel totally abandoned by this government and they're fearful of this government who went out in the last election and said they weren't going to raise the PST. This government does not trust them anymore and this was their one hope that there was this law in place, taxpayer protection law. Manitobans are now afraid because this Premier (Mr. Selinger) also has not made a firm commitment that he wouldn't raise taxes anymore. So we do have some huge concerns about where this government is going.

And the protection now is taken away from Manitobans, and that really has infuriated many, many people; they're more upset about that aspect of it than they are about the actual increase in the PST, although many are very upset about that, especially the ones who could least afford it. But people are extremely concerned that their right to vote has been denied them, and as some people have said that has been a slight against democracy, that this NDP government stole their vote and people are incensed about that.

So I would wish that maybe this government might have agreement to have a look at this amendment. We would urge them to do that and have a close look it because, inevitably, once this bill moves through and goes through the final processes, there will be a lot of legal eyes looking at it, and we, certainly, are going to, you know, be part of that effort because we do not believe that what the government has done has been in the best interest of the public.

So, you know, instead of this government calling all those people who were worried about this howling coyotes, I hope that they would realize there were many people out there that were so, so concerned about this government and what they felt was undermining of their democracy. And when we heard veterans, particularly, speak about that and feel compelled to come to committee because they fought for democracy, and then they see this government take that away from them, that really is what incensed a lot of people in Manitoba. That's why tens of thousands of people are signing petitions or coming to rallies or writing letters or phoning. People are upset. This was not in Manitoba's best

interest, and I would urge the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) to have a look at this particular amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Speaker, this Minister of Finance and others on this side of the House have taken a look at the amendments that members opposite bring forward. We do consider each and every one of them. We will not be supporting this one, however.

Let's—you know, the member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) did say that there will be a lot of legal minds that will turn their attention to the bill. She's probably correct in that. But, then again, there have been a lot of legal minds that have turned their attention to our budgetary process for decades and decades in this province. There have been legal minds that have turned their attention to the budgetary process of the federal government, and every single provincial government in the country. In Manitoba, this particular budget year, as was the case the first time I stood in this House and presented a budget, as was the case when my predecessors from this side of the House presented budgets dating right back to 1999, and, certainly, this same process has been in place since members opposite presented budgets in this House, Mr. Speaker, and then implemented them and followed through on the process that, essentially, is the same today as it was back then.

Mr. Speaker, the one thing I can guarantee members opposite is that this is not the side of the House that would cut deeply into health care and education. This is not the side of the House who chose, as members opposite did back in the 1990s, to raise the gas tax and then decrease the amount of money going into Manitoba's infrastructure, you know, decrease the amount of money going into roads and bridges. Our side of the House, through The Gas Tax Accountability Act, we said, okay, there's gas tax being taken from the Manitoba motorists; we're going to put that back into Manitoba highways. And that's what we've done year after year.

Mr. Speaker, Manitobans want us to invest in our province, to invest in growing our economy. They don't want us to do a half a billion dollars—over a half a billion dollars' worth of cuts, as the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Pallister) has said he would do if he ever had his chance to run the government.

The sales tax change that we've proposed in Budget 2013 follows established practices, and the courts, very significantly, I think, the courts have upheld the ability of governments to implement revenue measures in this manner, Mr. Speaker. The courts have said so. This is no different than any other budget that's been presented in this province. I was surprised members opposite haven't complained about, you know, about us removing the PST from the sale of bike helmets. We made that effective in May, on May 1st. That took place prior to the legislation being passed. Are they telling us now that we—that we shouldn't put in place an exemption for bike helmets? Is that what they're saying? If they want to be consistent, I suppose they should say, put the PST on bike helmets, if they're going to make that argument in terms of the court appeal.

*(15:50)

Mr. Speaker, the night that I presented the budget here in the Manitoba Legislature, both in 2013 and in 2012, that very night the tobacco tax took effect as of midnight the night that I presented the budget in this very Chamber. Are members opposite telling us now that we shouldn't have put the tax up on the—on tobacco? I was quite proud of the Finance officials working in conjunction with the RCMP who pulled off a bust of a couple of individuals who were bringing contraband tobacco into this province. We've worked to try to catch those bad guys who try those sorts of things. We work to try to reduce the number of teenagers, youths smoking. We try to reduce across the population the smokers, and we understand that that has a positive impact on people and health-care expenditures.

So I'd—I wonder if members opposite, to be consistent in their argument, Mr. Speaker, I wonder if they would not then argue further that we should put PST on bike helmets, that we should stop the 4-cent-a-cigarette increase that Budget 2013 brought forward. To be consistent, I would say they would. We're going to say no to them because we think it's important to take measures—anti-smoking measures and we think it's important to exempt bike helmets, and we did that before the legislation was passed.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's very instructive when we hear members opposite waxing eloquently and threatening court action and all of the things that they do in the House. This was no different than in 1993 when members opposite were in government and they looked to expand the PST. They—you know, they complain about expansions to the PST, which is

exactly what they did when they were in government. The difference, I would suggest, is what they expanded the PST to include.

What did they do back in 1993? Well, the Finance Minister for the Conservatives under Gary Filmon, right alongside the current member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Pallister), the Leader of the Opposition, they decided they would expand the PST to include such items as kids' clothing, feminine hygiene supplies, school supplies, baby supplies, safety clothing and safety equipment. This cost consumers \$48 million. They didn't do a referendum. They didn't worry about if they were going to end up in court or not. They didn't under—they didn't analyze the impact on seniors. They didn't analyze the impact on inflation. They didn't do any of that in 1993. Oh no, Mr. Speaker, they just came along and expanded that to include baby supplies and safety equipment, hygiene—feminine hygiene supplies.

And you know what the kicker is here? Not only were those mean-spirited, the kicker is they used the same process that we use—that we have today—that we employ today here—the same budgetary process, the same budgetary procedure, the same budgetary timetable as what existed then and now. Mr. Speaker, they expanded to include all those items in the 1993 budget which was delivered on April 6th, 1993. The taxes were raised on May 1st, 1993, and the enabling legislation which is at the crux of the Tory argument—the enabling legislation did not receive royal assent until three months later on July 27th, 1993. So the Finance Minister—the Conservative Finance Minister of the day followed the process. In came the budget on the 6th of April, tax was raised on May 1st and the enabling legislation was put in place on July 27th, just like we're doing with this.

You know, the other day, Mr. Speaker, I said the Conservatives were being hypocritical on another issue. At least they're being consistent, because they're hypocritical again. We won't be voting for this amendment.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): Well, Mr. Speaker, and it was certainly an interesting history lesson listening to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) talking about the—raising the PST prior to the balanced budget legislation even being passed—fiscal management even being passed. So, again, the comparison is not valid, and this particular amendment actually talks about going to the Court of Appeal. I thought that would appeal to the Minister

of Finance because he's got a dozen cases or so on the books right now, so this—he could probably get a bulk discount from his lawyers when he goes to contest this. So—[interjection]—so, you know, well, hey, you know the Minister of Finance says, I don't know lawyers. Well, I know a couple, but I've never been—had this many cases against me before, so I can't speak from the experience that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) is speaking from.

So, you know—and he talks about the 2012 budget, 2013 budget—anybody who can be proud of bringing in the largest tax increases in Manitoba's history—oh, pardon me, in the last 25 years—this government actually makes the Howard Pawley government of the 1980s look like a bunch of misers. Like, these guys—these guys can spend money like it's water, and it just—and there's—and they have no compunction about it, about spending taxpayers' money, about increasing taxes. In spite of all these tax increases we've had in the raising of fees and tax increase last year and the tax—the PST increase this year, they're still running deficits. You're still running a \$500-million deficit. You're still borrowing \$2 billion-plus each and every year. There's no end to the amount of money that these—this government will spend, and it's all borrowed money. Every time they stand up and talk about spending money, that's borrowed money. Every time they go out there and cut a ribbon, which they're taking away from future generations—they're taking the ribbons away from those future generations—they're spending that money with borrowed money.

And, in fact, just the other day when the Minister of Local Government (Mr. Lemieux) was standing up and announcing another splash pad, I thought, now, isn't that interesting, announcing a splash pad. Did they ever stop to think that maybe they should spend some money on where that water goes from the splash pad? Instead of dumping millions and millions of litres into the Red River into the—into Lake Winnipeg, maybe they should put some into fixing the sewer system instead of building the splash pads. But, no, no, no, no, it wouldn't be very attractive, I guess, down in that sewer hole, cutting a ribbon down there. Nobody would notice and nobody would want to go down there and take the pictures of them. Even the 192 communicators would have trouble getting down there to take pictures of that.

But, no, instead this government is quite content to raise the PST, to raise fees—\$5 million a week is

what it's costing Manitobans with this 14.2 per cent increase in the PST—\$5 million a week. That's coming out of each and every Manitoban's pockets. Whether it's a family, whether it's a business, whether it's a senior, they don't care, it's money in their pocket. Not only do they take \$5 million a week out of their pockets of Manitobans, they turn around and they put \$5,000 back in their own pockets from a vote tax. Instead of going out and asking for money and raising money the good old-fashioned way, no, no, they're too lazy or too afraid to go to the doors because the last time they were at the doors they— they promised not to raise taxes, so I can see why they're a little hesitant to go to those same doors now. But they—instead of going out and raising their own money, they are not content at all to go out and work for money for their own taxpaying—for their own fundraising, now they want to tax the Manitobans for—to raise money for their party.

They've broadened the PST. They've increased fees. They've increased the PST. There's no end to what this government will do. In fact, now they're even going to hear—they're going to introduce a death tax—man, as if it isn't enough to tax everybody when they're living, now they're going to go and tax you when they're dead. It's just—it's disgusting what this government will stoop to. They continue to talk about how government grows economy. In every major economy around the world it's not government that grows the economy, it's taxpaying people, it's businesses, it's seniors, it's kids running a lemonade stand that grow the economy.

* (16:00)

It's not the government that grows the economy, but these—this government does not understand that. They refuse to rein in their spending. This—there's not a revenue problem. They've certainly raised the revenues, but this government has a spending problem and they continue to 'spend'—spend money at record levels. They continue to grow the debt. They continue to run deficits. This should not—this is not necessary in a province like Manitoba, and like a previous speaker, the member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer) was mentioning that they continue to cut ribbons at the expense of our future generations. And it—they don't need to be doing this. They should rein in their spending.

Take a look at this amendment. If this—this amendment says after whenever Bill 20 passes and after it receives royal assent, take it to the Court of Appeal to see if this illegal tax rise on the PST is in

fact illegal. If they're so confident that it's not illegal, then, by all means, then they will have won and away they go. But take it to the Court of Appeal. Let the courts decide whether this illegal tax rise is indeed legal and from there let's move on from there. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House is the amendment to Bill 20.

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, please signify by saying aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye

Mr. Speaker: All those opposed to the amendment, please signify by saying nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

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

Mr. Goertzen: On division.

Mr. Speaker: On division.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: We'll now call the next amendment.

Mr. Helwer: I move, seconded by the member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon),

THAT Bill 20 be amended in Clause 3 as follows:

*(a) in the proposed subsection 67.3(1) of **The Financial Administration Act**, by striking out "and" at the end of subclause (a)(i),—and—adding "and" at the end of the subclause (a)(ii) and adding the following after subclause (a)(ii):*

*(iii) the total amount collected from vehicle registrations for the fiscal year, as authorized by the regulations made under clause 331(3)(a) of **The Highway Traffic Act**;*

*(b) by replacing the proposed subsection 67.3(4) of **The Financial Administration Act** with the following:*

Excess infrastructure funding revenue

67.3(4) If an amount is reported under clause(1)(c) as excess infrastructure funding revenue – excluding the amount collected from vehicle registrations that is reported as infrastructure funding revenue under subclause (1)(a)(iii) – the government's estimates of expenditure for the next four fiscal years must include infrastructure expenditures referred to in clause (1)(b) that exceed, in total, its estimated infrastructure funding revenue – excluding the amount reporting–reported under subclause (1)(a)(iii) – for those years by the same amount.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable member for Brandon West, seconded by the honourable member for Emerson,

THAT Bill 20 be amended in Clause 3—dispense?

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

During the reading of that there was one small oversight, and I'm wondering if it's the pleasure of the House to consider the amendment as was circulated in the House? *[Agreed]*

THAT Bill 20 be amended in Clause 3 as follows:

*(a) in the proposed subsection 67.3(1) of **The Financial Administration Act**, by striking out "and" at the end of subclause (a)(i), adding "and" at the end of the subclause (a)(ii) and adding the following after subclause (a)(ii):*

*(iii) the total amount collected from vehicle registrations for the fiscal year, as authorized by the regulations made under clause 331(3)(a) of **The Highway Traffic Act**;*

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amount reported under subclause (1)(a)(iii) – for those years by the same amount.

The amendment is in order.

Mr. Helwer: Too many numbers in that one quote, one area, I think. But, anyway, I am pleased to rise to speak to this amendment and it is, indeed, as an amendment that I believe the government obviously should consider.

Last year we did see vehicle registration fees raised by \$35, a substantial increase from this government and an impact on ratepayers of Manitoba Public Insurance, and an impact on them that does not go into their insurance. That \$35 is collected by MPI, additional \$35, and remitted directly to the government coffers in general revenues, and there was a promise at that time—but we know this government's promises are suspect—that that increase in fees, some 220 per cent—it was guaranteed that those fees, just like any gas tax increases, would be put into roads and highways—promised. But strangely enough, the revenue didn't get there. Isn't that surprising? And we can obviously see that, as I said, driving around Manitoba, that roads are deteriorating.

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

And, indeed, as I left Brandon this morning, there were come—some cones that they were going to start working on Victoria Avenue—finally—because that was voted as the worst road in Manitoba by Manitobans, worse than any other highway in Manitoba. And it's the responsibility of this government of course to maintain that highway.

And we have seen it deteriorate over the last number of years and, of course, finally they're embarrassed to the point where they have to, I believe the minister's words were, refresh Victoria Avenue. So I asked people in the industry, what does refresh mean to you when you're talking about highways and infrastructure? And they said it could mean a lot of things.

I did see the government's approach to refreshing highways when they had the little patching machine out there, if that is indeed refreshing—a refreshment of the highway. They put, you know, a little bit of asphalt in the hole, they put a little bit of oil there, then—and then they spray some gravel in there so that section of the road is refreshed. So we'll wait and see what they do to Victoria Avenue.

We know that what they really need to do is not only strip off the asphalt—they are sections of the road that need to be rebuilt, as we see areas elsewhere somewhat being rebuilt, but certainly Victoria Avenue does need areas of it being—to be rebuilt. And who knows how long it's going to take, but I'm told that it was going to start this morning.

And that will be refreshing, if that indeed does occur, because it is a major through fare—through fare for Brandon. There is a lot of industry, there is a lot of retail on that major portion of road through Brandon and, of course, their businesses will be impacted as they have already been impacted, because what you saw in Brandon, Mr. Deputy Speaker, was people no longer drove along Victoria Avenue. They would take alternate routes because it wasn't worth your car driving along Victoria Avenue, you might damage it and then you had to deal with MPI. And things like this rate increase didn't go to fixing roads, it's not going to go fix your car either, so you had to deal with that.

So they would go onto other roads; they would go onto Rosser Avenue, they would go onto Park Avenue and they would go onto Richmond, and you saw the traffic building on those roads as well. And, indeed, my constituency office is just off 18th and you often access it off of Rosser, and there were times that I had to wait for many, many minutes—several minutes—10, 15 minutes to make that turn into my office, because people weren't going on Victoria; they'd go down to Rosser and then they'd hit the light to turn onto 18th Street. So you'd get a few cars go through, you'd wait for the red light again, some more cars would go through, you wait again and more—so, that was happening.

And Victoria Avenue was built as the access onto 18th Street because it has the turning lights; it has the infrastructure there. But this government is driving people onto other roads and that shouldn't be surprising.

So what we're looking at in this clause is making sure that when the government makes a promise, that they have to follow up on that promise. Wouldn't that be a shock to Manitobans, if a promise made by this NDP government actually occurred? Because what happened in the last election? Let me think back; each and every NDP candidate that went to the door, when they were asked—or even if when they weren't asked—they said this NDP government will not raise provincial sales tax.

I think that the Premier (Mr. Selinger) even used a particular word that—let me think now. I'm trying to think what the word was. It was foolish, ludicrous—ridiculous; that would be the word. So apparently that's a magical word—word, because it made the promise go away. Because—what have we seen? Has the PST been increased?

* (16:10)

Some Honourable Members: Nonsense.

Mr. Helwer: Nonsense? That was the word? Okay, nonsense.

But those words, apparently, they don't mean much to this government because what happened? They promised they weren't going to raise the PST. They brought in a budget that raised it 14.3 per cent. Just like in this budget, the previous years they brought in this vehicle registration fee, increased it by \$35, promised it would go into infrastructure. Didn't happen.

So I guess that's what Manitobans have now come to expect from this government. Government says it's going to do this, doesn't do it. We're going to refresh Victoria Avenue in Brandon. Okay, we waited all summer. We knew the contracts weren't let. When's this going to happen? Apparently, it's supposed to happen today. And I've asked them what the—what does refresh mean? Can't get an answer to that, so we'll wait and see. And we know they have experimented with Victoria Avenue before. They used an experimental patch. That patch failed.

And they should experiment; that's good—that's good. You want to see experimentation, see if there's a better way to do things, maybe less expensive, maybe it'll last longer. So this patch failed and they just left it. Did they re-patch it? No. It failed, and it was supposed to last X number of years, two years. Didn't fix it. It sat there. Eventually, they carved it up again and put something else in there, again, that area because it was so much damage done to the roadbed has caused problems for anything they've done there.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

So this is something that we look at this clause, it will—in fact, what it'll do is ask the government to do what it said it would do. It said it was going to put this money, these vehicle registration fees in—into infrastructure, into capital infrastructure budget. Didn't happen. So all we're doing them to—all we're

doing is asking them to do what they said they would do, what they promised to Manitobans.

And I know that will be a change for this government. I know it'll be a questionable area that they will have trouble following up on their promises, not ignoring them, not pretending that they're followed up like some of the other promises—like, I'm thinking of one in particular. It was hallway medicine. I remember that promise resonated with Canadians. They were going to get rid of hallway medicine. Instead, they just changed the way that they counted the beds.

An Honourable Member: How long was that going to take?

Mr. Helwer: That was going to take just a few days, I think, that they were going to fix. So—[interjection] Six months. Okay. They were going to fix that with, you know, \$20 million. Is that what they talked about? Fifteen million dollars, they were going to fix that. So now we've gone from hallway medicine to highway medicine where we send birth 'monders' down the road to Saskatchewan.

And, again, I know that the government will have trouble with this amendment, but I encourage them to look at it and review it and, in fact, to vote for it. It would maybe give some Manitobans faith in politicians again, and that could probably be a good thing.

I would encourage the Finance Minister to look at it and say, yes, you know, he wants to give Manitobans confidence in politicians' abilities again because that is certainly lacking in this government. And I would encourage them to pass this amendment and to follow up on it and make sure it happens.

Mr. Struthers: The member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer)—I want to thank him for putting this 'resolu'—this amendment forward, and it does give us all an opportunity to talk a little bit about the Province's finances and this Bill 20. He says that, you know, we—it's our opportunity to instill in people some faith in politicians again and, you know, that's a laudable goal by every single one of us from both sides of the House.

I would suggest that when the—at, like, about an hour, hour and a half, maybe, before I presented the budget, when the member for Brandon West stood and said we want some action on Victoria Avenue in Brandon—within an hour and a half when I stood and said you're going to get action on Victoria Avenue in Brandon, you think that would qualify as instilling

some confidence, at least in the people of the fine city of Brandon, Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, you would—what I can tell the member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer) very clearly is that every dollar that we raise through this one-cent-on-the-dollar increase to the PST will go into projects just like the Victoria Avenue project that he has been asking about. Every dollar, Mr. Speaker.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I was—I couldn't help but note, right at the beginning of the speech, the member for Brandon West said—made a statement about numbers, and so many numbers, and there was a minor mistake with one of the numbers, and that's fine. It was an honest mistake on the part of the member for Brandon West.

But I don't intend to complicate things, but I would like to add some more numbers to the debate. I'm going to add the big one first: 622 million—\$622 million represents a record investment in Manitoba roads and highways alone this year, \$622 million. That's another number, you know, put it on the table for the member for Brandon West. He can think about that number. He can think about how his projects in Brandon fit into that number. I think he understands, as I pointed out earlier, that that number is quadruple the number that members opposite invested in Manitoba roads and bridges back in 1999, Mr. Speaker.

I think—you know, another number to consider is the fact that we are doubling—if—we can't just be worried about the city of Brandon. It's a great place, Brandon, Manitoba is, but in the city of Winnipeg, another great place, we are doubling this year the street renewal funding for the city of Winnipeg. We're doubling that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, our plan that we've put out, the plan that's contained in Bill 20, the plan that very, very clearly shows every Manitoban, including members opposite, where the 1 cent on the dollar is being spent, very clearly shows that we were going to continue with this record investment in our roads and in our bridges, also, critical infrastructure like hospitals and schools. So it's very clear that this—what—that the money that we have indicated we're going to raise will go directly into roads and bridges and hospitals and schools.

Mr. Speaker, what we're dealing with from members opposite is the party that says no to everything. In the 1990s, they said no to nurses; they said no to doctors; they said no to teachers; they said

no to hospitals and no to schools. They froze—one of the first things they did when they became government is they froze the hospital capital budget.

They—you know what else they did, Mr. Speaker? They're talking today about investments in roads and bridges. Well, in the 1990s, the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Pallister) and Gary Filmon and that crew, they said no to building roads and bridges that our economy depends on, that our families depend on, that farmers depend on, that fishermen depend on, that foresters depend on, our whole economy depends on.

You know what they did, Mr. Speaker? They froze or cut funding to roads and bridges. They froze or cut funding five times in the 1990s, just at a time when the economy—you know, they were facing an uncertain economic time, as well; that's clear. Just at that time, that very critical time in our province's economic history, the member for Fort Whyte and Gary Filmon and his group decided they were going to restrict spending. They were going to cut and restrict our economy from growth.

Mr. Speaker, that's not the way to go. You don't increase gas tax in the province and then cut the money going to roads and bridges five times in a row. That's not performance. And you know what? Just as they did then, they said no to investing in roads and bridges and they said no to improving our economy. They said no to putting people to work. They said no to expanding and growing our provincial GDP. They are consistently saying that again. Their response to the uncertain economic times in which we live is the same old failed policy of the 1990s.

* (16:20)

It's to restrict further—it's to cut, hack and slash. That does not stimulate growth. That does not put people to work. That makes our employment—our unemployment rates increase rather than decrease. That doesn't put people to work. That doesn't invest in flood protection that our Manitoba families and businesses and farmers depend on. That doesn't invest in our economy, Mr. Speaker.

That's what the Building and Renewal Plan is about. The Building and Renewal Plan says very clearly, we're going to increase by 1 cent on the dollar the PST and we're going to take every nickel of that increase and we're going to put it back into our economy. We're going to invest it in roads, in bridges, in schools and hospitals—the things that

Manitoba families depend on, the things that'll grow our economy.

So, Mr. Speaker, we do take a good look at the amendments that come forward, and I want to inform the member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer) and his colleagues that we won't support this one either.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House is the amendment to Bill 20.

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 by saying aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

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

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

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

Recorded Vote

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, a recorded vote, please.

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

* (17:00)

Order, please. The question before the House is the proposed amendment to Bill 20.

Division

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

Yeas

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

Nays

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

Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk): Yeas 18, Nays 32.

Mr. Speaker: The amendment is accordingly defeated.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: Prior to adjourning the House today, under the heading of celebrating our youth, I want to pay tribute to our page, Lauren Hadaller, who will be leaving us to attend the University of Ottawa and this is her last day with the Assembly. I know it was mentioned by the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Pallister) earlier in question period, but, unfortunately, she was not here to hear it.

So I'd like to take this opportunity—I know you will be surprised to learn that the—that Lauren is interested in law and she will be partaking in some of those activities while attending the university, and we'd like to wish her the very best in her future endeavors through her education and also her future career opportunities and selection. So thank you very much, Lauren, for being part of our team.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, August 19, 2013

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