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of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLAN, Nancy	St. Vital	NDP
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 13, 2014

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Mr. Speaker: Introduction of bills?

PETITIONS

Mr. Speaker: Seeing no bills, we'll move on to petitions.

Provincial Sales Tax Increase—Referendum

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

(2) Through the PST, 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 as follows:

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

This petition is signed by A. Bergen, B. Sawchuk, V. Dahl and many other Manitobans.

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

Beausejour District Hospital— Weekend and Holiday Physician Availability

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

(1) The Beausejour District Hospital is a 30-bed, acute-care facility that serves the communities of Beausejour and Brokenhead.

(2) The hospital and the primary-care centre have had no doctor available on weekends and holidays for many months, jeopardizing the health and livelihoods of those in the northeast region of the Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority.

(3) During the 2011 election, the provincial government promised to provide every Manitoban with access to a family doctor by 2015.

(4) This promise is far from being realized, and Manitobans are witnessing many emergency rooms limiting services or closing temporarily, with the majority of these reductions taking place in rural Manitoba.

(5) According to the Health Council of Canada, only 25 per cent of doctors in Manitoba reported that their patients had access to care on evenings and weekends.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government and the Minister of Health to ensure that the Beausejour District Hospital and primary-care centre have a primary-care physician available on weekends and holidays to better provide area residents with this essential service.

This petition is signed by D. Smith, C. Matychak, S. Buchholz and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: Any further petitions? Seeing none, we'll move on to committee reports.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Mr. Speaker: Seeing no committee reports, tabling of reports.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I'm pleased to table the Public Trustee of Manitoba 2012-2013 Annual Report.

Mr. Speaker: Any further tabling of reports? Ministerial statements?

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Speaker: I have no guests to introduce at the moment, so we'll proceed directly to question period.

Conference Board of Canada Report Employment Numbers

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Incompetence or deliberate misleading, Mr. Speaker, we'll find out today.

The NDP budget documents claim that the government will create 60,000 new jobs, but the Conference Board of Canada says 11,000. Now, one of them is right and one of them is wrong.

And, therefore, there is a gross misrepresentation of the facts, a falsehood and untruth, a delusion, perhaps, that's been presented in this House, been presented to the people of Manitoba. Yesterday both his Finance Minister and his Jobs Minister repeated this falsehood into the record of this place.

So I'd like the Premier to stand in his place and apologize for his government's either incompetence or simply deliberate deception to the people of Manitoba today.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I would like to table this document sent from the executive director and the deputy chief economist from the Conference Board of Canada for the members of the Legislature.

The Conference Board's executive director and deputy chief economist writes, and I quote: "The Conference Board recently produced a briefing entitled: Manitoba's Infrastructure Investment." He goes on to say, and I quote again: The report clearly lays out the impact on labour markets. The 5 and a half billion dollars in spending creates an average of 11,780 jobs per year. Employment in year 1, 2014, is estimated to be 8,500 jobs, and rises to 13,400 jobs in year 2018. As a result, over five years the core infrastructure plan creates 58,900 jobs. End quote.

Now—

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

Mr. Pallister: Well, it's a nice try, Mr. Speaker, but it is just a try.

We tried to get a hold of Mr. Pedro Antunes this morning, but he was on the phone with the government for quite a while, but the end of the—we were able to talk to him. And, in fact, he continues to dispute and stand by his comments of yesterday. And the comments he made yesterday were these, and they are for the record, and I quote: We are not talking about net new jobs here. And there's a definite difference in definition.

Now, the Jobs Minister claims it's all semantics. She says tomato, tomato. But two tomatoes aren't necessarily the same if one of them is rotten, and the government's logic is rotten in this case. Counting one job five times over five years doesn't change the fact that the government's overstating its job creation potential by at least five times. The Jobs Minister is equating person-years to jobs, saying they are the same.

Let's see if the Premier gets this and understands how wrong it is: The Premier was elected in 1999. That's 15 years ago. So that's 15 person-years of employment. How many jobs is that?

* (13:40)

Mr. Selinger: I would like to table the news release of November 15th, 1995, if I could. In that press release issued by the premier of the day, Gary Filmon, and the leader of the government—minister for Government Services, now the Leader of the Opposition, they put on the record—they tout a multi-year investment in a new bridge that they just clipped the ribbon on, something they seem to enjoy doing, and they say—[interjection] Mr. Speaker, I know they want to hear this. They say during construction approximately 265 direct and indirect construction jobs were created.

The Leader of the Opposition called person-years of employment jobs, just like everybody else does. I would like to give him the opportunity for—to apologize right now for using the same methodology that we use.

Mr. Pallister: I've got to tell you, Mr. Speaker, I don't think the Premier is doing any of his 15 jobs very well. I really don't.

The Conference Board of Canada has clarified that it's one fifth as many jobs as the government's

laying claim to. I understand, I really do, that the Premier is laying claim to five times as many jobs as he's actually creating. That he doesn't understand the difference between gross and net, I understand that.

The NDP government has jacked up taxes and claims credit that it takes money from Manitobans to create jobs Manitobans themselves could've created. I don't know if they think the money came from outer space, Mr. Speaker, but it didn't. It came from the kitchen tables of working families, of retirees across our province. And when the government takes hundreds of millions of dollars away from Manitobans, it doesn't create jobs; it uncreates jobs.

So I'd like the government to tell us why they are so focused on taking credit for creating jobs when they can't give credit to the real job creators of our province: Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Time has expired.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table two additional documents, one of them of September 10th, 2013, by federal Minister Oliver, and another one of December 12th, 2013, by the Minister of Transportation in Ontario.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition said this morning, he said, I challenge you to find another example where a Jobs and Economy minister or a premier actually equates person-years to jobs. He also said, if you produce that, if you find it, you've found another government that lied to the people.

Mr. Speaker, these documents—in my second document that I put in front of the Legislature, the Leader of the Opposition when he was the minister for Government Services with former Premier Filmon used person-years of employment and called them jobs.

Mr. Speaker, federal Minister Oliver calls 10,000 person-years of employment jobs when he talks about the TransCanada Pipeline. The—

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

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a new question.

Manitoba Hydro Development Plans PUB Review and Recommendations

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, now we're clear. The Premier is explaining to Manitobans that he's actually deserving

of credit for creating jobs even when Manitobans are already working in those jobs. That's very interesting.

And speaking of exaggeration, yesterday the Hydro Minister said we'd all freeze in the dark, he said, within the decade if we don't go along with the government's plan to supersize Manitoba Hydro. He's using fear, just as the Premier likes to do and others in his front bench, to scare Manitobans.

But the vice-president of Manitoba Hydro in testimony at the Public Utilities Board said there's no need until 2028. And, in fact, the expert testimony at the Public Utilities Board from an independent contractor says even longer, potentially 2033. So that's three times as long as the government is saying we have to make this decision.

Why are we in such a big rush? Who should we believe here, the government or the expert witnesses at the PUB?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the member asked for examples of other governments that have used the same methodology on describing jobs. We gave an example where he himself used person-years and called them jobs. We gave an example where the federal government used person-years and called them jobs. We gave an example where the Minister of Transport in Ontario used person-years and called them jobs.

The member has in effect called himself a liar in his press conference this morning. Will he—

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

I am starting to see an escalation of inappropriate, unparliamentary language here in question period. It started off on the first question, and I'm starting to see an escalation of it here with the Premier's response here a few moments ago.

I'm going to ask the honourable First Minister to withdraw the word liar in reference to another member of this Assembly. I've always asked that we keep level—the debate to a high level in here, and I want to make sure that we do that.

Mr. Selinger: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I take your advice and I withdraw that comment.

Mr. Speaker: Thank the honourable First Minister.

Manitoba Hydro Rate Increases US Development

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): I thank the Premier for the withdrawal of the comment.

And I want to clarify that on—in the budget document which refers to good jobs, of course, it doesn't explain that they're partial jobs, that there are one fifth as many as are stated in the text, and it might do that if it was destined to be accurate. But, of course, the funny part here is, of course, no one believes this government's promises anymore anyway, so in actual fact it doesn't matter how much they fabricate, puff or exaggerate.

Now, speaking of fear, Manitobans have much to fear with respect to the mismanagement around Manitoba Hydro. And it is now building a power line, because of the politicization of this government, on foreign soil. This is unprecedented. This is historic. This is unheard of. This is \$400 million.

And from a government that's doubling Manitoba Hydro rates and subsidizing American rates with that money, why is the NDP pushing Manitoba Hydro to build in the United States at the expense of Manitoba ratepayers?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I've put three examples on the record where the member himself when he was a minister used person-years of employment and called them jobs. I've given an example where the federal government used person-years of employment and called them jobs. I've given an example of the government of Ontario that used person-years of employment and called them jobs.

The member challenged anybody to bring forward examples of other governments that have used person-years of employment and called them jobs. He himself used person-years of employment and called them jobs, as did the federal government, as did other provincial governments.

Will the member take this opportunity to apologize to the Legislature for the misinformation he put on the record?

Mr. Pallister: It's not that cold, Mr. Speaker.

Power aid is a program the government's introduced to subsidize US buyers of hydro from Manitoba at Manitobans' expense. What it means is that Manitobans will pay ever higher rates for their

own power while US customers get discounted with the construction of a line right to their door.

What's next? Is the government going to introduce a subsidy to American customers to flip on the switch too? For heaven's sakes, under this program, we do all the heavy lifting here. We do all the perspiring and they get the juice down there.

And our rates have increased 23 per cent since this Premier came to power, and the best-case scenario for Manitobans—the best case—is that those rates will double again over the next 20 years.

Why is this Premier and this government so focused on jacking up Manitoba rates and discounting American ones?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the member's had ample opportunity to put his apologies on the record for the misinformation. He challenged the Legislature to show other examples of where people used person-years of employment and called them jobs. It's the very same approach that he used when he was last in government.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to Hydro, I have additional information for the members opposite that I'd like to table today, three copies I'll put in front of the Legislature right now. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, Hydro's preferred development plan, which has been put in front of the need-for-alternatives committee, identifies new dams, Keeyask and Conawapa, new transmission and additional energy efficiency is the plan that will keep the rates lowest for Manitobans in the long term. That is the case they're making in front of the committee. They are also reviewing all the other alternatives and illustrating why they will cost Manitobans more.

The plan put forward by Manitoba Hydro, it provides the lowest electricity rates for Manitobans over the long term. That is the case they are making. All gas is the least favourable—

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

Manitoba Hydro Development Plans PUB Review and Recommendations

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): At a recent PUB hearing, the committee heard from experts testifying that Manitoba Hydro assessments overstate the benefits divide—derived from average weighted

uncertainty scenarios. In other words, they are saying that Manitoba Hydro numbers don't make sense and are putting Manitoba taxpayers at risk.

* (13:50)

Mr. Speaker, this minister is doubling down with Manitobans' money with this rushed investment by Manitoba Hydro.

Will he let the PUB do its job and put Manitobans first?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): Well, Mr. Speaker, it's very clear that our economy is growing. It's very clear that our population is growing. It's very clear that we could run out of power, that we will run out of power within the decade if we don't do anything, which is exactly the opposite that members opposite have asked us to consider. The do-nothing option isn't a real option.

Mr. Speaker, I have no confidence that members opposite would read Hydro's preferred development plan that was tabled. The preferred plan noted above is the best plan for Manitoba, while all gas is the least favourable.

Hydro believes this to be the case for the following reasons: It provides the lowest electricity rates for Manitobans over the long term; it provides the highest level of system reliability and energy security to Manitobans. Mr. Speaker, this is a memo from—

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

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, also at PUB hearings, Manitoba Hydro officials outlined that it is not proven that Manitoba Hydro will be able to sell all its surplus dependable energy on a long-term basis. In other words, they're very concerned about projects based on contracts currently proposed. It's the willy-nilly approach in doing business with hard-working Manitobans taking all the risk.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the spenDP once again: Let the PUB do its job and listen to the experts that are right under their own nose. Pay attention to what's going on.

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Speaker, as we speak, Manitoba Hydro is before the NFAT talking about alternatives. They've put 15 options on the table. They said exactly what their preferred option is.

The only people with a closed mind and no other options available is the members opposite who want to delay, cancel and then privatize Manitoba Hydro and watch Manitoba families' rates go right through the roof.

Why else—here's some more reasons that Mr. Thomson gives for the preferred plan being the plan that Manitoba Hydro wants to move forward with: It supports Manitoba Hydro's long-term financial health and higher levels of tangible fixed assets; it has the lowest levels of regional greenhouse gas emissions; it provides the most jobs and greatest socio-economic benefits.

Mr. Speaker, I asked the members yesterday, why would they support Alberta jobs over Manitoba jobs? I ask them that—

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

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, at the PUB hearings, experts also said some of Manitoba Hydro's cost assumptions are out of date. Manitoba cost analysis does not incorporate any uncertainties. The comparison of technologies with different operating profiles and characteristics are misleading.

So, Mr. Speaker, I ask one more time: Will this minister listen to the experts, listen to his own department, listen to Manitoba ratepayers, put the brakes on this ill-conceived, rushed investment, once and for all listen to the PUB and let them do their job?

Mr. Struthers: This is the party, Mr. Speaker, that opposed Limestone, that mothballed Conawapa, and now they're being coy, telling people that we should put the brakes on this plan.

People have to be very leery about what they hear from our friends across the way when it comes to hydro. Their plan, no—undoubtedly, is to ask us to delay, then cancel the projects and then privatize Manitoba Hydro, just as they did with the telephone system, just as they tried to do with home care, just as their position was with MPI in the last election, just as the member's own leader has said he would do to our health-care system. That would devastate Manitoba families. That would take our economy backwards, not forward. That would cost us jobs in Manitoba, but if you prefer—

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

Manitoba Hydro Projects Future Rate Increases

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): Actually, Mr. Speaker, it was a Progressive Conservative government that built and opened Limestone, and now they're trying to take credit for that too.

Over the last two years of this NDP government, Manitobans have seen their hydro rates go up by 12 per cent plus compound increases. According to the PUB, the current rate increase requests are required to meet the operating losses from Wuskwatim, projected to total \$341 million.

Why are Manitoba ratepayers forced to pay more on their hydro bills for this NDP mismanagement?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): Well, with that preamble, Mr. Speaker, it proves that these Tories will say anything, whether it's *[inaudible]* They opposed Limestone—they opposed Limestone. They messed up the Conawapa deal, and now they're telling us that we shouldn't be doing Keeyask. They're telling us we shouldn't do Conawapa. They're telling us we should privatize Manitoba Hydro, and if you think any other plan is risky, the riskiest plan going is to privatize hydro and then watch rates for Manitoba families go skyrocketing through the roof.

Want to talk—and if they want to talk about rates, why don't we talk about what British Columbia's doing where they're seeing a 15 per cent increase over two years? Why don't we talk about Ontario—Ontario—whose rates will jump 42 per cent by 2018?

Mr. Speaker, this is a desperate group of people across the way who are out of step with—

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

Mr. Schuler: This minister's preamble proves the NDP will take credit for anything, Mr. Speaker, including Limestone, which was built by us.

According to the PUB, another reason for increases is reduced revenues from export sales. Manitoba Hydro's own annual report showed that export revenue has fallen 41 per cent. We are losing money on exports, and American utilities are being subsidized by Manitoba Hydro ratepayers.

Why do Manitobans have to suffer 20 years of compound increases to their hydro rates to cover for this NDP mismanagement?

Mr. Struthers: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll believe the word of the Conference Board of Canada or Mr. Scott Thomson over the people across the way who didn't build enough power to generate enough power to have a—to run a two-watt light bulb.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Thomson is very clear. The preferred plan that Hydro has put forward provides training and employment and business income opportunities for Aboriginal people. It provides the highest level of financial transfers and has the most flexibility to deal with future uncertainties in the export opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, the Conference Board of Canada disagrees with members opposite. Scott Thomson disagrees with members opposite. My view is we should let the—

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

Mr. Schuler: Well, Mr. Speaker, if this minister's poor answer isn't worry enough for Hydro ratepayers, then poor NDP decisions are resulting in Manitobans paying a 134 per cent compound rate increase by 2033. Manitobans are now shouldering the financial burden of building the bipole line down the wrong side of the province. Manitoba Hydro is now losing \$341 million in the first 10 years of Wuskwatim and losing \$262 million in export revenue, thus subsidizing American utilities.

The question, then, is: Why will Manitobans see a 134 per cent increase on their hydro bills just to help subsidize the US economy?

Mr. Struthers: Well, Mr. Speaker, just to repeat for the member opposite, our economy is growing, our population is growing. We will be out of power within 10 years if we do nothing.

In the memo that I received from Scott Thomson, it says, and I quote: Doing nothing is not an option if we are to continue to meet the needs of Manitobans for energy. We are planning to expand our demand-side management programs and will be filling our updated plan to you later this month. As you know, a significant component of our capital program over the next 20 years is driven by the need to refurbish existing infrastructure that was built in the period following the Second World War. There are no scenarios in which rates do not increase due to the infrastructure deficit.

Mr. Speaker, Hydro has—

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

* (14:00)

Low-Income Manitobans Cost of Living Increases

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, Manitobans living on fixed or limited incomes are very vulnerable to increases in costs. Things like the doubling of hydro rates can cause them to get behind on their bills.

Why has this government chosen to hurt those on limited and fixed incomes by pushing more costs onto them each year?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): We should talk about what's happened to people while they've been on low incomes and fixed incomes in this province.

What this budget has done, it has made a commitment to the development of a new program called Rent Assist that will see us work towards making sure that individuals receive 75 per cent of market median rent. We listened to all Manitobans.

In this budget, you will see \$5.5 million for child care, which will equal to thousands of child-care spaces, better working wages for individuals working in the field, as well as we develop the program going further.

And also what we've done, the greatest equalizer of all, ensuring that we're building a strong economy so that there are jobs and education opportunities for all Manitobans.

Mr. Wishart: Mr. Speaker, I do hope that commitment is one these people can take to the bank, but a commitment from this government isn't liable to be very negotiable.

Mr. Speaker, those on fixed incomes living on—in their own homes are very vulnerable to increased costs. This government has hit them with a litany of increases, broadening the PST for things like home insurance, increasing the PST by 14 per cent, breaking their promise to remove the education tax credits from their homes as promised, and now pushing up hydro rates to Manitoba. This may be the last straw.

Is this government trying to drive seniors on fixed incomes from their homes?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: What I see happening within this budget, and since 1999, a commitment for all Manitobans, a commitment that there are opportunities for everyone. Whether you live in the south or the north, the east or the west, we're here to work with you, and we're listening with you.

I think that—I'm not sure if the member heard, there was a Mr. David Northcott who spoke very proudly about this budget and his involvement about advocating for the changes that he felt were necessary, and that he felt we were listening. On a telephone conversation he told me, I'm doing cartwheels. Now, who'd believe that that would ever happen? But also what he did is, when he was asked by the media, he spoke strongly about this is the best budget he's seen in 20 years. He feels that this is a budget for all Manitobans.

We'll continue to do that. I will remind him in the next—

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

Mr. Wishart: This is the same gentleman that runs the Winnipeg Harvest, which is the busiest food bank in North America.

Mr. Speaker, those on EIA seldom pay their own heating costs, but landlords have to and always pass the cost down. Every time costs go up to those vulnerable people living on the edge, someone falls into the abyss and ends up on the street. Living on the street is about survival and not a life for anyone.

What this is—why does this government want to pursue a strategy that will push costs up to those living on the edge of homelessness?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: What we are doing in this government is we are providing a strategy that supports individuals, making sure that there's equality across Manitoba. We're making sure that we're building more housing. We have made a commitment to build 500 more social housing units, 500 more affordable, and I must remind him about Rent Assist and our commitment to meeting the 75 per cent of market median rent. We're doing all that while we are creating jobs as well as providing more child-care spaces.

I promised that I would remind him of their record, and in their record what they did is they clawed back the national child tax benefit. They reduced funding to child care in one year by \$3.7 million; that equals thousands of spaces. That's

what they did, and they—we should be very afraid about the reckless cuts that they're acknowledging and that they're wanting to do—

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

Manitoba Hydro Bipole III Landowner Negotiations

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): Mr. Speaker, Manitoba Hydro is under direct orders by this NDP government to block any attempt by landowners in the path of Bipole III to have their property rights respected. So under direct orders from this NDP government, Manitoba Hydro has been ordered to not negotiate with the Manitoba bipole landowners committee.

Why is this government so determined to crush landowners' rights? What is this government afraid of?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): Well, Mr. Speaker, we're not afraid to invest in Manitoba Hydro on behalf of Manitoba families.

Mr. Speaker, whether it's the farm industry, whether it's mining, whether it's forestry, whether it's financial services, we have an economy in Manitoba that is growing. We have a population that is growing.

The last thing we can—that we should be doing is taking the advice of members opposite, advice that would hurt the very farmers that the member opposite claims to support, and cancel projects that lead to the privatization of Manitoba Hydro which means that every one of those farmers would see their rates go through the roof.

We can build more generation stations. We can build more dams. We can sell power to our—

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

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, landowners in the path of Bipole III have many concerns, including biosecurity, liability, decreased property values, increased costs of working around the line, just to name a few of their concerns. Yet this government has ordered Manitoba Hydro to bully and intimidate landowners rather than begin to negotiate in good faith with the landowners group.

Manitoba Hydro used to be owned by Manitobans; now, apparently, it seems to be run by the NDP.

Why does the NDP not allow Manitoba Hydro to begin negotiations with the Bipole III landowners group?

Mr. Struthers: I wonder where that member was, Mr. Speaker, when this government equalized rates in Manitoba for Manitoba Hydro. His government was good with the situation that existed where northern and rural Manitobans—again, they claim to represent rural Manitoba, but where were they when it was time to vote to save rural Manitobans \$22 million in terms of their annual hydro bills? Where were they? They were AWOL.

They weren't there for farmers then. They're not there for farmers today.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, the NDP continue to interfere with Manitoba Hydro. The lack of respect shown to landowners is similar to their dismissive attitude of anyone—anyone—in Manitoba who questions the NDP's motives.

Manitoba Hydro has been ordered—they've been ordered by the NDP government to bully, intimidate and ignore landowners' concerns.

Why does this NDP government continue to order Manitoba Hydro not to begin negotiations with the landowners group? Why is this NDP government so desperate to push this project through the expense—at the expense of Manitoba landowners' legitimate concerns?

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Speaker, Hydro's development—preferred development plan is one that will benefit all Manitobans, including the exact farmers that the member opposite claims to represent today.

Mr. Speaker, the biggest risk to Manitoba farmers, the biggest risk to Manitoba families, is the plan by his leader—his leader—who has asked us to freeze this process. He's asked us to, you know, put it on hold. He's asked us to delay, which means that it would cancel the projects—and he knows that—and it would cancel the projects, which would lead to the privatization of Manitoba Hydro.

And where did that get his farmers back in the '90s when they privatized Manitoba Telephone System? It gave them higher rates, it gave them worse service—

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

Early Childhood Education Funding for Spaces

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, last September the Child Care Coalition of Manitoba held a meeting at the Children's Museum in Winnipeg to discuss the crisis in child care and early childhood education in Manitoba.

It's all too clear to many parents who want to work that working is impossible if you can't get child care. Too many parents are forced to wait too long to get the child care and early childhood education they so desperately need.

I ask the Premier: When the need is so great, why did he only add 1.6 per cent above inflation to the provincial budget for child care and early childhood education this year?

* (14:10)

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

We have the lowest child-care fees outside of Quebec. We are opening a thousand spaces this year, and when opened we will have achieved our goal of 6,500 additional spaces. We are committed to funding 1,000 enhanced nursery school spaces and have act—have, in fact, exceeded this target. This year we are funding 28,000 child-care spaces province-wide. This is an increase of 12,000 since 1990, Mr. Speaker.

We are providing more supports to early childhood educators. We've increased their wages and we have provided, the first time ever in the history of Manitoba, a pension plan for early childhood educators.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, 1,000 is not enough when the need is more than 10,000.

Mr. Speaker, a report by the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy has shown that approximately 30 per cent of children—our children, the foundation of our province—in low- to middle-income families are not ready for school in Manitoba at age five, and yet this government's record of over 14 years is hopelessly inadequate in addressing the very large shortage of early-childhood-education and child-care spaces in our province.

When will this Premier step up and ensure all children and families in need have access to the early

childhood education and child care they so desperately need?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I do have to point out that the member from River Heights has voted against every single budget that we have expanded child care in Manitoba. Every single time—we've expanded child care in Manitoba by over 12,000 spaces, by increasing salaries, by bringing ever the first—bringing in the first-ever pension plan, by building new child-care centres attached to schools in community organizations all across this Manitoba—all across Manitoba.

And the executive director of the Manitoba Child Care Association said, with the budget, it's a good day for child care. Any time when a government recognizes a need to expand and enhance child care, I am pleased.

I ask the member from River Heights to support the budget to get more child-care spaces to Manitoba families.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, as was discussed at the Child Care Coalition's meeting, we are dealing with a crisis. At last count, there were close to 11,000 children on the waiting list. Addressing this need requires about a 25 per cent increase in funding, while this government is only increasing funding by 1.6 per cent beyond inflation.

The government is shortchanging the mothers, fathers and children in Manitoba. One professional on the panel said she had to close her business and lay off 10 employees because there were no child-care spaces available.

When can mothers, fathers and children of this province expect adequate funding for child care and early childhood education in Manitoba?

Mr. Selinger: The thousand spaces that are being added this year will be added to again with this budget when it passes, and I look forward to the member supporting this budget.

Wages have gone up 54 per cent, first-ever pension plan for child-care workers, an additional 70 spots to train more early childhood educators, record investment in capital and facilities for daycare centres, 12,000 more spots.

We know there's more to do, Mr. Speaker. We have a commitment to rolling out more child-care spaces, more training spaces, more investments in child-care centres.

And every single time we've done that, the member from River Heights has voted against it. I ask him to finally be consistent. Vote for the budget that expands child care in Manitoba. Stop voting for the Tories who want to cut it.

Seven Oaks General Hospital Expanded Renal Health Dialysis Unit

Mr. Mohinder Saran (The Maples): Mr. Speaker, for many Manitobans, kidney disease is a major part of their daily lives with dialysis treatments many times a week.

Yesterday I was proud to join the Minister of Health for the opening of the expanded dialysis unit at the Seven Oaks hospital.

Can the minister please tell the House how our government is supporting the renal health patients throughout the province?

Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Health): Well, Mr. Speaker, and I was proud to be joined by the member for Maples, as well as the member for Tyndall Park (Mr. Marcelino) and the member for Burrows (Ms. Wight) as well, to announce the expanded dialysis unit at Seven Oaks General Hospital.

This \$3-million capital investment in eight new dialysis stations will mean 48 more people will be able to be served in that community, for a total of 288 people served in that community, Mr. Speaker. This is a really important part of what is—what—something we're working towards, our renal health framework that we're working with our partners to both talk about treatment but also prevention.

And, of course, we're trying to bring health care closer to people in their community. It's why we have 16 rural health centres plus centres in Brandon as well, to try to make it a little bit easier for families who are doing this, Mr. Speaker, as well as home hemodialysis, because, of course, on this—

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

Vita and District Health Centre ER Reopening Timeline

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): On October 17th, 2012, the emergency room in Vita closed. The minister of Health promised a month later that the emergency room would reopen; 512 days without an ER, 512 days of broken promises.

Mr. Speaker, what tragedy needs to happen before the minister will act? When will the new Minister of Health take action and reopen the emergency room at the Vita hospital?

Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, we know that Manitoba families deserve safe, high-quality health care close to home. We have a proven track record of hiring more doctors and more nurses, and bringing health care closer to people.

Mr. Speaker, if you want to talk jobs on this side of the House, for every person who was a nurse who lost their job when they fired a thousand nurses, every person they fired, we hired three and a half of those nurses back.

Mr. Speaker, we will keep working to recruit more nurses and more doctors for all Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Mr. Speaker: It's now time for members' statements.

Human Trafficking Awareness Day

Ms. Melanie Wight (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, today for the first time our province is observing Manitoba Human Trafficking Awareness Day. Human trafficking has a devastating impact on individuals, families and whole societies, both worldwide and here at home.

Last year our government increased funding to support the implementation of Manitoba's sexual exploitation strategy, Tracia's Trust, which is leading the country in support and programming. The strategy tackles the issue from all angles, from prevention and intervention to research and legislation. It considers all forms of sexual exploitation, including prostitution, pornography, sex trafficking, sex tourism and Internet luring. However, it is essential that we continue to expand the dialogue, as human trafficking is about many things in addition to sexual exploitation.

Human trafficking is a modern-day form of slavery. It involves the trade of persons for purposes ranging from sexual slavery and servitude to forced labour. Every year thousands of children, men and women fall into the hands of traffickers. Almost every country in the world is affected by trafficking, whether as a country of origin, transit or destination for victims. Human trafficking can completely devastate its victims, and we must

continually work to protect the most vulnerable, at-risk members of society.

There is a great deal of work to be done, but progress is being made. Two operations that were linked specifically to child sexual exploitation have been shut down by our Public Safety Investigations unit. Since the implementation of The Child Sexual Exploitation and Human Trafficking Act in 2012, there were five applications for protection orders; of these five applications, five protection orders were granted.

Mr. Speaker, these issues are not easy to talk about. It's heartbreaking to hear how deeply people's lives are affected. However, it is important that we keep talking. Through education and discussion, we can find solutions and, ultimately, save lives.

Thank you.

Janique Fillion

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): I'm proud that the schools in my constituency educate so many high-quality students, and often these students go on to win awards and go even further than just the Emerson constituency.

Janique Fillion is one of these students. Janique is a grade 12 student at École Communautaire Réal-Bérard in St. Malo. Recently Janique was elected—selected as a Loran Scholar, joining 29 other students from across the country in being selected for this very high honour.

The Canadian Merit Scholarship Foundation has been selecting Loran Scholars for 20 years and is funded entirely by donations from companies, foundations and individuals who support its mission of promoting gifted students who show promise of leadership and dedication to their communities.

* (14:20)

The Loran Award is comparable to the Rhodes Scholarship for undergraduates and comprises a tuition waiver, annual stipend and summer projects for four years with a total worth of up to \$80,000. Through a series of assessments and personal interviews, CMSF selects the top 30 of approximately 3,700 applicants as Loran Scholars.

The Loran Award is issued based on personal integrity and character, commitment to service and entrepreneurial spirit, breadth in academic and extracurricular interests, strongly developed inner directness and outstanding overall potential for

leadership. CMSF encourages scholars to resist the temptation to take easy or conventional paths and to seek out instead how they can most effectively contribute to society. To this end, they provide \$8,500 in funding for three kinds of scholarship-initiated summer internships that take place in the private sector, public policy fields and personal and community development.

I've been fortunate in my time as an MLA. Two students from my constituency have been named Loran Scholars. I am very proud of all of the students in my constituency, and I know that they will all achieve great things. Janique is a very gifted student, and represents a small high school—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member's time has expired. *[interjection]*

Is there leave for the honourable member to quickly conclude his member's statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Graydon: It is a testament to her skills as a student and the quality of the teachers in the classroom that she has been named a Loran Scholar.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of this House to join me in congratulating Janique Fillion on being selected as a Loran Scholar, and I wish her nothing but success in the future.

Thank you.

Reverend Roy David Hedges

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): It is an honour to rise today to pay tribute to a Reverend Roy David Hedges who passed away at the age of 85 years, and was interred yesterday at the St. Matthew's Anglican Church on the Peguis First Nation. Reverend Canon Barry Bear officiated with the able assistance of Mr. John Harper.

Born in Wales in 1929, Roy spent most of his life travelling the world as a soldier, before coming to Manitoba to retire. Over his career, he served in the armed forces of three countries: Great Britain, United States and Canada. Roy's path to the military truly was a trial by fire.

As a boy, he fought fires in the city of London, which resulted from the Nazi Luftwaffe bombing campaign of the Battle of Britain. This battle was a pivotal turning point in the Second World War, a battle immortalized in the words of Sir Winston Churchill when he said, never was so much owed by so many to so few.

Roy was one of those few.

Roy was accorded full military honours at his service, with special tributes from Afghanistan war veteran Corporal Doug Meier and Captain Jocelyn Berzuik of the Fisher Air Cadets where he served as padre.

Roy also worked closely with the local Legion Branch 158 and was instrumental in having it renamed to honour Canada's most decorated Aboriginal veteran, Sergeant Tommy Prince, who was a Peguis First Nation band member. Roy was a gifted speaker and was always called upon for occasions such as powwow and Remembrance Day.

I shored—shared many a podium with him and always had to be at my personal best to reach the level of the bar he set, in terms of oratory. He was an especially strong advocate on First Nations issues and was acknowledged as such yesterday by Peguis Chief Glenn Hudson.

The most moving tribute of the day came from his adopted son, Bryan Thomas. And in closing, Mr. Speaker, I ask leave of the Assembly to insert a poem that Bryan wrote and read that day for his father Roy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave—has—that has been indicated to have the poem included in the Hansard of today's proceedings? [*Agreed*]

Roy

There once was a man that everyone knew / He loved to talk and share a joke or two.

He also had many stories and he shared them all / He was also quite humble, since the day he could crawl.

His name was Roy Hedges, but I called him Dad / I was always annoying, but he never got mad.

He was there for the bad times, as well as the good / And he offered his help, as much as he could.

He did so much for us, and asked nothing in return / And if you ever sat with him, there was much you would learn.

He was always laughing, even when he got sick / He left an impression that would always stick.

He told us to be happy and to not feel scared / Right up to the end, he always cared.

Things happen so quickly over the years / One day you get that phone call that everyone fears.

At that moment you realize, your life changes forever / And you start thinking of all the time that you spent together.

But the ones who love us never truly leave / And we sometimes forget that while we grieve.

So now I'm done, my story comes to an end / I say I love you and goodbye, my father, teacher and friend.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for the Lakeside—or Agassiz, pardon me.

Olga Code

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): Mr. Speaker, today I wish to recognize one of Neepawa's local quilters.

Olga Code is a member of the Neepawa Tangled Threads Quilt Guild and was recognized by the club as their 2013 Featured Quilter. 'Ogla' has lived in a very interesting and full life and is still enjoying each day. 'Ogla' went to normal school and became a teacher; her successful teaching career spanned 35 years. She taught in one-room schools on the Prairies, in Winnipeg classrooms and for 25 years she taught grade 1 in McCreary, Manitoba. She taught three generations of students and has wonderful memories.

Olga met her husband in McCreary when she used to travel there from Winnipeg. When they married, they settled on a farm just out of sight of McCreary. She loved living on the farm, and she and her husband raised her two children there. She balanced the family, the chores on the farm, gardening and her career all very effortlessly.

Travelling has always been a passion for Olga. She has visited every province in Canada at least once, and some many times. After retirement, she and her husband also travelled to many parts of Europe, Istanbul, Casablanca and Australia. Some of Olga's favourite trips were cruises through the Panama Canal, the Caribbean islands and the coast of South America. She and some of her family have also traveled to the Czech Republic twice.

Olga and her husband enjoyed golfing, cross-country skiing and biking. Woodworking was another passion of theirs. Together they made and furnished dollhouses, barns, birdhouses and bird feeders. When her husband passed away, Olga turned to—the woodworking shop into her quilting sanctuary. She fondly remembers her very first quilt made at home alongside her mother. It was an appliqué of butterflies on a dyed piece of flour sack. It was quite the challenge. After retirement, quilting

became more important. In McCreary, a group of women would gather in homes and hold quilting bees. The money raised from the quilts went back into the community. Olga became part of the Tangled Threads quilting community four years ago when she left McCreary for a new home in Neepawa. She spends every Wednesday and Saturday at the Neepawa drop-in centre and hand quilting the various quilts that this group of quilters produce. The Neepawa club is very proud to have Olga as a member and says she adds a certain grace to the Neepawa Tangled Threads.

Congratulations to Olga for being recognized by the Neepawa Tangled Threads in 2013.

Thank you.

Buchanan School Math Night

Mr. Jim Rondeau (Assiniboia): Mr. Speaker, math is a lifelong skill that helps us succeed in the workplace and every facet of our personal life. Whether we're buying a coffee, baking or preparing a budget, math is critical. Math teaches us problem solving, critical thinking, and while allowing us to analyze patterns and relationships.

This past February, students at Buchanan School celebrated their love for math at the school's math night. The event brings together parents, grandparents and others and their children together at the school to play math-related games. From addition and subtraction to geometry and patterns, the game explores a variety of math principles in games.

By teaching their parents about the games, students are able to gain a deeper understanding of the concepts being taught during the day at the school. Playing the games together brings a family together for family fun and also teaches the essentials for life skills.

All the games for the event were developed by its organizers, Dianne Soltess, the curriculum co-ordinator for St. James school division, and Pat Stewart, multi-age teacher and program implementation assistant at Buchanan School. The games meld mental math with classic board game fun in an incredible, creative way that keeps kids and their parents busy for hours.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Dianne Soltess and Pat Stewart, all the administration teachers, and parents, for the time they put into the event. They had a great time. Students were having fun and laughing and really engaged. And I want to

recognize all the people who participated because your passion for learning, your group and community really made a difference, and these innovative ways will bring math everyday life and encourage kids to really enjoy math and learn it, and have it part of their lives.

Thank you.

House Business

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on House business.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker, in accordance with rule 31(9), I'd like to announce that the private members' resolution that'll be considered next Thursday is the resolution on national military driver's licence brought forward by the honourable member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer).

Mr. Speaker: It has been announced that in accordance with rule 31(9), that the private members' resolution that will be considered next Thursday is the resolution on the national military driver's licence brought forward by the honourable member for Brandon West.

On further House business, the Official Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Goertzen: I'm asking leave of the House to have Bill 206, The Cyberbullying Prevention Act, which currently stands under my name on the Order Paper, to be transferred to the name of the honourable member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko).

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to permit the change of name for Bill 206 that's shown on today's Order Paper and transfer the responsibility for that Bill 206 from the honourable member of Steinbach to the honourable member for Lac du Bonnet? *[Agreed]*

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

BUDGET DEBATE (Fifth Day of Debate)

Mr. Speaker: Now we'll proceed to orders of the day, government business, and to resume the adjourned debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Ms. Howard) that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government and the proposed amendment

thereto, standing in the name of the honourable Minister of Healthy Living, who has 29 minutes remaining.

* (14:30)

Hon. Sharon Blady (Minister of Healthy Living and Seniors within the Department of Health): I can assure members of this House that I will not be trying to use up the entire 29 minutes. I very easily could, but I do believe that it has to do with quality of remarks rather than quantity, and I would rather afford my colleagues in this Chamber equal opportunity to have their say in response to this fabulous budget.

Merci encore, Monsieur le Président. C'est un grand plaisir et un honneur d'être ici dans cette Chambre avec tous mes collègues, parce que ici nous sommes les représentatives de notre conscription, mais plus important, les représentatives élues de notre—de nos voisins. C'est très important qu'on peut travailler pour nos voisins dans une manière forte et une manière passionnante.

Translation

Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure and an honour to be here in this Chamber with all my colleagues, because we are the representatives of our constituencies, but more importantly, the elected representatives of our neighbours. It is very important that we are able to work hard and passionately on behalf of our neighbours.

English

I'm here, Mr. Speaker, in my—in support for the budget and I'm very proud to be here among my colleagues in this Chamber because, as elected representatives, it is our duty and our privilege and our honour to work hard for our neighbours and our constituencies.

And I'm very pleased with this year's budget and I would like to put, again, a few words on the record in support of this budget and against the, again, risky, reckless and regressive amendments put forth by members opposite. This budget reflects very important core values and core values that I know my neighbours and I share. It's about more opportunities for young people, whether that's through smaller class sizes, apprenticeships and meaningful training opportunities. It's about investing in infrastructure to help grow our economy and create good jobs and it's about investing in front-line services.

And what's interesting is that we've had through question period, references to on what day did this occur, on what day did that occur. And I have my own little question in that regard, especially regarding austerity policies: On what day was it that I put forward the offer to members opposite regarding a piece of very important economic literature? The report—the study by the Ph.D. student in economics from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, who had basically turned economic theory on its head because of the substantial Reinhart and Rogoff piece of literature that had been used as the cornerstone for recent austerity measures, and he basically turned it on its head because of the data errors. Well, I can tell you that that was April 24th of last year that I extended that opportunity, and no one's taken me up on that offer for the URL, and I do still have it here with me if they're interested.

But the one thing that I have to say is that I found really interested—interesting in the days before the budget when our Minister of Finance (Ms. Howard) mentioned that, you know, it was going to be a meat-and-potatoes kind of budget, it was going to be those kinds of things that people were looking forward to but, wait and see, you'll get the details on budget day, that the Leader of the Opposition had already decided on what kind of a budget it was going to be. He had already said that he was going to stand by his perspective of the previous budget, you know, the one where he was running with scissors.

And so—and he was going to stand beside—stand behind that idea of all of those cuts. I mean, first, I think it's a little short-sighted to, you know, make that kind of a prejudgment, not even wait, that he'd already decided—that he was already deciding to be last year's man, and some could even argue, well, not even last decade's. I'd have to say it would be last century's man, in terms of hanging on to tired ideas that had already shown to fail in the past.

And I also have to say, too, the one thing that was consistent in that is the focus on negativity and that's something that we continue to hear from the other side of the Chamber. And just from a mental health perspective it's commonly known—understanding within the mental health profession that one should not focus and dwell on mental—on negativity. It's not good for one's mental health and well-being. So I'll extend that recommendation out to members opposite.

And on that note, I would much now—much rather now focus on the positive, because there's

so much positive in this budget, whether it's that five-year, \$5.5-billion plan to build our province's infrastructure, grow the economy and create good jobs, a five-year plan that will invest \$250 million, partnering with the City of Winnipeg, to renew and upgrade Winnipeg roads, including major routes that matter to my neighbourhood, things like Pembina Highway, Route 90, roads around Polo Park and Lagimodiere, and also many residential streets across the city. It includes \$75 million for municipal roads and bridges.

I'm starting to think that my colleague from—the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) might be— we might have to change his job title to the minister of asphalt, but, you know, just a thought. But the one that really matters for my neighbourhood, just this past week, the Headingley bypass, and what that's going to do for traffic in my neighbourhood in terms of the extension of CentrePort way. It's going to make traffic flow safer and faster for my neighbours. It's also going to build CentrePort as the hub that we know it can be to create a wonderful economic growth potential for all of Manitoba to the north, to the south, to the east and to the west. And that road repair, again, whether it's on King Edward, Berry, or on Sturgeon closer to home, this is what matters to my neighbours. My neighbours know that this team is on their side. These things are going help communities grow across the province and the Conference Board of Canada confirms what we've said. They know that our plan will boost the Manitoba economy by \$6.3 billion, increase exports by \$5.4 billion, boost retail sales by \$1.4 billion, and, yes, 58,000-plus jobs. Again, quite the contrast to the time in this province under members opposite where we saw the near extinction of the building crane in Manitoba. But, again, not to dwell on the negative, let's move back to the positive.

Mr. Speaker, health care, another important thing for folks in my neighbourhood. We know it's important to all Manitobans and it's especially important for seniors, and that's a message that I get on a daily basis long before I was able to take this portfolio.

And we are providing seniors with better care options with personal-care homes in Winnipeg, Morden, and Lac du Bonnet, and improvements to home care. Manitoba was a pioneer in home care. We're proud of our government's commitment to continue building and improving this service, and we're looking forward to celebrating the 40th anniversary of home care this year, an

anniversary that wouldn't have happened if members opposite had had their way and privatized it. So this celebration will be even more sweet for those who are benefitting from that wonderful service.

This budget commits to ongoing funding for sprinkler and fire safety upgrades in health-care facilities based on the advice of firefighters and others on the new Fire Safety Task Force—an excellent idea, listening to the experts. And, of course, in my own neighbourhood the one project that is closest to our heart, our beloved Grace, where the Grace Hospital campus this year will see the opening of the Access Winnipeg west centre and, on the heels of that, will be movement towards our new ER and MRI expansions.

Announcements this past week have been phenomenal, including making progress to our commitment that all Manitobans have access to a family doctor, and I would like to thank all the ministers of Health that have been in this portfolio and working towards that, but our current one especially because, again, this funding for new health-care professionals at doctors offices, the launches of the first of 14 My Health Team clinics and the construction of new primary clinics across the province—sorry. I've got so much and I'm trying to say it so fast and it's tough to keep up. But I want to thank her for that because, again, those kinds of commitments are what matter not just to my neighbourhood, but to all Manitobans—and, again, in sharp contrast to the nurses fired and the medical seats shut down by members opposite. And the Leader of the Opposition can deny his connection to all those choices as much as he wants, but it doesn't make it any more true, and it also makes me wonder if, in addition to his multi-million-dollar home on Wellington Crescent, if he happens to possess real estate in Cairo, because he seems to be well-ensconced on the banks of denial. So—but, again, don't want to dwell on the negative.

Mr. Speaker, let's move on to another great thing that matters to folks in my neighbourhood, the importance of housing. Another issue that's also very important is seniors specifically in this province and in my neighbourhood and, again, very proud of a budget that will finish our current plan to develop 1,500 more affordable housing units and support 1,500 more social housing units, and we're building on a plan by committing to an additional thousand social and affordable housing units over the next three years. And it's so good to know that seniors are a big part of that housing strategy, and the Minister

of Housing and Community Development (Mr. Bjornson) recently announced that we're working with community partners to create 140 new homes for seniors across the province. So I'd like to thank him for the work that he's doing for the folks that I looked after in my portfolio.

*(14:40)

And, again, this is all about making life more affordable for seniors in other ways. This includes the fact that this year will mark the first year of our plan to eliminate school taxes for seniors by 2016, and all senior homeowners will now be able to apply for a school tax rebate of up to \$235 this year, Mr. Speaker, building up to the one—sorry, \$1,100 in education and property tax credits already in place, taking an additional 7,200 seniors off the school tax rolls.

But, you know, Mr. Speaker, we want to make sure that we do this fairly. We want to ensure that those who own, you know, luxury homes—maybe a million, maybe two, maybe, oh, I don't know, 2.2 million, for example—don't get a disproportionate advantage.

We believe also that everyone who has earned a pension deserves to retire with dignity, and so we are committed to a modest, phased-in and fully funded expansion of the Canada Pension Plan to look after those who have worked so hard to look after all of us in building this country. And we continue to work with other provinces that share our vision towards this goal.

And, Mr. Speaker, one of the parts of this portfolio that I'm loving is all the work on nutrition and food security. Just for those that don't know, March is Nutrition Month, and we recently celebrated that in the rotunda with the registered dietitians, and they do amazing work on things like our school nourishment programs. And we know that those programs help children grow, develop and do well in school. It helps them to be more settled, attentive and ready to learn.

And I had a marvellous story from Erin Terhoch Harris who is a—from the River East Transcona School Division and a member of the Child Nutrition Council board. And she told me of a student in her school who repeatedly had problems with making it to school on time, engaging, and they couldn't figure out what it was. They tried different supports, but he just really seemed to have no interest in school. When the school nutrition program came in,

suddenly this same student was showing up early to make sure he had access to food, was grabbing something to eat, and he was in class, attentive, participating. And he told her himself that that was what got him to school every morning and what got him settled. That little bit extra in his day is what turned his academic career around.

So it's so—I'm so proud to be part of a team that works with various partners to support children and youth in making healthier choices and to increase access to healthy foods. And it is this ongoing partnership with the Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba that is one of those gems that we can look towards in terms of these nutrition programs that are now in over 180 schools across the province, reaching 17,000 students with healthy food, building capacity. And we've got after-school fruit and vegetable programs in 39 sites involving over 1,500 students.

We've also got the farm-to-school fundraiser that I'd like to thank my predecessors for setting up—a wonderful partnership with Peak of the Market and work of the Manitoba Association of Home Economists. Nearly 800,000 pounds of Manitoba veggies have been sold every year, with over \$400,000 kept by schools and daycares across Manitoba. And it's not just about selling veggies, it about promoting locally-grown food and promotes healthy eating in a fun and interactive way. And, as a mom with a houseful of boys, I can tell you, anything you can do to get your—gets them to eat veggies, you run with.

And we're also—again, another wonderful partnership is the Winnipeg Foundation's Nourishing Potential endowment fund, providing grants to community organizations to strengthen healthy food initiatives. It's already provided 87 nutrition grants, totalling over \$500,000, including grants to places like the Andrews Street Family Centre, Rossbrook House, and Resource Assistance for Youth. And I'm proud that this budget continues to build on that success. It also commits an additional \$450,000 for child-nutrition programming for students in low-income schools.

And again, members opposite can chatter all they want, it doesn't change how positive things are in this budget. All the naysaying in the world does not mean we are going to listen to them.

Again, for the purposes our own mental health and well-being, we're going to focus on the positive

work that we are doing, not just for our neighbours, not just for your neighbours, but for all Manitobans.

And one of the things that I'm really proud of is we're championing food security in the North, because while my neighbourhood might be here in the city of the Winnipeg, we care about our neighbours all across the province and my neighbours want to know that we're looking after all Manitobans. And the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative includes school nutrition programs, community gardens, composting, greenhouses, traditional fishing, hunting and gathering and food preservation. And I was very proud to work with the Department of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, Food Matters Manitoba, Frontier School Division and many other community partners. And again, we're improving access to healthy foods in over 90 northern communities, including over 1,000 gardens, 300,000 pounds of vegetables, 62 greenhouses. We've got folks raising chickens and bees, and we've even got a Revolving Loan Freezer Purchase Program, which allows all that wonderful bounty to be stored. And, again, we are, in this budget, now launching a new pilot project to make healthy foods, including milk, more accessible to northern Manitobans. And, again, poverty reduction is another part of looking after every Manitoban, and, again, food security and other social determinants of health are a key part of that.

This budget increases the minimum age-wage once again, something we've done every year since 1999. It also introduces the Manitoba Rent Assist benefit which will significantly increase housing supports for people on social assistance, and it will move with them as they move up in the workforce. And once fully implemented, rent support for those on social assistance will rise to the 75 per cent of median market rate.

So these are the things that create better conditions for healthier living. What we're doing again is positive, Mr. Speaker, and I'm very proud to be a part of this team. And, again, my neighbours are happy with the fact that not only are we looking out for what they want and that we're on their side, but we are on the side of all Manitobans.

And, again, to members opposite, I would just make two recommendations for them. And, again, I don't say this necessarily with a report or a policy in hand, but in the same way that one should maybe, again, focus on the positive, not be staring at the silver lining looking for the cloud as they tend to do—

again, not terribly good for one's overall mental health and well-being. And, again, as the minister whose responsibility includes harm reduction and injury prevention, again, we don't have an official policy on this side, but I do remember my mother teaching me—and I don't know if, again, mothers of members opposite did—it's not really wise to run with scissors; somebody's bound to get hurt.

So thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now open the floor to my other colleagues so that more of them can reflect on all the positive things that have come out of this year's budget. And I would like to close by thanking my neighbours for their support and feedback and thank you to the Minister of Finance (Ms. Howard) for listening to them and delivering on what matters most to them.

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): It's an honour to be back in this House again, representing the constituents of La Verendrye.

I would like to start by welcoming my two new colleagues, and since I can't mention their names, I guess I'll just have to call them my colleague to the right, the member from Arthur-Virden and, well, my colleague to the left, from Morris. After listening to their maiden speeches, I know why they will be great representatives for their constituencies, and they'll be a great asset for this side of the House.

It's a shame that the Premier (Mr. Selinger) took so long to call a by-election for Morris, and I think I can see why. Looking at the talent we have here, he was probably just afraid of them. But I guess the constituents had the last say when they went out to vote and they showed the Premier what they thought of him not having them not having representation for almost a year.

Mr. Speaker, this is the third budget I have participated in since becoming an MLA. This budget, like the first two, I cannot support. With all the broken promises that I've seen over the last two and a half years, this NDP government has no credibility. Government should be trustworthy and transparent. After what this NDP government has done to Manitobans, Manitobans no longer trust them. But I will be supporting the amendment brought forward by the member from Fort Whyte, and I know I have the backing of the constituents of La Verendrye to do this.

In 2011, 57 NDP candidates went door to door and campaigned on no new tax increases. Read my lips, no tax—new—no new taxes, the Premier said. In

just a few short months, the Premier broke the promise.

In the budget of 2012, he expanded the PST to include home insurance and haircuts. He increased the gas tax by 2 and a half cents per litre, he raised vehicle registrations. Budget 2012 has no less than nine new taxes and fee increases, the biggest tax grab in Manitoba since the days of Howard Pawley.

* (14:50)

How is it possible for the NDP's financial experts to make such a miscalculation, going from no tax increases to the largest tax increases in years? Another broken NDP promise.

The second promise from the election of 2011 was to eliminate education taxes from senior's bills. Mr. Speaker, the seniors are still waiting; they're tired of broken promises and they won't be fooled again by this NDP government.

The third promise from the election of 2011 was to balance the budget by 2014. They laughed at us when we had a date that was a little later than that. This year's budget broke that promise, making it the sixth consecutive NDP budget to run a deficit.

Mr. Speaker, let's move on to Budget 2013. This is where the NDP increased the sales tax from 7 per cent to 8 per cent, a 14 per cent increase and even a bigger tax grab than the previous year. But this time the NDP not only broke their promise, they broke the law. The Balanced Budget, Fiscal Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act clearly states that Manitobans had the right to vote in a referendum before the government could issue a major tax increase. But the NDP raised it anyway, denying Manitobans their right to vote in a referendum. Sounds like a country we were just talking about the other day.

Mr. Speaker, because of this NDP government's spending habits and poor money management skills, the Province's debt has increased dramatically. The NDP government has done a terrible job of managing Manitoba's finances in a time of record-high transfer payments, record-low interest rates and record revenues. What will they do should the interest rates increase? Even a 1 or 2 per cent increase on interest rates would be devastating for this province.

The cost of servicing our debt has now gone up to \$872 million. That is approximately \$2.3 million each and every day. Mr. Speaker, the total amount of

money that we use—like, for the service—or interest charges on our debt is more than we spend on infrastructure in a year in Transportation, more than we spend in the Jobs and Economy, more than we spend on Municipal Government.

Mr. Speaker, there are, however, a number of things that we can give the NDP credit for, things like the highest inflation rate in Canada, increasing taxes to Manitobans by over \$500 million in the last two years and destroying hope and optimism for small business owners. I have heard from small businesses about their concern with the increase in the PST from 7 to 8 per cent. They can't believe that this NDP government thinks a PST increase will help small business. Every small business I have talked to is very concerned about the damage these tax increases are going to do to their businesses. Other businesses tell me their sales are down this year because consumers are feeling the pinch from this NDP government; their dollars just don't go as far as they used to, forcing them to make tough decisions.

What this government does not understand, that there are certain costs in running a business. There are capital costs, rent, hydro bills to pay, and if your sales are down those costs still remain the same. Capital costs don't go down when sale costs go down. But the profit from these sales makes the difference as to whether a business can expand, hire a summer student, or put some money away for retirement. We all know that business is the backbone of this province's economy, but this NDP government has no idea how small business works. They feel they can go ahead and continue raising taxes and fees without any consequences.

Mr. Speaker, businesses are not only affected by the NDP's spending habits, all Manitobans are impacted by the NDP government's spending habits. In Manitoba a low-income family pays—of four—pays 26 per cent more income tax they did—than it did 13 years ago. In BC or Alberta, the same family who have seen its income tax bill fall to zero; in Saskatchewan, that family's income tax fell by 168 per cent; and, in Ontario, it fell by 210 per cent.

Mr. Tom Nevašhonoff, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Another thing this government does not want to talk about is bracket creep. Manitobans' income rises with inflation, but the tax brackets do not. As a result, we are paying millions more in taxes because some fall into brackets that they don't really—doesn't really reflect their actual income level, another

hidden tax from the NDP that they will not do anything about.

Manitoba is one of only three provinces that doesn't index its tax system to the rate of inflation. This costs Manitobans millions of dollars in personal income tax every year. Manitobans are paying more in income tax and are not even aware of it. Record fees and tax increases are costing the average Manitoba family an extra \$1,600 a year, and now Budget 2014 is raising that even further. It's clear that the NDP have failed to keep their promises and as a result Manitobans are feeling the pinch.

This government claims to be the friend of low-income families, but what have they done for low-income families in Manitoba? Well, we've seen the—we've been the child poverty capital of Canada for the last six years with more than 55,000 children living in poverty in Manitoba. We all know how important it is to have a roof over our heads and food to eat, especially for our children. We all know how important proper nutrition is to the development of a child. Because of the cost of rent, low-income families on EIA are having to take money away from food and use it towards paying rent. This NDP government let rental allowances stay stagnant for the past 14 years. Along with the make-along with Make Poverty History coalition we called for the Employment and Income Assistance rental allowance rates to be raised to 75 per cent of median market rates. It was because of this that in Budget 2014 the NDP have promised to raise the EIA rent allowance for some time in the future, but won't say when.

The new Department of Children and Youth Opportunities has not amounted to any success stories, and even the NDP cannot dispute that they are desperately falling—failing our most vulnerable children.

While we're on the topic of our children, this budget does nothing to stop our net outmigration of people leaving this province for other provinces. As of now, 56,000 people in Manitoba have left to move to other provinces. We are losing our brightest young people to other provinces, the ones we need to fill the jobs here, and this government is doing nothing to stop this. They're encouraging people to leave with their high taxes and high spending habits.

One would also hope that with all these tax increases that we would see improved services under this NDP government, but that has not been the case. Nineteen—19 is the number of rural ERs that have

been closed under this NDP government. The ER at the Vita hospital in my constituency has been closed for almost 18 months now. The minister promised us the closure would be short—512 days to be exact. But it's been 512 days and still no ER. The NDP have broken their promise and turned hallway medicine into highway medicine.

The Minister of Health (Ms. Selby) has promised that all Manitobans will have a family doctor by 2015. How far will they have to drive to find one? I know it's not going to be that easy where I come from, another empty promise.

* (15:00)

It was the Premier (Mr. Selinger) that promised no matter where you live in this province you should have access to health care close to home. Well, that is not happening in Manitoba. The Conference Board of Canada ranks Manitoba's health-care system dead last in Canada. According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information, Manitoba has one of the lowest doctor-retention rates in Canada. Since the NDP took power, more than 2,200 doctors have left Manitoba to practise in other jurisdictions. Within the last year, 439 licensed doctors left Manitoba.

I ask, why are they leaving? If it's so good, why are they leaving? Our government obviously is not looking after them that they're leaving. The Health budget now consumes more than 40 per cent of the total budget—provincial budget, and it's growing. But, you know, Manitobans aren't seeing increased services. The NDP's inability to manage the health-care system needs to be changed.

Health care is not the only thing the NDP government has mismanaged. They've also failed us in infrastructure. Manitoba's highways and bridges are in poor shape. This NDP government has underspent the infrastructure budget by \$1.9 million over the last four years while overspending in every other department. But now they're—all of a sudden they're interested in infrastructure. Where were they the last four years? And they have a brand new five-year plan. When I start looking back over the budget from last year, the budget—it's—they always come up with a new five-year plan for something or other. But the trouble is they don't fulfill anything that's—well, last year was not five years. Because they had a five-year plan last year, five-year plan the year before, they had a 10-year plan before that. But the only reason that they announce a new plan is they have a whole bunch of new promises in it to break.

Manitobans aren't going to be fooled by this. Manitobans cannot believe anything this NDP government has to say. This year's budget is using infrastructure as the reason for the PST increase. Last year, the budget—they used the excuse that, well, they needed flooding—money for flooding increases, they needed money for whatever, the PST increase—they just had to have the money. When flooding didn't happen and it didn't get any traction from the public, they changed it to schools and hospitals. When that wasn't working, they changed it to infrastructure, and that is where they are today.

But, fortunately, with the NDP's record of broken promises, they are having a hard time convincing Manitobans to believe them. In my constituency we have on the Roseau River the Gardenton Floodway. It was announced in the Throne Speech last—in the last Throne Speech that something would be done of it. But yet I've talked to several people, nobody has a clue what's going on. There's no plan, there's nothing, but it's just an announcement so it'll get them some traction. But if they're not going to do anything with those announcements, why are they making them? Why are they breaking all these promises?

This year we're having all these infrastructure discussions but nothing is being said about the Gardenton diversion. With all this snow, is it possible that we may have a flood? But all of a sudden it's going to come that, oh, it looks like we've got to do something, so we're going to spend another six or seven hundred thousand dollars with a stop-gap measure to reinforce the dike until we can do something with it.

Hydro: I don't know why this government won't listen to experts. There are all kinds of experts out there who disagree with this government's policies. This government knows—does not know—does not have the expertise of Hydro. A lot of experts are telling them what they're doing is wrong.

We talk about having cheap hydro rates for Manitoba. They've increased the hydro rates 8 per cent in the last two years. They've got it for the PUB to increase it another 4 per cent. That is 12 per cent. Since this NDP government has come into power, that is approximately 23 per cent of increase. But they've also got it on the books that they want to increase the cost of hydro to the citizens of—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. It's getting a little loud in here. I just ask all members to please

co-operate a little bit and do a little less talking and a little more listening, and show the member who has the floor the respect that he deserves.

Mr. Smook: Thank you.

When a government raises the hydro rates every year, they're talking about raising it 4 per cent every year for the next 20 years, plus what they've raised it. I know of small businesses who are—they're scared of that; they have a \$2,000-a-month hydro bill on a small business. When you increase it every year by 4 per cent, that is—some businesses just won't be able to afford it. We talk about one of the members across there said, well, that's the market rate. The trouble is I believe Manitoba's—Manitoba Hydro's mission statement was that they should be giving Manitobans the cheapest possible rate for Manitobans, not having the Manitobans subsidize the Americans with hydro.

Honesty, integrity, transparency; three important items that a politician should have but I haven't seen it from across the floor lately. Right now there's, I believe, three lawsuits against this government; that really speaks for integrity, honesty.

The vote tax. We hear everybody talking across the floor about, you know, how we're in tough times; you know, we got to watch what we're doing, how we're spending. But they gave themselves—each one of them gets a \$5,000-a-year freebie so they can use that to campaign. That is not right for Manitobans, and that is not fair for any of us.

I would like to close by just saying that the only thing I have seen in the last three budgets of this NDP government is their ability to stifle economic growth and development in this province. The NDP's refusal to join the New West Partnership, to eliminate small business tax and to table legislation aimed at reducing red tape around services all contribute to this.

On this side of the House, we believe that in order for Manitoba's economy to grow, people's hard-earned dollars should be spent at their table, their kitchen table and not at the Cabinet table, like this NDP government.

Thank you.

Ms. Deanne Crothers (St. James): I am excited to be able to stand here today to speak to the budget that Minister Howard has brought forward. While I feel there are many specific elements to this speech that are good for specific groups of people, overall

my perspective on this budget is that it is a response to the needs of Manitobans and designed to make their lives simpler.

Speaking as someone's partner, as a parent, as someone holding a full—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Just to advise the member who has the floor right now to refer to people by their constituencies or ministers by their titles, and refrain from using their names.

The honourable member for St. James has the floor.

Ms. Crothers: My apologies, yes, sorry.

Speaking as someone's partner, as a parent, as someone holding a full-time position, as a community member, and clearly a rookie, I know how busy my household can be trying to co-ordinate four schedules, and I am certain that it is no different from any other Manitoban family, even more so if you are a single parent who is trying to do it all on your own.

While I have detected a certain disdain from the members opposite when the term consultation is used here in this Chamber, I feel that valuable consultation has taken place which has informed us about what Manitobans feel is important and how they would like us to move ahead.

Whether these consultations came through the previous work that my fellow MLAs have done, such as the work of the MLA for Fort Garry-Riverview when he completed the Liquor and Lotteries consultation, or that of the MLA for St. Norbert for his workplace health and safety consultation, or that of the Minister of Finance (Ms. Howard) herself who conducted a town hall conversation that engaged thousands of Manitobans to discuss with her their views and concerns.

* (15:10)

I also had the responsibility of conducting a consultation for the upcoming child-care multi-year plan that we will be releasing. And this proved to be one of the most important and enriching experiences of my political career, and one that has illustrated to me, in a very immediate way, the importance and the value of this process for both the public and the government. And I would even say it has reinforced my faith that people can directly and significantly help to forge policies and agendas through the simple act of sharing their ideas with their elected official.

It fills me with a great deal of pride to know that I belong to a party and I'm part of a government that believes that listening to individuals who have a specific suggestion about how we can do things differently is important.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please understand that the child-care consultations were not easy by any means. Of the 25 consultations that I conducted throughout the province, it would usually take the first half hour to get those in attendance to realize that I was there because I was interested in their perspective, their experience and, yes, their criticisms as well. Once I was able to establish that, that's when the constructive conversation began in earnest, and to see that from those suggestions and concerns which I carried forward from Manitobans to both the minister and the department of Child and Family Services, to see those taking shape and influencing how the budget was being designed was an absolute affirmation of why I chose to run as an elected official.

The budget's inclusion of \$5.5 million for new child-care spaces and better funding for centres is a signal from our government to Manitobans that we are listening and we want to work together to make sure that we are supporting families and helping them get what they need to make life less complicated and easier to get ahead. While it is still a work in progress, I am very excited about the release of the upcoming multi-year child-care plan that will outline how we are going to build and expand more child-care centres, create thousands of new spaces and provide higher wages and additional training for more child-care professionals while creating a stronger connection between child-care centres and the schools which our children will move into once they turn five.

I would like to acknowledge both the Minister of Finance who gave me the responsibility of conducting the consultation as she was the minister of child and family services at the time, as well as the current minister of child and family services for seamlessly following through during the consultation process to the end. The work that these two women have done to ensure that our child-care system continues to grow shows the value that this government places on supporting our families and providing excellent care for our little ones as they learn while in the care of our trained child-care educators during the most formative years of their lives, before school even begins.

The public in each of our constituencies has elected us to help make decisions as their representatives. Government's role is to make decisions on behalf of its people. It is our responsibility to listen to what Manitobans ask for us and to create opportunities that address their concerns by providing concrete responses to those concerns. We must weigh how best to serve all Manitobans with an eye to maintaining those things that we all need now, while still looking ahead and aiming for future successes. I'm particularly appreciative that this budget is one designed to create opportunities for all Manitobans to contribute their gifts and skills to this province, and we do that because we know that everyone has something to contribute and that there is potential within all Manitobans given the right opportunities.

In my previous career as an adult literacy instructor in Ontario, I saw for myself the impact that an adult, given the right opportunity and a bit of support, would have not just on their own lives, but on the lives of their children and the rest of their family. Once they realized it wasn't too late for them to learn and improve their skills, their world would begin to expand. I worked with many adults who had given up long ago on the idea of getting a high school diploma, who felt that they weren't smart enough or good enough to be able to master things that when they were younger they'd been told they couldn't do. Almost everyone I worked with was someone who hid their challenges extremely well. While some of the people I worked with were employed, they were tied to a very limited existence and narrow opportunities as a result of these long-hidden challenges. And it is such a terrible shame when we lock ourselves, especially from a young age, into self-perceptions that can end up defining us potentially for the rest of our lives, and I saw this again and again during my years in this field. It takes a great deal of bravery for adults to make their way to seek help developing skills that they don't want anyone else knowing that they can't do. And when you do make that connection with them, oh, my goodness, the experience of seeing that change take place before your eyes is an immense experience to share with an adult learner, because they discover not only that they can understand how to do it, but then they can be good at it. And their whole world changes in a very short period of time because in their minds they now can do things they never thought they could before. I think that should be an experience most of us in the Chamber can relate to.

For someone who has lived in poverty, who has, perhaps, come from a generational poverty, a situation of generational poverty, one who has come from a background where there may be social issues that extend to other generations within the same family, this realization really is a doorway to prosperity. To recognize that connecting Manitobans who might need just enough support to improve their basic skills with the people and places to give them that support is very reassuring to me and should be to other Manitobans who care about giving everyone the chance to discover that they can contribute and be rewarded for their contributions through better paying jobs in any number of fields.

Our budget speech identifies that we will be working to ensure that we help to break down barriers between welfare and work. One of the ways we will do this is through launching Manitoba Works, a new program with community agencies that will provide essential skills training. These are the very supports and opportunities that I witnessed for myself that make a lasting improvement on the lives of those who can access them. And, as Minister Howard said, no one should be worse off when they leave welfare for work. To make sure—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Once again, I'd like to remind the member to refer to our colleagues by their constituency or by their—ministers by their titles.

The honourable member for St. James has the floor.

Ms. Crothers: My sincere apologies. The Minister of Finance (Ms. Howard) said, no one should be worse off when they leave welfare for work. To make sure that those who are transitioning from social assistance to employment after they have accessed these training and essential skills opportunities, we are introducing a Manitoba Rent Assist benefit. And this year, we're working also on additional 1,000 social affordable housing units that will begin to be constructed. I look forward to the work that the Minister of Jobs and the Economy (Ms. Oswald) is driven to do with these kinds of initiatives. And we do this because we want to see individuals succeed and to have more Manitobans gain access to a life that is personally fulfilling and financially beneficial.

It is important, necessary and right for all persons to be invited to find their place at prosperity's table. And on this side of the House, we are happy to help them get there. As the Minister of

Finance (Ms. Howard) stated in the budget speech, helping people move from welfare to work is not just the right thing to do, it's the right thing for the economy. It seems to me that those two things should go hand in hand. I can't imagine a better motivation for any government than to keep that goal in mind as it makes its decision on behalf of its people.

It is not just about the bottom line or getting to a magic number at the expense of whatever might get in the way of reaching that goal, such as basic services that all Manitobans rely on daily. We're not going to cut those. It is about finding ways to help people get what they need so that they can contribute to the success that we all will benefit from as a province, because when we help each other find success individually, we're really helping everyone at the same time. That is how we approach things on this side of the House, and I believe that that is an idea that any Manitoban can support.

Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I rise today to discuss the budget presented by the Finance Minister and the NDP government on March the 6th. As the budget is primarily a financial document, I want first of all to address some of the basic financial aspects of this budget.

Was the budget balanced? The answer here is clearly no. Even this NDP government admits this. It wasn't balanced in spite of their 2011 election promise to balance the budget by 2014-2015. It's another in a long line of promises broken by this government. It's another demonstration of the poor financial management of this government. It's another in the long list comprising over 14 years of failure by this NDP government.

Let us look at the size of the deficit. The government provides two numbers. With regard to the core government operations, there is a deficit of \$613 million. With regard to the summary budget, which includes Crown corporations like Manitoba Hydro, the deficit is \$432 million. From the point of view of the finances, over which the government has direct control and is directly responsible for, the deficit is \$613 million, and this is the number which is most properly used to assess the budgetary performance of this government. It must be stated that this is a very large deficit. It compares to a deficit of \$690 million in core government operations in the previous fiscal year and, while

slightly better, still represents a very high level of deficit.

* (15:20)

When the Finance Minister says one of her goals is balancing the budget in 2016-2017, it must be said that at the rate of decrease in deficit demonstrated between this fiscal year and the one we're about to begin, a single-year decrease of \$77 million on a \$690-million deficit—it would take nine years or until 2023 to balance the budget. On this first goal of the Finance Minister, her goal to balance the budget by 2016-2017, the progress has not been good. This is particularly evident when the government had promised to balance the budget by 2014-2015 in the last election, and this current budget blows that commitment out of the water.

It's also to be noted that the budget for the upcoming 2014-2015 year doesn't contain any contingency funds for an emergency situation. In many years, unfortunately, emergencies do arise and certainly have arisen in Manitoba, and if the NDP had been thinking at all, they would've included such contingency funds as part of the budget. It's another sign that the NDP are ill-able or incapable of managing our provincial finances—the money of the people of Manitoba—at all well. There is no foresight or even realistic scope in their approach to financial management. With a body of recent historical evidence on the nature of emergencies that do arise in this province, there's a critical need for a proactive approach to prevention and management, instead of the government's reactive scramble after an emergency occurs.

This deficit of 630–\$613 million in core government operations is \$108 million more than forecast last spring. This shows that the government of the NDP is still not able even to keep to its budgetary commitment in expenditures. A careful analysis shows that the major reason for the larger deficit is that the NDP government spent \$131 million more than they budgeted in expenditures this fiscal year. This overspending of their expenditure budget has been a chronic problem with the NDP government, dating back to 1999 when they were first elected. Every year since the NDP came to power, they've spent more than they budgeted to spend. It is beyond a major problem, this failure to meet their budget and manage expenses well. With the NDP government at the helm, they are overspending Manitoba toward a financial crisis. Not comprehending the purpose of creating a budget nor

the expectation that they should actually meet and not exceed their expenditures is a major reason for the current financial problems of this government and for the growing debt.

Speaking of the debt crisis, the government's net debt is projected to be \$17.3 billion at the end of 2013-2014, an increase of \$1.4 billion over the net debt a year previous. The net debt is increasing much faster than the size of the budget deficit, and this is because the government is amortizing its infrastructure spending and, thus, using borrowed money to pay for much of their new infrastructure investment. The summary net debt has grown from 27.3 per cent of GDP to 28.7 per cent of GDP. This is a large increase for a single year and also emphasizes the poor financial management by the present NDP government.

Moving now to talk about infrastructure, the Finance Minister's second goal is related to building infrastructure in Manitoba. It's to be noted that the NDP have finally clarified their position from last year when, during the year, they were talking about spending the PST money on all sorts of items other than core infrastructure. For instance, last year, on September 20th, the Minister of Finance at the time, the MLA for Dauphin, said, and I quote: We have made the commitment that we're going to dedicate that money to critical infrastructure, roads and bridges and schools and hospitals.

This was one of many, many attempts by the government to explain what it was doing. In the end, the NDP decided to subscribe to the view that core infrastructure does not include hospitals and schools. So, now, they've restricted their definition to highways, bridges and strategic transportation infrastructure, flood protection and municipal infrastructure, including roads, water and sewer.

Even after the mess over communicating what the government was doing in terms of infrastructure and finance last year, the NDP have again, this year, demonstrated that they're still attempting to mislead Manitobans. On page 16 of the budget papers, the government shows that last year they only spent \$125 million of the \$196 million raised by increasing the PST on core infrastructure. Worse than this, the remaining \$71 million raised by increasing the PST was not set aside to be spent in future years, but rather it was spent on items other than core infrastructure and there is nothing to account for what those items were. The decision to spend this

money on items other than core infrastructure breaks their promise to spend every dollar of the money raised by increasing the PST. As I have pointed out, the failure of the NDP to spend the PST money on core infrastructure this year provides no credibility to their promises to do it in future years, particularly since in recent years they've underspent on infrastructure while overspending in other areas.

Yesterday it was exposed that the NDP claim of job creation from their infrastructure program has been grossly exaggerated. The NDP have been deliberately misquoting the Conference Board of Canada report to suggest that the next five years of infrastructure spending will create 58 to 60 thousand jobs. They did this not once but 13 times in the first four days of the Legislature session.

In fact, the Conference Board of Canada report concludes that the infrastructure spending will only create 58,000 person-years of employment. The NDP intend to count a person who becomes newly employed in the first year and stays employed for all five years, five times. If one considers that if each of the jobs created were a permanent job, then a maximum of 13,400 jobs would have been created, not 58,900 as the NDP are trying to claim. The exaggerated spin of the NDP is not helping them convince anyone this year as people are used to their deception. There are more problems yet with the NDP proposal which I will be exposing in due course.

The third goal stated in the budget speech is investing in front-line services that Manitoba families can count on. Let us begin by looking at child care and early childhood education. As was made abundantly clear at a forum on September 18th last year, child care and early childhood education are in a crisis situation here in Manitoba. There are more than 10,000 children on the provincial standardized waiting list.

The stories of problems accessing child care abound. On the panel, one of the panelists who is self-employed was unable to get access to child care and she had to leave her business, resulting in the 10 people she was employing being laid off. This doesn't make any sense at all. To have a child care and early childhood education system operating in a way so that people cannot work and people are being laid off because they're unable to actually access the desperately needed child care and early childhood education for their children.

The additional funding this year for child care and early childhood education represents an increase of 3.8 per cent. If one considers inflation in Manitoba, this last year at 2.2 per cent, then this is a real increase of only 1.6 per cent with 10,000 additional spaces still outstanding on the provincial registry. This would realistically require an increase of about 25 per cent in funding for child care and early childhood education. Clearly the NDP increase in funding for child care and early childhood education this year is not enough to address the crisis which exists today.

The suggestion that the NDP are providing front-line services that families can count on is clearly unfounded, as these needs are not being met. Perhaps the NDP should have taken a more realistic look at what's actually needed. Tunnel vision and blind mismanagement are again evident when considering that even if this NDP government were to accept the reality of the Conference Board of Canada's report on the creation of 14,000 jobs, they couldn't be expecting parents to jump at these opportunities for job creation if mothers and fathers are still waiting on the list of nearly 11,000 for child care and early childhood education spaces.

* (15:30)

Let us look in other areas. Take for example preventive health care. This has been a problem for many years under the NDP, a marker of whether the NDP approach is working is whether new cases of a preventable disease like diabetes are in fact being prevented. The NDP tried to make a case that their efforts were being effective last year, but an analysis of the evidence quickly showed that the incidents of diabetes, the number of new cases diagnosed each year still remains much higher than it was when they were first elected in 1999 and that the overall number of Manitobans being diagnosed with diabetes is continuing to increase. Overall, sadly, an effort to improve strategies for the prevention of sickness including the prevention of diabetes was not mentioned in the budget speech. It is sad that the diabetes epidemic which has been raging in Manitoba since 1996 is receiving so little attention from this government. Indeed, this is a tragedy, because preventing type 2 diabetes, a preventable condition, can dramatically improve the health of people and just as dramatically reduced health-care costs.

I was pleased to see a mention of flood prevention in the budget, but far more disappointed

to see that there was no indication that the government will be coming forward with an effective surface water management plan to aid in flood prevention as well as to help in reducing the pollution of our rivers and lakes by phosphorous. Over the last four decades the amount of drainage which has occurred has increased the amount of water running off the land in Manitoba and in the last 15 years this has occurred very dramatically in southwestern Manitoba. Small streams have turned into rivers in the spring as the result of much more rapid runoff from the increased drainage. The overall result is careful studies by Ducks Unlimited scientists like Pascal Badiou has shown, is that there's now some 30 per cent more water coming off the land than previously.

It is no wonder that flooding is more severe in recent years, particularly when one adds the impact of climate change. The budget should've had a major focus on improved water management with an emphasis on water retention to reduce the speed and volume of water coming off the land, to reduce downstream flooding and to reduce phosphorous going into Lake Winnipeg. I can tell the members of this Chamber that, when I was visiting people in Morris constituency in January, I certainly heard from people about issues of poor water management policies by this government which need to be addressed. Why they were not addressed in this budget is certainly a puzzle even if, as many say, the NDP don't really understand or care about farmers. The NDP should care about Manitobans living in towns and cities and around lakes which are downstream and who can be affected by flooding, and they should also care about farmers.

There is much more that should've been in this budget, but was not. In the NDP view, economic growth appears to depend almost solely on spending on infrastructure. There is, for example, little attention given to addressing the fact that we have fallen behind Saskatchewan in manufacturing production or the need to address red-tape issues, taxation issues like the payroll tax and improving research and innovation to develop, produce and market innovative new products and services. There should've been more attention to small, medium and large businesses in this budget.

There are many issues surrounding health-care delivery, including notably the function of our emergency rooms which need attention. There are issues around education that also require attention, for example, the low scores of our students in math,

language and science. There are issues in the functioning of our child and family services system which need improvement, as we've seen in the testimony before the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry. Sixty-two areas were identified in Commissioner Hughes report alone.

Recently, I visited with individuals in New Zealand to talk about their approach to child welfare. While we have a population in Manitoba of 1.2 million people and have 10,000 children in care, one might expect New Zealand with a population of about 4.5 million people to have four times as many children in care or about 40,000 children, but it does not. In New Zealand, there are only about 4,000 children in care. They have found a way to better involve and support the extended families that is effective so that fewer children need to be taken into care. I should point out that New Zealand with 18 per cent of its population being Maori or Aboriginal is not dissimilar to Manitoba where 10 per cent of our population is First Nation and about 8 per cent Metis. Further, I met with Anton Blank who heads an organization dedicated to eliminating child maltreatment in Maori families within two generations. We need such a vision and such an effort here.

Strangely missing from the budget speech was a vision in funding for decreasing violence against women. This is clearly an important area of concern. Why it was not mentioned is a mystery. The fact that it was not mentioned shows that the government's priorities are not the same as many Manitobans who see this as important to address.

In addition to what I've already said about this budget, I want to indicate that I see part of my job, and the job of Liberals in Manitoba, is to hold this government to account. Nice words were said by the government in the budget about increasing the support for shelter, for rents, for those on low income. The government has said that at some future point, it hopes that the level of support will reach 75 per cent of market rates for rents. As Liberals, we will be keeping a close eye on the government to see if they actually meet this commitment. At this point we don't know when the government plans to reach support equal to 75 per cent of market rates. Will it be next week? Next month? Next year? Later this year? Or tens of years from now? It should happen as quickly as possible, but quickly is not a word that is associated with this government. So we and others are likely—have to wait, and possibly to wait some more, and possibly to wait some more after that.

We have learned over many years that the actions of this government do not always match their words. And I want to let the government know that we, as Liberals, will be watching them very closely. And we will be watching them closely not only in this area but in other areas, for example, in their support of seniors and for the quality of life of our seniors. There are many other areas in health care and the well-being of families where we will be watching closely.

There's much to be done to improve the health of all; to decrease infant mortality is one example. The government and the people of Manitoba know that we will be watching and doing everything we can to keep this government accountable. With this government it is a difficult task but we will be vigilant, we will do our best and we and our team will work night and day to get improvements in Manitoba from where we are now.

In the session ahead, I will be bringing these concerns up again and again. I have more to add from the concerns of middle-income Manitobans, concerns of families in which both parents are working and families with single working parents. There's much to—that needs to be done in our province. This budget was not the answer. It was a sad 'aggemp'—attempt at guessing where the answers lay, and I will be voting against it.

Thank you.

Ms. Nancy Allan (St. Vital): Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it certainly is a privilege to be here today in the House and put a few words on the record in regard to Budget 2014 that is an investment in communities all across this province.

I just want to start off today by saying that I don't have a lot of time to speak today because we have this huge lineup of people who are so excited to speak today to the budget because such—it's a wonderful budget. So I'm not going to take my full 30 minutes because we have to make room for everyone.

But I do want to take this opportunity to thank the new Minister of Finance (Ms. Howard), the MLA for Fort Rouge. I know that this is no easy task to be the Finance Minister, certainly in these difficult economic times that we have faced since the recession set in in 2008. But I am pleased that she has taken the time to travel across this province, to listen to people across the province, to stakeholders who have met with her in regard to what their

priorities are and in regard to the investments that we should be making to continue to grow our economy. And Budget 2014 is a reflection of what she heard and a reflection, I believe, of what we all want, what we all want for our children, what we all want for our constituents and for our communities. We want our young people, in this day and age, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to find good jobs so that they can participate in our society and they can lead meaningful lives. And I believe this is what Budget 2014 is all about. I believe it reflects what Manitoba citizens told our new Minister of Finance (Ms. Howard), and we, of course, will be very pleased to support this budget.

* (15:40)

I would also like to talk a little bit about the balanced approach that we have taken in Budget 2014. This is a balanced approach, it's focusing on growing our economy and it is focused on creating jobs.

And I would like to recognize the MLA for Seine River who is in the new role as the Minister responsible for Jobs and the Economy, and I cannot think of a better person to be in the role of—in this role, Mr. Deputy Speaker. She is—as is everyone knows in this House, she is a former educator and actually taught in my constituency of St. Vital at Glen Lawn Collegiate and was the vice-principal at Victor Mager School.

And, of course, the MLA for Seine River is a parent of a young guy, his—he's a great little guy, his name is Jack, and I think it—we couldn't have asked anybody better to be in this portfolio because she cares—just like any other parent, cares in this province, she wants young people in this day and age to have an opportunity, to find good jobs, to participate in our economy. And I know that she is going to work hard so that we have opportunities for all of our young people so that they can work, they can live and they can stay right here in Manitoba—right here in Manitoba.

And it has been difficult, you know, dealing with budgets since 2008 when we started dealing with a very, very uncertain economy. And we have had to make difficult choices, but I can guarantee you we have not made the choices that were made by the opposition. And the Leader of the Opposition, when he sat around the Cabinet table, we have not made those choices. We are focusing our—we are focusing on our plan to grow our economy and to create good jobs. We want to ensure that we have opportunities

for young people to build their futures here in Manitoba.

I'm very fortunate, I have two children, one 26, one 29. One is an electrician in the trades who went through the apprenticeship system, and I am very, very pleased that we are continuing to grow our apprenticeship system so that young people can find an opportunity to be a welder or a plumber or an electrician or a sheet metal worker. We need to continue to have those kinds of jobs for young people so—and I got to tell you, they are good jobs, well-paying jobs, and we need to continue to make those jobs available for young people.

And my son, Joel, he has a job; he went and got his degree from university and he is the hospitality industry, and that's an industry that he loves. And that's what we all want for our young people these days—we want them to have an opportunity to work in jobs that they love.

The other thing Budget 2014 does and that is so critically important is we are investing in better roads, we are investing in flood protection and we are investing in clean water.

Now, I know that the Minister of Infrastructure has talked many times about our investments in asphalt, and I'm actually thinking that the Leader of the Opposition might be talking to his colleagues about supporting this budget just because of the amount of money that we're going to spend on asphalt, because I know Mike Brown is his director of communications, who ran against me in St. Vital, and I remember his very first promise during the election campaign, it was to pave every back lane in St. Vital. And I still remember the photograph of him in the brochure, and it was from the waist down, in a—walking through a back lane, and he was going to pave every back lane. So I am quite sure that they are going to support this budget just because there's a lot of asphalt that is going to be paved—roads, roads, roads, and I am sure that Mike Brown is trying to convince the Leader of the Opposition to support this budget.

We are also working, Mr. Deputy Speaker, very hard on restoring our balanced budget responsibly so there are no cuts to services that families count on. And so, once again, I just want to remind members opposite that we did not do what they did when they were facing the very kinds of economic uncertainty that we are facing today. The Leader of the Opposition sat at Filmon's Cabinet table and they made cuts that hurt families and that hurt our

economy. They are also—they have been—they have said very clearly that they would make cuts again. They have said that they would reverse the decision on the PST increase, but it's funny, they never really say what they're going to cut. You know, they never really come—you know, we know that in the past they cut health care. We know in the past they cut schools. We know they cut—in—when we got into power in 1999, northern Manitoba wasn't even on the map. We had to get a new provincial map so that northern Manitoba could be on it. So we know that if they were in charge, we would have crumbling roads and, once again, young people would be leaving our province, just like they did when they were in government.

I am so pleased that I had the opportunity to be the minister of Education, and I want to say what a great job my colleague the MLA for Riverview-Fort Garry is doing in—Fort Garry-Riverview is doing in the Department of Education and Advanced Learning, and I want to take this opportunity to congratulate him on the piece of legislation that he introduced this week, The Public Schools Amendment Act (Connecting Schools to the Internet).

Now, this was an incredible piece of work because a long journey was taken to try to provide broadband for students in rural communities and in northern communities. And it was very, very difficult, and we worked with the bureaucrats in our department, worked with the superintendents of the school divisions from across Manitoba that were concerned about this, and they had many meetings with the Manitoba Telephone System to try to find an affordable package so that we could do this for our school divisions all across this province, and in—particularly in northern Manitoba, where there isn't a lot of broadband.

And this is about equity. This is about equity for all students. If we lived in Saskatchewan, this would be easy because it's already been done. It was—it's SaskPower. They provide broadband to all of the students and all of the schools in SaskTel in Saskatchewan.

But there's a problem here, in Manitoba, and we know what the problem is. The problem is the Manitoba Telephone System was sold by the previous government—*[interjection]* Oh, oh, and the MLA, you know, over there, who has never once mentioned the new schools that we're building him, the new schools, and wondering if he, as he chirps

from his seat, would be prepared to suggest to us which school he'd like to cut, or maybe the Boundary Trails health system. Maybe he'd like to cut that. Yes.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

So I just would also just like to mention that the work that we have done in education has been phenomenal, and I just want to say that I was very disappointed when the MLA for Morris spoke the other day to our Budget 2014 and he seemed to have a taxation fixation. And I was very disappointed because the last—one of the last announcements I did as minister of Education was in his riding, in Morris, when I was there and he was there in the front row, participating with all of the stakeholders, right there when we announced the new vocational opportunity for young people in Morris, the mechanical and the welding shop. And, you know, it was an amazing announcement, and I had parents come up to me and speak to me personally after that announcement. One father was almost in tears. His son was standing beside him, and he talked about the difference that this was going to make for kids in this community. He talked about it to me personally.

So I just wanted to mention that because it is absolutely what we are investing here in the province of Manitoba. We are going to continue to invest in education opportunities and training opportunities because we know that is how young people can participate in our economy. Education is the equalizer, regardless of your prior learning experience, regardless of your economic circumstances. If you have an education, you can participate in our society.

* (15:50)

And I am so pleased, I just want to thank my colleagues on this side of the House one more time, and I know I thanked them last session when we passed Bill 18, but I just want to thank my colleagues who stood strong and who stood beside me when we passed Bill 18 in this House. Thank you very much to my colleagues, because we know how important it is to have safe schools, safe schools where young people can reach their full potential. And I was a little disappointed in the opposition.

I had a message from Evan Weins the other day, and he reminded me that it was his first-year anniversary of his first interview that he did on Bill 18 a year ago. And he talked to me about it, how it changed his life. And I'm very proud of Evan

Weins for the courage that he showed, and I know that Evan's going to be going to the University of Winnipeg and he's going to be going to one of our post-secondary education institutions here that we are funding. When any—every other jurisdiction in Canada is cutting back on funding their post-secondary education systems, we're here in Manitoba continuing to invest, and I am so proud. I know that he is going to have a great time. He's taking political science, so we better be careful; he could be in this House one day, and it would be very, very exciting to see him in here.

And, you know, I just want to say thank you to everyone on this side of the House that has put thoughtful comments on this budget, because we know that this is a budget that invests in families. It invests in families, it invests in young people, and we are going to continue to grow our economy and move Manitoba forward.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Pleased to rise today to speak to the amendment to the budget. I have watched in consternation as I saw what the government tried to defend here, and some of it is obviously—they have difficulty defending and it is somewhat indefensible. I note the Premier (Mr. Selinger) was out in Brandon this afternoon making announcements, obviously, didn't drive over the highways, which is unfortunate. The highways had dried—regularly drive on and he could see how traffic works there, that often people travel in the passing lane because the right-hand lane is so damaged that—and rough, that you can't travel on that. And it took me a little while to figure out why everybody's travelling in the passing lane and—but, you know, that's the way that it works with infrastructure in Manitoba these days.

What happened—has happened over the past many years of this NDP government is they have neglected infrastructure, and when you don't maintain, then you have these major failures. And it's the major failures that we're looking at now in infrastructure that are costing all the dollars and all the promises, and we have lots of promises out there but very little action. We see time and time again we've got lights on bridges to stop the oncoming traffic so that traffic can proceed over the one-lane bridge, and then the lights change and traffic could come the other way. You know, it is quite—I think, when you're in a small town that it's quite exciting when you get a traffic light because it means you're

growing, and they often are. But these traffic lights are on the bridges controlling the traffic flow. So it's quite sad to watch that that's what we've fallen to in Manitoba.

And I wonder, in the Premier's announcement today, I didn't see it in there. I saw that there is some resurfacing on Victoria Avenue from 1st Street to 18th Street, but I wonder if they're going to resurface the resurfacing they did last year because it was such a job that I look at what was done there, and now we have large cracks opening up in that paving that's not even a year old. It was done last summer. It'll be, I would think, quite embarrassing for the government to have to patch the paving with the patching machine when it goes out with a little sand and gravel and asphalt to patch that virtually new pavement that they were so proud of last year and they bragged so much about. But, unfortunately, it's having difficulty withstanding even one winter, let alone several. And that is one of the big problems with this government's management of infrastructure, is they've left it for so long and then when they go and do it, it's just patchwork. They don't do the work underneath that is necessary to create a good base. And those are the things that cost big dollars, but if you don't do it there, you're going to be redoing it time and time and time again.

But we see lots of failures with this government, and it's become that there's almost a one-to-one correlation here. An NDP promise equals an NDP failure, so it's getting a little easier to track because promises come out daily. We saw a whole bunch today; we've seen some yesterday. Promise, promise, promise—no action, yet another failure. So those are things that we can track. They are things that the Manitoba public is finding much easier to track, and they're having difficulty believing anything the government says.

And, obviously, we look at the jobs creation here, and what's been going on with the government's numbers not quite lining up with what the real job might be, I was quite surprised that that's how the minister wants to count jobs. If that's how you count jobs, then, wow, our companies have created a huge amount of jobs over the years. But I am worried that perhaps the payroll tax will start to be allocated to the number of jobs in the way that this government counts it, and our payroll tax will be accelerated, multiplied to the extent about four or five times what we're talking about, and that would be quite damaging—as damaging as the payroll tax is to Manitoba business. And this government likes to

brag about taking taxes off of business—that is one of the most punitive taxes, a tax on jobs.

And when I look at what it does to Manitoba businesses, it stagnates those businesses, because businesses expand by creating new jobs, by growing; they expand by buying other businesses, and often those are small businesses, and automatically they become subject to the payroll tax and are not as efficient. People come in, companies come in from outside of Manitoba and may start a small operation. Indeed, we had a competitor come into Manitoba—a competitor to our business. It was one of the largest in Canada, but in Manitoba they had a small number of employees and they did not pay payroll tax in Manitoba, whereas we did, and it's a huge competitor. So uneven playing field there for Manitoba companies. Definitely not the way to go, but this government just keeps raking in the money and, of course, taxing federal jobs.

Now, if you were the federal government looking to position staff in Canada and you know that they need to be there to service the population of Canada, but on the other hand you look at, well, if we put them in Manitoba, we're going to have to pay an extra payroll tax on those people we put in there, whereas we put them in Saskatchewan, just over the border, then we don't have that additional cost. Let me think, would that be a factor in where they put people from the federal government? Perhaps it would be. Drives people out of Manitoba.

So promises, what kind of promises? Well, certainly the promise that this NDP government would not raise the sales tax, that was a well-known promise coming into the last election. I believe the Premier (Mr. Selinger) said it was—what was the word? Nonsense? Was that the word?

An Honourable Member: Nonsense.

Mr. Helwer: Nonsense, exactly. And, of course, they expanded the PST to apply to many, many other things, some of it backdating with insurance and making the insurance agents go after the tax, back to their clients. And that was certainly something that was very damaging to that relationship, but, nonetheless, the government forced them to do so.

Mr. Mohinder Saran, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

So expanding the tax and a broken promise and all of that was probably, we thought, what—from what the government said, going into infrastructure. Of course, it didn't, and then last year they—what? Increased the sales tax by 14.3 per cent, I think. That

was the number, wasn't it, it went up by? And that promise was, well, we need to put this—increase this because it's all going into infrastructure. But then we look at the numbers in infrastructure, and there's \$1.9 billion that the government has underspent in infrastructure. They spent it in all the other departments. All the other budgets went up, overspending consistently in all other departments except for infrastructure. And isn't that quite shocking? And suddenly this is something that the government wants to focus on and it wants to say how great a job they're doing, which, of course, they're not.

* (16:00)

And we—Manitobans see that time and time again, as they drive across the roads, as they deal with sewer backups, as they deal with frozen water lines, as they deal with bridges that are damaged, that are closed, that are partially closed, that are missing, that are limited in what they can take. And as we travel around Manitoba we hear more and more from people that have said—say, you know what, that bridge over there, the government promised 10 years ago that they were going to replace it. All they've done is put up new signs and said, you know, you can't take this truck over there or this particular bridge is closed to traffic. So that's what happened with this government's infrastructure.

And certainly we see it in their budget. And then there's the \$71 million that's just gone somewhere and accounting is not a strong suit across the way. The government says, well, that \$71 million will be spent—it'll be guaranteed it's going to be in to infrastructure next year. Well, there's some little accounting things that have to happen for that to take place. You have to put a journal entry in to put it into a particular account, to set it aside so that it can be, you know, moved forward into the next year, into a surplus account. But you can't really have that account when you run a deficit of the nature that this government has done, nor pull that much money out of the rainy day fund. So I don't know that the government really understood that in order for that actually to happen, they had to follow through that process and perhaps the minister could talk to her department a little bit more about what actually needed to be done there in order for that promise to be true.

So, of course, you know, another broken promise but, what the heck, this government has several of them. So the PST, sales tax, broadening of

the tax, that was a promise, again, was broken so another failure. Education tax, there was something there. I think they promised to remove it from seniors. Yes, they did.

An Honourable Member: Who was that?

Mr. Helwer: Oh, what party was that? Was—the new—the NDP—I think that's what it was—that they promised to remove it. And now they're maybe able to do it over time but we might have to put a cap on it because we wouldn't want to have seniors, you know, not paying tax in residences that are very, very valuable. Well, what about if that senior has lived in that residence for, who knows, 50, 60 years. It's gone from \$25,000 to half-a-million dollars; that is quite a valuable residence. And, under this government, perhaps that senior would not be eligible for that education tax rebate, even though they may not have the income to pay that. They had the growth and the value of their asset but they don't have the income and this government would say, if they cap it that way, well, that doesn't matter; your house is worth a lot so we'll take away your opportunity for that rebate.

There was something else that's kind of a moving target that was a province—or it's become a moving target and it was a promise—no, no, it was something about balancing something, but what were they going to balance? They were going to balance the budget. I think that was going to happen this year, was the promise. But it didn't. When I look through these documents, there's negative numbers there and then there's this huge sucking sound out of the rainy day fund.

So I guess that was another broken promise, another failure of the government. And the minister's not quite sure when that's going to happen. Is this another solid date that they forecasted? Well, maybe, maybe. I think they also talked about education tax on farmland, taking it off of farmland. That was another promise and they sort of did that, but then they capped it. And when we look at people who are eligible for this, often it's the women that farm that are having difficulty because the male spouse may be eligible for this, but the female spouse may not be. So, damaging to women who operate farms with their spouses and it's just a detriment to—and another promise that's broken. The NDP will say, well, no, no, we took the farmland, the sale—the education tax off the farmland, no, no, we did. Oh, well, what about that cap? Well, we'll just kind of ignore that, I think, is what they're going to do.

So, again, NDP promises equal failures. And then we see the cuts and this government says, oh, no, cuts, can't have cuts. But if you have been in a health care—the health care area, you have experienced the cuts of this government. Anyone that's been in a waiting room of an emergency room—we've had people that have had extreme difficulties in those waiting rooms, even to the point where they died or they were sent home, died there. We have—what kind of health care we have? Let me see, we used to have hallway medicine, that's what it was called. I wonder if they counted the hallways the same way that they count employment? No, because then that would be exaggerating the hallway medicine, wouldn't it, and they wouldn't want to have that. So we know hallway medicine still very much does exist. I have been in hospitals and seen it. And I know the government doesn't like to count it anymore, but you see the beds in the hallways with the patients. And some of them have been my own relatives, and I've spoke about before my very dignified aunt waiting for open-heart surgery in the hallway just—in the hospital just across the river here. And very sad to see her waiting there in the hallway, people passing by, patients, nurses, doctors, visitors, maintenance staff, cleaning staff, and there she is in the hallway waiting for her surgery. And so it is quite 'coppon.'

So we went from hallway medicine, though, there was something else that happened there with highway medicine. Quite interesting. Especially on the way to Saskatchewan. Go to Saskatchewan to have the birth of your child. Isn't that a great idea? Hmm. And now, of course, we have something else happen, cabbie medicine. There's cabbie medicine as well, taxicab medicine.

And blame somebody else. This government is good at trying to redirect, to place blame on other people, and certainly talk—not take any of the blame yourselves.

So it's—I—you know, I really am disappointed when I see what's come out of this government. So cuts all across the health-care board.

Addictions areas, we've seen restrictions on the intake there, you know, that they've said, well, you know what, we're kind of closed for maintenance here, so we won't be able—we're going to paint. It'll be nice. But we won't be able to take you until September. Is that okay? You'll be able to hang on 'til then? And as we all know—I'm sure that you know—when people come to the realization that they

need to deal with their addiction, they often can hold it together with the help of friends and family for a week, possibly a little bit more, before they're drawn down back into that addiction. And to be told that you can't go into any treatment centre for months, well, it paints a very dismal world there. And that opportunity to help those people along their way is gone.

I talked about infrastructure, and we see those cuts every day, \$1.9 billion that's been vacuumed out of the budget over the last four years, \$71 million in this most recent sucked again. We don't know where it went. To overspending in other departments that, even after they—as they had have overspending still had cuts to services, front-line services that Manitobans depend on and that this government criticizes others for.

But there was something else happened in education recently, and what was that, now? There was a clawback from the universities last year. They took some money back, even though it was guaranteed funding for three years, which, I think, originally, the schools were—well, not happy; they were accepting. At least they had firm, consistent funding for three years. And then in the last year, half of it was clawed back. But this government doesn't see that as a cut. They try not to look at it as a cut. Well, obviously, it is. The students and faculty of the universities and community colleges have to make up that cut, and we see it in declining opportunities for students and difficulties in the universities and community colleges across the board.

And then there was something else in education I just read about. The minister seemed to say that all the school boards should have ample funding. Ample, lots out there, no problem at all. And then we still see tax increases from the school boards. And they're all coming out now with their budgets.

And certainly in Brandon, the school board there decided that they could not go with the full-scale increase in order to maintain services as they had projected, as they had wanted to. And they had to cut back and, indeed, that did result in the loss of 11 teaching positions, which, in the equivalence of this government pander here, means that the minister fired 11 teachers in Brandon. And how many more are on the list?

And they are, of course, the young teachers that are most at risk here. They are people that are trying to create family life. They are trying to create a

position for themselves, and they are trying to find a position where they can put in that consistency. And it had looked like it was going to be consistent in Brandon, but apparently not now. And so we wonder where else that is going to go, how many more cuts, how many more teachers is this minister going to fire.

* (16:10)

So we go on and on, and, you know, CFS—a clawback of 4 per cent from already existing budgets. This was your budget, but, oh, halfway through the year, no, we're going to take some of that back so you don't have it to spend anymore, you know, and deal with it. You guys have to deal with it. And we've seen it in group homes; we've seen it across the board. Some of the most vulnerable people in Manitoba are affected by this government's decisions.

So, you know, and then we get into these—this report here that they commissioned. Even though they asked the Auditor General to review the effect of PST—and she works for the government, at least for another few weeks until she retires. So, you know, her office is paid for by the public of Manitoba, by the government, and they've asked her to review it. And then we see that they've hired somebody else to do something pretty similar, the Conference Board of Canada.

And so, as I said, you know, I was struck that the—part of the budget they talked about expanding the use of lean management across government to maximize value and eliminate duplication and repetitive processes. Hmm, well, here we have a fine example of duplication and repetitive process. You had somebody that was already doing this, the Auditor General, and now you've asked someone else to do it. Were you worried about what the Auditor General was going say about your sales tax increase and the impact on the economy?

But, you know, here we have the Conference Board of Canada, a well-respected organization, and then we have the minister skewing what they say in here, and the job creation numbers—quite interesting on those. I'm quite shocked in the way that the government has skewed these numbers and tried to present them as new jobs. If you are in the business of paving, you have existing employees and they usually come back year after year. Sometimes they're seasonal, but those are existing staff. But in this government's parlance, those are new jobs. Even though you may not hire any new staff, if you

brought them back to work on a government project, those are new jobs. But that's not true; that's not how business works and it's not how you should skew these types of statistics.

I'm interested in the multiplier here, and I have to delve into that a little bit more. It's not very in-depth here like some of the documents that I've dealt in in multipliers before, who—you know, the learned journals such as the American Economic Journal, who deal with multipliers. And we know from some of the discussion that's gone on there, that the effect of government expenditure is far below the effect of an expenditure from a private sector organization. Often you will look at a multiplier of 0.4 from the private sector, and much, much smaller, less than 1 per cent often, from the government, especially in circumstances where there are tax increases.

And this is important: if there is a tax increase, the effect of government expenditure is reduced, and we see that time and again in past economic history, and this government doesn't seem to understand that. But they went away—ahead with their tax increases and expecting that they would have a huge effect in expenditures and on multipliers, but, unfortunately, in economics and in the business models, that is not the case. They are counterproductive, indeed, because what you do have is you have government expenditures replacing private sector expenditures, competing for scarce resources in that regard. And those are things that are damaging to economies, especially when you have tax increases. And there are many studies that show this as an increased tax wedge that will increase the real marginal cost of supplying a given level of output. So it's damaging, certainly, to the economy, not only to raise taxes but to expect that government spending is going to augment or replace private sector spending. That is certainly not the case; it causes inflation, it damages the economy and creates many tax distortions along the road, you know. So we go back these aggressive fiscal stimuli that may not have the effect and certainly have been shown that they do not have the intended effect as we look back on years of how that might occur.

So, again, broken promises, and it's just become to the point where an NDP promise is an indication of a future failure, and I think that it's pretty simple for the public to understand. They certainly seem to understand it now when the NDP come out with promises; that means that that project is likely going to fail, and, you know, the promises again and again

of what they're going to use tax revenues for. There was a promise of the fuel tax increase that was all going to go into infrastructure. Not one dime because they underspent by \$1.9 billion. There was another promise from vehicle registration fees, every dime was going to go into infrastructure, and again not one dime went in—it's gone into the government coffers, the overspending in other departments. Huge increases in vehicle registration fees sucked out of Manitoba taxpayers and drivers and not one dime has gone into infrastructure. And then we hear, of course, that the sales tax increase is necessary for infrastructure and, again, we see not one dime.

You know, I think back to the Auditor General talking about tracking children, I believe it was in the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry, and she was concerned that we were not able to track a child but Manitoba Lotteries, now Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries, could track every dime. Hmm, I wonder if we could use some similar computer system to Liquor & Lotteries to not only track the children but perhaps to track the PST. Perhaps we could find out where all those dimes from the PST increase went and then we could indeed show that the government is not following up on its promises and every time it creates a promise, as they now seem to be doing daily, or more than daily, sometimes twice a day, I think there were a couple done today, one in Winnipeg and one in Brandon, it creates another opportunity for failure, and indeed those failures are becoming quite large and prevalent.

Now, I'm sure there are others that want to speak to this piece of documentation here. I'll try to be polite. We did kill some trees with this and apparently the government did. So I'm sure there's others that wish to speak to that, so thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

Mr. Clarence Pettersen (Flin Flon): I'm glad I get the opportunity to put a few words on the record on the budget and represent the—my northern constituency of Flin Flon.

I first have to, before I begin, thank the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and the Minister of Finance (Ms. Howard) for making not only a good budget for Manitoba but, I think, probably the best budget in Canada. I—the former minister of Finance, the Minister of Hydro, basically set the, I guess, plan for this budget and I have to thank him, too. What happened with his courage and vision, he realized that with an economy that was in hard times and also an economy that was devastated by a billion-dollar

flood, we had the former Finance minister using courage and responsibility in making sure that Manitobans are looked after.

Getting to this year's budget, I'd like to say that this year's budget is about families. It's about what matters most to Manitobans. We're investing in infrastructure, education and training, and these investments will set the tone and plan for Manitoba in years to come. We want to restore a balanced budget by 2016 and '17. We will continue to reject calls for reckless cuts, like the opposition and the leader-opposition are talking about.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Also want to tell you that, you know, when you have a budget like this, it has to be based on trust, and I have to say that the Minister of Finance (Ms. Howard) has built up a trust for all Manitobans, looking after not just Manitobans in the south or the west or east or north, she's looking after all Manitobans. We're the party, remember, Mr. Deputy Speaker or Mr. Speaker—I'm sorry—we're the party of we, they're the party of me, and we think about all Manitobans.

* (16:20)

So I thank everyone on our side of the House, the caucus here, for being part of a team in regard to that. I notice the opposition minister, when he got up, didn't talk about the budget much, talked a little bit about it, but really didn't ask some of the tough questions. What does that mean? I don't know, but I think people are waiting in Manitoba to see what kind of leader or leadership that he's going to show. And I think we're looking back to his past, and people are wondering, is that where the road he's going to take? Are we going back to the '90s? And that kind of makes uneasiness for a lot of people.

I notice that the leader opposition talked about building, and I don't know what he was talking about. He was building—he's built a lot of things, he said, and then he said you have to have a strong foundation, but with no vision, no goals. How can you build without the vision and goals? We, here with this budget, have set out the vision, set out the goals for Manitoba, and we're proud to be going in that direction.

If you're just talking about cut and slash, you know, that's the party of doom and gloom, and I know, just in today's paper—today's paper was a hallelujah of good news for our party. I mean, on the front page we're announcing concussion clinics. You

flip the page over, there's the Minister of Education with a big smile giving a high five, saying that he's putting money towards education. You look a little bit deeper, there's the Minister of Health (Ms. Selby) talking about the concussion clinic; then the Premier (Mr. Selinger) was also in there. And I was thinking, is this the Free Press, or is this some NDP guide book because I was very proud to see that we are front and centre in the minds not only of the people of Manitoba but also on the minds of the press, the Free Press?

Also, I'd like to say that, you know, the party of doom and gloom has always looked to the west, even to the south, and I have to say I welcome the new members that are part of the party in opposition, but, again, one of the members, the first thing he talked about was Saskatchewan. And, you know, I can't believe this. We had the minister—or minister, I'm sorry, the member from Emerson, you know, loading up his half-ton and driving west to see the great opportunities in Saskatchewan, and, of course, when they looked at about their power and their hydro, well, 50 per cent of it is coal power. When they looked at affordability, well, we have better affordability here in Manitoba.

When they took that half-ton down to Minot to see what kind of government insurance or government response to flooding was, they drove right back to Manitoba because there was no help in Minot, and, of course, they loaded up that truck and they went out to Calgary. And, when they went out there, they wanted to see what kind of flood mitigation, flood preparedness was going to be done in Calgary, and they found out nothing. So they drove that bus slowly—[interjection]—and, well, bus, I thought it was a truck too. Okay, a 'druck,' a truck, anyways the minister from Emerson driving, driving the speed limit, but sometimes he would put his foot on the accelerator to get back to good old Manitoba, and then what did he see there?

He saw the love train, but the love train is no more. It's the train of optimism. It's the train of gold. It's the train of hope, and I'll tell you, thank you. I'll tell you, we will make room. We will make room for the opposition to join that train of hope and optimism. We'll take that train down to Victoria Avenue, and we will—what we'll do, the train of hope will have Captain Asphalt in front. We'll have Captain Asphalt in the front. Yes, the minister from Thompson will be there and probably you'll smell him coming before you see him, but he'll go to Victoria Avenue and 18th Avenue. He will go

through Morden and Winkler and that. He will be looking at the different roads. Ah, he'll be looking at the different roads, and when, you know, Captain Asphalt be looking at PTH 75, the Trans-Canada Highway. He'll be looking up north at Highway 10. He'll be looking at Highway 12. He'll be looking at Highway 6. That is the gateway to the North, and I'll tell you, Captain Asphalt won't miss a bump or a crack. He'll be doing it all. He'll be also doing the Perimeter Highway, making you Winnipeggers happy. But, like I say, we'll have Captain Asphalt going all through Manitoba. So the benefits to infrastructure—yes, look it, there's a picture right there. Captain Asphalt's got it right out there. Look at that. My goodness. I don't know, maybe we should have copies for everyone in here.

But I'd just like to say that this budget, with our infrastructure spending, with our increasing education and apprenticeships, with the possibility of a good future for Manitobans, north, south, east and west—this budget basically is a good budget for everybody in Manitoba, and I'm proud to be here representing it.

But, you know what, getting back to the opposition minister said he likes to build things, I'm wondering, and I'm hoping our side could be just a little quiet because I want to hear this. What do you guys plan to build? Do you hear anything? I hear nothing. They don't plan to build anything. What have we built? Well, we've built the MTS Centre; we've built the football stadium; we've built the Human Rights Museum, and the Convention Centre, CentrePort. We are the party of building.

Are we the party of ribbon cutting? Yes, and we're proud of it because, you know what, we are opening things; we're not cutting and closing. I'll tell you one thing, we don't have to worry about carrying scissors around because we got them in front of us and we are going to be cutting ribbons to prosperity. They, you don't know how they're carrying the scissors, and, believe me, they could fall and hurt themselves or hurt all Manitobans.

The other thing I noticed in the budget is very important to the economic prosperity of Manitoba is hydro. And we believe in hydro for all Manitobans; we're the party that brought in equalization for hydro rates north and south. They didn't want to do it. Okay. So everybody pays the same rate, doesn't matter if you're in Flin Flon, in Winnipeg, or Morden; I think that's just, and, believe me, we're the just party.

We also put our eggs, you can say, into Hydro because what we want to do is we want to make sure that Manitobans in 10 years will have hydro for Manitobans. What do they want to do? They want to click off the lights in Wisconsin—click. They want to click off the lights in Minnesota—click. They want to click off the lights in Saskatchewan—click. And they want to click off the lights in Hydro. Click. Click.

I, like I say, I'm astounded how they can stand here, sit here beside me, and criticize a budget that is for all Manitobans, Mr. Speaker. Not only for all Manitobans but it's for the future of Manitobans; it's for my children, the opportunities for kids, and also opportunities in the future for their kids. So it's a budget that is long-lasting.

I also want to say that sometimes we have to go back in the past and talk about what we stood for. And I was so proud of my caucus, my party last spring when we stood up for Bill 18. And, you know, that was a pivotal moment, I guess, you could say in my political career because I was a teacher for 33 years and, being a teacher, I could see the need of antibullying bill, and I could see the need where kids, children have to feel safe going to school on their way there and going home. I could see that there's a need for everybody to be treated with fairness and respect. And, when we voted on it, I expected the whole House to be 'overwhelmingly' in favour of it, but then my good colleagues—my good colleague from Beausejour who's—was a, well, was a great teacher I hear in that area, and I could not believe that he did not stand up or even walk over and sit beside me, didn't have to stand up, just walk over and sit beside me as I voted in favour of Bill 18. So that was a very important part. And I think it really defines the difference; that really defines the difference between us and them. Okay, us and them.

* (16:30)

They did not want, and I repeat, they did not want the Jets to come back here, but we did. We did. We wanted to make sure—[interjection] Sorry. Apparently—thank you, Mr. Speaker. You want me to speak louder, and I—apparently, I have trouble with that, but thank you.

But, no, I think we have to realize that I'm only going to speak a few short minutes and like to say that I thank the—my opposition cohorts, members, for putting their voice on record. I respect their voices, no doubt about that. But there definitely is a difference between our two parties. And I definitely like the party that I represent. We're the party of we;

they're the party of me. And that won't change. And as we see the Leader of the Opposition, who I went to university with, the Leader of the Opposition is still bringing up what he would do in the '90s with Filmon. And so I note they say, well, don't bring that up in the past. Well, he brings it up; it's not us. He brings it up. He's the one that brings it up, so it's hard for us not to quote him when he says something in CJOB.

So I just have a, I guess, a history lesson for the opposition, and that is, you know, the past never goes away and people don't forget. They didn't forget last election, and, believe me, they won't forget this election.

So thank you, Mr. Speaker, for letting me put a few words on the record. I want to thank also all my constituents who believe in me, and thank you for giving me this time. Thank you.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And what an honour and privilege it is to stand in my place today and follow the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Pettersen), who really so eloquently spoke to us this afternoon. And, you know, I was just reading, before he spoke, through horoscopes, and I came across a horoscope that said—seems kind of appropriate to me for today—listen to the advice of someone older, wiser or more experienced. You might encounter this person in a classroom, meeting or in a large conference.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't think I encountered that anyone that has or—my—the person that spoke ahead of me as older or wiser or more experienced, and I think that probably, some of the comments that he put on the record entertained us considerably, but I'm not sure that there was a lot of substance to it.

Before I get into my comments, I would like to congratulate both the member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Pivniuk) and the member for Morris (Mr. Martin), who were elected by their constituents just this spring and have the opportunity to join us at this very historic time in the Manitoba Legislature, and I wish both of them well. And I know that they will both do very well and serve their constituents well. So, to them, I hope that they don't hang on absolutely every word that every member of the Legislature says, especially those on the opposition's side, because we do know that we've come to hear a lot of things from the government's side of the House that are not necessarily believable. And I know the member for Flin Flon talked about the budget being all about what matters most to families.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I think what matters most to families is that they have a government that tells the truth, a government that tells—*[interjection]*—well—and doesn't mislead them or deceive them. And we know that parents try to teach their children to tell the truth. We've seen this government get caught in lie after lie after lie. And I know that Manitoba families don't find that entertaining or that's not something that they can support. Manitoba families expect more of their government. They expect to hear things and be able to believe what government is saying. And we know that we haven't heard from the government's side of the House. And I can give specific examples of times when they have deceived and misled Manitoba families, and as recently as the last budget that was brought into this Chamber last year where, you know, in 2011 the Premier (Mr. Selinger) stood up with great fanfare and said, you know, no new taxes. We're not going to raise taxes if we're re-elected. We're going to—as a matter of fact, raising the PST was absolutely nonsense; that would not happen.

Well, what did we see, Mr. Speaker? We saw from this government the largest tax increase in the history of this province. Not only did the year before in the 2010, or right after the 2011 election, we saw them expand the PST base to include a lot of services that hadn't been included before. And then the following year we saw them raise the PST by 1 per cent, and to me and to most Manitobans who were outraged—absolutely outraged, and we saw it in the protests at the Legislature; we saw it in the presentations where people came out and spoke in opposition to Bill 20. Not only were they deceived and misled by the government in 2011, but they also had their democratic right to a vote on any increase in major taxes that they had been afforded under the balanced budget legislation.

And, Mr. Speaker, we basically have—we have no balanced budget legislation anymore. We have a government—and I remember the former premier, Gary Doer, standing up and saying: We will keep balanced budget legislation. Well, what was then is not now. We don't have a Gary Doer on the government side of the House, and we have a Premier that will say anything to get elected and do exactly the opposite afterwards.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I also wanted to just make a couple of comments on my—the person that—the member for Flin Flon that spoke just ahead of me, and he says they have a vision for the province. They have a vision. They seem to believe that they know

what's best for families. He talked so eloquently about the love train and hop on the love train. Well, there are many families—young families from southwestern Manitoba that have had to hop on the love train and go to Saskatchewan to have their babies delivered because there were no hospitals here in rural Manitoba to deliver those babies. So the love train has exported people to Saskatchewan.

I don't know what the message is with the love train. I guess maybe those young families shouldn't have hopped on the love train in the first place and then they wouldn't have had to go to Saskatchewan to have their babies delivered. I mean, I think that many families in those communities have felt betrayed, have felt betrayed by a government, a government who has misled them, a government who has cut services to them. Services have been cut. Mr. Speaker, 18 rural emergency rooms have been closed. Those are cuts to health-care services in rural Manitoba. So they can't stand with any conviction, with any honesty, and say that services haven't been cut.

We've just heard in the last couple of weeks, Mr. Speaker, that teachers are going to be cut in the Brandon School Division, and that's not the only school division that that's going to happen in. We're hearing it from other school divisions. So there are cuts to teachers. Teachers are being fired under this NDP government, and they should be ashamed of themselves, ashamed for standing up and not being honest, not telling the truth to Manitobans.

* (16:40)

Mr. Speaker, it's fine to be critical of others. And it's—I'll tell you what governments in the past have done, but I won't stand up and be held accountable for what we have done as the government. They should be ashamed—ashamed—to stand in this House and say that this budget is all about what matters most to families. It's not what matters most to families when you can't be truthful, when you can't be honest with them. What do you want families to teach their children? I don't want to teach my grandchildren that they can lie and they can say anything and get away with it. That's not the way. That's not the Manitoba way. And that's not what families want.

Families don't want to see money taken out of their pockets to feed a spending addiction that a government has, Mr. Speaker, at the expense of the ability to provide the supports that their children might need to enrol in a hockey program or a soccer

program, a dance program or piano lessons. Parents want to be able to make those choices for their families and their children. And this government is removing that ability for families to choose what's best. When they have less money in their pockets, they don't have the ability to make the choices that they would like to make.

And who's to say that government knows best? Mr. Speaker, I would believe that families know best how to spend their hard-earned money. And it's not up to government to come in and say, just give us a little bit more because we know best. We know better how to spend your money. We know what's best from you—for you. We'll govern with a dictatorial approach. We'll remove that money from your pockets that belongs to you, and we'll ensure that it's spread around. Well, how is it spread around? We know it's going into the coffers of the NDP party through the vote tax.

We know that every member on the government side of the House—and I guess there used to be 37; I don't know what's happened. There's only 36 now in the government benches of the House. But I don't know what is happening to the vote tax for that 37th member of the government side of the House. Is that money still coming into the coffers of the NDP? We need to have that question answered by the government today.

But, Mr. Speaker, who's to say that Manitobans approve of the government taking more of their tax dollars and asking Manitobans to subsidize their political party, their own political coffers, to run attack ads? Is that what Manitoba families really expect of their government? Is that what Manitobans really expect? I would think not. As a matter of fact, I know that's that's not what Manitoba families want. I think Manitoba families would want to see the government look at spending their scarce tax dollars in a manner that's going to best benefit Manitobans. And lining the coffers of the NDP party with taxpayers' dollars does absolutely nothing to better Manitoba and Manitoba families.

So I wouldn't say that the vote tax that this government is taking is what matters most to Manitoba families. Mr. Speaker, that's not something that they asked for and that's not something that they voted for. And it's something that I think the government should be ashamed to even stand up and admit that they have done.

Mr. Speaker, we do know that as far back as 1999, when the NDP first got elected, they got

elected on a very simple promise. That was a promise to fix hallway medicine in six months with \$15 million. Can you believe it? What a joke. What a joke. But I think that the joke actually was on Manitobans who actually believed that the NDP government was going to do that. And they voted for them. Well, you know, what do we have today? Is hallway medicine gone 14 years later? Absolutely not. As a matter of fact, I think you'd probably see more hallway medicine today. They've got stalls in the hallway numbered, so they don't look like they're hallways anymore, but nonetheless it's hallway medicine.

But what's been added to hallway medicine? Highway medicine. Mr. Speaker, we have 18 emergency departments closed throughout rural Manitoba. People have to get on the highways and travel longer distances to get the health care that they used to be able to receive. And, if you can find one that's open, it might be closed for business and you might have to drive on to the next hospital.

Mr. Speaker, we've got parking lot medicine, where ambulances are lined up for hours in the parking lots in emergency rooms in the city of Winnipeg waiting for treatment. You've got ambulance drivers, EMTs tied up, waiting with patients to be triaged or seen in emergency departments.

Is this what they said when they were going to—promised to get rid of hallway medicine, that it was going to be replaced with highway medicine, with parking lot medicine, and now taxicab medicine. Can you believe it? Now, all of a sudden, the taxicab drivers are responsible for people that died that were sent home from emergency departments when, possibly, they shouldn't have been sent home.

Mr. Speaker, we have a government that continues to try to deflect away from the real issues of accountability and responsibility for their actions and for their policies. And we've put lots of—there's been lots of additional resources put into our health-care system, but what are we seeing? We're not seeing a better health-care system as a result.

Mr. Speaker, but, again, the government deflects away, pretends that's it's not their responsibility. You know, it's always a spokesman for a minister. You very seldom see a minister stand up and take accountability or answer a question for something that's gone wrong in their department. It's a spokesperson or an email or prepared statement by someone in the department rather than politicians

standing up and being accountable for the decisions they make and trying to defend those decisions. And it's a sad day when government has to hide behind their staff and expect someone else to answer the tough questions for them.

So, Mr. Speaker, how can Manitoba families believe anything that they're told? They were misled in 1999, and election after election after election they've talked about what they're going to do or what they're not going to do.

Mr. Speaker, they stood up and said that they weren't going to privatize Manitoba Hydro. Well, what have they done? They've pretty well bankrupt Manitoba Hydro. They're giving our hydroelectricity away to the States at bargain-basement prices. They're now actually going to build transmission lines in the United States, because we have to help out our poor US cousins. Unbelievable to think that we've gone in this direction in just a little over a decade.

Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that Manitobans can have any faith in anything that this government says. So we have a budget document that members on the government side of the House are standing up and supporting, but how many of them actually believe that anything that it says in that budget document is going to be followed through on? How can we have any comfort that anything that they said can stand the test of credibility? We've seen time and time again where they say one thing and they do another. They have the ability to pay lip service to a lot of issues and stand up and talk about how well they're doing. We see that on the housing side and on the social side of government where people are having difficulty finding places to live, people are having difficulty making ends meet on our welfare system. We are having—seeing higher incidences of child poverty. We're seeing record numbers of families using food banks. Mr. Speaker, these aren't things that we should be proud of as a society.

* (16:50)

And, Mr. Speaker, we see government stand up and say, well, we're doing this, and we've implemented this program, and we're pouring money into this, and we're doing all kinds of things. Well, why aren't we seeing results? Why aren't we seeing better results for families in poverty, for children in poverty, for people that are living in bedbug-infested accommodations right in Manitoba Housing? Why aren't we seeing improvements in the status of those that most need our support? Are we spending

money? Yes, we're spending money. Are we getting results? Are we seeing people being lifted out of poverty? We're not.

The statistics are showing us things that are very different from the kinds of answers we get, as ministers in this House stand up and talk about the wonderful job that they're doing. Mr. Speaker, the numbers don't equate. The amount of dollars that are being spent don't equate to better service and better supports for families.

We're seeing people with disabilities and mental disabilities having trouble finding homes and appropriate accommodations. Mr. Speaker, these are serious issues. These are issues that need to be addressed by a government that talks about caring, but doesn't seem, in reality, to be able to do anything to improve the status of many, many within our society that need our support and need our help.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to indicate really clearly to this government that I'm extremely disappointed—that I do support the amendment that's been put forward by our leader. You know, we were hopeful, maybe—we were hopeful—that because of the public outcry, we might have seen just a little bit—just a little bit—of compassion on the government's side of the House. We might have seen a government that heard Manitobans—that heard Manitobans—when they came out to speak on Bill 20, that heard Manitobans that said that they were disenfranchised—that they were disenfranchised—because government took away their ability, their democratic right to vote, that had been there in legislation, when taxes were increased. We thought that, just maybe, there was a glimmer of hope that they might change their minds. They might change their minds and really consider what matters most to families, but we didn't see that. We didn't see that in the budget. We see a lot of lip service paid to a lot of initiatives and to infrastructure and job creation that is, certainly, again extremely misleading.

Mr. Speaker, how can Manitobans, with any confidence, move forward and believe anything that this government says, any initiative that they put on the table, any answer that they give in question period? How believable are they when we have a government that consistently has made promises that they haven't delivered on?

Mr. Speaker, I find it extremely difficult to even think that all members on the government side of the House would stand up and support this budget. I find

it difficult to believe that many Manitobans will support this kind of a budget.

And, as we move forward, I know that we are going to see many instances again where there will be promises that are broken, that at—because this government's track record speaks for itself. Year after year, and budget after budget, election after election, we've seen a government that stands up and says one thing and, on the other hand, does another. It's come to a point where, Mr. Speaker, they've lost touch with reality. They've lost touch with real Manitobans out there, who don't have any confidence—and we've seen it in some of the polling numbers; they don't have confidence in the ability of this party to govern any longer, and many of the reasons for that, Mr. Speaker, are as a result of Manitobans being misled and promised things over the years that haven't been delivered upon.

So, Mr. Speaker, I stand in support of the amendment that was put forward. I would hope that the government would have some second thoughts about the direction that they are heading. I would hope that they would want to leave a little more money in people's pockets so that Manitobans could choose what they spend their precious, hard-earned dollars on. And I will be voting against this budget, voting for the amendment and voting against the budget of the government this year.

Hon. Kevin Chief (Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities): First off, I want to say it's a pleasure on behalf of the constituents of Point Douglas to be able to put some words on the record about Budget 2014. I know it was a budget that we spent an incredible amount of time talking to Manitobans all over the province, municipal leaders, the business sector, of course, industry, labour, moms and dads, grandparents and young people, and we, you know, as part of our \$5.5-billion-a-year plan, you know, really kicked off a lot of those discussions.

I do want to say, though, you know, put some words on the record about our Minister of Finance (Ms. Howard). I do represent the area of Point Douglas, and, you know, there's certainly some challenges there for people and it's important that we hear from people directly. And I've got to say how incredibly proud I was so many young people, so many families that the Minister of Finance the time to come out—and she did, of course, listen to municipal leaders and business leaders—but she actually talked to a group of students that are

working hard through literacy, through adult education, families that have dealt with some, you know, incredibly challenging circumstances, and she came and she listened to them.

They gave her a lot of great information. They gave her a lot of great ideas, and we've always said government services work best when communities engage. The best way to engage people is to listen to what they have to say, and I know that our Minister of Finance (Ms. Howard) listened to these families, these young people, and I've got to say how very proud I was when she stood up and she made those voices—and I've got to say sometimes people perceive these voices to be the weakest in our community—and the Minister of Finance, because she took the time to listen to them, listen to some of the hardships and struggles, she actually was able to put them in the budget speech and made those voices the strongest voices within Budget 2014. That's the spirit on which this budget raised on, Mr. Speaker.

So not only are you hearing from people like Chris Lorenc, including people like Mayor Sam Katz and lots of leaders in our community, but you're hearing from some of the people who have—who are struggling the most and their ideas are listened to and the people that the minister took time to listen to voices were heard and became some of the most powerful voices, Mr. Speaker.

I do want to say—talk a little bit about the \$5.5-billion plan. I know that we're putting a lot of

emphasis on core infrastructure, of course, better highways and bridges, improved flood protection, strong municipal infrastructure. I do want to say, for the record just before you stand up, 58,900 jobs, Mr. Speaker, that are going to be created for that and boost our economy, \$6.3 billion, and increase retail sales by \$1.4 billion.

And, although I represent the City of Winnipeg, I do want to acknowledge the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) he's been very busy letting people know the kinds of investments we're making, and, you know, there's a few I want to mention, of course, Highway 75 and, you know, I want to bring these different highways up because, although I represent the City of Winnipeg, all families, many people drive on these highways, regardless of where they live and Highway 75 is a great example. And Highway 75 is now at flood standards, so those businesses down the road are going to have protection just like all families do in the city of Winnipeg, improvements to Trans-Canada east and west—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities (Mr. Chief) will have 26 minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 13, 2014

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